

**49th SESSION**

Report  
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**County and municipal elections in Finland (13 April 2025)**

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

Rapporteurs:<sup>1</sup> Gobnait NI MHUIMNEACAIN, Ireland (L, ILDG)  
 Kristoffer TAMSONS, Sweden, (R, EPP/CCE)

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*Summary*

Following an invitation by the authorities of Finland, the Congress deployed an observation mission to assess the wellbeing service county and municipal elections held in Finland on 13 April 2025. On election day, nine teams involving a total of 19 Congress observers visited 110 polling stations to observe the election procedures, from opening to counting.

In the context of the recent establishment of the wellbeing counties, county and municipal elections were held for the first time on the same day. Overall, the delegation found that the elections were well-organised and it commended the high level of trust all stakeholders placed in democratic processes. The election administration conducted its duties in a timely, professional and independent manner, despite the increased workload of holding both elections the same day. The election campaign was competitive and peaceful, focused on county and municipal issues and voters were presented with balanced and in-depth coverage by the media. No major cases of hate speech and disinformation were reported, but vandalism incidents were flagged. While youth and non-Finnish residents remained underrepresented as voters and candidates, the newly elected councils successfully approached gender parity. The election day proceeded calmly and peacefully, with no major procedural shortcomings or inconsistencies. At the same time, the dual election caused some confusion among voters on candidate selection, while the roles and responsibilities of the newly established counties remained unclear to most. This situation resulted in unusually high numbers of ballot papers being declared invalid.

While the overall assessment was positive, Congress observers noted some areas for improvement, including strengthening the electoral dispute framework to ensure timely redress, expanding the requirements of campaign finance disclosure to all candidates, reinforcing voter education on voting procedures and making training compulsory for all members of election commissions. Finally, the delegation encouraged more efforts to reinforce local and regional democracy, including boosting civic participation, notably of youth and non-Finnish voters, considering incentives for local councils to elect mayors in order to strengthen local political leadership, as well as introducing clauses to limit cumulative political mandates.

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

## **RECOMMENDATION 532 (2025)<sup>2</sup>**

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) refers to:
  - a. Article 1, paragraph 3 of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to the Committee of Ministers’ Statutory Resolution CM/Res (2020)1 relating to the Congress;
  - b. Chapter XIX of the Congress Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions;
  - c. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) which was ratified by Finland on 3 June 1991;
  - d. Congress Recommendation 408 (2017) on Local elections in Finland (9 April 2017);
  - e. the invitation by the authorities of Finland, dated 4 November 2024, to observe the county and municipal elections held in the country on 13 April 2025.
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 grassroots elections is a key element in the role of the Congress as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.
3. The Congress acknowledges that the legal framework is conducive to holding genuine local and county elections in Finland and guarantees the fundamental principles of transparent, inclusive and fair electoral processes.
4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that:
  - a. the 2025 wellbeing services county (WSC) and municipal elections embodied the inclusiveness and strength of democratic processes in Finland, which are characterised by a high level of trust;
  - b. the electoral system offered extensive opportunities for all residents to vote on or before election day, including Swedish-speaking citizens, non-Finnish citizens, voters with disabilities – with nearly all polling stations accessible – and those in institutions; the advanced voting procedures, used by over 50% of all voters, were conducted in a transparent and open manner;
  - c. the election administration at all levels conducted electoral preparations in a professional and independent manner and enjoyed a high degree of public confidence, embodied in the almost complete lack of electoral disputes;
  - d. the election campaign was competitive, peaceful and centred on local issues and only a few incidents of hostile rhetoric and no systematic disinformation campaigns were reported;
  - e. despite financial hurdles, Finland’s dynamic and vibrant media landscape – supported by strong freedom of expression and integrity safeguards – provided voters with trusted, balanced and extensive information throughout the election period, allowing them to make an informed choice; voters seem well-equipped to counter disinformation, due to strong civic and media education initiatives;
  - f. the number of women elected in municipal and county council elections increased, exceeding the 50% mark in the county elections, even in the absence of legally mandated quotas. These figures bring Finland closer to gender parity at local and regional levels;
  - g. the transparency requirements applied to campaign finance were efficient and recourse to voluntary disclosure of interim campaign reports by candidates before the election day increased;
  - h. election day, from opening to counting, was orderly and well-managed and polling station staff were committed to carrying out their responsibilities effectively and professionally, despite the increased workload of having to handle two elections.

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<sup>2</sup> Debated and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2025 (see document CG(2025)49-12, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Gobnait NI MHUIMNEACAIN, Ireland (L, ILDG) and Kristoffer TAMSONS, Sweden, (R, EPP/CCE).

5. At the same time, the Congress points out the following issues:

a. given the recent establishment of the WSCs and the first ever organisation of both elections on the same day, confusion persisted among candidates and voters alike on the role of WSCs, which might have contributed to the lower turnout;

b. the dual voting procedure was not always understood by the electorate, who often confused candidate numbers, leading to unusually high numbers of invalid ballot papers and an increased workload for staff;

c. the fact that a politician could hold up to four distinct political mandates was seen as a challenge for the promotion of political diversity, as well as leading to a level of conflicting responsibilities; on the other hand, both mayoral and county council head positions remain largely unelected, limiting political leadership at both levels of self-government;

d. participation of youth and non-Finnish citizens both as voters or as candidates remained lower than that of the average population;

e. during the campaign, vandalism of electoral billboards reached higher levels than in previous elections, resulting in additional expenses for candidates;

f. the election dispute resolution system offers restricted legal remedies during the electoral process, challenging the right to prompt and effective remedy;

g. the lack of a spending cap and of a requirement for all candidates to submit a financial report – as only elected candidates are required to do so – as well as the high threshold for disclosing private donations, undermined transparency, accountability and the level playing field; moreover, the sanctioning power of the National Audit Office remains limited to non-compliance cases;

h. on election day, despite the electoral system being grounded in trust and experience, some shortcomings regarding ballot handling and security safeguards were noted, including the lack of provisions requiring the total number of ballot papers to be counted upon opening the ballot box, instances of ballot papers being left unattended during counting, diverging opinions on polling station set-up and inconsistencies in sealing of ballot boxes;

i. while Congress observers were generally welcomed, the rights and status of international election observers are not provided for by law, a situation not in line with Article 8 of the Copenhagen Document.

6. In the light of the above, the Congress invites the authorities of Finland to:

a. strengthen citizen participation efforts to boost their understanding of the role of WSCs. The Congress again highlights the importance of sufficient financial autonomy for the counties to manage a substantial share of local affairs, in accordance with the Congress Recommendation 516 (2024) "Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Finland";

b. communicate widely on the voting procedures in case of dual elections and consider steps such as double ballot booths, clearer ballot paper design and increased technical assistance to limit the number of invalid ballot papers;

c. consider, as part of efforts to promote local and regional democracy, setting up incentives for local councils to elect mayors, in order to strengthen political profile leadership at local level, notably in larger urban zones, and introducing clauses to limit cumulative political mandates;

d. intensify voter education efforts targeting the participation of youth and non-Finnish residents as voters and candidates, via incentives and visibility campaigns in different languages;

e. promote public messaging that emphasise the respect of political campaign materials;

f. strengthen the electoral complaints and appeals framework by introducing clear and timely judicial remedies during the electoral process;

g. expand financial transparency by requiring that all candidates, regardless of the election outcome, submit their financial reports, introducing dissuasive sanctions for campaign finance violations and a cap on campaign expenditures;

h. introduce mandatory training for all members of the election administration to ensure consistent electoral practice, enhance safeguards for handling of sensitive electoral materials before and after election day and improve reconciliation procedures;

i. adopt legislation on the rights and status of domestic and international observers.

7. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation regarding the 2025 county and municipal elections in Finland and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM<sup>3</sup>

### I. INTRODUCTION

1. Following an invitation by the authorities of Finland, received on 12 November 2024, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities deployed an election observation mission to observe the municipal and wellbeing service county elections (thereafter: county and municipal elections) held on Sunday 13 April 2025 in Finland.

2. Although the Election Law,<sup>4</sup> regulating the electoral process in Finland, does not contain explicit provisions for international election observation, Finland grants both representatives from Finnish and international election observation organisations the right to observe elections, upon authorisation by the Ministry of Justice.<sup>5</sup> The Congress and the international NGO Democracy Volunteers deployed observers for these elections.<sup>6</sup> The Congress had last observed local elections in Finland in 2017.

3. A delegation composed of 14 Congress members, one member of the national delegation of a Partner for Local Democracy of the Congress, one expert and the Congress secretariat carried out an election observation mission from 11 to 14 April to observe the 2025 municipal and county elections. Ms Gobnait Ní Mhuimneacháin (Ireland, ILDG) led the delegation and Mr Kristoffer Tamsons (Sweden, EPP/CCE) served as Deputy-head of delegation. Prior to the election day, the delegation held a series of meetings in Helsinki on 11 and 12 April 2025 with key election stakeholders, including representatives of the diplomatic corps, civil society organisations, the media, political parties, and candidates contesting the elections. These meetings provided valuable insights into the legal and institutional context and the political environment ahead of the vote. The programme, composition of the delegation and deployment plan are appended to this report.

4. On election day, nine Congress teams were deployed across the country to observe the electoral process in approximately 110 randomly selected polling stations, from opening to closing and counting. The observation covered a geographically diverse sample of urban and rural areas throughout Finland.

5. The following report focuses specifically on issues arising from exchanges held with Congress interlocutors in the context of the municipal and county elections held on 13 April 2025 in Finland and on observations made on the election day. The Congress wishes to thank all of those who met with the delegation for their open and constructive dialogue.

