

# ELECTION OBSERVATION AT GRASSROOTS LEVEL



Twenty years of experience  
in electoral matters

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities  
of the Council of Europe

The Congress



Le Congrès

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

# **Observing Local and Regional Elections**

Twenty years of the Congress experience

*Over the last twenty years, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has conducted regular activities to observe local and regional elections in the Council of Europe member States, and sometimes beyond. This brochure highlights major achievements and continued challenges in this field.*



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## Observing local and regional elections

The Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities are the two political assemblies of the Council of Europe mandated by the Committee of Ministers to observe elections in their respective fields<sup>1</sup>.

As guardian of local and regional democracy, the Congress was granted the observation of elections at grassroots' level.

Together with the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, it is part of the Congress institutional responsibility to evaluate the situation of local and regional democracy in Europe. Election observation has become widely accepted as a key barometer of the democratic development of a country and as an instrument in support of better electoral processes.

Based on its specific mandate, the Congress organised some hundred missions from 2001 on – mainly in Council of Europe member States and occasionally beyond – such as in the Palestinian territories and in Israel in 2008, in Tunisia in 2018 and in the Kingdom of Morocco in 2021.

On average, the Congress conducts three to five missions per year. The scope of these missions depends very much on the political context of the respective vote and the interest expressed by a State in the

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the complete range of Council of Europe's activities in the sphere of elections can be found in the Information document [GR-DEM\(2019\)8](#) prepared by the Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM) of the Committee of Ministers and dated 19 September 2019.

deployment of a Congress delegation. A summary table of these missions can be consulted in this brochure.

## **Developing a specific methodology**

In the last twenty years, the Congress methodology in observing elections at local and regional level has been refined to meet the highest international standards. In 2010, the Congress made a major step forward in terms of systematisation of its electoral activities and adopted a proper election observation strategy in its Resolution 306. Through Resolution 353, adopted in 2013, the way was paved towards a more systematic follow-up to the recommendations. In October 2015, the revised Congress rules and procedures brought into focus targeted activities in the framework of the post-electoral dialogue.

The progressive structuring of election observation through Congress reference texts went together with a better practical organisation of its missions in the field. Significant progress has been achieved regarding more systematic implementation of its methodology through compulsory political and legal briefings for the Congress observers and the continued incorporation of international standards. In addition, the Congress increased co-operation with strategic partners, notably the Council of Europe Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR. Finally, it professionalised the whole observation process through collaboration with academics and electoral experts who are supporting the rapporteurs of the Congress with the drafting of the reports and recommendations further to an election observation mission.

### *Professionalising Congress observers*

One of the major features of the Congress methodology is that observers are local or regional elected representatives from the 46 member States of the Council of Europe. Many of them have been involved in the practical organisation of elections in their own municipality or region. Thus, election observation at international level is a possibility for them to share experiences and compare the different systems in use in Europe<sup>1</sup>. Back in their home country, the discussions with local and regional stakeholders and the information collected on the spot are a source of inspiration for the members of the Congress. This is a win-win-situation for both the observers and the country in which elections are being held, an opportunity to look beyond one's own nose and a chance to learn from each other.

To ensure election observation based on common democratic standards, the Congress has established a set of rules for the composition of its delegations which include a balanced representation of the different political groups, a fair geographical representation and gender balance. Moreover, the Congress is striving for a balanced participation of members of both the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions. In their regular setting, delegations are composed of five up to 20 Congress members, representatives of the Secretariat and an expert.

Access to up-dated country files, practical information and training are major tools of the Congress to improve the performance of its observers in the field. Particular emphasis is being placed on ethics while observing, in particular in respect of impartiality, conflict of interest and non-acceptance of inappropriate gifts or invitations. A

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<sup>1</sup> In line with the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, the OSCE Copenhagen Document and the UN Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.



Congress Guide on observation of local and regional elections contains a list of “dos and don’ts” for observers and is also available at the end of this brochure. Thorough preparation prior to a mission and systematic feedback after a mission at post-electoral briefings are preconditions of successful observation of elections and constitute the basis of high-quality reports and meaningful recommendations to member States. Observation forms which are filled in by observers on the Election Day ensure a standardised documentation of the observations made.

### *Congress election observation in major crisis situations*

Due to the restrictions linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Congress had to adapt its methodology to fulfil its mandate of observing local and regional elections, which is all the more important in crisis situations. In this context, Resolution 455 (2020), adopted by the Statutory Forum on 28 September 2020, made it possible to develop an alternative methodology for observing local and regional elections.

This includes remote and “hybrid” missions to observe local and regional elections. The remote format comprises online meetings of the delegation with various interlocutors followed by online debriefings with local observers after the Election Day. Congress delegations on remote activities are normally composed of the representatives of the Congress on the Council for Democratic Elections of the Venice Commission. No deployment to the country is foreseen during remote missions and, due to this limited scope, an information report without formal recommendations is prepared. The “hybrid” format combines preparatory meetings organised online with a short on-site observation mission on the Election Day. Consequently, election observation reports are prepared including a

Recommendation to the Committee of Ministers as it is the case for fully-fledged observation missions.

## **Cooperating with major stakeholders in the field**

As it is the case for other activities, the Congress is working in complementary and good collaboration with other key actors in the electoral field, notably the Parliamentary Assembly and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, and OSCE/ODIHR. Maintaining and reinforcing co-operation with its partners by sharing expertise, best practices and field experiences is high on the agenda of the Congress.

