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Risk-alert dashboard on local and regional democracy

Committee on the Monitoring of the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and on the respect of Human Rights and the Rule of Law at local and regional levels (Monitoring Committee)

Co-rapporteurs:[1] Kirstine BILLE, Denmark (L, SOC/G/PD)
Kristoffer TAMSONS, Sweden (R, EPP/CCE)

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Summary

The risk-alert dashboard was prepared as a contribution to the New Democratic Pact for Europe. It was prepared in the context of growing geopolitical tensions, a decline in democratic standards and the rise of foreign interference affecting the day-to-day functioning of sub-national authorities, as well as local and regional elections across Europe. It is not designed to apply to situations of warfare and martial law, which require specific consideration.

The dashboard is intended to serve as a structured early-warning mechanism at the sub-national level, designed to identify emerging threats to local and regional democracy before they become entrenched and cause irreversible damage. It translates existing European standards into a practical set of guiding questions and key indicators, organised around nine thematic areas: local autonomy and institutional safeguards; financial autonomy; electoral integrity; the free exercise of local office and political opposition; administrative neutrality; civic space and participation; the rule of law and the multilevel checks and balances; violence, intimidation and hate speech; and local media.

This tool is not limited to identifying warning signs. Rather, it is also intended as a gateway to the corrective measures implemented by the relevant authorities and stakeholders, in order to halt and reverse decline and reinforce local democracy.

1. L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
SOC/G/PD: Group of Socialists, Greens and Progressive Democrats
ILDG: Independent Liberal and Democratic Group
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
PfE: Patriots for Europe Group
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress



RESOLUTION 531 (2026)[2]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

b. the Reykjavík Declaration, adopted at the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavík, 16 and 17 May 2023), the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy (Appendix III of the Reykjavík Declaration) and the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of those Principles;

c. the Congress monitoring reports and recommendations on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the Council of Europe member States and its reports and recommendations further to the observation of local and regional elections and on recurring issues based on assessments resulting from congress monitoring and election observation missions;

d. Congress Resolution 466 (2021) "Ensuring the respect of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in major crisis situations";

e. Contemporary commentary by the Congress on the explanatory report to the European Charter of Local Self-Government adopted by the Statutory Forum on 7 December 2020;

f. the Updated Rule of Law Checklist of European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), CDL-AD(2025)002;

g. the Code of Good Practice on electoral matters of the Venice Commission and related documents, CDL-AD(2002)023;

h. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goals 11 on sustainable cities and communities and 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

2. The Congress:

a. expresses deep concern regarding recent geopolitical conflicts, emergencies, democratic backsliding and foreign interference affecting local and regional elections across Europe;

b. seeks to contribute to the aims of the Council of Europe New Democratic Pact for Europe, by helping to define and identify nascent threats to democracy in European countries at local and regional level, so as to enable the timely alerting of member states and the adoption of early response measures, both in legal and political terms;

c. reiterates that its recommendations on monitoring compliance with the Charter and following the observation of elections represent an important element of the Council of Europe's early warning system that can point to possible democratic backsliding in member States;

d. further highlights that in order to assess and address emerging risks comprehensively, the early warning mechanism should define a comprehensive set of key indicators drawing both from Congress monitoring and election observation results as well as from other areas of activity of the Congress—particularly human rights, execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and rule of law activities at the local and regional levels.

3. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress:

2. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-11, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Kirstine BILLE, Denmark (L, SOC/G/PD) and Kristoffer TAMSONS, Sweden (R, EPP/CCE).

a. adopts the appended Risk-Alert Dashboard to serve as an early warning mechanism and a barometer for the health of local and regional democracy, with the specific aim of identifying trends indicating possible democratic backsliding in Europe;

b. entrusts the members of its Committee on Monitoring the Implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and on Respect for Human Rights and the Rule of Law at Local and Regional Levels (“Monitoring Committee”) to use the Dashboard in their respective countries as a reference tool enabling them to identify potential risks and early signs of democratic deterioration at the local and regional levels and then to share this information and bring it to the attention of the committee where appropriate;

c. invites the Monitoring Committee and country rapporteurs to use the Dashboard as a supporting resource when considering communications related to alleged violations of principles and standards of the Charter and when proposing possible follow-up actions, including enhanced political dialogue with national and/or local and regional authorities, fact-finding missions or closer monitoring cycles;

d. further invites the Monitoring Committee to share and disseminate the Dashboard among the internal and external partners of the Council of Europe, including civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders engaged in monitoring the health of local democracy;

e. urges all relevant Congress bodies to contribute to the feeding and regular updating of the Dashboard and use it as guidance when engaging with national and subnational authorities of Council of Europe member States as well as when deciding on more targeted support to member States within the framework of cooperation activities.

