

24 March 2025

2024 Annual Activity Report of the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance

Action required: for information

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INTRODUCTION

At the 4th Summit of the Council of Europe held in Reykjavik in May 2023, the Heads of State and Government committed to securing and strengthening democracy and good governance at all levels and recognised the essential role of multilevel governance in delivering the [Organisation's vision](#).

In order to streamline the Council of Europe's work on multilevel governance, the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance was rebranded as [Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance](#) and transferred to the Secretariat of the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities](#). This merger is grounded on a history of close co-operation between the Centre of Expertise and the Congress, using monitoring reports, legal instruments, and Council of Europe standards and reference texts in the design and implementation of projects.

At the Congress, the Centre of Expertise now regroups all co-operation projects in the area of multilevel governance, which are demand-driven in response to political dialogue on the ground and on the monitoring of the provisions of the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in the Council of Europe member states.

The Centre of Expertise projects contribute to developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels. They promote responsive, inclusive, representative, and human rights-based decision-making. The Centre also supports reforms and provides policy advice; it develops the capacities of local and regional elected representatives as well as public officials at all levels, while supporting effective participation in democratic processes.

The Centre of Expertise projects and targeted support to member states therefore contribute to the strategic framework of the Council of Europe.

In 2024, the Centre of Expertise implemented 18 projects of a combined value of €13 million in 21 member states, as well as one in support of Belarusian democratic forces. This includes the implementation of two multi-country projects, which offered increased opportunities for peer learning and co-operation among local authorities and civil society actors. Altogether, around 2 000 people developed knowledge and skills related to Council of Europe standards, multilevel governance and local democracy through participation in capacity building activities. In addition, 16 legal opinions and policy advice documents were delivered to seven member states.

Moreover, a new [European Label of Governance Excellence \(ELoGE\)](#) Accreditation Platform was established in 2024 under the aegis of the Congress Bureau, and award ceremonies were held in Finland, Spain and Türkiye.

Looking ahead to 2025, the total value of projects implemented by the Centre of Expertise amounts €15.5 million and includes new projects in Serbia, Ukraine and in Kosovo*.



* All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

ALBANIA - SUSTAINING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM AT LOCAL LEVEL

Since joining the Council of Europe in 1995 and ratifying the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 2000, Albania has undertaken a series of ambitious reforms to strengthen local self-government. A key milestone was the 2015 Territorial Administrative Reform (Law 115/2015), which consolidated 373 local authorities into 61 municipalities, restructuring local governance with administrative units as functional components.

Building on the findings of the 2021 Congress [monitoring report](#) - which underscored the need for greater financial resources and deeper decentralization - Albania developed its 2023–2030 decentralization strategy, emphasizing sustainable development, digital governance, financial autonomy, and democratic participation.

To support these aims, two major projects have been implemented: [Sustaining Public Administration Reform at the Local Level in Albania \(SPAR\)](#) and [Promoting Deliberative Democracy and Innovative Approaches to Citizen Participation in South-East Europe](#).



Launched in December 2022, SPAR seeks to modernize human resource management, consolidate training frameworks for local officials, and advance good democratic governance.

In 2024, the project achieved several concrete outcomes:

- [Training Needs Assessment](#) module was digitalised helping to align the capacity-development offer with municipal needs at around 75%.
- The New Core Competency Framework introduced a framework guiding merit-based recruitment, training, and evaluations across local administrations, thus boosting the attractiveness of the Albanian public service.
- Inaugural [Public Administration Week](#) was organised, engaging over 2,000 citizens, promoting transparency and accountability in governance.
- The role of the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA) as Albania's principal institution for civil service professional development was reinforced and 35 civil servants benefited from targeted training through ASPA courses.
- Human Resource Management tools were reinforced and updated, including the relaunch and operationalisation of the Collaboration Platform (formerly administrata.al).

In parallel, Albania is actively involved in the regional deliberative democracy project that spans Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. This initiative aims at strengthening democratic processes across South-East Europe and foster innovative citizen engagement.

In this framework, the Centre of Expertise established a Community of Practice comprising 43 members (representatives of 18 local authorities from the six beneficiaries and the seven association of local authorities) and formed a regional pool of trainers to encourage effective citizen participation.



Strengthening of human capital at both local and national levels is essential, as actions at the central and local levels are deeply interconnected.

Ms. Adea Pirdeni

Minister of State for Public Administration and Anti-corruption, Albania



Albanian stakeholders include the Association of Local Autonomy of Albania and the municipalities of Berat, Roskovec, and Tirana. They have collaborated to exchange best practices ahead of piloting deliberative processes. A practical guide titled [“How to Organise a Deliberative Process at the Local Level?”](#) has also been published and adapted to local contexts. It is being used as a basis for the regional training of trainers that will ultimately support local authorities.

ARMENIA – FOSTERING DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT, DECENTRALISATION AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Since joining the Council of Europe in 2001 and ratifying the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 2002, Armenia has undertaken far-reaching reforms to strengthen local democracy, with unwavering Council of Europe support. In late 2022, the Territorial and Administrative Reform of Armenia (TARA) reorganised the country into 71 consolidated communities, followed by the approval of a Decentralisation Concept on 7 November 2023 - further aligning Armenia’s governance with the Charter principles.

The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#) adopted in 2020, highlighted areas demanding improvement, notably constrained municipal autonomy, limited local financing, and weak consultation mechanisms between central and local authorities.

The Centre of Expertise, through the [Democratic Development, Decentralisation and Good Governance in Armenia – Phase II \(DDDGGGA – Phase II\)](#) project has supported Armenia’s decentralisation agenda since December 2022 under the [Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2023 - 2026](#), helping to address recommendations from Congress monitoring reports.



In 2024, project activities helped further Armenia’s decentralisation reform and helped deliver the following outputs:

- Four Community Consultation Initiative meetings were organised to offer opportunities to discuss development of the revised Law on local self-government involving more

than 40 key stakeholders and actors per session, including local authorities, central government, civil society, and international partners. Women comprised more than 55% of participants per meeting, reinforcing inclusivity in the decentralisation process.

- A specialised working group was established, chaired by the Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, to ensure comprehensive consultation with local authorities.
- Armenia became the first country to activate the [CDDEM](#) Rapid Response Service, receiving expert input from 15 member states and the Venice Commission to inform the preparation of the new draft Law on Local Self-Government.
- Key provisions of the revised Law on Local Self-Government were developed and are expected to be presented to the Prime Minister and National Assembly in 2025.
- Local development was reinforced through training on inter-municipal co-operation (IMC), benefiting 30 consolidated communities. 11 grants were awarded to selected local authorities to prepare feasibility studies on economic growth, tourism, and resource management.

The capacity-building programme to promote Cross-Border Co-operation between Armenia and Georgia continued with a 4th session held in Dilijan, Armenia, bringing together around 30 mayors and senior officials from Armenian and Georgian border municipalities.



We gained new perspectives and identified weaknesses through the community resilience assessment process, according to the criteria defined in the Resilience Building Strategies toolkit. Recommendations of international experts were highly relevant, further validating the effectiveness of the e-tool.

*Economic development officer
of a consolidated community, Armenia*



The “[Support to Communities Hosting Refugees in Armenia](#)” project, was developed as part of the comprehensive [support package](#) of the Council of Europe under the [Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026](#). It aimed to strengthen local resilience and provide direct assistance to local authorities, across Armenia’s most affected regions, thereby enhancing their capacity to manage the crisis and to address the immediate needs of refugees present on their territories.