Observation missions jointly organised with the OSCE/ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly took place in recent years, for example in Ukraine (2015), North Macedonia (2017) and Georgia (2021).

The Joint Opinion on the Congress Checklist for compliance with international standards and good practices preventing misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes at local and regional level, prepared by the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR, and adopted in March 2017, is another example of co-operation between the Congress and its strategic partners.

### *The Council for Democratic Elections*

Four members represent the Congress on the Council for Democratic Elections of the Venice Commission: two members and two substitutes

representing both Chambers.<sup>1</sup> Active contribution to the Council, one of the well-established European interfaces in electoral matters, enables the Congress to foster co-operation, exchange of know-how between strategic partners and tackle transversal problems and new challenges.

Reports and recommendations adopted by the Congress systematically refer to the common standards developed in the framework of the Council for Democratic Elections thus contributing to the coherence of the Council of Europe activities in electoral matters.

## **Substantial achievements in the last twenty years**

The reports prepared by the Congress in the last years show that many member States have made considerable progress to ensure free and fair electoral processes. The professionalisation of the electoral administration and the drafting of electoral laws in line with international standards are major achievements. However, there is still room for improvement in respect of key elements of the process, notably depoliticisation of election administration, prevention of misuse of administrative resources, accuracy of electoral registers and elimination of inconsistencies in legislation.

Also, media freedom is a key condition of fair and free elections. During many missions, the Congress has observed that the role of media to inform citizens is being challenged by oligarch structures and insufficient legislation on transparency of media ownership. This is a

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-EL\(2004\)009-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-EL(2004)009-e)

threat to independent journalism and deprives voters of their right to make an informed choice based, not least, on unbiased media content. In recent years, the Congress has also taken into account the conduct of election campaigns online and the role of social media. In this context, it recognised the increasing importance of hate speech and fake news during election campaigns.

Criteria to stand in elections and, in particular, the possibility for independent candidates to compete in electoral processes are also crucial. At local level, this entails a fair representation of communities and should allow candidates to run in elections without the political and financial support of the political establishment. Even though the legislation has been improved in many countries through the introduction of quota regulations, the concrete political participation of women still remains a matter of concern.

The question of transparency of the financing of electoral campaigns and political parties is one of the key issues covered by the Venice Commission through the Code of Good Practice in the field of Political Parties. However, the implementation of standards on financial reporting is in many countries still very poor. It also intersects with other issues such as the misuse of administrative resources in electoral processes.

## **Addressing recurring transversal issues**

In the framework of the assessment of positive developments and challenges in the implementation of the Charter, the Congress, , approximately every three years, adopts a report which analyses the implementation of the Charter and the observation of European electoral standards at local and regional level in Council of Europe member States.

The latest report on "Recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Congress monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and election observation missions" was adopted in 2021 and covers the period from 2017 to 2020.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to country reports and periodic reports on recurrent issues, the Congress specifically addresses cross-cutting issues which are of broader relevance.<sup>2</sup> So far, it includes the following:

*The situation of independent candidates and the opposition in local and regional elections (2022)*

The situation of independent candidates has long received only little attention. Still, their contribution to political pluralism makes them relevant political actors. Certain proportionate measures to limit the number of political contestants are considered compatible with international standards. However, overly strict restrictions on participation of independent candidates not only inherently reduce political pluralism, they can also be easily manipulated to silence the opposition viewpoints. The report provides an overview of international standards and best practices and argues in favour of the inclusion of independent candidates in local and regional electoral races. ([CG\(2022\)42-13](#))

*Beyond elections: the use of deliberative methods in European municipalities and regions (2022)*

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<sup>1</sup> See the report: [www.coe.int/congress-recurring-issues/en](http://www.coe.int/congress-recurring-issues/en)

<sup>2</sup> See the reports: [www.coe.int/congress-elections-transversal](http://www.coe.int/congress-elections-transversal)

Governments increasingly rely on various forms of non-electoral participation of their citizens, as a complement to representative democracy. Although deliberative methods are time and resource intensive and require a strong commitment from all actors in a political community, they have become one of the most innovative ways of deepening citizens' participation in political decision-making. Additionally, deliberative processes increase the transparency of political decisions and are highly effective for specific problems that are difficult to solve in a partisan electoral environment. The report aims to promote the use of deliberative methods and provides relevant guidelines. ([CG\(2022\)42-12](#))

### *Holding referendums at local level (2021)*

Referendums are used as a tool of direct democratic involvement for resolving issues which are fundamental for peoples' lives. In this context, they can become a point of controversy due to the potentially divisive nature of their questions and the problems that may occur over the referendum campaign. Although national referendums have nowadays attracted much attention, it is in fact the local referendums that are most widespread in Europe. The report seeks to raise awareness about specificities of local referendums and promote their use in line with international standards and best practices. ([CG\(2021\)40-11](#))

### *Local and regional elections in major crisis situations (2020)*

The COVID-19 pandemic as well as other crises have exposed democracies in Europe to considerable challenges in maintaining the functioning of democratic institutions, including free and fair periodic elections. Election observation during crises represents another

challenge. The report acknowledges that not all electoral standards can be kept in major crisis situations. At the same time, it stresses that a minimum core of electoral principles have to be upheld. It provides guidelines based on international standards and best practices on holding and postponing local and regional elections in times of major crises. ([CG-FORUM\(2020\)01-05](#))