RECOMMENDATION 553 (2026)[3]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

b. Reykjavík Declaration, adopted at the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavík, 16 and 17 May 2023), the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy (Appendix III of the Reykjavík Declaration) and the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of those Principles;

c. Article 2, paragraph 1.b, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that one of the aims of the Congress is "to submit proposals to the Committee of Ministers in order to promote local and regional democracy";

d. Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 on the participation of citizens in local public life;

e. Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)3 on supervision of local authorities' activities;

f. Committee of Ministers' recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 on the principles of good democratic governance;

g. Committee of Ministers' recommendation CM/Rec(2022)2 on democratic accountability of elected representatives and elected bodies at local and regional level;

h. Committee of Ministers' recommendation CM/Rec(2008)2 on efficient domestic capacity for rapid execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights;

i. the Congress monitoring reports and recommendations on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the Council of Europe member States and its reports and recommendations further to the observation of local and regional elections and on recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Congress monitoring and election observation missions;

j. Congress Recommendation 453 (2021) "Ensuring the respect of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in major crisis situations";

k. the Updated Rule of Law Checklist of European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), CDL-AD(2025)002;

l. the Code of Good Practice on electoral matters of the Venice Commission and related documents, CDL-AD(2002)023;

m. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goals 11 on sustainable cities and communities and 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

2. The Congress:

a. expresses deep concern about recent geopolitical conflicts, emergencies, democratic backsliding and foreign interference affecting local and regional elections in Europe;

3. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-11, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Kirstine BILLE, Denmark (L, SOC/G/PD) and Kristoffer TAMSONS, Sweden (R, EPP/CCE).

b. seeks to contribute to the aims of the Council of Europe New Democratic Pact for Europe, by helping to define and identify nascent threats to democracy at local and regional level in European countries, so as to enable the timely alerting of member States and the adoption of early response measures, both in legal and political terms;

c. recalls that its recommendations on the monitoring of compliance with the Charter and following the observation of elections provide a valuable basis for assessing democratic institutions in member States and represent an important part of the Council of Europe's early warning system that can contribute to pointing to possible democratic backsliding in member States;

d. further highlights that, in order to assess and address emerging risks comprehensively, there is a pressing need for an early warning mechanism defining a broader set of key indicators drawn from Congress monitoring and election observation reports and from other areas of Congress and Council of Europe activity—particularly those relating to human rights, the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and rule of law activities at the local and regional levels;

e. in this respect, considers that the appended Dashboard provides such assessment criteria and may serve as an innovative, structured and comprehensive early warning mechanism as well as a barometer for the health of local and regional democracy in the context of democratic backsliding in Europe.

3. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to:

a. make use of the Dashboard as a relevant early warning mechanism that signals possible erosion of local and regional democracy and identifies areas in which the Organisation may enhance its political dialogue and provide assistance to member States to prevent and respond to democratic backsliding;

b. use the Dashboard as guidance for developing activities, including within Council of Europe action plans, aimed at safeguarding and strengthening democracy and good governance at all levels across the European continent;

c. encourage member States to use the Dashboard as a reference tool to assess whether they properly implement Council of Europe standards on local democracy and, where necessary, address deficiencies by taking timely improvement measures.

4. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this Dashboard in their activities relating to member States.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM[4]

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4. This explanatory memorandum has been prepared with the contribution of Prof. Angel M. MORENO, Chair of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government (GIE), Prof. Tania GROPPI and Prof. Nikos CHLEPAS, Vice-Chairs of the GIE and Congress advisers on constitutional matters, Prof. Christina BINDER and Prof. Jens WOELK, members of the GIE.