Eleven municipalities (Byureghavan, Gavar, Martuni, Masis, Pambak, Tashir, Tumanyan, Yeghegnadzor, Vanadzor, Vayk, and Vedi) successfully developed [Resilience Building Strategies](#), positioning them as pilots for national crisis response planning and long-term integration.

Four communities from the most affected regions—Kotayk, Ararat, Armavir, Syunik, Gegharkunik, and Lori—were selected following a call for proposals to implement impactful initiatives addressing both the urgent and mid-term needs of Karabakh refugees.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA - INNOVATING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

Having joined the Council of Europe and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 2002, Bosnia and Herzegovina has worked closely with the Council of Europe Congress to strengthen local democracy and promote good governance.

The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#) was adopted in October 2019, underscoring the need for deeper citizen engagement, stronger municipal autonomy, and more robust frameworks for local self-government.

Since 2020, the Congress has played a pioneering role in promoting deliberative democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina and throughout South-East Europe. Its interventions have been instrumental in breaking the political deadlock in Mostar by introducing deliberative processes that empower local public authorities and citizens to actively contribute to local decision-making.



Building on this success, the Congress has continued to support local authorities in implementing citizen assemblies and advancing democratic practices. This support has been delivered through bilateral projects and the ongoing regional initiative on promoting deliberative democracy in South-East Europe.

In addition, the Congress is further promoting open government and is conducting a comprehensive study to assess human rights practices within local governance through the project “[Innovating Democratic Participation at the Local Level in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)”. implemented under the Council of Europe [Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022– 2025](#).

In 2024, the project advanced decentralisation and democratic participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina through several key achievements:

- 119 public officials and local elected representatives developed competences in good democratic governance, including open, inclusive, innovative, and human rights-based practices.
- Two citizen assemblies were organised in the cities of Mostar and Banja Luka.
- The Mostar Citizens’ Assembly, which focused on tourism and economic development, resulted in 29 recommendations for the city authorities. These recommendations have been translated into an Action Plan that is to be presented to the newly elected City Council.
- The Citizens’ Assembly in Banja Luka addressed the question of youth entrepreneurship, with 50% of its members being young people (including four under the age of 18), 20 recommendations were adopted on matters such as education, start-up funding, digital communication, and other initiatives to support youth-led business ventures.
- The website www.mostargradimo.ba, developed as a dedicated platform for communicating deliberative processes under the previous project has now been successfully handed over to the City of Mostar.
- A Memorandum of Understanding between the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the associations of Local Authorities in both the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska was signed. This first ever joint meeting of the presidencies of these associations was recognised as a successful model for future cross-entity co-operation.

- Seven local authorities and the District of Brčko were supported in applying for the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local Programme. As a result, Travnik and Modriča became the first municipalities from Bosnia and Herzegovina to join this global initiative.

Additionally, 24 local authorities across Bosnia and Herzegovina - 11 from the Federation and 13 from Republika Srpska (with the City of Banja Luka joining in 2023) - were engaged in the Platform of Exchange on open local governance, representing over 25% of the country's population.

The follow-up project, "[Strengthening Democratic Innovations and Promoting Human Rights at the Local Level in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)" to be carried out from July 2024 to December 2025 continues building on this endeavour. It further aims to raise awareness of human rights protection and support human rights-based policymaking at the local level, fostering a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance framework.

It promotes deliberative democracy as a complementary form of citizen participation and included in 2024 the publication of a comprehensive guide titled "How to Organise a Deliberative Process at the Local Level?" available in both [English](#) and [Bosnian](#), and which will be transposed into an e-learning course. In addition, a pool of local trainers in deliberative processes was established with a view to supporting local authorities that are willing to renew their engagement with citizens and civil society.

To achieve these goals, the Council of Europe signed a grant agreement with the associations of local authorities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Republika Srpska to enhance cross-entity co-operation and bolster the capacities of their members to further embed in their policy-making the principles of transparency, accountability, inclusiveness and co-creation with citizens and civil society. In addition, a baseline research on local human rights practices and needs at local level was launched and a dedicated web platform is being developed to showcase good local practices.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is also part of the regional project "[Promoting deliberative democracy and innovative approaches to citizen participation in South-East Europe](#)" along with Albania, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. This initiative aims at strengthening democratic processes across South-East Europe and foster innovative citizen engagement.

A Community of Practice has been established including representatives from the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republika Srpska, and the cities of Sarajevo, Doboј, and Brčko District in the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

BULGARIA - DEVELOPING FISCAL DECENTRALISATION AND IMPROVING LOCAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Bulgaria joined the Council of Europe in 1992 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1995. In its most recent [monitoring report](#), adopted in January 2021, the Congress recognised Bulgaria's efforts to transfer competences to the local level, increase municipal resources, and institutionalise consultation procedures.

Nonetheless, key challenges persist, including the heavy reliance of local authorities on transfers from the state budget, inadequate local tax revenues, a general shortage of resources at municipal level, and a limited degree of local financial autonomy. The Centre delivered tailor-made expertise to Bulgarian authorities on decentralisation, municipal finances and local development issues with a view to improving fiscal decentralisation and financial management at local level.



The project [“Developing Fiscal Decentralisation and Improving Local Financial Management in Bulgaria”](#) was carried out between 2022 and 2024 and co-funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. Implemented by the Centre of Expertise in close collaboration with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the Ministry of Finance, the National Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Bulgaria, and other key stakeholders, it focused on enhancing fiscal decentralisation and strengthening financial management at local level, addressing recommendations from Congress monitoring.

At the closing conference in April 2024, key project outputs were presented:

- A detailed [Technical report](#) provided an extensive assessment of the existing legal, administrative, and fiscal context of municipalities in Bulgaria.
- A [peer review report](#) offered friendly advice on topics such as local tax capacity, intergovernmental transfers, data transparency, consultation procedures, and public communication of municipal budgets. This has led to a [Policy advice](#) on fiscal decentralisation which was supplemented with a [roadmap](#) to support delivery of Bulgaria's Decentralisation Strategy.
- [A training needs analysis](#) involving 158 municipalities highlighted the necessity for a national training strategy and recommended the establishment of a specialised agency to coordinate capacity-development for the civil service.

Building on these findings, a comprehensive [training curriculum](#) for Bulgarian local officials and civil society representatives was piloted to improve transparency and sustainability in municipal financial practices. A [Local Finance Benchmark](#) adapted to the Bulgarian context was also tested with nine pilot municipalities, facilitating continuous improvement in local fiscal management.

CROATIA - GOOD GOVERNANCE AT LOCAL LEVEL

Croatia became a member state of the Council of Europe in 1996 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1997, with the Charter entering into force in 1998. Croatia has made significant efforts to strengthen local self-government, aligning its policies with the principles of the Charter.

The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#) and recommendation on local and regional democracy adopted on 28 March 2024 following a monitoring visit in June 2023, welcomed improvements while identifying areas for further progress. Specifically, it urges national authorities to increase the share of public affairs managed by local authorities and ensure they are consulted on matters that affect them directly. It calls for clearer definitions of competences of local authorities.