*Voting rights at local level as an element of successful long-term integration of migrants and IDPs in Europe's municipalities and regions (2018)*

In the context of migration flows within the area of the Council of Europe, an increasing number of people have settled or been resettled in countries or regions other than those of their origin. As voting encourages displaced persons to participate actively in the life of their communities, the right to vote at local level can be seen as a natural starting point for successful long-term integration. The report examines the international standards with regard to voting rights of IDPs and non-citizens, outlines the major challenges and describes the diversity of approaches chosen by Council of Europe member States. ([CG35\(2018\)37](#))

*The misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes: the role of local and regional elected representatives and public officials (2017)*

The misuse of administrative resources during elections has been highlighted as a matter of concern in numerous Congress reports. In practice, misuse of administrative resources ranges from pressure exerted on civil servants and public employees to the use of State

resources during electoral campaigns. The report examines overall recurrent problems of misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes and identifies areas with specific relevance for the local and regional level. It also looks at relevant international standards and best practices and presents a selection of national examples to tackle this problem. ([GC31\(2016\)7](#))

In order to provide concrete guidance for the implementation of the according standards, the Congress adopted the "Checklist for assessing compliance with international standards and good practices on the prevention of the misuse of administrative resources in electoral processes at local and regional level" ([CG32\(2017\)12](#)), also published as a "[Practical Guide](#)" for local and regional politicians and officials.

### *Electoral lists and voters residing de facto abroad (2015)*

The issue of voters remaining on electoral lists while residing de facto abroad has been noted in a number of Congress reports. This category of voters raises concerns from the perspective of effective electoral management, transparency and combatting electoral fraud. With this report, the Congress makes local and regional authorities aware of their responsibility for the practical side of elections, in particular the quality of electoral lists. The report argues that a "genuine link" should exist between voters and their electoral constituency as decisions on local issues belong to the electorate actually permanently residing in the constituency concerned. ([CG/2015\(28\)6](#))

### *Criteria for standing in local and regional elections (2015)*

The right to stand for local and regional elections is a key component of territorial democracy. While there needs to be some regulation to



eliminate spurious candidates, the health of democracy depends on the greatest possible proportion of the electorate being able to stand as candidates. Against the backdrop of raising mobility in Europe and increasing demands to run in elections, the report finds that there remain too many restrictions on standing for local and regional elections. The report therefore recommends reviewing the legislation in member States with a view to removing them. ([CG/2015\(28\)7FINAL](#))

### *Voting at 16 – Consequences on youth participation at local and regional level (2015)*

Due to socio-political developments and growing disenchantment with politics, lowering of the voting age became a matter of public debate in Europe. While most countries set the minimum voting age at 18, demographic shifts, education, greater access to information and increased political awareness have significantly improved decision making among the youth. Against this background, the report discusses the pros and cons of lowering of the voting age, with particular attention to local and regional elections. The report also presents a comparative analysis of current practices regarding voting requirements at the territorial level in view of international standards. ([CG/2015\(29\)8PROV](#))

## Follow-up to Congress recommendations

The Congress attaches great attention to the follow-up of its election observation missions and to the implementation of recommendations emerging from such observations. Consequently, and in complementarity to the political monitoring process of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, it has introduced the possibility to open a post-electoral dialogue. In co-operation with State authorities, political forces, national associations of local and regional self-government and other relevant stakeholders, it highlights specific issues detected during election observations and offers support to work on suitable solutions. This is also ensured by the participation of the Congress in post-electoral conferences organised, for instance, by the Parliamentary Assembly and other departments of the Council of Europe or by member States.

During the Fact-finding Mission carried out in 2016 in Albania, the Congress, for the first time, engaged in such a post-electoral dialogue, further to the local elections held in June 2015<sup>1</sup>.

Further to the observation of the October 2016 local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and a fact-finding mission to Sarajevo and Mostar organised in June 2017<sup>2</sup>, a Congress "Reflection Group on Mostar", bringing together European partners, including the EU Committee of the Regions, was created with the aim to contribute to a sustainable solution restoring local democracy in Mostar where a political deadlock had prevented local elections since 2008. The project "Building democratic participation in the City of Mostar", launched in 2019, created opportunities for citizens to engage in a

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<sup>1</sup> Post-Electoral dialogue - 24 to 26 February 2016 - [CG30\(2016\)15](#)

<sup>2</sup> Post-Electoral dialogue – 25 to 26 May 2017 - [CPL33\(2017\)03](#)

deliberative process through citizens' assemblies to participate in local decision making. Most notably, local elections were held in Mostar in December 2020 and a Congress cooperation project introducing a citizens' assembly in the city was implemented. The project will serve as a model to be endorsed by other municipalities with support from the Congress.