### II. POLITICAL CONTEXT

6. Since 2012, Finland is a parliamentary republic. Pursuant to the Constitution, the political framework is founded on principles of democracy, the rule of law, parliamentarism, and the separation of powers. Legislative authority is exercised by the 200-member parliament, a unicameral body elected for four-year terms. The government exercises executive power. The president is elected for a six-year term by direct vote, and, *inter alia*, holds a significant role in foreign policy. Alexander Stubb, former Prime minister of Finland, was elected to this role in 2024. The independence of the judiciary is guaranteed by the Constitution. Judicial power is vested in the courts, with the highest levels being the Supreme Court and the Supreme Administrative Court. Finland is also a bilingual republic, with Finnish and Swedish as official languages (and Sámi having an official status in some northern areas of the country). It has one autonomous region, the Åland Islands, which holds local elections separately. Close to a third of the population lives in bilingual municipalities. Finland was found by all Congress interlocutors as enjoying solid democratic practices, based on characteristically high levels of trust at all levels of government.

7. In April 2023, Finland held its last parliamentary elections, which resulted in a political shift, from the centre-left government led by the Social Democratic Party (SDP) to a conservative coalition comprising the National Coalition Party (KOK), the Finns Party, the Swedish People's Party and the Christian Democrats.<sup>7</sup> The new coalition government is perceived as prioritising cuts to public spending, including on local self-government budgets, to reduce national debt, as well as stricter immigration and crime policies.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Prepared with the contribution of Ms Nathania TABONE, Congress expert on electoral matters.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, "[Election Act \(714/1998\)](#)", 2 October 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Justice, Department for Democracy and Public Law, Vaalit.fi, "[Election Observation](#)", accessed 4 June 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Democracy Volunteers, "[Observing Finland – on Europe's Frontline of Democracy](#)", 13 April 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Justice, "[Parliamentary Elections 2023: whole country, results by candidate nominator](#)", accessed 4 June 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Corinne Deloy, "[The centre-right \(KOK\) wins the general elections in Finland, followed by the nationalist populists \(PS\)](#)", *Fondation Robert Schumann*, 4 April 2023.

8. On 13 April 2025, Finland voters were called to vote for the first time for both municipal and county council elections on the same day, as provided by law. The latest municipal elections in Finland were held on 13 June 2021, amid the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>9</sup> Turnout reached 55% of all registered voters, the lowest participation rate since 1945.<sup>10</sup> The campaign focused on local services and taxes, the Social and Health Services Reform (also known as “SOTE reform”), COVID-19 recovery strategies for local businesses, employment and education. Other topics included immigration policies, improvement in public transportation, and environmental concerns. The dominant political parties were KOK, which obtained 21.4% of the votes, followed by SDP with 17.7%, and the Centre Party (KESK), with 14.9%. The Finns Party obtained 14.5% of the votes, marking an increase from its previous electoral results, while the Green League and the Left Alliance experienced a decline in their results.<sup>11</sup>

9. Following the adoption of the SOTE reform in 2021 under the previous ruling coalition, the first-ever WSC elections were held on 23 January 2022. This reform came after close to 15 years of intense political negotiations on this new layer of administration. Therefore, most political parties focused their campaigns on some provisions of the newly adopted SOTE reform, notably budgeting of healthcare services, service accessibility and regional disparities. In the elections, KOK received 21.5% of the votes, SDP 19.3%, KESK 19.2%, and the Finns Party 11%.<sup>12</sup> The Left Alliance and the Green League performed better in urban areas, whereas the KESK was favoured in more rural counties. Voter turnout reached 47.5%, reflecting moderate participation levels and a decline compared to local elections.

10. The political climate ahead of the 2025 municipal and county elections was marked by rising living costs, negative growth and widespread economic uncertainty, with an increasing number of citizens facing hardships and the unemployment rate reaching the highest levels among EU countries.<sup>13</sup> While Finland has long been recognised for its universal and comprehensive approach to social protection, ageing population, growing social inequalities and budget cuts have challenged the welfare system and resulted in some societal dissatisfaction and doubts about the implementation of the SOTE reform. The ongoing war in Ukraine as well as Finland’s 1 300 km-long shared boarder with the Russian Federation, have furthermore raised serious security concerns, leading to two announcements in the lead-up to the elections: growing defence expenditures<sup>14</sup> and the country leaving the Ottawa Convention, which bans the use of anti-personnel landmines.<sup>15</sup> The geographical proximity with Russia was also perceived as threatening, both online and in the country.<sup>16</sup> With the border being fully closed, past dynamic economic ties with Russia are now inexistant, reshaping the country’s economy.

11. Overall, the 2025 local and county elections were perceived as a barometer of citizen satisfaction with the WSCs and with the governing coalition’s handling of the transition to the county-level of governance. Furthermore, Finland’s electoral cycle has meant that voters have been called to the polls every year since 2021. Many Congress interlocutors feared electoral fatigue and a low turnout, pointing out that Finland traditionally has the lowest participation rate in local elections in Northern Europe.

### III. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

12. Chapter 11, section 121 of the Finnish Constitution<sup>17</sup> provides for the decentralisation of governance and establishes municipal and other regional self-government bodies. It guarantees that their administration “shall be based on the self-government of their residents”. Local self-government is organised into two tiers: municipalities, which serve as the primary units of local self-governance, and wellbeing services counties (WSCs), both of which are directly elected by their respective residents every four years. Municipalities are regulated by the Constitution and the 1995 Act on Local Government (LGA)<sup>18</sup>, while the WSCs were created and are governed through the 2021 WSC Act.<sup>19</sup>

9 Excluding those in the autonomous Åland Islands, last held in 2023.

10 Statistics Finland, [Municipal Elections](#), 13 July 2021.

11 Ministry of Justice, [“Municipal Elections 2021: Whole country, results by party”](#), accessed 4 June 2025.

12 Ministry of Justice, [“County Elections 2022: Whole country, results by party”](#), accessed 4 June 2025.

13 Yle, [“Report: Nearly one million people in Finland at risk of poverty, social exclusion”](#), 6 March 2025 and Yle, [“Finland’s unemployment rate hits 9.4%, with jobless rate for men bleakest in EU”](#), 25 March 2025.

14 Ministry of Defence of the Finnish Government, [“Finland to raise defence spending to at least three percent of GDP”](#), 1 April 2025.

15 Reuters, [“Finland to exit landmines treaty, hike defence spending given Russia threat, PM says”](#), 1 April 2025 and Yle, [“Finland’s withdrawal from landmine treaty moves forward”](#), 28 May 2025.

16 Finland has been the target of some disinformation campaigns from Russia, in particular in the context of its NATO accession in 2023. See for instance, Yle, [“HS: Russian woman spreading anti-Finland propaganda on YouTube”](#), 18 June 2025. See EU DisinfoLab, [“Disinformation Landscape in Finland”](#), April 2025.

17 Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, [“The Constitution of Finland \(731/1999\)”](#), 11 June 1999.

18 Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, [“Finnish Local Government Act \(365/1995\)”](#), 17 March 1995.

19 Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, [“Wellbeing services counties \(611/2021\)”](#) (in Finnish), 29 June 2021.

13. Currently, there are 308 municipalities (including 16 in the autonomous Åland Islands region, which were not called to vote in 2025), as well as 21 WSCs. By law, municipal and WSC elections are held every four years, with 2025 being the first time when both WSC and municipal elections were held simultaneously, with the declared aim to increase voter participation in both elections.

14. The Constitution grants municipalities broad autonomous powers in governance and public service provision. The responsibilities of municipalities stem from the LGA, and include organising, regulating and maintaining primary and secondary educational institutions, access to social services, environmental protection and urban planning, managing public infrastructure, as well as youth and cultural services. Municipal councils are the decision-making bodies of municipalities and are responsible for taking decisions on municipality budgets, income taxes, and for developing and implementing policies and strategies. The delegation was also informed that unemployment allowances were also transferred from the State to municipalities in January 2025, in a context of high unemployment rates in Finland. Municipalities have similar responsibilities, regardless of their population.

15. The expansion of responsibilities of municipalities, to include many delegated administrative functions, has been a topic of discussions for nearly 15 years, with several plans to re-empower municipalities, better coordinate governmental activity and redress their deteriorated financial situation proposed by successive governments. Between 2014 and 2018, the Finnish government presented plans to remove social and healthcare services from municipalities and transfer them to autonomous regions.<sup>20</sup> In 2021, the SOTE reform that shifted social and healthcare services to established welfare areas, the wellbeing service counties, was passed. The reform became fully effective on 1 January 2023. Approximately 50% of services, personnel and income was transferred from the municipalities to WSCs, resulting in a profound change in the entire public administration, the effects of which were still being felt in the 2025 elections.<sup>21</sup> Many interlocutors regretted that voters were not well aware of the competencies of the WSCs and that the WSCs struggled financially.<sup>22</sup> Finnish citizens in general perceived that the quality of public service provision had decreased with the reform.<sup>23</sup>

16. In 2021, 21 WSCs were therefore created by the WSC Act. The declared aim of the reform was to improve efficiency, provide equal access to services and alleviate administrative burdens for citizens. Following the ensuing WSC elections in 2022, the WSCs became exhaustively responsible for healthcare services (hospitals and medical emergency care), social services (mental health support, disability services, and social assistance), as well as fire and emergency rescue operations. Unlike municipalities, WSCs do not possess the authority to levy taxes and are dependent on the central government for funding. The strong democratic mandate of the WSC councils which are directly elected by residents was perceived to be in contrast with their imposed setup and responsibilities and lack of control over budget sources. While the Constitution establishes the framework for “municipal and other regional self-government”, it contains no explicit provision for WSCs, an issue the Congress raised in its latest Monitoring report.<sup>24</sup> No WSC was constituted in Helsinki. Some interlocutors regretted that the distribution of counties had sometimes been done artificially, leading to a low sense of belonging among communities. Others expressed doubt on the survival of some counties and considered plausible to merge some of them together.