[The European Label of Governance Excellence \(ELoGE\)](#) programme was launched in Croatia by the Association of Cities. The ELoGE Benchmark and questionnaires were translated and

disseminated to local authorities throughout Croatia by the Association. A total of nine cities enrolled in the process and committed to applying the good democratic governance benchmark. The Association of Cities delivered an awareness raising and capacity-development programme with representatives of the participating local authorities. An award ceremony is planned for Šibenik, Croatia in March 2025.

CYPRUS - ENHANCING LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Having joined the Council of Europe in 1961 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1988, Cyprus embarked on a comprehensive local government reform, culminating in legislation that came into effect in 2024.

The Congress [monitoring report](#) in 2021 noted the closer alignment of new legislation with the principles of the Charter and praised the focus of the planned reforms on modernising self-government through enhanced competences and financial capacities for local authorities.

In recognition of the Centre of Expertise longstanding support, the Cypriot authorities made a voluntary contribution to launch the [“Enhancing the Local Government Reform in Cyprus”](#) project (Jan 2023 – Jun 2025). The project aims at supporting the implementation of the Local Government Reform in Cyprus and strengthening the capacity of local authorities to provide good democratic governance and high-quality services to their citizens, according to European standards.



In 2024, the Centre of Expertise has helped advance this reform through a series of impactful measures:

- 507 local officials across Cyprus developed capacities based on Council of Europe standards, including through a multi-stage [Leadership Academy Programme](#).
- Twelve local trainers were equipped to deliver capacity-building sessions based on Council of Europe standards.
- Extensive training materials were developed in Greek ensuring the programme’s sustainability and replicability.
- A national public ethics benchmark for local governments in Cyprus was adapted and developed from [CM\(2020\)27](#).
- [The European Label of Governance Excellence \(ELoGE\)](#) was launched.
- Twelve local authorities introduced a public ethics benchmark; two municipalities have been supported in developing strategic municipal plans.

FINLAND - DELIVERING GOOD GOVERNANCE AND BALANCED LOCAL ECONOMY

Finland became a member of the Council of Europe in 1989 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1991. Since then, Finland has developed a robust framework for local self-government through the Finnish Local Government Act of 1995 and further decentralisation reforms that ensure strong municipal autonomy and financial independence.



The Congress [monitoring report](#), adopted in October 2024, noted the overall positive application of the Charter's principles in Finland, the establishment of a second tier of local government at regional level ("wellbeing services counties"), the extensive responsibilities of local authorities, and the effective collaboration between central and local governments.

The Centre of Expertise developed the "[Delivering Good Governance and Balanced Local Economy in Finland](#)" project in response to a request from Finnish authorities to support implementation of the SOTE Reform. This initiative provided policy recommendations to strengthen legislation, improve governance processes and boost local financial autonomy. Moreover, it addresses the need for modernising public administration and enhancing municipal performance.

In 2024, the Centre of Expertise delivered four policy advice reports with recommendations to reinforce the SOTE reform and strengthen multilevel governance in Finland.

These policy advice papers, drawing on experience and good practice from Council of Europe member states, include key recommendations on the following issues:

- Metropolitan governance, inter-municipal cooperation, and spatial planning in the City of Turku and Turku City Region. The report contains recommendations to strengthen governance processes and boost development based on recent good practice from member states, including Austria, Latvia and the Slovak Republic.
- Fiscal decentralisation and fiscal autonomy of regional and local governments, and the fiscal impact of the reform. Based on results of [Local Finance Benchmarking for central and local authorities](#) carried out under the project in 2023, the recommendations aim to reconcile the budgetary needs of the municipalities with the fiscal decentralisation capacity of the central government.
- Administrative capacities of the Finnish Wellbeing Services Counties. A comprehensive quantitative and qualitative social analysis of the economic, administrative, and political challenges related to the SOTE reform, includes proposals to address legislative and organisational challenges faced by the new regional level of governance.
- Political accountability and governance procedures: Analysis and policy recommendations to feed into policy review on the accumulation of mandates across levels of administration in Finland based on practice in several Council of Europe member states (Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Ireland, UK, Slovakia);

A comprehensive, sustainable, replicable training curriculum was prepared and adapted to the Finnish context to help develop good democratic governance competences and strengthen local and regional institutions beyond the project cycle.

More than 200 Finnish officials at all levels of government developed their capacities through participation in the programme.

The European Label of Governance Excellence (ELOGE) programme was introduced in Finland for the first time with following municipalities receiving the label at an award ceremony in Helsinki in May 2024: Iitti, Kristiinankaupunki, Parikkala, Kolari, Kuopio, and Tohmajärvi.

GEORGIA - ADVANCING PARTICIPATORY AND HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Since joining the Council of Europe in 1999 and ratifying the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 2005, Georgia has undertaken significant decentralisation and local self-government reforms aimed at strengthening democratic governance.

The most recent [Congress monitoring report](#) on Georgia was adopted in November 2018 and highlighted the substantial progress achieved by Georgia in the field of local democracy.

Several projects implemented by the Centre of Expertise have supported these efforts by ensuring that legislation aligns with Council of Europe standards and that key recommendations from Congress monitoring reports are addressed.



These initiatives have focused on enhancing citizen participation in decision-making, promoting gender equality, eliminating discrimination, and empowering local authorities to implement inclusive governance frameworks.

The project “[Strengthening Participatory Democracy and Human Rights at the Local Level](#)” implemented from December 2020 to April 2024, has helped deliver significant results:

- Approximately 10,000 citizens across 18 municipalities have benefitted from new participatory opportunities that have led to more inclusive policy outcomes.
- 3,000 public sector and civil society representatives have been equipped with essential participatory tools through capacity-development initiatives that include citizens’ assemblies and the CivicLab methodology developed by the Council of Europe.
- The [curriculum on human rights and anti-discrimination](#) was launched to equip local authorities with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives that are essential for advancing a human-rights based local democracy.
- Fifteen municipalities have improved their participatory frameworks, with six developing strategic documents that now integrate citizen input into local planning processes.
- Two municipalities, Ozurgeti and Rustavi, have pioneered citizens’ assemblies, engaging over 70 citizens in deliberative processes that directly shaped local policies.
- Around 20 strategies and action plans focusing on anti-discrimination, gender equality, and social inclusion were developed with project support, thereby reinforcing human rights protection at the municipal level.
- Targeted training for local officials has further strengthened social inclusion and enhanced municipal capacities in human rights and governance.

The establishment of the Committee on the Localisation of Human Rights within the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) has bolstered local advocacy efforts, while the adoption of a dedicated human rights strategy and NALAG’s Best Practice

Programme have further empowered local authorities and expanded the project's impact nationwide.

In 2024, a bridging project titled "Promoting Human Rights and Participation at Local Level through Open Government: A Case Study in Georgia" was implemented to further advance participatory governance and human rights protection.

A participatory research assessed how human rights, citizen participation, and inclusivity are integrated into governance processes in six local authorities involved in the Open Government Partnership. The findings informed an online peer exchange event during OpenGov Week, bringing together representatives from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova to share good practice and foster cross-country dialogue.

The [final report](#) of the study published in both Georgian and English, now serves as a valuable resource for local authorities by offering insights for advancing human rights protections and fostering inclusive governance.

Additionally, capacity development activities that included mayors and senior officials from local and regional authorities bordering Armenia, carried out in collaboration with their Armenian counterparts, have further strengthened opportunities for cross-border co-operation.