I. PURPOSE, SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE INDICATOR FRAMEWORK

1. This “dashboard” sets out a structured set of indicators to support the identification and assessment of democratic backsliding from a local and regional (sub-national) perspective.

2. Throughout the document, the term “local” should be understood as encompassing both local and regional levels of governance, reflecting the integrated nature of sub-national democratic systems. In fact, by adopting a bottom-up perspective, the “dashboard” complements existing national-level assessments and focuses on the functioning of democracy within municipalities, regions and their communities—where early signs of democratic deterioration often first become visible.

3. Democratic backsliding at the sub-national level typically unfolds through gradual and cumulative processes, rather than through abrupt institutional breakdown. Incremental legal, administrative or financial measures—often taken in isolation and formally compliant with existing frameworks—may, over time, weaken local autonomy, distort political competition, and reduce accountability. In this context, the present set of indicators is designed as a practical tool for monitoring and assessment, accessible not only to experts but also to public authorities, associations of local and regional governments, civil society actors and other stakeholders. It translates and operationalises existing European standards and reference frameworks—such as those developed by the Venice Commission and the Council of Europe—by applying them specifically to the context of local and regional democracy, its institutions and its communities.

4. The indicators are conceived as a policy-oriented “dashboard”, serving three main functions. First, they enable comparative assessment over time, allowing users to identify developments, detect emerging risks and track trends, thereby contributing to early warning and prevention. Second, they provide a comprehensive and cross-sectoral overview of the state of local and regional democracy, making visible the cumulative impact of developments across different domains. Third, they support evidence-based policy responses, offering a structured basis for dialogue, monitoring and, where appropriate, corrective action by relevant authorities and stakeholders.

5. The framework of the “dashboard” is organised around a set of interrelated thematic areas covering the core components of local and regional democratic governance. They are organized in nine thematic sections which include: local autonomy and institutional safeguards; financial autonomy; electoral integrity and political competition; the free exercise of local mandates and the role of opposition; administrative neutrality and integrity; civic space and participation; the rule of law and multilevel checks and balances; protection against violence, intimidation and hate speech; and the functioning of local media. These sections are mutually reinforcing and interdependent dimensions. Developments in one area—such as constraints on financial autonomy or pressures on media—may have direct consequences for other areas, including political pluralism, participation or institutional trust. A comprehensive assessment therefore requires consideration of both individual indicators and their interaction across the system.

6. Each thematic section follows a common analytical structure: an explanatory paragraph outlining the context and relevance of the area; a guiding question capturing the overarching issue, with a focus on the impact or effects of potential backsliding; and a set of key indicators, consisting of concrete and specific questions which, taken together, may reveal situations, developments or trends indicative of democratic backsliding.

7. The dashboard is not designed to situations of warfare or martial law, which require specific consideration.

8. By providing a coherent and operational set of indicators, this “dashboard” aims to strengthen the capacity of institutions and stakeholders to monitor, assess and respond to democratic backsliding at the sub-national level, and to contribute to the safeguarding of democratic standards within multilevel governance systems.

II. HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

9. This set of indicators is designed as a practical dashboard for monitoring democratic developments at the local and regional level.

- **Read each thematic section holistically:**
  Each section begins with an *explanatory paragraph* outlining the context and relevance of the area, followed by a *guiding question* capturing the overarching concern, and a *set of key indicators* providing concrete and operational questions.

- **Use indicators cumulatively:**
  Individual indicators should not be assessed in isolation. It is the combination and repetition of signals across indicators and over time that may point to situations, developments or trends of democratic backsliding.

- **Assess changes over time:**
  The tool is intended to support comparative analysis, allowing users to track developments, identify patterns and detect emerging risks as part of an early warning approach.

- **Capture cross-sectoral effects:**
  Users should consider interactions between thematic areas, as developments in one domain (e.g. financial autonomy or media environment) may have implications for others (e.g. political competition or participation).

- **Support dialogue and response:**
  The findings derived from the indicators can inform evidence-based discussions, monitoring processes and policy responses by public authorities, associations, civil society and other stakeholders.