## Reports adopted by the Congress since 2001

*Thematic reports:*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Rapporteurs</b>	<b>Report and/or Recommendation and/or Resolution</b>
2022	The situation of independent candidates and the opposition in local and regional elections	Vladimir PREBILIC Slovenia (L, SOC/G/PD)	<a href="#">CG(2022)42-13</a>
2022	Beyond elections: The use of deliberative methods in European municipalities and regions	Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ Belgium (R, SOC/G/PD)	<a href="#">CG(2022)42-12</a>
2021	Holding referendums at local level	Vladimir PREBILIC Slovenia (L, SOC/G/PD)	<a href="#">CG(2021)40-11</a>
2020	Local and regional elections in major crisis situations	Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG) and Jos WIENEN, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE)	<a href="#">CG-FORUM(2020)01-05</a>
2018	Voting rights at local level as an element of successful long-term integration of migrants and IDPs in Europe's municipalities and regions	Jos WIENEN Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE)	<a href="#">CG35(2018)17</a>
2017	Checklist for compliance with international standards and good practices preventing misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes at local and regional level	Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG32(2017)12</a>
2015	Electoral lists and voters residing de facto abroad	Jos WIENEN, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE)	<a href="#">CG/2015(28)6FINAL</a>

2015	Criteria for standing in local and regional elections	Oleksii HONCHARENKO (Ukraine, R, SOC) et Viacheslav ROGOV (Russian Federation, L, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG/2015(28)7FINAL</a>
2015	Voting at 16 – Consequences on youth participation at local and regional level	Liisa ANSALA (Finland, L, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG/2015(29)8PROV</a>

*Country reports:*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Elections observed</b>	<b>Date of the elections</b>	<b>Rapporteurs</b>	<b>Report and/or Recommendation and/or Resolution</b>
2022	Serbia	Partial local elections	3 April 2022	Carla DEJONGHE, (Belgium, ILDG, R)	<a href="#">Report to be adopted in October 2022</a>
2022	Netherlands	Local elections (hybrid mission)	16 March 2022	Vladimir PREBILIC (Slovenia, SOC/G/PD, L)	<a href="#">Report to be adopted in October 2022</a>
2022	Albania	Partial local elections (remote mission)	6 March 2022	Stewart DICKSON, (Royaume-Uni, GILD, R)	<a href="#">Report to be adopted in October 2022</a>
2021	Armenia	Partial local elections (remote mission)	5 December 2021	Stewart DICKSON, (United-Kingdom R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CPL(2022)42-04</a>
2021	Denmark	Local and regional elections	16 November 2021	Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Norway (R, EPP/CCE)	<a href="#">CG(2022)42-17</a>
2021	Georgia	Local elections	2 October 2021	David ERAY, Switzerland (R, EPP/CCE)	<a href="#">CPL(2022)42-02</a>
2021	Morocco	Municipal and regional elections (hybrid mission)	8 September 2021	Vladimir PREBILIC, Slovenia (L, SOC/G/PD)	<a href="#">CG(2022)42-19</a>

2020	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Local elections in Mostar (remote mission)	20 December 2020	Stewart DICKSON, (United-Kingdom, ILDG, R)	<a href="#">CG-MON(2021)18-09</a>
2020	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Local partial elections (remote mission)	15 November 2020	Stewart DICKSON, (United-Kingdom, ILDG, R)	<a href="#">CG-MON(2021)18-09</a>
2020	Ukraine	Local elections (remote mission)	25 October 2020	Stewart DICKSON, (United-Kingdom, ILDG, R)	<a href="#">CG-BUR(2020)35-37</a>
2019	Republic of Moldova	Local Elections	20 October 2019	Vladimir PREBILIC (Slovenia, L, SOC/G/PD)	<a href="#">CG-FORUM(2020)01-04</a>
2019	Turkey	Repeat Mayoral Elections in Istanbul	23 June 2019	Andrew DAWSON (United Kingdom, R, ECR)	<a href="#">CG37(2019)14</a>
2019	Turkey	Local Elections	31 March 2019	Andrew DAWSON (United Kingdom, R, ECR)	<a href="#">CG37(2019)14</a>
2018	Slovenia	Local Elections	18 November 2018	Robert GRUMAN (Romania, R, EPP-CCE)	<a href="#">CPL36(2019)02</a>



2018	Poland	Local Elections	21 October 2018	Jos WIENEN (Netherlands, L, EPP-CCE)	<a href="#">CG36(2019)18</a>
2018	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Elections of cantonal assemblies	7 October 2018	Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CPR36(2019)02 Recommendation 432 (2019)</a>
2018	Republic of Moldova	Early Local Elections in Chisinau, Balti	20 May 2018	Gunn-Marit HELGESEN (Norway, R, EPP-CCE)	<a href="#">CG35(2018)22</a>
2018	Tunisia	Municipal Elections	6 May 2018	Xavier CADORET (France, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CG35(2018)10</a>
2018	Netherlands	Local Elections	21 March 2018	Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CPL35(2018)04</a>
2017	Georgia	Local Elections	21 October 2017	Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CPL34(2018)03</a>
2017	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Local Elections	15 October 2017	Karim Van OVERMEIRE (Belgium, R, NR)	<a href="#">CPL34(2018)02final Recommendation 413 (2018)</a>
2017	Armenia	Elections to the Council of Elders of Yerevan	14 May 2017	Liisa ANSALA (Finland, L, ILDG)	<a href="#">CPL33(2017)04</a>