A new project, "[Advancing Participatory and Human Rights-Based Local Democracy in Georgia](#)" is implemented under the [Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2024–2027](#) with the financial support from the Austrian Development Cooperation. The initiative aims to ensure that residents across Georgia benefit from enhanced public services and increased community involvement through participatory, human rights-based decision-making and efficient decentralisation efforts.

In 2024, local experts developed competences in applying behavioural insights to enhance civic participation and human rights protection. A formative research methodology and baseline study on public services were developed to assess citizen engagement, satisfaction, and access to self-governance.

A civil participation manual and an updated School Participatory Budgeting toolkit were created to institutionalise participatory practices. Work also began on complementing the human rights and anti-discrimination curriculum for local authorities, integrating new priorities such as countering disinformation and hate speech.

HUNGARY – DEVELOPING LOCAL GOVERNMENT PUBLIC FINANCE AND BUILDING MUNICIPAL CAPACITY

Hungary joined the Council of Europe in 1990 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1994. The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#), adopted in 2021, acknowledged progress in local autonomy while highlighting areas for further improvement.

The Centre of Expertise has maintained a longstanding partnership with the Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities (TÖOSZ), supporting initiatives such as the Hungarian Local Governments Best Practices Programme and the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE).

Implemented from 2022 to 2024, the "[Local Government Public Finance Development and Municipal Capacity Building in Hungary](#)" project aimed to strengthen municipal financial management and enhance the capacity of local authorities to deliver efficient public services.



The project was successfully completed in December 2024 with the following outputs:

- A peer review delivered advice on [Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations, Data Access and Use, and Local-Central Policy Dialogue \(2023\)](#).
- The [Policy Advice Report 2024 on the Local Business Tax and the Solidarity Contribution](#) was delivered.
- The [Standard Expenditure Needs \(SEN\)](#) methodology was piloted, leading to the introduction of an interactive tool that compares cost and performance across 13 social services in Hungarian municipalities. This process received strong support from the Ministries of Finance, Interior, and Public Administration and Regional Development, as well as from the State Treasury and the Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities (TÖOSZ).
- The Centre of Expertise co-facilitated a Local Finance Working Group with relevant actors and stakeholders from central and local government, and supported the design of a new Local Government Data Platform hosted by TÖOSZ.
- A comprehensive, replicable training curriculum was prepared and adapted to the Hungarian context to help develop good democratic competences and strengthen local institutions beyond the project cycle.
- Over 110 elected officials and staff from 100 local authorities, and local government associations developed their capacities through the implementation of public ethics and local finance benchmarks and participation in the Leadership Academy Programme.

ITALY - PROMOTING GOOD DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Italy, a founding member state of the Council of Europe, ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in May 1990. Italy has embarked upon several significant local government reforms over the years, aiming to enhance efficiency, decentralisation, and reinforce local autonomy.

The latest Congress [monitoring report](#), adopted in March 2024, noted progress in increasing local and regional revenues, improved consultation processes. However, challenges remain including ensuring consistent implementation of reforms across regions and addressing disparities in capacity between different local authorities.



Since 2021, the Centre of Expertise, in partnership with the Associazione Italiana per il Consiglio dei Comuni e delle Regioni d'Europa (AICCCE), has been promoting the principles of good democratic governance at the local and regional level.

In 2024, the Centre of Expertise supported AICCCE in promoting the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE) as an opportunity to enhance democratic governance at all levels, in line with [CM/Rec\(2023\)5](#) and its [explanatory memorandum](#).

A series of capacity development and awareness raising events were organised both online and in-person to present the 12 principles of good democratic governance and guide the municipalities through the ELoGE process.

A total of 145 municipalities, representing a broad geographical distribution, applied to participate in the programme, highlighting widespread interest in processes that foster innovation, improve governance practices, and support citizen participation at local level in Italy.

Furthermore, in collaboration with AICCCE Friuli Venezia Giulia and International Institute of Sociology of Gorizia (ISIG), the Centre of Expertise implemented the European Academy Programme (EAP 2025), a customized training initiative designed for local administrations in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region. More than 40 participants developed capacities and practical skills to promote good democratic governance and strengthen resilience, leadership, and cross-border cooperation. The Programme included opportunities for exchanges with Slovenian municipalities on cross-border co-operation and resilience.

LITHUANIA - INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE

Lithuania became a member state of the Council of Europe in 1993 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1999. In 2010, Lithuania established Regional Development Councils comprising municipal mayors, social and economic partners, and local council delegates. However, the Congress [monitoring report](#) adopted in 2018 noted that these bodies did not fully meet the Council of Europe's [Framework Reference for Regional Democracy](#).

As a result, The Centre of Expertise implemented two large-scale projects from 2019-2023 to support harmonisation of regional development legislation with European best practices and the Charter. These projects focused on enhancing the accountability of local representatives and ensuring coherent governance frameworks. As part of this effort, Lithuania launched the



European Label of Governance Excellence (ELOGE) award to recognise outstanding local governance.

Under the Lithuanian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and in collaboration with the Lithuanian Ministry of Interior, the Centre of Expertise organised an international conference on “Multilevel Governance for Ensuring Democracy and Strengthening Resilience at All Levels of Governance” in Vilnius, in September 2024.

The conference brought together experts, policymakers, and practitioners to explore how enhanced multilevel governance can strengthen democratic processes and address common challenges - a direct follow-up to commitments made at the 4th Summit in Reykjavik.

The takeaways from the Conference were presented to the Congress Bureau and shared with the Council of Europe’s Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDDEM). These takeaways will be developed further in a follow-up conference under the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers in June 2025.

MALTA - CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT A KEY ELEMENT FOR GOOD REGIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Malta became a member state of the Council of Europe on 29 April 1965 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government on 6 September 1993, coinciding with the establishment of its local government sector.

In 2019, the Maltese local government underwent a reorganisation, which was welcomed by the Congress. However, the [monitoring report](#) adopted by the Congress in 2024, among others, recommend increasing the competences of local authorities. The Centre of Expertise has been supporting good governance efforts in Malta since 2014 through a series of activities and small projects aimed at strengthening democratic governance at local level.



In 2024, a comprehensive [Training Needs Analysis](#), prepared with guidance from the Centre of Expertise and through interviews and online surveys with local government representatives, officials and stakeholders, was published.

The Centre of Expertise supported the Local Government Division to transform the Training Needs Assessment into a comprehensive National Training Strategy. This strategy is to be launched at Conference in Malta in January 2025 and will serve as the foundation for a new training unit dedicated to regional and local authorities, integrating best practices from other Council of Europe member states.

As part of this initiative, the Centre of Expertise organised a three-day study visit to Strasbourg for a delegation of twelve Maltese officials, including the Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government. During the visit, the delegation attended the Congress plenary session, including discussion of the latest monitoring report on Malta. The visit also included meetings with several key stakeholders from France such as the Associations of Mayors, the Institut National d’Etudes Territoriales, and the Eurométropole de Strasbourg.

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA - PROMOTING OPEN LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND CIVIL PARTICIPATION

The Republic of Moldova has been a member of the Council of Europe since 1995 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1997. The latest Congress [monitoring report](#) from 2019 highlighted notable progress in decentralisation and participatory governance. The Congress has supported the Republic of Moldova's efforts to strengthen multilevel dialogue, improve governance at the local level, and align with European standards.

Notable achievements include progress in decentralisation reforms, the development of a Public Administration Reform Strategy for 2023–2030, and the adoption of the Fifth National Action Plan to the Open Government Partnership (2023–2025) both co-created with local authorities. Building on these reforms, the Centre of Expertise has provided tailored policy advice and focused on empowering local authorities to adopt transparent, and inclusive governance practices.