17. Both municipalities and WSCs have directly elected councils as decision-making bodies; the municipal council and the WSC council, respectively. The number of municipal councillors depends on the number of residents in the municipality, while WSC councils have between 59 to 89 members based on their population. A distinctive feature of the Finnish local government is that top executive officials are not always indirectly elected by residents but often hired or appointed by the councils. By law, municipal councils may choose whether to have a chief executive (civil servant) or a mayor (politician) as head of administration. In most cases, a chief executive is hired by the council, following a call for applicants. One interlocutor raised the point that even in these cases, the recruitment of the executive was not completely devoid of political considerations. Only seven municipal councils have chosen to

<sup>20</sup> Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, CG32(2017)08final Local and Regional Democracy in Finland, para. 24-30.

<sup>21</sup> K. Sahamies, A. Haveri, A.-V. Anttiroiko, *Local Government: Contours of the Past, Present and Future*, in E. Pekkola, J.-E. Johanson, & M. Mykkänen (eds), *Finnish Public Administration: Nordic Public Space and Agency*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 93-108.

<sup>22</sup> At the end of 2024, almost half of the WSC were not able to balance their budgets and were unable to follow the pace of cuts imposed on them at the horizon 2026, which risks putting them in breach of the law. Yle, “[More than half of Finland's healthcare regions in the red](#)”, 12 December 2024 and Yle, “[Purra: Sote reform has been a failure](#)”, 20 August 2024.

<sup>23</sup> In a survey completed at the end of 2024, nearly 60% of respondents found that the healthcare services in their municipalities had worsened in the last two years. Yle, “[Poll: Vast majority dissatisfied with social and healthcare reform](#)”, 11 November 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, “[Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Finland](#)”, 15 October 2024, CG(2024)47-13.

elect a mayor from amongst the council members (including Helsinki, Kärkölä, Puolanka, Turku, Tampere, Pirkkala and Tuusula). Traditionally, the mayor is thus the head of list from the party scoring first in the elections. It sometimes leads to mayors being minority leaders and having to find broad consensus.. Mayors, municipal chief executives and county directors are responsible for administrative oversight and are accountable to the respective elected councils.

18. Following the adoption of the SOTE reform, concerns were raised on the fact that elected representatives could hold multiple positions of trust concomitantly. In the current system, municipal councillors could also be county councillors and MPs. 77% of the county councillors also hold a local mandate. While the situation has not arisen yet, they could also be eligible to be elected mayor (Article 44 LGA). Many interlocutors from parties and NGOs deplored this de facto “political multitasking”, noting potential conflict of interests, additional burden of work and overlapping schedules and responsibilities, aggravated by a tight electoral calendar.<sup>25</sup> Such overlap could blur the distinction between separate mandates, potentially confuse voters and also carries the risk of conflicting responsibilities and loyalty to the different positions held. The situation was qualified as excessive and not too healthy for local democracy by these interlocutors. At the same time, interlocutors from some parties noted the increased difficulty of recruiting candidates pushed them to encourage candidates to run for all elected positions and perceived this possibility as a way to maintain political presence and increase political support for the party across different layers of governance. They pointed out that MPs being municipal councillors also allowed for local issues to be raised in Parliament in a more direct manner. They mentioned that ultimately voters should be able to sanction these candidates by voting them out if they think their performance is affected by holding multiple positions.

19. The Constitution guarantees specific autonomous governance structures for certain regions. The self-governance of the Sámi people within the Sámi region is administered by the Sámi Parliament, which is statutorily empowered to oversee certain matters related to the Sámi language, culture, and indigenous rights. Additionally, the Åland Islands possess extensive legislative, executive and administrative autonomy, as stipulated in the Act on the Autonomy of Åland,<sup>26</sup> over education, healthcare, and policing. They were not part of the SOTE reform and do not have a WSC tier of local government. The region is directly represented in the Finnish parliament with one seat guaranteed to a member of parliament from the Åland Islands, elected in the national elections. The last elections in the Åland Islands took place in October 2023, with the next municipal elections scheduled for October 2027. The 16 municipalities of the Åland Islands are Swedish-speaking.

20. Helsinki is Finland's capital and most densely populated municipality, with over 600 000 residents, making it several times larger than any other Finnish municipality. It does not have a legally recognised special administrative status that would reflect its unique governance responsibilities, which was noted in past Congress Monitoring reports. At the same time, Helsinki remains solely responsible for organising all public services within its jurisdiction, as no WSC operates in the city. The Helsinki City Council, constituted of 85 councillors, is mandated to elect a mayor.

21. Overall, the Congress delegation noted with satisfaction Finland's high commitment to improving and finetuning local self-government, in line with the European Charter on Local Self-Government. The Congress delegation refers to Congress Recommendation 516(2024) on the monitoring report of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Finland and its explanatory memorandum, for a more in-depth analysis of local self-government. Notably, the delegation reiterates the Monitoring rapporteurs' recommendations to grant a special legal status to Helsinki and to guarantee constitutional standing for WSCs.

22. At the same time, the delegation considered that, given the recent establishment of the WSCs and the first ever organisation of both WSC and municipal elections on the same day, doubts persisted among candidates and voters alike on the role of WSCs. It encourages the authorities to strengthen citizen participation efforts to boost their understanding of the role of WSCs and continues to highlight the importance of sufficient financial autonomy for the counties to manage a substantial share of the local affairs. On the other hand, the delegation pointed out that the fact that a politician could hold up to four different political mandates was seen as a challenge to promote political diversity, as well as leading to a level of conflicting responsibilities and loyalty to the different positions; while, both mayoral and county council head positions remain largely unelected, limiting political leadership at both levels of self-government. It recommends, in order to promote local and regional democracy, considering setting up incentives for local councils to elect mayors, in order to strengthen political profile leadership at local level, notably in larger urban zones, and introducing clauses to limit cumulative political mandates.

<sup>25</sup> See on this matter Congress Recommendation 423 (2018) “[Conflicts of interest at local and regional levels](#)”.

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, “[Act on the Autonomy of Åland \(1144/1991\)](#)”, 16 August 1991.

#### IV. DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

##### 1. Domestic legal framework and electoral system

23. The Finnish Constitution establishes fundamental human rights and freedoms, including electoral and participatory rights of Finnish citizens who reach the age of 18 by election day. The legal provisions governing municipal and regional structures are laid down in the Election Act, the LGA and the WSC Act, the latter coming into force at the start of 2022, and being the most significant reform in Finland's electoral legislative framework in the past decade or so. The Election Act forms the core of the electoral legal framework, including for municipal and WSC elections. It provides, *inter alia*, for voter and candidate eligibility criteria, voting procedures, as well as the transparency and uniformity of the electoral process.

24. The latest amendments to the Election Act were adopted in December 2024, and clarified that, when concurrent elections are being held, contestants in each election shall be assigned distinct ordinal numbers. Although the Election Act lays the grounds for a sound electoral process, it contains some gaps and shortcomings as observed by international observers in the past.<sup>27</sup> *Inter alia*, it does not contain explicit provisions regulating international election observation and it maintains some limitations related to election dispute resolution. In particular, it lacks binding deadlines for resolving disputes and does not guarantee the right to challenge all stages of the process, such as candidate registration (detailed below).

25. Other legislation governing the electoral process include the 1969 Act on Political Parties<sup>28</sup> and the 2009 Act on Candidate's Election Funding<sup>29</sup>, which govern political party and campaign financing, as well as obligations of disclosure and reporting. The Act on the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yleisradio Oy)<sup>30</sup> includes provisions for equitable coverage of political campaigning. The Criminal Code provides sanctions for undue voter influence, vote buying, breaches related to freedom of assembly, expression and association, as well as falsification or manipulation of electoral results. The Act on Equality between Women and Men<sup>31</sup> provides for a 40% gender quota in public administration bodies, which are also applicable to both municipalities and WSCs, but not to municipal councils specifically (Article 4.a). In accordance with the Language Act<sup>32</sup>, the two nationwide official languages of Finland, Finnish and Swedish, are to be used throughout the electoral process. In addition, Sámi has an official status in some northern areas of the country, where it is also used in electoral process.

26. The electoral system is governed by the LGA (Article 26), while procedures are detailed in the Election Act. Elections are direct, secret and proportional, and the right to vote is equal. Residents of municipalities directly elect the municipal council every four years, through proportional representation. Municipalities, including large ones like Helsinki, constitute a unique electoral constituency and one interlocutor noted that this situation could lead to some neighbourhoods being underrepresented in decision-making. In a quite unique voting system, each citizen is allowed to vote for only one individual candidate, by writing on the ballot paper the identification number of the said candidate. While candidates are presented on party lists, voters are not allowed to vote for the whole list but must select one individual candidate only. The WSC Act aligns with the LGA with respect to the electoral system and process. WSC councillors are therefore elected through direct suffrage through a proportional voting system by the residents of the WSC. Following the establishment of the WSC, Article 143 of the Election Law provided for both municipal and county council elections to be held on the same day.

27. Seats are then allocated using the D'Hondt system for both elections. Candidates are arranged in order of popularity and each party is then allocated seats in proportion to their vote share. The order of candidates elected is determined by the number of personal votes they receive, regardless of the party (Article 89, Election Act). No electoral threshold is used. There are no assigned seats for national minorities in municipal and county councils. In general, Congress interlocutors were highly satisfied with the electoral system, which they thought provided for highly personalised political representation.

28. Overall, the delegation found that the legal framework is conducive to holding genuine local and county elections in Finland and guarantees the fundamental principles of transparent, inclusive and fair electoral process.