III. THEMATIC INDICATOR GROUPS

Cumulative effect of issues # Local/regional perspective // dimension; - reference to “local” also includes regional dimension # inter-linkage between the different dimensions

1. Local autonomy, subsidiarity and institutional safeguards

10. **Explanatory Paragraph:** This thematic group examines the extent to which the institutional and legal foundations of local self-government are respected in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. It covers both formal guarantees and their practical application, focusing on the scope of competence allocation, political representation and discretion exercised by elected local and regional authorities, and the use of legislative, administrative or judicial instruments affecting local decision-making. The relevance of this area lies in the fact that erosion of local autonomy often occurs incrementally and through ostensibly lawful measures, including recentralisation, re-scaling and territorial re-design, substitution of elected authorities, or procedural shortcuts, which may cumulatively weaken democratic self-government and alter the balance between levels of governance.

11. **General/Guiding Question:** Is local autonomy reduced and disrespect of subsidiarity in law and in practice observable?

12. **Key indicators**

1. Can you recognise processes of recentralisation which are significantly reducing local competencies without equivalent safeguards?

2. Are elected local/regional bodies or their core functions repeatedly replaced by special commissioners, task forces, or ad hoc higher-level authorities in a way which cannot be explained by objective or technical reasons?

3. Is there a trend towards marginalisation of municipal councils in favour of executive decision-making aligned with central government interests?

4. Have mandatory consultations with local government associations been regressed, suspended or rendered ineffective?

5. Is legislation affecting local democracy adopted through fast-track or emergency procedures in ways that limit scrutiny or consultation?

6. Are emergency or crisis powers misused or prolonged in a manner that adversely affects local self-government?

7. Are consolidations (mergers) or other forms of apportionment being manipulated to undermine local democracy?

8. Is there case law having significant negative impacts on local autonomy and/or local democracy?

9. Are there further repeated or structural violations of the European Charter of Local Self-Government significantly reducing local/regional autonomy?

2. Financial autonomy and economic leverage

13. **Explanatory Paragraph:** This thematic group examines whether financial arrangements enable local and regional authorities to exercise their responsibilities autonomously or whether fiscal instruments are used in ways that constrain political discretion and democratic accountability. It covers the level, structure and predictability of local revenues, intergovernmental transfers, equalisation mechanisms and funding procedures, as well as the balance between formula-based and discretionary financial decisions. This area is particularly relevant because pressures on financial autonomy often emerge through cumulative changes (such as selective funding practices, increased earmarking or reduced transparency) which may gradually increase dependence on central authorities and weaken the capacity of local and regional governments to act independently.

14. **General/Guiding Question**: Do reductions in revenue, limitations on fiscal discretion, or the use of financial instruments undermine the autonomous functioning of local and regional authorities or expose them to political control?

15. **Key indicators**

1. Has there been a significant and disproportionate reduction in local or regional revenues, taking into account the overall economic and fiscal context?

2. Is there evidence of selective and systematic allocation of grants or subsidies linked to political alignment?

3. Have selective and systematic delays in intergovernmental transfers been observed that cannot be explained by objective or technical criteria?

4. Is formula-based funding being replaced, in whole or in part, by discretionary mechanisms?

5. Is there a trend towards increased earmarking of funds that reduces the effective discretion of local or regional authorities?

6. Are national investment or recovery programmes used in ways that bypass municipal/regional councils or standard procurement rules?

7. Has the elimination or significant reduction of local fees or taxes occurred without adequate compensatory funding mechanisms?

8. Are equalisation schemes being dismantled, weakened, or applied in a manner that undermines their corrective function?

9. Have consultation procedures concerning the allocation of redistributed resources to local or regional authorities been regressed, suspended, or rendered ineffective?

3. Electoral integrity, pluralism and fair competition at the local level

16. **Explanatory Paragraph:** This thematic group examines whether local and regional elections are conducted under conditions that ensure genuine pluralism, fair competition and effective electoral accountability. It covers the legal framework governing elections, the conduct and independence of electoral administration, campaign conditions, media access, financing, election day procedures and the availability of effective remedies. The relevance of this area lies in the fact that distortions of electoral integrity often emerge through cumulative legal adjustments, administrative practices, and asymmetric use of public power rather than through overt manipulation alone. Patterns such as the misuse of resources, targeted pressure during campaigns, unequal media access, declining effectiveness of legal remedies, or reduced competitiveness among candidates may signal a progressive weakening of electoral safeguards even where elections continue to be formally held.