2017	Finland	Local Elections	9 April 2017	Lelia HUNZIKER (Switzerland, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CPL33(2017)05 Recommendation 408 (2017)</a>
2016	Republic of Moldova	Elections for the Popular Assembly of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia	20 November 2016	Sevdia UGREKHELIDZE (Georgia, R, EPP-CCE)	<a href="#">CPR32(2017)02</a>
2016	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Local elections	2 October 2016	Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG32(2017)16 Recommendation 399 (2017)</a>
2016	Armenia	Local by-elections	18 September 2016	Liisa ANSALA (Finland, L, ILDG)	<a href="#">CPL31(2016)02</a>
2016	Serbia	Local and Provincial Elections	24 April 2016	Karim Van OVERMEIRE (Belgium, R, NR)	<a href="#">CG31(2016)21</a>
2015	Ukraine	Local Elections	25 October 2015	Jos WIENEN (Netherlands, L, EPP-CCE)	<a href="#">CG30(2016)07-final Recommendation 386 (2016)</a>
2015	Albania	Local Elections	21 June 2015	Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CPL/2015(29)2 Recommendation 377 (2015)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 388 (2015)</a>
2015	Republic of Moldova	Local Elections	14 June 2015	Line VENNESLAND FRASER (Norway, L, CRE)	<a href="#">CPL/2015(29)3 Recommendation 378 (2015)</a>

2015	Republic of Moldova	Elections of the Bashkan (Governor) and partial elections to the People's Assembly of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia	22 March 2015	Lars O. MOLIN, Sweden (L, EPP-CCE)	<a href="#">CPR/2015(29)3</a>
2014	Georgia	Local Elections	15 June 2014	Jos WIENEN (Netherlands, L, EPP/CCE)	<a href="#">CPL(27)5FINAL Recommendation 360 (2014)</a>
2014	Ukraine	Pre-term Local Elections	25 May 2014	Nigel MERMAGEN (United Kingdom, L, ILDG)	<a href="#">CPL(27)4FINAL Recommendation 359 (2014)</a>
2014	Netherlands	Municipal Elections	19 March 2014	Pearl PEDERGNANA (Switzerland, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CPL(27)3FINAL Recommendation 358 (2014)</a>
2013	Armenia	Elections for the Agavani (Assembly) of the City of Yerevan	5 May 2013	Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CPL(25)3FINAL Recommendation 344 (2013)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 359 (2013)</a>
2013	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Municipal Elections	24 March 2013	Jüri LANDBERG (Estonia, L, ILDG)	<a href="#">CPL(25)4FINAL Recommendation 345 (2013)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 360(2013)</a>
2012	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Local Elections	7 October 2012	Amy KOOPMANSCH AP (The	<a href="#">CPL(24)3PROV Recommendation 339 (2013)</a>

				Netherlands, L, SOC)	<a href="#">Resolution 355 (2013)</a>
2012	Armenia	Local by-elections	9 and 23 September 2012	Henry FERAL (France, L, EPP/CCE)	<a href="#">CPL(24)2REV Recommendation 338 (2013)</a>
2012	Serbia	Local Elections	6 May 2012	Nigel MERMAGEN (United Kingdom, L, ILDG)	<a href="#">Report CPL(23)3 Recommendation 330 (2012)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 348 (2012)</a>
2011	Bulgaria	Local Elections	23 October 2011	Mihkel JUHKAMI (Estonia, L, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG(22)5 Recommendation 318 (2012)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 338 (2012)</a>
2011	Norway	Test on E-voting in the framework of Local Elections	12 September 2011	Nigel MERMAGEN (United Kingdom, L, ILDG) and Devrim CUKUR (Turkey, R, SOC)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(21)9</a>
2011	Republic of Moldova	Local Elections	5 June 2011	Hannes WENINGER (Austria, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CPL(21)4 Recommendation 313 (2011)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 329 (2011)</a>
2011	Albania	Local Elections	8 May 2011	Volkram GEBEL (Germany, L, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CPL(21)3 Recommendation 312 (2011)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 328 (2011)</a>

2010	Republic of Moldova	Elections of the Bashkan (Governor) of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia	12 December 2010	Volfram GEBEL, Germany (EPP-CD)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(19)34</a>
2010	Ukraine	Local Elections	31 October 2010	Nigel MERMAGEN (United Kingdom, L, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG(20)7 Recommendation 303 (2011)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 322 (2011)</a>
2010	Georgia	Local Elections	30 May 2010	Günther KRUG (Germany, R, SOC)	<a href="#">CG(19)8 Recommendation 291 (2010)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 311 (2010)</a>
2009	Azerbaijan	Municipal Elections	23 December 2009	Francis LEC (France, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CPL(18)2 Recommendation 284 (2010)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 300 (2010)</a>
2009	Armenia	First Municipal Elections in Yerevan	31 May 2009	Nigel MERMAGEN (United Kingdom L, ILDG )	<a href="#">CPL(17)5 Recommendation 277 (2009)</a>
2009	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Local Elections	22 March 2009	Paolo RONDELLI (San Marino, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CG(16)16REP Recommendation 269 (2009)</a>
2008	Israel	Local Elections	11 November 2008	Jean-Claude FRECON (France, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(15)99</a>

2008	Georgia	Elections to the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara	3 November 2008	Günther KRUG (Germany, R, SOC)	<a href="#">CPR(16)2REP Recommendation 264 (2009)</a>
2008	Finland	Electronic voting in the Finnish Municipal Elections	26 October 2008	Keith WHITMORE (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG/CP(15)4</a>
2008	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Local Elections	5 October 2008	Nigel MERMAGEN (United Kingdom, L, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG(15)34REP Recommendation 256 (2008)</a>
2008	Armenia	Local Elections	28 September 2008	Paolo RONDELLI, (San Marino, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CG(15)33REP Recommendation 255 (2008)</a>
2008	Serbia	Local and Provincial Elections	11 and 25 May 2008	Paolo RONDELLI (San Marino, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CG(15)32REP Recommendation 254 (2008)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 275 (2008)</a>
2008	Republic of Moldova	Elections to the People's Assembly in Gagauzia	16 and 30 March 2008	Paolo RONDELLI (San Marino, R, SOC)	<a href="#">CG(15)11REP Recommendation 239 (2008)</a>
2007	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Presidential Elections in the Republic of Srpska	9 December 2007	Giorgi MASALKINI Georgia (Georgia, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG(14)35REP Recommendation 237 (2008)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 254 (2008)</a>

