

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 408 (2017)¹ Observation of local elections in Finland (9 April 2017)

1. Following the invitation from the Ministry of Justice and Employment and the Ministry of Local Government and Public Reforms of Finland, dated 8 August 2016, to observe the local elections held in the country on 9 April 2017, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe refers to:

a. Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Committee of Ministers' Statutory Resolution (2000) 1 relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

b. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122, hereinafter "the Charter"), which was ratified by Finland in June 1991, and the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207), ratified in February 2012;

c. Chapters XVIII and XIX of the Congress Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions and on the implementation of the post-monitoring/post-electoral political dialogue.

2. The Congress reiterates the fact that genuinely democratic local and regional elections are part of a process to establish and maintain democratic governance, and that observation of political participation at territorial level is a key element in the Congress' role as guardian of democracy at local and regional levels.

3. It welcomes the fact that the local elections held on 9 April 2017 were organised in an overall professional manner and that election day was held in an orderly and peaceful atmosphere.

4. It recognises the high level of transparency of the electoral processes, which ensures genuine public trust.

5. It praises the system of voters' registration, which provides for high quality voters' lists and stipulates that only individuals who are permanently residing in a specific municipality are entitled to vote at the local level, which is

in line with Congress Recommendation 369 (2015) on electoral lists and voters residing *de facto* abroad.

6. It also acknowledges the efforts made by the Finnish authorities to strengthen the position of female candidates through gender quotas on candidates' lists and the effective participation of women as elected local councillors.

7. In light of the above, the Congress suggests that further improvements can be made in respect of the general electoral process and therefore invites the Finnish authorities to:

a. as a back-up measure to the on-going regional government reform, strengthen citizen participation at territorial level, including the increased promotion of regional political parties and lists of independent candidates active in the regional context;

b. introduce mandatory training for all members of the election administration and all assistants involved at the level of polling stations in order to ensure a consistent level of knowledge and skills within the election administration;

c. intensify the efforts to educate voters, in particular targeting the non-Finns who have the right to vote and to be elected in local elections, in order to further include them in the electoral process as both candidates and voters;

d. ensure that all candidates in the local elections submit information on their campaign financing, irrespective of the election results;

e. consider introducing incentives for local councils to elect mayors in order to strengthen the political profile of mayors at local level, notably in the larger urban zones.

8. With regard to the regional administrative reform, the Congress invites the Finnish authorities to implement genuine decentralisation at regional level. In this respect, the Congress highlights the importance of financial autonomy for the newly created regions.

9. In addition, in the context of the regional elections to be organised for the first time in 2018, the Congress encourages the Finnish authorities to schedule the regional elections on a different day than the presidential election, in order for regional topics not to be overshadowed by the national vote and so that voters can be fully informed about regional matters.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 19 October 2017, and adopted by the Congress on 20 October 2017, 3rd sitting (see Document [CPL33\(2017\)05](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Lelia HUNZIKER, Switzerland (L, SOC).