27 See Needs Assessment Reports by the OSCE/ODIHR on Finland at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/finland>

28 Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, "[Act on Political Parties \(10/1969\)](#)", 10 January 1969.

29 Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, "[Act on Candidate's Election Funding \(273/2009\)](#)", 24 April 2009.

30 Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, "[Act on Yleisradio Oy \(1380/1993\)](#)", 22 December 1993.

31 Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, "[Act on Equality between Women and Men \(609/1986\)](#)", 8 August 1968.

32 Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, "[Language Act \(423/2003\)](#)", 6 June 2003.

## 2. Relevant international standards

29. The rights of citizens to vote – and to stand in elections – at periodic, genuine democratic elections is an internationally recognised human right, as stated in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which provides that: “[e]veryone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives [...]. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures”.

30. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) also provides for the right to vote and stand in elections: “[e]very citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in Article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors”.

31. At European level, the right of all citizens to free elections is guaranteed by Article 3 of the Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 9): “[t]he High Contracting Parties undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature”.

32. With respect to local and regional elections, Article 3.2 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) sets out that local self-government shall be “exercised by councils or assemblies composed of members freely elected by secret ballot on the basis of direct, equal, universal suffrage, and which may possess executive organs responsible to them”. Citizens’ rights to exercise their democratic choice is the foundation of political participation at local and regional level, as also enshrined in the preamble to 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), which has been ratified by Finland.

33. In addition to the above-mentioned international treaties, soft law instruments also guide Congress observation missions, including Congress Resolution 306 (2010) “Observation of Local and Regional Elections”, Resolution 274 (2008) “Congress Policy in observing local and regional elections” as well as the Venice Commission’s Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, which specifies guidelines on the five principles underlying Europe’s electoral heritage, namely “universal, equal, free, secret and direct suffrage”.<sup>33</sup>

34. Specifically on election observation, the Congress also refers to Article 8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen document, which provides that: “The participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place. They therefore invite observers from any other CSCE participating States and any appropriate private institutions and organizations who may wish to do so to observe the course of their national election proceedings, to the extent permitted by law. They will also endeavour to facilitate similar access for election proceedings held below the national level”.<sup>34</sup>

35. Genuine elections to establish democratic governance cannot be achieved without rule of law and unless a wide range of other human rights and fundamental freedoms are guaranteed without discrimination. Consequently, the conclusions of observation reports are also taken into account issue-specific resolutions, recommendations, and opinions adopted by the Congress and the Venice Commission which each address different aspects of the electoral process. The Congress has specifically addressed the following subjects through the adoption of transversal reports : electoral lists and voters residing abroad, criteria for standing in elections, the use of administrative resources, local voting rights, elections during crisis situations, and the situation of independent and opposition candidates.<sup>35</sup> The Congress also incorporates the thematic work of the Venice Commission into its reports, notably, their standards concerning, inter alia, the use of technology, campaigns, dispute resolution, gender representation, persons with disabilities, national minorities, electoral systems, and the media.

<sup>33</sup> Council of Europe, European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), “[Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#)”, 25 October 2019.

<sup>34</sup> OSCE, “[Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE](#)”, 29 June 1990.

<sup>35</sup> Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, “[Transversal reports – Local and regional elections](#)”, 10/32

36. The delegation noted that in the absence of specific provisions regarding international election observation, the authorities could consider adopting regulations establishing the status and rights of international observers.

### 3. Previous Congress recommendations

37. The last Congress election observation report on Finland, adopted in 2017, recommended various improvements to strengthen local democracy. It advised encouraging municipal councils to elect mayors to reinforce political leadership at the local level, particularly in larger cities, such as Helsinki. Additionally, the Congress recommended that Finland enhance citizen participation by promoting regional political parties and independent lists. To foster transparency, the Congress also urged that all candidates in local elections, not just those elected, be required to disclose their campaign finances. Stronger voter education targeting non-Finnish residents was also recommended to increase their participation as voters and candidates. On voting rights, the Congress endorsed Finland's approach to restrict local election voting to permanent residents. On simultaneous elections, the Congress recommended scheduling regional elections separately from national elections to avoid overshadowing regional issues. Additionally, it recommended implementing genuine decentralisation during the regional reforms by ensuring financial autonomy for the new directly elected regional units. Finally, on election administration, the Congress recommended introducing mandatory training for all election administrators and polling station staff.<sup>36</sup>

38. The Congress had also observed the limited application of electronic voting in the Finnish municipal elections (26 October 2008), the first ever Congress observation of electronic voting systems. It found that the Finnish electronic voting did not conclude in a way which satisfied the fundamental principles for democratic elections, in particular the principle of universal suffrage. A total of 232 votes were not registered because of inadequate voter use of the voting terminals (a lack of confirmation of the chosen candidate and/or a precipitated withdrawal of the voting card that had to be inserted into the terminal). Elections were later repeated in the three concerned municipalities.<sup>37</sup>

## V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

39. The election administration is organised in a four-tier structure, headed by the Ministry of Justice, comprising 21 Wellbeing Services County Election Committees (WEC) at regional level, as well as 292 Municipal central Election Committees (MECs) and Election Committees (ECs) at the local/polling station level, which oversee approximately 2 000 electoral committees that are responsible for organising opening, voting, closing and counting. The election administration organises the practical aspects of the vote on election day and during the period of advance voting period. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for the organisation of advance voting abroad (approximately 100 polling stations) and on-board Finnish ships. Candidates, their relatives and spouses, cannot participate in the work of electoral commissions (Article 13.2, Election Act) and all election officials are bound by law to act impartially in their electoral duties (Article 9.a).

40. The Ministry of Justice is the highest election authority (Article 9-10, Election Act) and the Director of Election Administration leads electoral preparations. There is no permanent independent commission and elections are implemented by civil servants. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for the coordination and oversight of the entire electoral process; it advises on draft electoral legislation, issues secondary regulations and provides guidance to lower levels of the election administration; it is responsible for managing the electoral budget and establishing the timetable; it approves and prepares electoral materials and handles centralised tasks, such as out-of-country voting, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; postal voting, maintenance of the registrar of political parties, and the Election Data System. Moreover, it is responsible for voter education and information campaigns.

41. Each Wellbeing Service County council appoints a WEC for the duration of the council's term in office (Article 12a, Election Act). The committees are composed of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and three members, together with at least five deputies who also serve as substitutes.<sup>38</sup> Decisions can be taken with a simple majority, provided there is a quorum of at least five members. The WSC Act mandates the WSC council to ensure representation of voter groups that nominated candidates in the previous WSC elections. A 40% gender distribution should be respected. These committees are responsible for the oversight of WSC elections (and referendums) in their respective counties, including

<sup>36</sup> Congress, [CPL33\(2017\)05](#), Local elections in Finland (9 April 2017), 20 October 2017, *Op.cit.*

<sup>37</sup> Congress, [CG/CP\(15\)4](#) Information report on the electronic voting in the Finnish municipal elections (observed on 26 October 2008)

<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, "[Administrative Procedure Act \(434/2003\)](#)", 6 June 2003. Sections 27-30 provide for the disqualification of members.

tabulating and announcing the results, registering candidates and appointing new councillors, if a seat becomes vacant.

42. MECs are composed in a similar manner than WECs, but the number of MEC members may be increased in proportion to the population of a municipality.<sup>39</sup> MECs are responsible for overseeing the electoral preparations in a given municipality and bear greater responsibilities than WECs, as they oversee voter registration services, manage advance voting and election day logistical arrangements, tabulation of polling station results, allocation of seats to municipal councillors, and publication of the results.

43. Election committees (ECs) are appointed for each polling station covering an electoral district by the MECs prior to each election. They are responsible for the administration of in-person and advance voting in the respective municipalities. Additionally, the MECs may appoint special ECs responsible for voting at home and in institutions, such as hospitals and prisons. Regular polling station ECs are composed of five members, and special ECs are composed of three members (in which case, the gender quota does not apply). For advance voting, the MECs also appoints two or more electoral officials, while one is dedicated to home voting. In addition, election assistants are appointed to each polling stations, to support any voter who might require assistance. Only chairpersons receive systematic training ahead of elections.

44. The delegation was informed that the election administration handled all tasks in a timely and transparent manner and all interlocutors agreed on the transparency and professionalism of its members. They pointed out that most procedures had not changed since the last elections and that EC members were often experienced. The only major change was the holding of two elections on the same day, which had not happened in Finland since the European and local elections of 1996. The election administration also indicated to the delegation that efforts had been deployed to strengthen participation and voter education: basic information on electoral procedures had been translated in 21 languages, text messages were sent and young voters were reached out to. Interlocutors from NGOs welcomed this effort, but also noted that the materials were often not reaching their target communities. The administration also pointed out that, due to the high level of advance voting, counting could start in parallel with the election day voting, but results could not be published until the end of voting hours. By closing time, close to half of the votes had already been counted, leading to a fast publication of preliminary results.

45. The Congress delegation welcomed the fact that election administration at all levels conducted its duties in a professional and independent manner and enjoyed a high degree of public trust, embodied in the quasi-null number of electoral disputes. As only chairpersons could benefit from training despite two elections being held at the same time, the delegation recommends introducing mandatory training for all members of the election administration to ensure consistent electoral practice. Consideration could be given to ensure equal representation of both genders and presence of speakers of both official languages in each polling station.

## VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

46. A voter is eligible to vote in municipal or WSC elections if they have attained 18 years of age by election day, and are Finnish citizens, or citizens of EU member states, Iceland or Norway, provided they have registered as residents in the given municipality or county at least 51 days prior to election day.<sup>40</sup> Citizens of other countries are eligible to vote if they have registered as residents in the county or municipality at least two years prior to the 51st day before elections. All eligible voters, regardless of their criminal record or mental capacity, have the right to vote, in line with international standards.