2007	Serbia	Kosovo <sup>1</sup> Municipal and Assembly Elections	17 November and 8 December 2007	Joe CONWAY (Ireland L, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG(14)34REP Recommendation 236 (2008) Resolution 253 (2008)</a>
2007	Republic of Moldova	Local Elections	3 and 17 June 2007	Joseph BORG (Malta, R, EPP/CCE)	<a href="#">CG(14)23REP Recommendation 227 (2007) Resolution 246 (2007)</a>
2007	Albania	Local Elections	18 February 2007	Jean-Claude FRECON (France, SOC, L)	<a href="#">CG(13)44PART2 Recommendation 214 (2007)</a>
2006	Republic of Moldova	Election of the Bashkan (Governor) of Gagauzia	3 and 17 December 2006	Susan BOLAM (United Kingdom, R, EPP/CCE) and Paolo RONDELLI (San Marino, R, SOC)	<a href="#">CG(13)43PART2 Recommendation 213 (2007) Resolution 232 (2007)</a>
2006	Azerbaijan	Rerun of Local by- elections	6 October 2006	Véronique MOREIRA (France, R, SOC)	<a href="#">CG(13)33PART2 Recommendation 206 (2006) Resolution 225 (2006)</a>
2006	Georgia	Local Elections	5 October 2006	Wim VAN GELDER (Netherlands, R, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG(13)32PART2 Recommendation 205 (2006)</a>

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<sup>1</sup> All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

					<a href="#">Resolution 224 (2006)</a>
2006	Serbia and Montenegro	Referendum on the State-Status of Montenegro	21 May 2006	Keith WITHMORE (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG(13)15 PARTII Recommendation 186 (2006)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 211 (2006)</a>
2006	Ukraine	Local and Regional Elections	26 March 2006	David LLOYD-WILLIAMS (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG(13)10PARTII Recommendation 192 (2006)</a> <a href="#">Resolution 216 (2006)</a>
2005	Palestinian territories	Local Elections (fourth phase)	15 December 2005	Christopher NEWBURY (United Kingdom, L, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(12)100</a>
2005	Republic of Moldova	Local by-elections	27 November and 11 December 2005	David LLOYD-WILLIAMS (United Kingdom, L, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(12)98</a>
2005	Armenia	Local Elections	25 September and 16 October 2005	Sean O'BRIEN (Ireland, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CG/CP(12)13</a>
2005	Republic of Moldova	Local by-elections	10 and 24 July 2005	Pascal MANGIN (France, L, EPP/CCE)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(12)34</a>
2005	The former Yugoslav	Local Elections	13, 27 March and 10 April 2005	Keith WHITMORE (United	<a href="#">CG/BUR(11)122rev.</a>



	Republic of Macedonia			Kingdom, R, GILD)	
2004	Azerbaijan	Local Elections	17 December 2004	Wim VAN GELDER (Netherlands, R, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(11)95</a>
2004	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Referendum on the new law on municipal boundaries and on decentralisation	7 November 2004	Sean O'BRIEN (Ireland, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(11)75</a>
2004	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Municipal Elections	2 October 2004	Christopher NEWBURY (United Kingdom, L, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG/CP(11)13</a>
2004	Serbia and Montenegro	Local Elections	19 September 2004	Alain CHENARD (France, Honorary member, former President of the Congress)	<a href="#">CG/CP(11)14</a>
2004	Georgia	Regional Elections in Adjara (Georgia)	20 June 2004	Joseph BORG (Malta, R, EPP/CD) and Ian MICALLEFF (Malta, L, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(11)40</a>
2004	Serbia and Montenegro	Presidential Elections	13 and 27 June 2004	Ayse Bahar CEBI (Turkey, L, EPP/CD) and Christopher NEWBURY	<a href="#">CG/BUR(11)26</a>

				(United-Kingdom, L, EPP/CD)	
2004	Romania	Local and Regional Elections	6 June 2004	Günther KRUG (Germany, R, SOC)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(11)25</a>
2004	Ukraine	Mayoral Election in the town of Mukachevo	18 April 2004	Joseph BORG (Malta, R, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(10)125</a>
2003	Albania	Local by-elections in Tirana	28 December 2003	Yavuz MILDON (Turkey, R, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG/BUR10(87)</a>
2003	Republic of Moldova	Regional elections in Gagauzia	16 and 30 November 2003	Christopher NEWBURY (United Kingdom, L, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(10)89</a>
2003	Serbia and Montenegro	Presidential Elections	16 November 2003	Joseph BORG (Malta, R, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(10)70</a>
2003	Albania	Local elections	12 October 2003	Helene LUND (Denmark, L, SOC)	<a href="#">CG/CP(10)16</a>
2003	Republic of Moldova	Local Elections	25 May and 8 June 2003	Yavuz MILDON (Turkey, R, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(10)19</a>