17. **General/Guiding Question:** Are local and regional elections conducted in a manner that negatively affect conditions of competition, pluralism, and protection of electoral rights in law and in practice?

18. **Key indicators**

1. Are electoral laws or key elements of the electoral system (including composition of election administration, constituency boundaries, seat allocation method or voting rules) amended frequently or close to elections, in contravention of the one-year rule, and without broad political consensus?

2. Is the electoral administration insufficiently transparent, politicised, or subject to interference, including undue influence over electoral commissions?

3. Are voter registers inaccurate, or are changes to voter registration rules introduced without transparency or broad agreement?

4. Are candidate fees, deposits, or other eligibility requirements disproportionate or applied in a manner that excludes significant numbers of candidates, particularly political opponents, independent candidates or minority groups?

5. Are candidates, parties, or electoral lists arbitrarily excluded, banned, or prevented from participating in elections?

6. Are fundamental freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and movement restricted during electoral campaigns?

7. Has there been any regression of female candidates' participation due to legislative changes or other targeted actions or omissions?

8. Is the legal framework for campaign finance balance and transparency weakened, selectively applied, or inadequately enforced, including with regard to public financing, donation limits, foreign or business funding, or spending caps?

9. Are independent bodies responsible for monitoring campaign finance, media regulations or electoral integrity weakened, captured, or rendered ineffective?

10. Is the legal framework governing media coverage during election campaigns insufficient to ensure fair competition, including safeguards against slander, hate speech, or abusive negative campaigning?

11. Are rules governing free or paid airtime in the media during electoral campaigns disregarded or applied in a discriminatory manner?

12. Is undue pressure exerted on local media during election periods?

13. Is there noticeable involvement of higher-level or central government authorities in campaigning activities and media coverage of campaigns during local elections?

14. Is there significant suspicion of (foreign) interference in local elections, including through information manipulation, illegal party financing, or cyber operations?

15. Is voter or candidate intimidation taking place, whether initiated, encouraged, or tolerated by public authorities or government-aligned actors?

16. Is there a significant decline in the effective competitiveness of elections, including un-levelling the playing field between candidates, reduced choice for voters or systematic advantages for incumbents?

17. Are administrative resources and official positions misused for electoral purposes, for instance through harassment of opposition actors, targeted social assistance before elections, or the use of local service delivery as electoral leverage?

18. Is there a deterioration of the online campaigning environment? Are there allegations of growing online abuse on social media towards certain candidates/parties? Are these not followed by investigations and sanctions?

19. Are employment relationships misused for electoral purposes, including pressure on public employees or conditional employment practices?

20. Are there significant instances of vote buying or material inducements offered to voters?

21. Are observers reporting widespread breaches in electoral silence (if applicable), pressure on voters, cases of family voting, violations of voting secrecy and abuse of assisted voting or alternative voting systems (mobile, postal, out-of-country), in particular affecting vulnerable groups?

22. Is there evidence of result-related manipulation, including ballot stuffing, falsification of results, tampering with protocols, pressure on electoral officials especially on election day during counting or obstruction of recounts or audits afterwards?

23. Are valid election results arbitrarily annulled, partially or fully, or are elected candidates denied certification or equivalent official recognition?

24. Are domestic or international election observers restricted, obstructed, or discouraged?

25. Are effective legal remedies against electoral irregularities unavailable, inaccessible, delayed, or ineffective in practice?

4. Free exercise of the local mandate and political opposition

19. **Explanatory Paragraph:** This thematic group examines whether locally elected representatives can exercise their mandates freely and effectively, and whether political opposition at the local level can

operate under conditions of pluralism, equality and legal protection. It covers legal, administrative and practical measures affecting the status, rights and working conditions of local elected officials, for instance mayors, executive board members, councillors and opposition representatives. The relevance of this area lies in the fact that pressures on elected officials often manifest through selective sanctions, discriminatory practices or informal constraints, which may not immediately abolish representative institutions but can gradually weaken political competition, discourage dissent, and alter behaviour within local councils.