47. For the 13 April 2025 elections, a total of 4 530 989 people were eligible to vote at the municipal level, while 3 970 342 people were eligible to vote at the county level. Interlocutors welcomed the highly inclusive voter registration procedures, which allows non-Finnish residents to take part in grassroots democracy but also voters temporarily abroad (or on-board Finnish ships) to vote in local elections. No issues were brought to the delegation's attention regarding systematic issues with voter eligibility, neither were there any reports of groups of voters being excluded from the register. Voter registration

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid 32.

<sup>40</sup> The right to vote is governed primarily by the Constitution (Article 14), which stipulates that "[e]very Finnish citizen and every foreigner permanently resident in Finland, having attained the age of eighteen years of age, has the right to vote in municipal elections and municipal referendums" and the Election Act, which sets out clear provisions on the right to vote in municipal and WSC elections. Article 28 of the WSC Act also establishes voting rights. A citizen living abroad for more than a year loses its municipality of residence (Article 5, Municipality of Residence Act), limiting possibilities for voters living de facto abroad to vote in elections.

procedures were generally perceived as simple and transparent, although some interlocutors noted that registration procedures were not so clear for non-Finnish citizens. In municipal elections, these voters constituted 8.6% of all registered voters.

48. Finland has a passive voter registration system. The voter register is extracted by the Digital Population Data Services Agency 46 days before election days, based on data from the Population Information System. The voter register is available limitedly for individual public inspection starting 41 days before election day. The register, which excludes personal identity numbers, can be accessed at locations designated by the Agency or by telephone. Eligible voters receive a personalised voting invitation slip no later than 24 days before election day. Voters may request corrections in their registration data online up to 23 days before the election day.

49. Taking into account the deadline for delivering voter invitations, this timeframe could be problematic and not sufficient for voters to identify and request necessary corrections. However, the election administration informed the delegation that very few mistakes were noted and no complaints were received on this matter. The final voter register is published 13 days before each election; after this date, changes in voter registration may only be done through pending appeals at the Provincial Administrative Court.

50. Pursuant to Article 9 of the Election Act, alternative voting mechanisms are established to ensure that eligible residents who are unable to vote on election day in person may participate in advance. Advance voting takes place in at least one polling station in each municipality as well as in Finnish embassies abroad, in hospitals and prisons, on ships. It can also be provided by mobile ballot box at the voters' residence upon request (at-home voting for ill or disabled voters). For the 2025 municipal and county elections, advance voting took place between 2 and 8 April. Voters being temporarily abroad could vote in approximately 100 out-of-country polling stations between 2 and 5 April, or by mail. Voters had ample opportunities to vote wherever they preferred and on the day of their choosing, through out-of-country, advance, at home and postal voting provisions. Advance voting is not tied to the municipality of residence and polling stations can be established in libraries, shopping centres, hospitals, and community buildings. Advance voting procedures were found to be particularly user-friendly, resulting in their high popularity.

51. The Congress delegation commended that the electoral system offered extensive opportunities for all residents to vote on or before election day, including Swedish-speaking citizens, non-Finnish citizens, voters with disabilities – with nearly all polling stations accessible – and those in institutions. The advanced voting procedure, conducted in a transparent and open manner, was highly praised by the delegation, with nearly 50% of voters using this procedure to vote. The delegation assessed the voter registration system as inclusive and fair but noted that the limited time frames provided for challenging the accuracy of the voter register, combined with the complexity and duration of appeals to the administrative court, could be reviewed to provide sufficient time to challenge and lodge appeals concerning electoral rolls.

## **VII. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION**

52. Every person registered to vote has the right to stand for municipal and WSC elections, unless they are legally incapacitated or not residing in the municipality where they seek to stand. Incompatibility with some public employment exclude some officials from this right, as per the exhaustive list provided in Article 72 of the LGA and Article 77 of the WSC Act. These include senior municipal government roles (and of bodies controlled by the municipality), oversight and auditing roles or leadership positions within municipal councils. At the same time, the law allows individuals to stand for election and be elected simultaneously at national, municipal and WSC levels.

53. Candidates may be nominated by a registered political party, a joint list, or a constituency association, with nominations submitted to the MECs or WECs depending on the competition a candidate would want to enter. Candidates are prohibited from running on more than one list.

54. Candidate nominations must be submitted to MECs and WECs no later than 40 days before election day, in this case on 4 March 2025. After the nominations are received, the committees are responsible for reviewing the eligibility of candidates and must notify applicants of their certification status at least 32 days before the vote, which was finalised on 13 March. In practice, corrections to registration requests were largely handled directly by the electoral administration in cooperation with the respective candidates, resulting in a simple, open and transparent registration procedure.

55. In a broader context, it is worth noting that political parties in Finland may be removed from the party register by decision of the Ministry of Justice if they fail to win a seat in two consecutive parliamentary elections. While this rule is intended to maintain an efficient and active party system, it raises questions about political inclusivity and rights of locally relevant parties in the long term. The Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters highlights the importance of political pluralism, cautioning against rules that could disproportionately affect smaller or emerging parties, particularly those representing minority views. Such measures can limit the diversity of political options available to voters, which the Code sees as a fundamental aspect of a democratic system.

56. Independent candidates had to set up a constituency association at the municipal or WSC level in order to stand for election, resulting in small additional hurdles compared to party affiliated contestants, in addition to their lack of access to public funding. The association must obtain a minimum amount of signatories (50 for county elections, 5 to 10 for municipal elections) together and draft a founding document that must contain basic details about the candidates. 959 candidates registered on constituency associations, a situation that some interlocutors described as a noteworthy increase from past elections.

57. In the 13 April 2025 elections, a total of 16 registered parties fielded candidates. 29 950 candidates registered for municipal council elections and 10 097 for the county elections.<sup>41</sup> This figure constituted a 15.9% decrease in candidates running in municipal elections compared to 2021. Some interlocutors explained this decrease by the lack of motivation for being part of a county council, electoral fatigue and general dissatisfaction with politics. 31.2% of the candidates ran in both municipal and county council elections. Out of all candidates, 6 367 candidates were incumbent municipal councillors (21%), 990 were county councillors and 162 Members of national Parliament and 88 candidates held the three mandates concomitantly. The delegation was informed that technically they could also be elected mayors, which would bring the total number of potential concomitant mandates to four. Almost all ministers were also registered to run and interlocutors pointed out that having "big names" on their list was important for the list to gain seats. Other interlocutors pointed out that these candidates had sometimes no intent in taking their seats if elected, which was seen as not conducive to stronger local democracy.

58. Women constituted 42% of candidates for the municipal elections (+2.6% compared to 2021). Only 7.8% of candidates were under 30 years old. While Swedish-speaking citizens represented 4.5% of all those entitled to vote, they amounted to 5.6% of candidates, showing a certain dynamism in local politics. On the other hand, while non-Finnish citizens represented 8.6% of those registered to vote, they constituted only 2.8% of the candidates. Congress interlocutors noted that it remained complicated for non-Finnish voters to stand in elections, due to lack of information and language proficiency, as well as cases of hate speech and racism. The difficult task of learning Finnish language was perceived as a disadvantage for such candidates and a major factor discouraging them from running and not all parties mobilised these potential candidates. Some interlocutors noted that the lack of candidates for some parties meant that the internal screening process was rushed and incomplete, leading to some controversial profiles being selected to stand in elections.<sup>42</sup> One interlocutor appreciated that the barriers to become a councillor, even in Helsinki, were not so high and that active citizens could easily get involved.

59. The Congress delegation observed that the candidate registration process itself was carried out smoothly and was assessed as fair and inclusive. At the same time, it believes more consideration could be given to locally-relevant parties and independent candidates, as these are an essential component of a healthy democracy. At the same time, it recommends intensifying voters education efforts targeting youth and registered non-Finnish residents, via incentives and visibility campaigns, in order to further include them in the electoral process both as voters and candidates.

## VIII. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

60. The Constitution guarantees fundamental freedoms of association, expression, right to information and assembly. Campaign-related regulations are set out in the Elections Act, the Act on Candidate's Elections Funding, and the Act on Political Parties, the latter also reinforces these fundamental freedoms, as well as the freedom of the media, and guarantees all parties and candidates

41 All figures are provided by Statistics Finland, <https://stat.fi/en/publication/cm1hlbrft09e207w7pv561t1l>

42 In particular, a public debate occurred after a Finns Party candidate was found to have a criminal past that could be problematic, notably a sexual abuse conviction. While the party withdrew its support, it was too late for the party to deregister the candidate. Yle, "[Finns Party pulls support for candidate convicted of child sex abuse](#)", 15 March 2025. Earlier in 2025, the Left Alliance also experienced an issue with a candidate which voiced pro-Russian views on social media. See Hankaniemi A, "[Left Alliance local politician's municipal election candidacy on hold due to Russian post](#)", Yle, 17 January 2025 (in Finnish).

the right to disseminate their political messages and the right of voters to receive and be adequately informed. The law also prohibits campaigning or attempting to influence voters inside polling stations or in their vicinity on election day. In addition, the Criminal Code prohibits offences such as, electoral fraud, result rigging and defamation and hate speech, including during election campaigns. Campaign-related violations can currently only be addressed through the courts, which may limit timely enforcement.