The project "[Reinforcing the Culture of Dialogue and Ethical, Open Local Governance in the Republic of Moldova](#)", implemented from 2022 to 2024 under the [Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova \(2021–2024\)](#), has significantly strengthened political dialogue and enhanced the quality of local governance. By focusing on integrity, corruption prevention, open government, public ethics, gender equality, and migration management, the project has contributed to a more inclusive, transparent, and ethical local policy framework.

In 2024, the project achieved several key results:

- Draft amendments to enhance multi-level governmental dialogue, developed through an inclusive and participatory process, were registered in Parliament in 2024 and are expected to be adopted soon.
- A comprehensive mapping of de-concentrated public services at the local level was completed to guide public administration and territorial-administrative reforms.
- For the first time, local representatives were included in the Moldovan delegation during the Moldova-EU bilateral screening meetings.
- Two Moldovan localities were selected to join the OGP-Local Programme in 2024, a significant step for the country in the Open Government Partnership.
- Advocacy, policy-influencing, and data collection capacities of the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM) were strengthened.
- An evaluation of transparency in decision-making processes supported the implementation of the Fifth National Action Plan to the Open Government Partnership.
- Over 340 representatives of local authorities received training on open government principles, and 310 were provided with tools to implement the new law on access to public information.
- Peer exchanges facilitated knowledge-sharing among municipalities from Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, focusing on open government, human rights-based governance, and migration management.
- Awareness campaigns in 2023–2024 raised public understanding of the need to prevent hate speech, sexism, and gender-based violence during elections. A tailored guide on combating sexism in Moldovan local politics was also developed and shared.
- The 2023 National Survey on Human Rights in Moldova included, for the first time, the right to participate in local decision-making, aligning with the Additional Protocol to the Charter.

In December 2024, the Centre of Expertise launched the project “[Promoting civil participation in political decision making in the Republic of Moldova](#)”. The project seeks to enhance the engagement of citizens and civil society organisations in decision-making. It focuses on ensuring that political decisions at local and national levels are informed by recommendations from diverse societal sectors, including women, youth, and marginalised groups, reflecting the needs and opinions of all citizens. The project contributes to the aims of the [Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2025-2028](#).

The launch and first project workshop on 3 December 2024 in Chisinau engaged more than 80 participants from local and central authorities and civil society who welcomed the initiative and emphasised its relevance.

The project “[Strengthening resilience in local and regional authorities facing migration challenges](#)” was implemented from 2023 to 2024 under the [Council of Europe Action Plan on protecting vulnerable persons in the context of migration asylum in Europe \(2021-2025\)](#). The project was designed to help local authorities address migration emergencies caused by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, by strengthening their capacity to manage migration effectively and fostering sustainable solutions for both residents and migrants.

To support the project implementation, a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) was signed with the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM) and the national associations of local authorities from Poland and Romania to support implementation.

In the Republic of Moldova, a comprehensive country assessment report detailed the challenges and needs for effective migration management and integration. Three local authorities - Edinet, Straseni, and Vinogradovca - were selected to participate in a Community of Practice on Migration and Human Rights at the Local Level, created as a multilateral peer exchange platform between counterparts from Poland, Romania, and Moldova. They participated in eleven thematic peer exchanges which further enabled them sharing experience and knowledge and supported the development of a “Toolkit for emergency migration management strategies for local authorities and stakeholders”.

Additionally, a national roundtable was organised to facilitate multilevel dialogue on migration and social inclusion, between central authorities -such as Parliament, the State Chancellery, Regional Directorates, and local authorities and their association CALM.



It was a useful workshop, presenting effective practices on migration risks, especially at local level. This will help representatives of local authorities to develop necessary strategies and regulations, to reduce potential risks occurring in such crises, which become more and more present in the world. We had a beneficial exchange of best practices aimed at facilitating the work of local authorities, with important guidelines received from international experts.

*Constantin Cojocari
Mayor of Edineț, Republic of Moldova*



Over 175 Moldovan participants engaged in both national and international awareness and capacity-development activities, have raised awareness of international good practice and policy approaches for effective migration management. In addition, 22 local elected representatives and administrative staff were equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to develop operational guidelines and strategies to mitigate local migration risks. The

Toolkit was made available in the Romanian language and distributed to project partners and stakeholders throughout the country.

These results improved the capacity of Moldovan public authorities to address migration challenges in a transparent, inclusive, and sustainable manner.

MONTENEGRO - PROMOTING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Montenegro became a member state of the Council of Europe in 2007 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government the following year. The most recent [Congress monitoring report](#) on Montenegro was adopted in 2024. Montenegro benefits from co-operation activities implemented by the Council of Europe which have played a pivotal role in advancing Montenegro's reform agenda, aligning Montenegro with Council of Europe standards and supporting the country's European Union accession process.

Montenegro is part of the regional project "Promoting deliberative democracy and innovative approaches to citizen participation in South-East Europe" along with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia and Serbia. The project was launched in Bar on 18 April 2024, during a dedicated launching event.



This initiative aims to strengthen democratic processes and foster innovative citizen engagement across the region. In this framework, the Centre of Expertise established a Community of Practice to facilitate peer learning. It includes representatives from the municipalities of Bar, Savnik, and Tivat, and from the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro.

The capacity development activities are based on the guide titled "[How to Organise a Deliberative Process at the Local Level?](#)". The local authorities will also be further supported by a regional pool of trainers on deliberative democracy which was formed and is being trained within this project.

NORTH MACEDONIA - PROMOTING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

North Macedonia became a member state of the Council of Europe in 1995 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1997. The most recent [Congress monitoring report](#) on North Macedonia was adopted in 2021.

The country has been actively participating in various initiatives, engaging notably in intergovernmental co-operation and assistance programmes in the fields of legal reform and human rights.



Through a project implemented by the Centre of Expertise, the Congress is promoting deliberative democracy in the region as an innovative form of citizen participation in local decision-making. North Macedonia is part of the regional project "[Promoting deliberative democracy and innovative approaches to citizen participation in South-East Europe](#)" along with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro and Serbia.

The initiative aims to strengthen democratic processes and foster innovative citizen engagement across the region. In this framework, the Centre of Expertise established a Community of Practice to facilitate peer learning. It includes representatives from the municipalities of Aerodrom, Centar Skopje, and Makedonski Brod, and from the Association of the Units of Local Self-Government.

The capacity development activities are based on the guide titled "[How to Organise a Deliberative Process at the Local Level?](#)". The local authorities will also be further supported by a regional pool of trainers on deliberative democracy which was formed and is being trained within this project.

POLAND - DEVELOPING A POLICY APPROACH FOR INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS

Since joining the Council of Europe in 1991 and ratifying the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1993, Poland has undertaken significant reforms to enhance local self-government. These reforms have aimed at decentralising administrative powers and strengthening the autonomy of local authorities. The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#) adopted in 2019 underscored the need for continuous efforts to uphold the principles enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government.



In response to the growing challenges posed by the migration trend and population displacement across Europe, the Centre of Expertise developed a multilateral project to strengthen public authorities' capacity to manage migration and foster sustainable, democratic solutions for both residents and migrants. The project "[Strengthening resilience in local and regional authorities facing migration challenges](#)" was implemented from 2023 to 2024 under the [Council of Europe Action Plan on protecting vulnerable persons in the context of migration asylum in Europe \(2021-2025\)](#).