2002	Serbia and Montenegro	Municipal elections in Kosovo <sup>1</sup>	26 October 2002	Thomas JIRSA (Czech Republic, L)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(9)80</a>
2002	Armenia	Local Elections	20 October 2002	Christopher NEWBURY (United Kingdom, L, EPP/CD)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(9)60</a>
2002	Republic of Moldova	Regional Elections in Gagauzia	6 and 22 October 2002	Yavuz MILDON (Turkey, L, EPP/CD) and Noreen RYAN (Ireland, R)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(9)59</a>
2002	Bosnia and Herzegovina	General Local Elections	5 October 2002	Keith WHITMORE (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(9)58</a>
2002	Serbia and Montenegro	Local by-elections	28 July 2002	Owen MASTERS (United Kingdom, R)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(9)40</a>
2002	Georgia	Local Elections	2 June 2002	Keith WHITMORE (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(9)17</a>
2002	Ukraine	Local and Regional Elections	31 March 2002	Christopher NEWBURY (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(8)164</a>

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				Kingdom, L, EPP/CD)	
2001	Slovak Republic	Regional Elections	1 December 2001	Martin HAAS (Switzerland, L)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(8)99</a>
2001	Georgia	Regional Elections and elections for Head of Republic held in the Autonomous Region of Adjara	4 November 2001	Keith WHITMORE (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(8)97</a>
2001	Croatia	Local Elections	20 May 2001	Keith WHITMORE (United Kingdom, R, ILDG)	<a href="#">CG/BUR(8)12</a>

## **Congress rules and procedures with regards to election observation**

The Congress is governed by statutory resolutions adopted by the Committee of Ministers under the authority of the Statute of the Council of Europe and by its own principles aimed at amplifying these statutory texts. The topics presented below are extracts of the Rules and Procedures adopted by the Congress at its 31th Session on 21 October 2016 and revised by the Statutory Forum on 28 September 2020. They relate, in principle, to the basics of election observation missions, notably the composition of respective Congress delegations.

### *General provisions on election observation*

Following an invitation by the authorities of a country to observe local and/or regional elections, the Congress Bureau decides on the acceptance of the invitation and on the scale of the operation (electoral assessment mission, pre-election mission, observation mission) and on its format (on-site, hybrid or remote). In the absence of a Bureau meeting, the Congress President takes the necessary decision, after consultation with the Presidents of the Chambers.

The Congress may also decide not to deploy an observation mission following an invitation, for exemple if the latter arrives too late to ensure a meaningful observation process or for other reasons. An official invitation should be received by the Congress at the latest 60 days prior to the Election Day.

### *Delegations for election observation*

In case of a fully-fledged onsite mission, the Secretariat sends a call for interest, including the application form, to the e-mail addresses of all Congress members. Secretaries and Heads of national delegations receive a copy. Congress members who express their interest and send back the form by a given deadline will be considered. Candidatures from members of national associations whose associations agree to cover their costs shall also be taken into account.

Based on candidatures received within the given deadline, the Secretary General of the Congress proposes a draft delegation, including the delegation's leadership, normally involving between 5 and 20 members.<sup>1</sup>

The composition of delegations is determined according to an appointment system allowing for a balanced representation of the different political groups of the Congress, gender balance and a fair geographical representation and also taking into account the chronological order of candidacies put forward by the members.

A delegation comprises the Congress members, as described above, and one or more representatives of the Congress Secretariat as well as an expert in electoral matters. The delegation is usually accompanied by interpreters to facilitate communication between interlocutors and the Congress delegation.

In order to ensure a meaningful participation in the work of the mission, the candidate's language skills (in at least one of the official languages of the Council of Europe, English and French) will be taken

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<sup>1</sup> For remote and "hybrid" election observation activities, members of the delegations normally include the representatives of the Congress on the Council for Democratic Elections of the Venice Commission.

into consideration. In addition, experience in election observation and participation in trainings are amongst the criteria.

For the appointment as Head of Delegation/Rapporteur, in addition to the criteria mentioned above, moderation skills and capacities in political dialog are required.

Observation delegations should not include Congress members from the country in which the elections are going to be monitored and from countries with special relations with the respective country.

Members taking part in a pre-election visit are expected to also be available for the main election observation mission.

In order to ensure a meaningful participation in the online meetings, in case of remote and hybrid missions, the scope of the delegation is reduced.

### *Reporting after election observation*

A written report will be drawn up by the Rapporteur with the assistance of the Congress Secretariat and the expert. It should reflect the opinion of the members of the entire delegation. The report must be comprehensive, noting positive and negative factors, distinguishing between significant and insignificant aspects. It should identify patterns that could have an impact on the integrity of the election process and on the authenticity of the vote. It takes into account resolutions/recommendations previously adopted by the Congress, including those arising from the monitoring of the country concerned, as well as relevant opinions and recommendations from other Council of Europe bodies and international organisations and institutions.

Following missions which include a deployment on the Election Day observation of polling procedures on the Election Day, the report is accompanied by a Recommendation to the Committee of Ministers.

In the case of remote missions, an information report is prepared which contains propositions to be endorsed by the Monitoring Committee and the Congress Session.