61. There is no official campaign or campaign silence period and candidates were free to interact widely with voters through social networks and in person events. The delegation was informed that the political culture in Finland is highly personalised, with political parties being somehow secondary to personalities. Therefore, the campaign still required some in-person canvassing. Some events were held to promote youth participation as well. Some political parties and candidates informed the Congress delegation that they had started campaigning several months before the 2025 municipal and county elections, while others chose to wait until February-March to start, due to a certain level of “campaigning” fatigue. Most candidates reported conducting their campaigns primarily in person and online, through flyers and advertisements, and the display of posters in designated public areas and private properties. The use of posters for county elections showing candidates from neighbouring municipalities was perceived as confusing for voters.<sup>43</sup> Women were visible on billboards, in debates and in campaign events, but youth and minority groups were less represented.

62. The election campaign has been assessed by the Congress as competitive and peaceful, focusing on policy discussions. Campaign topics were dominated by education and health policies (notably mental health), local economic development, urban planning, and public transport. Additional topics included mitigating the effect of climate change, work opportunities for youth and access to social housing. Immigration was perceived as less of a campaign topic in this campaign, in comparison to past national elections.

63. The delegation was informed that WSCs were not very popular among voters and some interlocutors even expressed doubts on the future of the WSCs as an administrative level. The public debate focused primarily on their shortcomings, stemming from their dire economic situation, convoluted legislation and the growing deficit of social welfare and healthcare professionals. Debates on healthcare were found by some interlocutors to be too technical to engage voters. While a significant part of the problem derived from public budget cuts, criticism of WSCs has also been expressed by Finnish decision-makers, particularly the Ministry of Finance, a position held by the Finns Party since 2023. One interlocutor regretted that non-Finnish voters were underrepresented in conversations about the health sector, as they constitute a large share of the staff of these public institutions.

64. At the same time, some interlocutors regretted that the many international events had somehow pushed local issues to the background. In particular, in Eastern counties, the situation with Russia was a source of preoccupation. While older generations were used to a hard border with their neighbour, the situation had resulted in younger residents moving away increasing fears of rural depopulation. The economic situation was also a matter of concern, with considerable concern on the future of the welfare system. They noted that these elections were considered as “mid-term elections” to assess the work of the current government, especially on safety and health.

65. No systematic hate speech and disinformation campaigns nor major incidents of campaign-related violence were reported to the delegation, reflecting the political stability that Finland enjoys. Hate speech targeting residents with migrant background and women was perceived to be much less present than in national elections, while the overall tone was less confrontational and more moderate. Interlocutors did report many cases of vandalism of posters of the ruling parties, but not only. Some candidates had to cooperate with other parties to identify vandalised posters and had to replace many billboards, using large amounts of their personal savings to do so. The delegation was also informed of a case of vandalism of a Finns Party office in 2024. Some interlocutors also highlighted that the tone of the campaign, while overwhelmingly respectful, had gotten more heated in competitive races, as was the case in Helsinki.<sup>44</sup>

66. The delegation noted with satisfaction that the election campaign was competitive, peaceful and centred on local issues and only few incidents of hostile rhetoric and no systematic disinformation campaigns were reported. At the same time, during the campaign, vandalism of electoral billboards reached higher levels than in previous elections, resulting in additional expenses for candidates. The

43 Siniauer P. “Election officials open up about April’s electoral deficit: an unreasonable task”, 24 May 2025.

44 For instance, KOK mayoral candidate, Daniel Sazonov, was attacked by a rival questioning his citizenship, due to the fact that his parents were part of the repatriated Ingrian Finns from Russia, in a move that generated anger and rebuttal from many politicians. Yle, “[Helsinki mayor race sparks controversy as candidate questions rival’s citizenship](#)”, 8 February 2025.

delegation recommends that local authorities promptly address incidents of vandalised campaign posters and promote public messaging that emphasise the respect of political campaign materials.

## IX. CAMPAIGN AND POLITICAL PARTY FINANCE

67. Political party and campaign financing is regulated by the Act on Candidate's Election Funding and the Act on Political Parties. One of the oldest public funding systems in the world, the public funding provisions were established for Finnish parliamentary parties in the 1960s, in an attempt to strengthen democracy and prevent foreign illicit funding by the Soviet Union. While political parties receive public funding for parliamentary campaigns if they pass a 2% of the votes threshold, there is no public funding specifically allocated for municipal and WSC elections (Section 4, Act on Candidate's Election Funding). In 2024, nine parties received between €8.3 million and €173 000 based on their representativeness in Parliament to conduct political activities.<sup>45</sup> Such funds cannot be allocated to individual party candidates.

68. Candidates in municipal and WSC elections may finance their campaigns using personal funds or campaign contributions. Interlocutors mentioned that, while some parties pay for photographs and limited amounts of billboards, most candidates must self-fund their campaigns. Candidates met by the delegation emphasised the unexpected costs of replacing defaced posters. They also perceived that advertisements were particularly expensive for these elections. Financial support and donations from abroad, from certain public sector entities, such as local authorities, or from unidentifiable donors are prohibited. Candidates in municipal or WSC elections may not accept donations over €3 000 from a single donor; however, political parties supporting local or regional candidates are not subjected to this limitation and can receive up to €30 000 a year from individual donors. While anonymous donations are banned, donors' identities only have to be publicly disclosed if their aggregated donations exceed €800 in municipal campaigns or €1 500 in WSC campaigns. Contributors below this threshold are therefore not known by the voters, limiting transparency. Third-party campaigning is unregulated.

69. At the time of finalisation of this report, a bill presented in Parliament proposed to increase these levels to €2 200 for all elections, except for municipal elections (€1 100). The National Audit Office of Finland ("the Audit Office") publicly advised against raising such thresholds, which could constitute a step backwards for transparency.<sup>46</sup> The delegation also believes that raising threshold would impede full transparency for voters.

70. The law prescribes transparency and disclosure requirements for contestants, which are overseen by the Audit Office. The election administration informed the delegation that they have no role in this matter. There is no cap on the maximum spending limit, nor obligation to open a dedicated bank account. According to the Act on a Candidate's Election Funding, the obligation to disclose campaign finances within two months after municipal and WSC elections only applies to elected council members and deputy members. Non-elected contestants are not required to submit declarations. In addition, the legislation foresees sanctions only if the Audit Office determines that the disclosure obligation has not been fulfilled and Congress interlocutors feared that such provisions limited its oversight powers.

71. Corruption levels are very low in Finland, with Finland ranking second best in the world in Transparency International's Index of Corruption. Most interlocutors expressed satisfaction with the current system, allowing voluntary disclosure before the election day and providing for reporting obligations for all elected candidates after the election day. Between 13 March and 12 April, a quarter of county candidates and a fifth of municipal candidates submitted voluntary declarations, which were released on the website of the Audit Office.<sup>47</sup> Significant discrepancies persisted among parties, with opposition parties, Green League, Left Alliance (56%), Centre Party (20%) and SDP (13%) being more proactive, while governing parties remained under 10%: KOK (4%), Finns Party (4%), Christian Democrats (7%) and Swedish People's Party (1%).<sup>48</sup>

72. On 16 June, final reports were submitted to the Audit Office and showed large discrepancies in both expenses and revenues among parties and candidates. Overall, KOK received the largest amount of corporate donations, whereas SDP received more funding from trade unions. Individual candidates spent vastly different amounts, ranging from a few hundred euros in small municipalities to tens of thousands in larger cities. For example, in Helsinki, the newly elected mayor Daniel Sazonov spent the most, with €111 000 being spent, while the SDP and other challengers in the capital city spent between €65 000 to €45 000. Some large contributors including companies and foundations distributed small

45 In particular, 5% of these funds must be used to cover women's political activities in the party. Viljanen V. "[How are political parties funded in Finland?](#)", DemoFinland, 9 January 2025.

46 Carlson J. "[Transparency in election financing should be promoted](#)", National Audit Office, 3 June 2025 (in Finnish).

47 National Audit Office Website, "[Responsible candidate openly discloses his/her election funding](#)", 14 March 2025 (in Finnish).

48 MTV Uutiset, "[One fifth of municipal election candidates reported their election funding in advance](#)", 2 April 2025 (in Finnish).

grants to many candidates. The identity of many donors, under the €800 disclosure threshold for municipal elections or €1 500 for county elections, was not revealed.<sup>49</sup>

73. The Congress delegation welcomes the transparency requirements applied to campaign finance and the increasing recourse to voluntary disclosure of interim campaign reports by candidates before the election day. However, it notes that the lack of spending cap and of a requirement for all candidates to submit a financial report— as only elected candidates are required to do so – as well as the high threshold for disclosing private donations, undermined transparency, accountability and level playing field. Moreover, the sanctioning power of the National Audit Office remains limited to non-compliance cases. The delegation encourages the authorities to expand financial transparency by requiring that all candidates, regardless of the election outcome, submit their financial reports as well as to introduce dissuasive sanctions for campaign finance violations and a cap on campaign expenditures

## X. MEDIA

74. Freedom of expression is guaranteed constitutionally; all individuals have the right to “express, disseminate and receive information, opinions and other communication” without censorship. The legal framework guarantees freedom of the press; interference by the state in media activities is only permitted if ‘unavoidable’. In line with international good practice, the law provides for equal opportunities to access media platforms for all candidates and political parties, including on the national broadcaster, Yle. Finland ranks fifth in the world on Reporters without Borders Index<sup>50</sup> and journalists are operating in a safe environment, where violent acts are mostly unheard of.<sup>51</sup>

75. Notwithstanding the relatively small market (a little over 5.5 million population), Finland boasts a pluralistic media system, where undue political influence is rare and not tolerated, as reported by the delegation’s interlocutors. The media landscape is diverse, with a fair balance between state- and privately-owned media outlets. Interlocutors explained that traditional newspapers, notably the Helsingin Sanomat, continue to play a vital role in the media landscape, with many cities and towns having their own publications.