A quadripartite [Memorandum of Understanding](#) was signed by the Congress with the Association of Polish Cities (APC) and the national associations from the Republic of Moldova and Romania.

In Poland, a country assessment report detailed local migration management challenges and needs of local authorities. Three municipalities - Hrubieszów, Rzeszów, and Wrocław - joined the Community of Practice on Migration and Human Rights. This platform was established to enable peer exchange among local and regional authorities from Poland, the Republic of Moldova, and Romania.

As a result, 11 thematic peer exchanges enhanced regional co-operation among the three countries and with Ukraine. The "Toolkit for emergency migration management strategies for local authorities and stakeholders" and a "Compendium of good practices on migration management and multilevel cooperation" were produced and made available in Polish.

A national roundtable was organised in June 2024 to support multilevel dialogue between different government levels and stakeholders in migration and social inclusion. This meeting was a timely contribution to development by the government of the Migration Strategy for Poland for 2025-2030.

More than 104 Polish participants took part in awareness and capacity-development activities organised in Poland as part of the project. The experience and practices in Poland have influenced the design of the practical toolkit on emergency migration management and have been presented in the Compendium of good practices.

Polish public authorities, at both central and local level, are now more aware of international good practices and existing policy approaches for managing migration.

ROMANIA - STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES FACING MIGRATION

Since joining the Council of Europe in 1993 and ratifying the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1998, Romania has implemented several significant decentralisation and local self-government reforms. These reforms have aimed to enhance local autonomy, improve administrative efficiency, and align local governance with European standards.

The Centre of Expertise has supported Romania through various projects to ensure that legislation aligns with Council of Europe standards. These initiatives have focused on strengthening local administrative capacities, promoting ethical governance, and fostering citizen participation in local decision-making processes. The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#) on Romania was adopted on 23 March 2023.



Since the beginning of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, Romania has played a crucial role as both a host and transit country for refugees, posing new challenges for local governments in migration management, social inclusion, and service provision. To address these challenges, the project [“Strengthening resilience in local and regional authorities facing migration challenges”](#) was implemented from 2023 to 2024 under the [Council of Europe Action Plan on protecting vulnerable persons in the context of migration asylum in Europe \(2021-2025\)](#).

Through a multilateral, multi-stakeholder approach, targeted interventions helped enhance the capacity of public authorities to manage migration and to promote democratic, inclusive, and sustainable solutions for both local communities and migrants.

A quadripartite [Memorandum of Understanding](#) was signed with the Association of Communes of Romania (ACoR) and local authority associations from Poland and the Republic of Moldova to support the project.

Three communes - Bogdan Vodă, Măgurele, and Tulcea - along with ACoR representatives joined a Community of Practice on Migration and Human Rights at the Local Level. This platform fosters peer exchange among local and regional authorities from Poland, the Republic of Moldova and Romania to address migration challenges collaboratively.

A national roundtable, bringing together representatives from various levels of government and key stakeholders in migration and social inclusion helped further enhance multilevel

dialogue, The discussion was held on the basis of a country assessment report that detailed migration management challenges met by local authorities and their needs.

Additionally, six elected officials and local administration staff received training on developing operational guidelines and strategies to mitigate local migration risks. Eleven thematic peer exchanges promoted knowledge-sharing among municipalities from Romania, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, with over 118 Romanian participants engaging in capacity-development activities. The "Toolkit for emergency migration management strategies for local authorities and stakeholders" was translated into Romanian and distributed among project partners, providing practical guidance and examples of good practice for effective migration management.

SERBIA - PROMOTING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Serbia became a member state of the Council of Europe in 2003 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 2007. Since then, Serbia has benefited from Council of Europe initiatives that support its reform agenda, ensure compliance with European standards, and advance its EU accession process. The latest Congress [monitoring report](#) was adopted in 2017.

The Centre of Expertise has implemented a series of projects with the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities of the Republic of Serbia with the aiming of strengthening governance practice and introducing modern human resource management practice in local self-government.



In 2024, as follow-up to previous support to the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government in Serbia, the Centre of Expertise organised capacity-development activities and delivered policy advice in preparation of a new joint project, co-funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe set to launch in 2025. In 2024, had the following activities and results:

- A workshop was organised to present recommendations from a multi-country study on professional development for local officials.
- An expert analysis on performance appraisal procedures to improve human resource management practice in local authorities was completed
- 20 elected officials and civil servants developed capacities on professional development initiatives and performance appraisal procedures.

Serbia also participates in the regional project "[Promoting deliberative democracy and innovative approaches to citizen participation in South-East Europe](#)", alongside Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.

In this framework, the Centre of Expertise established a Community of Practice for Serbia that includes representatives from the National Association of Local Authorities and the municipalities of Bujanovac, Leskovac, and Tutin. A regional pool of local trainers was also created to support these initiatives and a practical guide on "[How to Organise a Deliberative Process at the Local Level?](#)" was published to assist local authorities.

SPAIN - CONSOLIDATING GOOD DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Spain joined the Council of Europe in 1977 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1988. The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#) was adopted in 2021.

The Centre of Expertise has a longstanding cooperation with the Basque Association of Municipalities (EUDEL), who have piloted the Local Finance Benchmark (LFB) in the country and implemented the [European Label of Governance Excellence \(ELoGE\)](#) since 2017. The Centre of Expertise has also collaborated with the University of Murcia in the implementation of ELoGE.



The Centre of Expertise supported the Basque Association of Municipalities (EUDEL) in the organisation of the 2024 edition of the [European Label of Governance Excellence \(ELoGE\)](#).

This was the first implementation of the revised benchmark based on CM/Rec(2023)5 on the principles of good democratic governance adopted by the new ELoGE Accreditation Platform established under the aegis of the Congress Bureau. Five Basque municipalities (Donostia/San Sebastián, Azkoitia, Irun, Ermua and Legazpi) were awarded the label at a ceremony in July 2024.

In the second half of the year, the Centre of Expertise supported EUDEL in organising a series of peer-to-peer workshops to share ELoGE innovative practice in areas such as public ethics and leadership; urban civic engagement; and introducing gender-sensitive procurement in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These and other good practices are presented in [a dedicated webpage](#), and used by EUDEL to grow the network of municipalities participating in the ELoGE process.

TÜRKIYE - ENHANCING LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Since joining the Council of Europe in 1950 and ratifying the European Charter of Local Self-Government on 9 December 1992, Türkiye has undertaken various initiatives to enhance local self-government. However, as noted in the latest Congress [monitoring report](#) (2022) challenges remain in fully aligning with the principles of the Charter.

Following the successful piloting of the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE) programme by Argüden Governance Academy in 2022, and the increasing level of participation by local authorities in the process in 2023, the Union of Turkish Municipalities (TBB) agreed to become a member of the national ELoGE Platform in Türkiye in 2024.



The involvement of TBB in the process led to a significant increase in participation by Turkish local authorities. 27 municipalities participated in the process – developing their capacities and increasing awareness of Council of Europe good democratic governance standards. At an award ceremony in Ankara on 12 December 2024, 13 municipalities received

the ELoGE award, including four metropolitan authorities (Adana, Ankara, Balıkesir, Gaziantep), two cities (Amasya, Niğde), and seven district municipalities (Avcılar, Bağcılar, Etimesgut, Kadıköy, Melikgazi, Sultanbeyli, Eskişehir).

