

Demonstrations and Social Unrest in Europe

Congress Bureau statement, 26 October 2026

The Bureau of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe refers to the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter, the Reykjavík Principles of Democracy adopted by the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe on 16-17 May 2023 and the Vilnius Declaration adopted at the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter on 3-4 July 2024. These texts underpin the Council of Europe member states' commitment to maintain European standards in human rights, democracy and the rule of law, including in the current social and political context of Europe.

The Congress Bureau has monitored closely the protests in a number of member states which, although unconnected, are often organised and led by young people and rooted in the cost-of-living crisis and in calls for better working, studying and living conditions and public services.

It also recognises that in some circumstances, those who have sought to organise or attend a peaceful process have found those protests infiltrated by others intent on committing acts of violence and causing criminal damage.

The Congress is profoundly concerned by all instances of violence. It draws attention in this context to the [statement](#) published by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights on 23 October 2026, calling for the protection of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and human rights-compliant policing.

It emphasises that the freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association are protected by the European Convention on Human Rights and apply to every individual in Europe. This means that those wishing to engage in peaceful and lawful protest should be allowed to do so without hindrance by government at any level, except where restrictions are prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society, as specified by the Convention and in the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.

National and sub-national authorities, exercising their respective competences, are similarly obliged to protect and promote human rights relating to health, education and housing, and to employment, welfare and other social provisions and protections.

The Bureau acknowledges that a series of challenges over recent years – including financial crises, wars and conflicts and their social and economic impact, and demographic change – have put financial strain on many governments, and at all levels. Governments must nonetheless make the choices and decisions required to protect human rights, for the dignity of every individual, and to maintain public trust in democratic institutions.

Equally, it calls on national and sub-national authorities to facilitate legitimate and peaceful protest, while also supporting lawful and proportionate law enforcement measures, including by the police, where protestors or persons having infiltrated demonstrations become violent and endanger people or property.

In light of all this, the Congress will hold an event in 2027, bringing together relevant stakeholders, to assess what more it, and local and regional authorities across Europe, can do to better ensure respect for social rights, in particular.