76. At the same time, interlocutors from the media regretted the degradation of the financial situation of media outlets, as consumers are less and less willing to pay for news and the advertisement market is very competitive. While budget cuts affected public agencies, Finland retains one of the highest number of media outlets per capita in the world, with numerous and dynamic regional and local newspapers, including in minority languages. Several interlocutors have flagged that local and minority media outlets are becoming more and more susceptible to commercial pressure and declining print revenues, which has made survival difficult.<sup>52</sup> They considered Swedish-speaking media to be relatively protected from financial pressures, as they had access to grants and fundings to cover politics in depth.

77. Yle, both a radio and television broadcaster, is governed by the Act on Public Broadcaster. The Act provides for democratic coverage of elections by requiring Yle to “support democracy and everyone’s opportunity to participate by providing a wide variety of information, opinions and debates as well as opportunities to interact”.<sup>53</sup> Yle is under parliamentary supervision and remains the most popular media outlet in the country. The Parliament decides on the budget but has no authority on published content or recruitment decisions. However, Yle has recently faced the biggest budget cuts in its history following the decision of a cross-parliamentary group to significantly reduce its funding. This decision led to numerous dismissals in 2025, which were strongly deplored by media interlocutors.<sup>54</sup>

78. Interlocutors also pointed out the difficulties they encountered when seeking to cover both municipal and county council elections at the same time, with more than 300 individual elections being held simultaneously. It meant hundreds of candidates and campaign events to cover, while voters seemed only moderately interested in these elections. The complicated financial situation of some media outlets was perceived as forcing them to make hard choices on which competition/event to cover to better interest viewers, or to focus on national news. Several debates and interviews were released in both public and private media, including in Swedish language. When municipalities were headed by a mayor, as for instance in Tampere and Helsinki, debates were held between heads of lists. The race in

49 Yle, [“Whose money did politicians sink into the elections? Behind the scenes, the Finnish-Swedish foundation that invested a huge sum is revealed”](#), 17 June 2025.

50 Reporters without borders, [“Finland Country Profile 2025”](#).

51 Pöyhtäri R., Väliverronen J. Villi M. [“Safety of Journalists, Finland”](#), 2024.

52 Reunanen E., [Finland Country Report](#), Digital News Report 2024, Reuters Institute.

53 OSCE/ODIHR, [Needs Assessment Mission Report](#) – Republic of Finland, Presidential elections (28 January 2024), 21 December 2024.

54 Yle, [“Yle announces 14 redundancies in second phase of restructuring talks”](#), 2 June 2025.

Helsinki was particularly well covered by the media, as the incumbent mayor, Juhana Vartiainen, chose not to stand in the elections. Yle organised a “mayoral exam” for the five heads of list of the most represented parties on 27 March.<sup>55</sup> Some interlocutors regretted that most debates were held with national party chairpersons and focused on national politics and that the number of participants was limited to representatives of key parties for local debates, fearing that local lists would get less visibility.

79. The regulatory framework does not specifically address disinformation, but self-regulation, anti-disinformation education and media literacy campaigns are extensive in Finland. The delegation was informed that the media was very much involved in promoting civic participation and that journalists had strong professional ethics, including in newspapers printed by parties, leading to fake news being quickly debunked and therefore, less successful than in other European countries. Interlocutors mentioned that the current situation with Russia had created a national consensus on the support to Ukraine and Finnish citizens were therefore less influenced by Russian disinformation. They considered that the media environment was based on trust,<sup>56</sup> integrity and robust civic education, for journalists and voters. Therefore, they did not express any concern on the impartiality of the media coverage of the campaign, which was perceived as balanced and fact-based.

80. The Council for Mass Media in Finland is a self-regulatory independent oversight body, which, together with self-imposed journalistic guidelines, contribute to the impartiality of election media coverage.<sup>57</sup> Interlocutors pointed out that challenges such as SLAPPs, online harassment of journalists, while still very limited, tend to be on the increase.<sup>58</sup>

81. The Congress delegation highly commended the dynamism of Finland’s media landscape, including at local and regional levels, supported by strong freedom of expression and integrity safeguards. It praised the fact that despite financial hurdles, Finland’s dynamic and vibrant media landscape provided voters with trusted, balanced and extensive information throughout the election period, allowing them to make an informed choice. It underscores the fact that the Finnish population seems to be well-equipped to counter disinformation, due to strong civic and media education initiatives.

## **XI. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS**

82. Equality between men and women is a fundamental right enshrined in the Constitution and the Act on Equality between Women and Men. The Act includes a 40% gender quota applicable to state administration committees, advisory boards, working groups, and similar bodies, as well as to municipal boards, committees, and inter-municipal cooperation entities. However, the quota does not extend to elected bodies, such as municipal councils.

83. The electoral legal framework does not establish gender quotas or placement rules for candidate lists in municipal or WSC elections, nor does it provide proactive measures, such as financial incentives for political parties, to promote equal gender representation. Despite the absence of such provisions, interlocutors emphasised that women’s political participation remains high in practice, supported by a strong political commitment to gender equality and significant representation within political party structures and among elected officials. However, it remains the parties’ responsibilities to decide how they constitute their lists, leading to important discrepancies between parties. Two parties, the Green League and the Animals Rights Party had more women than men as candidates, but other parties such as the Finns Party and the Liberal Party had less than a quarter of female candidates in municipal council elections.<sup>59</sup>

84. Over the past decade, the number of women elected to municipal councils in Finland has shown a gradual increase. In the 2021 municipal elections, women accounted for 40.2% of all elected councillors. This share rose to 45.0% in the 2025 municipal elections, marking a notable improvement in gender representation at the local level. In the WSC elections, women continued to outperform men in terms of electoral representation. In 2025, 57.4% of elected WSC councillors were women, representing an increase of 53.3% in the previous election. Currently 18 of the 21 WSCs have more women councillors than men.

55 Rita M., Näveri A. “[The government’s request for 35 million euros heated up emotions in the Helsinki mayoral exam](#)”, Yle, 27 March 2025.

56 Finland remains one of the countries in the world where trust in the news is the highest, consistently scoring over 60% of respondents trusting the media in international surveys. See OECD, “[Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results](#)”, 10 July 2024.

57 In 2025, it handled 206 complaints, resolved 13 and approved 17. <https://jsn.fi/en/>

58 Celuch M., Latikka R., Oksa R. and Oksanen A. (2023), [Online Harassment and Hate Among Media Professionals: Reactions to One’s Own and Others’ Victimization](#), Sage Journals.

59 Statistics Finland, Op.cit.

85. Despite these positive trends, women still remain underrepresented in senior local political leadership positions. As of 2025, updated data on the proportion of female mayors or municipal executive committee chairs was not yet available; however, previous figures indicate that women held approximately one in five of these roles.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, as raised by Congress interlocutors, women, as politicians and as journalists, are at higher risks of receiving hate mail and sexist comments on their appearance.

86. Voter turnout figures from recent elections also show that women tend to participate more actively in elections than men. In the 2025 WSC elections, turnout among women reached 54.9%, compared to 48.5% among men. Young men seem to be one of the least active voting groups, with some Congress interlocutors discussing better strategies to incite them to participate, both as voters and as candidates.

87. The Congress delegation commended the number of women elected in municipal and county council elections, exceeding the 50% mark in the county elections, even in the absence of legally mandated quotas. These figures bring Finland closer to gender parity at local and regional levels. The Congress also notes with satisfaction that there are no systematic barriers for women's electoral participation, in compliance with international standards on gender equality. At the same time, consideration could be given to implementing more measures to foster representation of women in decision-making positions and on all party lists.

## **XII. PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN ELECTIONS**

88. Finland has a robust legal framework for the protection of national minorities, as assessed by the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.<sup>61</sup> Equality and non-discrimination are enshrined in Section 6 of the Finnish Constitution. Section 17 of the Constitution explicitly guarantees the right to use one's language and culture by providing that, while the national languages are Finnish and Swedish, the Sámi, Roma and other groups shall have the right to maintain and develop their own languages and cultures. Finland guarantees minority rights such as language use, cultural rights, autonomy and consultation through other legal frameworks ensuring an indirect voice of minorities into law and policy. At the same time, the general atmosphere of mutual understanding seems to have been negatively affected by increased polarisation, significant budget cuts perceived to affect minorities disproportionately and more common public discourse legitimising hate speech on ethnic and linguistic bases.

89. The Finnish electoral system does not provide for quotas or guaranteed seats for minority representatives, apart from Åland's guaranteed seat in Parliament. Political representation of minorities is dependent on whether a candidate or party reaches the required personal votes to be elected. Notably, the Sámi people have a form of guaranteed direct representation through their own parliament, established by the Sámi Parliament Act,<sup>62</sup> which explicitly obliges Finnish authorities to consult with the Sámi parliament on matters relating to Sámi culture, land and language.

90. The political participation of the Swedish-speaking citizens is among the most active in Finnish politics, primarily through the Swedish People's Party of Finland, which is currently part of the national governing coalition. Representation of Swedish speakers is also provided for indirectly through extra parliamentary representation established by law. Minority groups are also vocal about their political and cultural interests through various associations or consultative mechanisms, but some wished greater recognition and support including Roma, Karelians and Russian-speakers.<sup>63</sup>

91. Electoral rights are a long-standing critical issue for the Sámi, with controversies erupting on the compilation of the electoral registers between central authorities and the Sámi Parliament, due to changes in the definition of who is to be considered a Sámi. In 2019 and 2022, Finland was found by the UN Human Rights Committee to have violated the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in cases concerning inclusion in the electoral roll for the Sámi Parliament. The Congress was made aware of these issues in the context of the 2024 Sámi Parliament elections and the delegation refers to the 2025 report of the Advisory Committee, which calls on the authorities "*to create conditions*

60 Statistics Finland, "[Altogether 44.1 per cent of those elected in the County elections 2025 are new councillors](#)", 9 May 2025.