In monitoring local elections in Türkiye in March 2024, the Congress noted with satisfaction that Turkish citizens showed their genuine commitment to local and regional democracy by turning out to vote and standing as candidates in large numbers. The high turnout rate – one of the highest in Council of Europe member states – demonstrates a strong commitment of citizens to democratic processes.

UKRAINE - STRENGTHENING MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND GOOD DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

Ukraine joined the Council of Europe in 1995 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1997, with its Additional Protocol in 2014. Launched in 2014, Ukraine's decentralisation reform, especially in territorial amalgamation and fiscal decentralisation, has become one of its most successful initiatives. The Centre of Expertise has provided key legal and methodological support for this reform implementation, adopted by Ukrainian partners. The last Congress [monitoring report](#) was adopted in 2013, and a next visit is scheduled for 2025.

Since February 2022, local authorities have become pivotal in resisting the Russian Federation's war of aggression and the need for targeted support has grown. Despite ongoing challenges, the Council of Europe remains a trusted adviser, reinforcing Ukraine's commitment to building a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable multilevel governance system in line with Charter principles.



In 2024 the Centre of Expertise implemented two projects in Ukraine within the [Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine “Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction” for 2023–2026](#): one addressing mainly to central authorities and the other mainly to local authorities. The Centre of Expertise successfully continued implementation of the project “[Strengthening Good Democratic Governance and Resilience in Ukraine](#)”. It aims at strengthening good democratic governance and public administration, through improvement and implementation of the legal framework, improvement of the quality of public services delivered by local authorities, with specific focus on metropolitan areas and enhancement of general public's awareness of and demand for good democratic governance.

Irrespective of the challenges brought about by the Russian Federation's on-going war of aggression against Ukraine, the Centre of Expertise continued to co-moderate the High-Level Dialogue on good democratic governance and held its third round in Strasbourg in [July 2024](#) prioritising the following areas:

- strategy of the “decentralisation” reform: the Centre of Expertise prepared a [Policy Advice document CEMG/PAD\(2024\)6](#) on Ukraine's 2014 Decentralisation Reform Concept, and started facilitating a specialised expert group aiming to revamp the Reform Concept and designing what the system of multilevel governance should look like under martial law and upon return to civilian administration;

- division of competences between the state and local self-government and amongst their tiers: the [CEMG launched broad consultations](#) among national stakeholders.

The Centre of Expertise continued its assistance in preparing a fundamental reform of the state sub-national representation and legality supervision over local authorities: it prepared a legal opinion ([CEGG/LEX\(2024\)1](#)) assessing compliance of the draft law with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and with the main Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on this issue [CM/Rec\(2019\)3](#).

Moreover, to complement preparation for enactment of the future law, the Centre of Expertise facilitated a [pilot initiative](#) of Ternopil Regional State Administration, assisting its pilot transition into a prefecture type administrative body and introduction of a consultation mechanism at regional level.



The High-Level Dialogue on good democratic governance at the Council of Europe is extremely important on Ukraine's path to European integration and to strengthening our country's democracy. This is a versatile platform for finding consensus and solutions that will meet the needs of Ukrainian society and Ukraine's aspirations to join the European Union.

*Oleksandr Kornienko
First Deputy Chair of the Parliament of Ukraine*



In 2024, some additional tangible results include:

- A new law on public consultations was adopted building on the CEMG's legal [Opinion CEGG/LEX\(2021\)1](#): out of 39 Council of Europe recommendations the Parliament addressed 36 (92%), including the key ones.
- A new law on local democracy was adopted. The Centre of Expertise has [contributed](#) to elaboration of this law since 2021, broadening opportunities for the effective and direct engagement of citizens in policy and decision-making.
- Eight by-laws on local public service were approved with expert support from the Centre of Expertise.

Over 140,000 public officials developed capacities through training programmes delivered by the Centre based on a comprehensive Training Needs Analysis. Also in 2024, a specialised governmental agency developed two additional model training programmes in partnership with the Centre. Furthermore, Ukraine was assisted in implementing its National Anti-Corruption Strategy by delivering proposals for a template Code of Ethics for local public officials, a draft law on codes of conduct, and an Action Plan to enhance integrity in local governance based on [CM\(2020\)27](#).

Additionally, a direct grant was awarded to the "Lviv Agglomeration"- an association of ten municipalities including Lviv - which established transparent, democratic ties, enhanced intermunicipal co-operation, and strengthened local identity and cohesion. The Lviv Agglomeration convened the "[First International Forum of Agglomerations in Ukraine](#)," setting an innovative model that has since inspired other metropolitan communities in the country.

In 2024, key outputs included a manual on the new law on local public service, three methodological recommendations on inter-municipal co-operation and public ethics, and explanatory notes addressing ad hoc requests from national stakeholders.

Findings from the 8th nationwide [survey](#), commissioned by the Centre of Expertise, confirmed that decentralisation remains Ukraine's most popular reform and underscored the vital role of

local authorities in strengthening resilience during wartime. These insights have enabled Ukrainian policymakers to refine national policies and reforms. Throughout the year, the Centre of Expertise co-organised several high-level public discussions that engaged nearly 900 in-person participants, 1,000 online attendees, and many social media observers, all based on toolkits developed by the Centre.

The project “[Strengthening multilevel governance, democracy and human rights at local level in Ukraine](#)” was launched in 2023 to enhance dialogue and co-operation among different levels of government, promote collaborative governance and citizen participation, and safeguard equality and non-discrimination at the local level.

In 2024, the project built on previous achievements by forging new partnerships with key stakeholders. A landmark memorandum of understanding was signed between the Congress and the Ukrainian Association of District and Regional Councils (UAROR), complementing an existing agreement with the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC). Co-operation with the Secretariat of the Open Government Partnership was deepened, and a new training-of-trainers programme on open local government was piloted with AUC staff. In addition, multilevel dialogue was facilitated through different platforms – both peer exchanges and high-level events – to disseminate key learnings and experiences on open government principles and human rights at local level.

The Centre of Expertise supported the implementation of [local initiatives](#) to foster democratic innovations in 10 municipalities. They developed e-governance tools, boosted participation of underrepresented groups such as youth, women, and internally displaced persons, protected veterans’ rights, and strengthened social cohesion. An assessment on the promotion and protection of human rights at the local and regional levels was conducted to inform future support and policy adjustments.



Our initiative focused on preventing corruption and enhancing transparency through community engagement, education and feedback mechanisms. With the involvement of experts and representatives of the civil society, law enforcement and the National Agency on Corruption Prevention, Fastiv developed its Anti-Corruption Code. We will continue working towards accelerating European integration to make our community more aligned with European values.

Mykhailo Netiazhuk, Mayor, Ukraine



Legislative support was provided through consultations with local authorities, national associations, the parliament, and government representatives to align national legislation with the Charter and to reinforce the role of local and regional authorities in Ukraine’s reconstruction.

Additionally, intermunicipal co-operation was enhanced through the AUC Committee for the development of de-occupied and temporarily occupied communities, which established a platform for 70 communities from 11 regions to address critical issues in these areas, such as housing, employment, and education.

As part of this project, the [Register of Damage for Ukraine](#) was also promoted to support the claims process among local and regional authorities and their national associations.