20. **General/Guiding Question:** Are local elected representatives, including those in opposition, prevented from exercising their mandates freely, without intimidation and/or subjected to selective sanctions or discriminatory treatment?

21. **Key indicators**

1. Are mayors or locally elected representatives unduly suspended, dismissed or removed from office?

2. Are criminal, administrative or disciplinary proceedings applied selectively against opposition representatives?

3. Are locally elected officials subjected to detention, imprisonment, threats or other forms of intimidation?

4. Are funding decisions or administrative practices applied in a discriminatory manner that disadvantages opposition-led municipalities?

5. Is the opposition marginalised within local councils, including through changes to internal rules, procedures or standing orders that limit its role or rights?

6. Is there evidence of self-restraint or self-censorship among locally elected representatives due to fear of sanctions or retaliation?

7. Is there a noticeable decline in the willingness of individuals to stand for local elected office?

8. Is there an obvious lack of political pluralism within local/regional governments' associations?

5. Administrative neutrality and integrity of local governance

22. **Explanatory Paragraph:** This thematic group examines whether local administrations operate in a professional, impartial and stable manner, or whether they are subject to politicisation, instrumentalisation or capture. It covers appointment practices, personnel management, disciplinary measures and the conduct of supervisory, inspection and auditing bodies exercising oversight over local authorities. The relevance of this area lies in the fact that interference with administrative neutrality often occurs through gradual changes in staffing, oversight and control mechanisms, which may erode professionalism, institutional continuity and trust in public administration without formally altering governance structures.

23. **General/Guiding Question:** Does the organisation and functioning of local administration negatively affect professionalism, political neutrality and continuity, even more, are administrative structures and oversight mechanisms being used for political or punitive purposes?

24. **Key indicators**

1. Have there been significant transfers, dismissals or forced resignations of senior municipal officials following changes at the national political level?

2. Are public appointments, particularly by central authorities, politicised, especially within supervisory, inspection or auditing bodies responsible for overseeing local governments?

3. Are appointments within municipal administrations or municipally owned companies based on political loyalty rather than merit or professional criteria?

4. Are administrative resources and official positions misused for electoral purposes, for instance through harassment of opposition actors, targeted social assistance before elections, or the use of local service delivery as electoral leverage?

5. Have disciplinary measures been taken against municipal staff for political expression, perceived political affiliation or other arbitrary reasons?

6. Are inspections, audits or anti-corruption procedures applied selectively or used in a punitive manner against certain local authorities or officials?

7. Is there a pattern of rapid turnover in key administrative positions that undermines institutional stability?

8. Is there evidence of declining administrative professionalism, expertise or continuity within local governance structures?

9. Is there a decline in transparency and accountability of local decision-making, notably opaque procurement and tenders, refusal of freedom of information requests, closed-door meetings, late publication of budgets/spending decisions?

6. Civic space, participation and democratic culture

25. **Explanatory Paragraph:** This thematic group examines whether civic space and participatory practices at the local level enable meaningful citizen involvement beyond periodic elections and including youth. It covers the legal and practical functioning of mechanisms of direct democracy, public participation and consultation, as well as the regulatory environment for civil society activity, assemblies and demonstrations. The relevance of this area lies in the fact that democratic erosion at local level often manifests through the gradual hollowing out of participatory channels, where formal mechanisms remain in place but lose substance, inclusiveness or impact. Promoting youth participation through various means, including permanent participation structures, regular opportunities, sufficient funding and equal access to participation mechanisms, but also civic education from an early age on, can consolidate democracy by preparing younger generations for their future involvement. Trends such as declining engagement, withdrawal from participatory processes or reduced trust in local democratic institutions may indicate a weakening of democratic culture even in the absence of explicit legal prohibitions.

26. **General/Guiding Question:** Do legal frameworks and local practices limit or negatively impact effective citizen participation, rendering for instance participatory mechanisms increasingly formal, constrained or disregarded in practice?