### *Post-electoral dialogue*

The importance of election observation at local and regional level and its complementarity to the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government has been broadly acknowledged within the Council of Europe. In order to ensure coherence and effectiveness of these tools and the implementation of recommendations emerging from its election observation missions, the Congress has introduced the option of a post-election observation dialogue. This may be put into place at the joint initiative of the Congress and relevant authorities. The Permanent Representative of the country concerned, the Head and the Secretary of the national delegation to the Congress will be duly informed of the post-electoral dialogue process. The dialogue comprises the following steps:

- a. a presentation of the Congress Recommendation to the relevant national authorities, notably central election commissions and/or other national authorities in charge of electoral management;
- b. an exchange of views with the relevant national authorities, notably central election commissions and/or other national authorities in charge of electoral management, as well as other competent stakeholders;
- c. the drawing-up of an implementation timetable by the Congress delegation in co-operation with the relevant national authorities,



notably central election commissions and/or other relevant authorities in charge of electoral management, as well as other competent stakeholders, in order to put the recommendations agreed on as priorities into practice;

d. on the basis of this implementation timetable, if appropriate, an action plan or co-operation programme will be developed in association with other relevant departments of the Council of Europe.

# **How to observe elections – the dos and don'ts**

## *1. Prepare yourself properly*

Sign the Congress Code of Conduct and attend trainings, in particular organised during Congress Sessions. Read the background materials including previous reports, history and information about the political system and become familiar with the legal framework for elections. Stay abreast of the current political context.

## *2. Follow the instructions*

Fully dedicate yourself to the observation mission, follow the instructions of the Congress delegation's leadership (Head of delegation/Rapporteur), abide by the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters and attend the required briefings and debriefings.

## *3. Be an active member of the delegation*

Contribute to the meetings with the Congress interlocutors prior to Election Day (state/ government/electoral officials, diplomats, representatives of parties, media, NGOs, experts).

## *4. Remain impartial*

Maintain strict political impartiality at all times (to avoid expressing or showing any bias or preference in relation to national authorities, political parties, candidates, issues etc.).

## *5. Do not interfere in electoral processes*

Avoid obstructing the election process; do not intervene or give instructions to election officials, political party representatives or other observers. Instead, you may raise the awareness of election officials of significant problems, irregularities, fraud etc. and you should note them down.

## *6. Show respect*

Respect the sovereignty of the host country, and the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its people, as well as its laws, and follow lawful instructions from the country's governmental, security or electoral authorities.

## *7. Gather information*

Note if laws, regulations and actions of state / governmental / electoral officials unduly burden or obstruct the conduct of the elections. If necessary, ask questions of officials without obstructing the election process.

## *8. Fill-in the forms*

Keep a well-documented record of the observation by using, in particular, the Congress questionnaire (or the forms provided by partner institutions).

## *9. Form a comprehensive opinion*

Be aware that conclusions following election observation should be comprehensive, noting positive and negative factors, and distinguishing between significant and insignificant aspects.

## *10. Act jointly*

Co-operate with other international election observers, notably with the Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE/ODIHR.

## *11. Give feedback for the report*

Contribute to the finalisation of the written report, read the draft report and give feedback to the Congress delegation's leadership (Rapporteur) and participate actively in the debate for the adoption of the report at the Congress Session.

## *12. Avoid conflicts of interests*

Avoid conflicts between any actual or potential financial or any other interests, on a professional, personal or family level, in connection with the country concerned by an election observation mission. If you are unable to avoid this, inform the Congress Secretariat. Refer to the Rules and Procedures of the Congress, in particular Paragraph 64.3.d and to the Code of Conduct of Congress members, in particular Paragraph 8<sup>1</sup>.

## *13. Don't accept gifts*

Avoid any situation that could appear to be a conflict of interest or receiving an inappropriate payment or gift during a mission. Refer to

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<sup>1</sup> Rules and Procedures of the Congress <https://rm.coe.int/congress-rules-and-procedures/1680a39eb7> and Code of Conduct of Congress members <https://rm.coe.int/code-of-conduct-flyer-a5-for-members-en/1680a162df>.

the Code of Conduct of Congress members, in particular Paragraph 15 and to Rules and Procedures of the Congress, in particular Rule 65.1.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Code of Conduct of Congress members (2021) <https://rm.coe.int/code-of-conduct-flyer-a5-for-members-en/1680a162df> and Rules and Procedures of the Congress <https://rm.coe.int/congress-rules-and-procedures/1680a39eb7>

#### *14. Do not show any preference*

During meetings with the Congress interlocutors prior to and on Election Day, avoid expressing or showing any bias or preference in relation to national authorities, political parties, candidates, issues etc.

#### *15. Avoid spontaneous media statements and contradictions*

Refrain from making statements / declarations to the media, via social networks or in public, on conclusions drawn from the observation before the final mission statement. Clarify possible requests from the media with the Congress delegation's leadership. Avoid contradiction or conflict of statements / declarations compared to the overall final assessment of the elections.

As guardian of local and regional democracy, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has been observing some hundred local and regional elections over the last twenty years.

The compilation “Twenty years of the Congress’ experience in electoral matters” retraces how the Congress became a well-established institution in the field. It also highlights the substantial achievements made by many countries in Europe in respect of European standards in electoral matters. It eventually explores the recurring transversal issues that have been identified at grassroots level.

The Congress, in co-operation with its strategic partners, is committed to continue supporting countries who are interested in welcoming international observers on their territories by deploying a delegation of its members on the ground and by drafting meaningful recommendations to contribute to better electoral processes.

[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

The Council of Europe is the continent’s leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member States, including all members of the European Union. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 46 member states. Composed of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three committees, it brings together 612 elected officials representing more than 130 000 local and regional authorities.