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

The project "[Promoting Deliberative Democracy and Innovative Approaches to Citizen Participation in South-East Europe](#)" was launched in 2024. It is funded by a voluntary contribution from Germany and runs until 2025. This initiative aligns with the [Reykjavik Principles for Democracy](#), the Council of Europe [recommendation on deliberative democracy](#) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities' [recommendation on the use of deliberative methods](#) in European municipalities. It focuses on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.



The Centre of Expertise has established a Community of Practice that includes 43 representatives of 18 local authorities and the seven associations of local authorities from the six beneficiaries in the region. This platform fosters peer learning and exchange on good practice in organising deliberative processes. In parallel, a regional pool of 34 trainers was formed to build capacity and support local authorities who are willing to further develop opportunities for citizen deliberations. A comprehensive guide on "How to Organise a Deliberative Process at the Local Level"- available in [English](#) and [Bosnian](#) - has been published, with plans underway to develop an e-learning course for broader dissemination.

As a result, several local authorities have initiated efforts to integrate deliberative methods into their decision-making. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, successful citizens' assemblies in Mostar and Banja Luka have provided replicable models, while local authorities in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo* are planning similar initiatives. These capacity-development activities enhance local expertise, promote transparent and inclusive governance, and facilitate regional co-operation, laying the groundwork for sustained democratic innovation in South-East Europe.

MULTI-COUNTRY PROJECT ON MIGRATION AND INCLUSION

The project "[Strengthening resilience in local and regional authorities facing migration challenges](#)" developed under the [Council of Europe Action Plan on protecting vulnerable persons in the context of migration asylum in Europe \(2021-2025\)](#), supported local and regional authorities in Poland, Republic of Moldova, and Romania in managing migration pressures at Ukraine's borders. A key component was the establishment of the Community of Practice on Migration and Human Rights, which brought together local elected officials, technical experts, and national associations from the three countries. This platform facilitated peer-to-peer exchanges among nine local authorities and three national associations, and promoted cross-border collaboration.

Significant results include active participation by over 445 representatives from local, regional, and central authorities as well as civil society organisations in capacity-development and awareness-raising activities. As a result, central authorities now have a better understanding of the strengths, challenges, and needs of local entities in migration management. The national associations: APC (Poland), CALM (Moldova), and ACoR (Romania) have also deepened their knowledge of international migration practices and policy approaches.



Additionally, as a result of the project, two key resources are available: a Toolkit for Emergency Migration Management Strategies and a Compendium of Good Practices on Migration Management and Multilevel Co-operation, that are available in English, Polish, and Romanian. These tools provide practical guidance on international human rights standards, preparedness, and effective response to migration emergencies, supporting sustainable and dignified migration management at the local level.

BELARUSIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES

The Congress, as an active member of the [Contact Group on Co-operation with Belarusian Democratic Forces and Civil Society](#), has been entrusted to implement activities in 2024 and 2025 focusing on political support to the Belarusian democratic forces and supporting the incorporation of European standards of local democracy into the work of the Belarusian democratic forces to help prepare for the transformation of the local self-government system in a future democratic Belarus.

The Centre of Expertise is implementing activities within the [“Leading the Change for Democracy and Human Rights at Local Level with Belarusian Democratic Forces”](#) project which supports democratic governance and human rights by providing capacity development and expert guidance to reform local self-government in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government.



Building on a successful 2023 pilot workshop, the project seeks to integrate European standards into local governance reforms and promote the Charter through the “Leaders for Change” methodology.

Early in 2024, representatives of Belarusian democratic forces engaged with the Congress leadership and Ms Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya addressed the 46th Congress session in March 2024. She requested support in preparing the reform of the local self-government system, rehabilitation programmes for children of repressed individuals, and enhanced educational opportunities, as well as the endorsement of the European perspective for Belarus, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova.

The Congress also reviewed the “Local Self-Government Concept for a New Belarus,” identifying reform gaps and issuing recommendations. Three workshops were organised for 30 participants of the Belarusian democratic forces, covering key governance concepts, decentralisation, and risk management. These sessions produced concrete recommendations

to align future reforms with European standards. Participants also developed knowledge of Council of Europe standards and received a Belarusian translation of [A contemporary commentary by the Congress on the explanatory report to the European Charter of Local Self-Government](#).

Participants in 2024 activities have requested further in-depth, focused capacity development workshops and activities to pursue the development of legislation such as the draft Law on Local Self-Government and provisions on local self-government of the draft Constitution for a future, free, and democratic Belarus.

KOSOVO* - STRENGTHENING MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE

Article 123 of the Kosovo* [Constitution](#), which establishes the fundamental principles on local self-government, refers to the European Charter of Local Self Government in its paragraph 3, according to which local self-government bodies shall respect the Charter as well as observe and implement it to the same extent as that required of a signatory State.

A previous Congress project developed the capacities of the Association of Kosovo Municipalities (AKM) and promoted multilevel dialogue. In 2022, the Centre of Expertise, in co-operation with the European Association for Local Democracy, launched the European Label of Governance Excellence programme in Kosovo*.

In 2024, the Centre of Expertise prepared the new project “Strengthening Multilevel Governance and Participatory Democracy,” set to launch in January 2025. This project aims to improve local self-government and enhance local democracy by fostering multilevel dialogue and strengthening local authorities’ capacities in deliberative democracy and open government. It is implemented in close co-operation with the Ministry of Local Government Administration and the AKM, a Guest Observer with the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress.



The project builds on Congress co-operation activities since 2012 and on the Council of Europe’s sustained engagement with Kosovo*.

Additionally, Kosovo* is part of the regional project “[Promoting Deliberative Democracy and Innovative Approaches to Citizen Participation in South-East Europe](#),” alongside Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

This initiative aims to strengthen democratic processes and foster innovative citizen engagement across the region. Within this framework, the Centre of Expertise established a Community of Practice that includes representatives from the municipalities of Lipjan/Lipljan, Pejë/Peć, and Prizren, and the AKM. This platform was created for peer learning on deliberative processes along with a pool of local trainers. Capacity development is provided on the basis of the guide for local authorities on “[How to Organise a Deliberative Process at the Local Level?](#)”

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full Name
AKM	Association of Kosovo Municipalities
AUC	Association of Ukrainian Cities
ACoR	Association of Communes of Romania
AICCRE	Associazione Italiana per il Consiglio dei Comuni e delle Regioni d'Europa (Italy)
APC	Association of Polish Cities
ASPA	Albanian School of Public Administration
CALM	Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova
CEMG	Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance (Council of Europe)
CDDEM	Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Democracy
DDDGGGA	Democratic Development, Decentralisation and Good Governance in Armenia
DG REFORM	Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (European Commission)
EAP	European Academy Programme
Charter	European Charter of Local Self-Government
ELoGE	European Label of Governance Excellence
EUDEL	Basque Association of Municipalities (from its Basque name "Euskal Udalen Elkarte")
IMC	Inter-Municipal Cooperation
ISIG	International Institute of Sociology of Gorizia
LFB	Local Finance Benchmark
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
NALAG	National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia
OGP	Open Government Partnership
ReBuS	Resilience Building Strategies (toolkit)
SEN	Standard Expenditure Needs
SOTE	Social and Health Care Reform (Finland)
SPAR	Sustaining Public Administration Reform at Local Level in Albania
TARA	Territorial and Administrative Reform of Armenia
TBB	Union of Turkish Municipalities
TÖÖSZ	Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities
UAROR	Ukrainian Association of District and Regional Councils

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