27. **Key indicators**

1. Have national or regional legislative amendments reduced or eliminated existing mechanisms of direct democracy, public participation or freedom of assembly at the local level?

2. Have participatory mechanisms been cancelled, suspended, or maintained in a purely formal manner without substantive impact on decision-making?

3. Are assemblies, demonstrations or civil society activities restricted through local regulations or administrative practices in undue ways?

4. Are participatory processes captured or dominated by elites, organised interests or government-aligned actors, to the exclusion of broader civic involvement?

5. Is there a frequent refusal by local authorities to respond to, consider or integrate citizen input, including the results of valid local referendums or popular consultations?

6. Has there been a significant decline in public trust in local democratic institutions or participatory bodies?

7. Is participation in local democratic processes declining despite the continued existence of formal participatory mechanisms?

8. Is there a pattern of citizen withdrawal from participation, characterised by disengagement rather than open contestation or protest?

9. Are turnout levels in local elections or referendums consistently very low or significantly declining, notably among certain groups?

10. Have any efforts been made to strengthen youth participation from an early age on, including via permanent structures, regular opportunities, more funding and equal access for youth participation activities?

7. Rule of law, remedies, and multilevel checks and balances

28. **Explanatory Paragraph:** This thematic group examines whether the rule of law provides effective protection for local self-government within the multilevel governance system. It covers access to independent oversight and judicial remedies, the functioning and independence of courts and monitoring bodies, the proportionality of administrative supervision, and compliance with national and international judgments affecting local authorities. The relevance of this area lies in the fact that legal protection at local level may erode gradually through weakened oversight institutions, ineffective remedies, or practices that prioritise expediency over legality. Declining confidence in judicial protection, reduced recourse to litigation, or the routine use of exceptional powers may signal a breakdown of checks and balances even where formal legal frameworks remain in place.

29. **General/Guiding Question:** Do local authorities lack effective legal protection, independent oversight and proportionate supervision resulting in their rights and guarantees not being safeguarded within the multilevel system of governance?

30. **Key indicators**

1. Have independent monitoring and accountability bodies—such as ombudsmen, anti-corruption institutions or similar mechanisms—been weakened, restricted, rendered ineffective or captured?

2. Is the independence of the judiciary compromised in ways that affect the protection of local self-government or the adjudication of disputes involving local authorities?

3. Do local authorities face limitations or obstacles in accessing judicial remedies to challenge decisions affecting their autonomy or competences?

4. Is trust in judicial protection declining among local authorities or other relevant actors?

5. Is there a reduction in litigation by local authorities due to a perception that legal remedies are ineffective or futile?

6. Is there non-compliance, delayed compliance or selective compliance of state authorities with national or international court judgments concerning local self-government?

7. Is there non-compliance, delayed compliance or selective compliance with national or international court judgments by local authorities?

8. Is administrative supervision over local authorities disproportionate, shifting from legality-based control towards expediency or political interference?

9. Do supervisory interventions lack adequate reasoning, transparency or proportionality?

10. Is trust in impartial supervision declining among local authorities or other relevant actors?

11. Are there human rights violations by local authorities and their administrations on their own initiative?

12. Are there human rights violations by local authorities due to legislative obligations requiring relevant actions or omissions?

13. Are emergency powers misused, prolonged or applied in a manner that weakens legal safeguards for local self-government, whether nationwide or in specific territories?

8. Violence, intimidation, and hate speech

31. **Explanatory Paragraph:** This thematic group examines whether the local democratic environment is affected by violence, intimidation or hostile discourse (especially through social media) that undermines political participation and pluralism. It covers acts of physical violence, threats, harassment and hate speech directed at local representatives, candidates, journalists, activists or community groups, as well as the response of public authorities to such conduct. The relevance of this area lies in the fact that tolerance of intimidation or inflammatory discourse at the local level often constitutes an escalation point in democratic backsliding, creating a climate of fear and self-censorship, discouraging participation and weakening trust in democratic institutions. Reduced civic engagement and patterns of impunity of perpetrators may indicate a broader breakdown of democratic safeguards.

32. **General/Guiding Question:** Is the local political and civic environment affected violence, intimidation and tolerated hate speech, hindering safe and inclusive participation, pluralism and open democratic debate?

33. **Key indicators**

1. Are minorities or political opponents targeted, stigmatised or harassed at the community level?

2. Is hate speech, including incitement to violence or discrimination, notably on social media, becoming normalised or tolerated in local political discourse?

3. Have there been incidents of physical violence, threats or intimidation targeting local representatives, candidates, journalists, activists or other participants in local political life?

4. Do public authorities fail to prevent, condemn or effectively investigate acts of violence, intimidation or hate speech?

5. Is there evidence of impunity for perpetrators of such acts, including a lack of accountability or effective sanctions?

6. Are there observable chilling effects on political participation, civic engagement, freedom of expression or public debate at the local level?

9. Local Media

34. **Explanatory Paragraph:** This thematic group examines whether local media operate in an environment that ensures freedom of expression, pluralism and independent scrutiny of local authorities. It covers the legal, economic and practical conditions under which local media function, including ownership structures, access to information, allocation of public resources, and the safety and professional independence of journalists. The relevance of this area lies in the fact that democratic backsliding at the local level is often accompanied by subtle but cumulative pressures on local media, leading to self-censorship, homogenisation of narratives and reduced investigative reporting. Changes in media behaviour, market structure or public authorities' engagement with journalists as well as misuse of social media may signal a deterioration of the local information environment even where formal media freedoms remain intact.

35. **General/Guiding Question:** Do local media lack freedom and independence, adequate pluralism, transparency and access to information and are they subject to political, economic or administrative pressures that undermine their watchdog role?

36. **Key Indicators**

1. Are there legal, administrative or informal measures that restrict freedom of expression at the local level, leading to chilling effects such as self-censorship by journalists or media outlets?

2. Is the local media environment weakened in ways that undermine pluralism, including through pressure on public media, excessive concentration of ownership or dominance of a single outlet?

3. Is there a lack of transparency regarding ownership, financing or control of local media outlets?

4. Have local media outlets been acquired by actors linked to national or local political power?

5. Have independent local media outlets closed or experienced financial collapse following political change?

6. Are targeted local media smear campaigns, including character assassination, conducted against political opponents, civic activists or independent voices?

7. Are social biases instrumentalised or disinformation campaigns conducted through local media or local information channels?

8. Are journalists granted favours, privileges or rewards based on loyalty, while critical or dissident journalists face intimidation, harassment or violence?

9. Is public advertising or communication spending by local authorities allocated selectively in a manner that favours government-friendly media outlets?

10. Has advertising or sponsorship been withdrawn from critical local media in a discriminatory or retaliatory manner?

11. Do government-friendly local media outlets receive preferential treatment in public procurement procedures, subsidies or other forms of public support?

12. Are inspections, audits or regulatory controls used selectively or punitively against specific local media outlets?

13. Are local journalists targeted by strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) or similar legal actions intended to discourage reporting?

14. Do public authorities fail to effectively investigate or respond to threats, attacks or acts of violence against local journalists?

15. Are local journalists' access rights restricted with regard to council meetings, public events or official information?

16. Is live streaming, recordings of public meetings or access to public archives limited or discontinued without objective justification?

17. Is there a reduction of the diversity of viewpoints due to an increasing homogenisation of media narratives across local outlets or an increased reliance on official press releases or government communication without independent scrutiny or investigative follow-up?

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Why a New Democratic Pact for Europe?

Democratic backsliding, disinformation, impunity, and authoritarianism are undermining democracy in Europe. People are increasingly afraid and frustrated. It comes at a time when democratic security – the resilience of our democratic institutions, freedoms, and values – is our first line of defence against the threats we face. A collective response is needed. There is no quick fix and no single solution. With the New Democratic Pact, the Council of Europe unites with its partners to boost solutions that work and create new responses. To identify them, consultations are needed. The Pact will serve as a collective and inclusive process – not to reinvent democracy, but to reinforce its foundations, amplify its benefits, and innovate its form to make it tangible for everyone, especially younger generations. The directions set during the consultation phase running through 2026 will shape the work that follows.