61 Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Sixth Opinion on Finland](#), 16 June 2025.

62 Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, "[Sami Parliament Act \(974/1995\)](#)", 17 July 1995.

63 For instance, Roma people have established consultative mechanisms such as the [Advisory Board on Romani Affairs](#). In addition to the national board, there are four regional advisory boards, which work at the local and regional level. These boards aim to enhance the equal participation of the Roma population in the Finnish society, to improve their living conditions and socio-economic position and to promote their culture. Also the Jews and Tartars play an active role in maintaining contact with local authorities.

for an inclusive dialogue with all segments of the Sami community with a view to reaching a shared understanding on the prolonged debate regarding the registration to the electoral roll of the Sami Parliament". In June 2025, a bill was passed in Parliament, which will allow the Sámi in the future to determine who is entitled to vote in elections for the Sámi Parliament and who can stand as a candidate, potentially solving the decades-long dispute with central authorities.<sup>64</sup>

92. The Congress delegation welcomes the provisions concerning the Åland islands and the widespread use of the Finnish and Swedish languages, by national and local authorities.

### XIII. NEW VOTING TECHNOLOGIES

93. New voting technologies were unsuccessfully piloted in the 2008 municipal elections, which were observed by the Congress.<sup>65</sup> Since then, paper voting has been considered by interlocutors as a safer alternative, due to potential issues surrounding the technical and security faults of these systems as well as fears of foreign interference and cyberattacks.<sup>66</sup>

94. Nevertheless, other aspects of the election process were based on electronic processes, such as electronic notification of voters delivered through the Suomi.fi messaging service, the advance voting system that electronically administers voter information, the secure and correct attribution of ballots to voters abroad, and the centralised voter register and voter information sharing system, which is consulted on election day by the polling station staff for voter identification checks. In addition, the Congress observers noted the use of electronic voter identification devices (scanning ID cards) in some counties, which worked smoothly in polling stations visited.

### XIV. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

95. The election dispute resolution mechanism is primarily governed by the Election Act and the Administrative Judicial Procedure Act.<sup>67</sup> At local level, MECs and WECs serve as the first instance for handling complaints during the electoral period, including on election day. However, their jurisdiction is limited to procedural matters. Complaints related to the voter register are decided by the Digital Population Data Services Agency and may be appealed to the Regional Administrative Court. Other decisions by electoral authorities may be appealed to the Administrative Courts and, if permitted by law, further appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court.

96. The Administrative Courts have jurisdiction over the electoral process and are also responsible for appeals against the certification of election results. Such appeals may be lodged by any political entity or eligible voter within 14 days of the publication of results. A Finns Party candidate's appeal to the Administrative Court of Turku to annul the results in Turku was rejected (see below).<sup>68</sup> The courts have the authority to annul election results. Decisions on candidate registration are considered final and binding. If a candidate is excluded, they may only appeal after the election, as the law does not provide for an immediate judicial remedy. This provision undermines the right to an effective remedy.

97. Finland relies on general courts to determine electoral matters and the judiciary enjoys high legitimacy and trust among citizens to handle these matters. Although the Election Act requires that certain election-related cases be processed by administrative courts without delay, the law does not impose specific deadlines. This falls short of international good practice,<sup>69</sup> which provides that electoral dispute deadlines should generally range between three and five days. Reliance on general courts may also render the process cumbersome and costly, discouraging individuals from pursuing complaints against electoral authorities. As disputes are handled by distinct administrative courts, there is no common online database gathering all electoral disputes.

98. The Congress delegation noted that Finland's system for election dispute resolution offers limited legal remedies during the electoral process. Complaints and appeals can only be submitted with respect to a limited number of specific issues such as voter eligibility and candidate registration, which are determined only after an election. Limited time frames to challenge the voters list together with the complexity and duration of administrative court cases could infringe the right to vote if not determined before final publication of the voters list. This falls short of international standards requiring effective

64 Yle, "[Finland approves reform of long-contested Sámi Parliament Act](#)", 19 June 2025.

65 Congress, [CG/CP\(15\)4](#), *Op.cit.*

66 Vähä-Sipilä A., "[A Report on the Finnish E-Voting Pilot](#)", *Electronic Frontier Finland Effi*, 28 November 2009.

67 Ministry of Justice, FINLEX, "[Administrative Procedure Act \(434/2003\)](#)", 6 June 2003.

68 Collin P. "[The Administrative Court dismissed the complaint regarding the Turku municipal elections](#)", 16 May 2025 (in Finnish)

69 See the Venice Commission Code in Electoral Matters, Chapter on dispute resolutions.

remedies throughout the electoral process to be addressed promptly and effectively. The delegation recommends strengthening the electoral complaints and appeals framework by introducing clear and timely judicial remedies during the electoral process.

## **XV. ELECTION DAY<sup>70</sup>**

99. On election day, nine Congress teams observed a total of 110 randomly selected polling stations across a balanced mix of urban and rural areas. Teams were deployed to the regions of Uusimaa (including the capital, Helsinki), Kymenlaakso, Pirkanmaa, Central Ostrobothnia, North Karelia, Southwest Finland, Northern Ostrobothnia, Central Finland and Lapland. The observation covered opening, voting, closing and counting procedures. Congress observers were welcomed in almost all polling stations by polite and sufficiently staffed Election Committees (EC). They also welcomed the setup of fundraising stands for charities outside of polling stations, which increased the feeling of togetherness.

100. Overall, observers assessed the election day as calm, transparent and professionally managed, with no incidents or systemic irregularities. Teams deployed in polling stations even described the election day as celebratory and joyful. Opening was assessed positively, with all polling stations observed opening on time. Congress observers noted that voting took place in a peaceful atmosphere, free of tensions or intimidation, with polling stations operating on a schedule from 9:00 to 20:00. Procedures were implemented in line with the law and enjoyed public trust. Identification checks, marking of the voter list and ballot stamping were observed consistently throughout the day. Congress teams only noted that ballot boxes were not always sealed in the same fashion.

101. On the inclusivity of the process, almost all polling stations were assessed as physically accessible for voters with mobility impairments, contributing to the inclusive nature of the process. The Election Act lays down provisions for assisted voting, as well as requirements for polling stations to be of adequate size and suitably equipped to support the voting process. A designated (and separate from EC members) election assistant was present in all polling stations visited, to support voters in case they required assistance. While nearly all polling stations were in practice accessible to persons with disabilities, observers noted that voters with visual impairments could encounter difficulty reading the candidate lists posted inside voting booths. Consideration could be given to use larger font sizes to enable all voters to vote independently, without needing assistance.

102. Congress observers assessed the EC members as competent and well-prepared, despite the increased workload and confusion of having to handle two elections at once. They noted that EC members were able to carry out their responsibilities effectively, relying on training materials made available by the Ministry of Justice. The teams were informed that most chairpersons had followed some training. In some polling stations, the Congress delegation noted that all EC members were speakers of only one of the two official languages, mostly Finnish. Although not witnessed, Congress observers believed that this could result in challenges, should a Swedish-speaking voter encounter an issue while voting, or vice versa.

103. The teams also witnessed that the number of ballot booths was sometimes too low and led to queues, while the set-up of polling station was not always ideal. In some polling stations, one booth was dedicated to municipal elections and a separate one to county elections. In other polling stations, the same booths were used for both. In one polling station, voters had to first register and vote in municipal elections, and then register again by showing ID for the second time and vote in county elections, resulting in slightly longer queuing times.

104. Congress observers were pleased to see that election day procedures, and to a larger extent the electoral staff themselves, benefitted from the large trust of voters. As was already expressed before the election day, it seemed unthinkable that an EC member (or MEC/WEC) would try to change the outcome of the vote. Indeed, in what could be considered problematic in other environments, procedures were based on collective confidence. For instance, EC chairpersons reportedly collected ballots and took them to their private homes the night before the election, contrary to Venice Commission's standards on the secure storage and custody of sensitive materials. In addition, ballots did not contain serial numbers or other unique identifying features, which weakens safeguards against ballot substitution or fraud. Voting registers were also not signed by voters directly, for data privacy concerns.

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<sup>70</sup> Congress delegation members assess the conduct of elections based on a standardised election day questionnaire, which is filled out for every observation by Congress teams. The questionnaire covers all areas and aspects of the election day, from the conduct of opening, voting, counting and closing procedures and include questions on the persons present in the polling station, the atmosphere outside and inside the polling station, election material, transparency, potential irregularities, official complaints and a general assessment.

Observers welcomed the simplicity of the procedures but felt that some additional safeguards could be envisaged.

105. On counting procedures, the Congress observers witnessed the transparent and professional manner in which the closing and counting processes were conducted but found, in some instances, the process to be slow and necessitating a lot of staff and space, as the number of candidates could reach several hundreds. Teams observed stamps, pens and ballot papers left unattended and unsupervised after the ballot boxes were opened. In polling stations observed, unused ballots were not counted prior to the opening of the polls, nor were used ballot papers counted right after unsealing the boxes, making it difficult at the end of the day to reconcile the number of ballots issued with those cast, spoiled or unused.

106. Furthermore, despite technically sound voting procedures, a non-negligible number of voters appeared to struggle understanding the dual nature of the 2025 municipal and county elections. As observed by the delegation and feared by the interlocutors ahead of the election day, some voters seemed to be uncertain regarding the role and the relevance of the WSCs. The two candidate lists with different individual numbers for each list, even when a candidate was running in both elections, caused confusion and voters were sometimes unclear which number to write down. This confusion suggested that voter education efforts were not sufficiently effective, particularly given the novelty of the local government system and the fact that municipal and county elections were held simultaneously for the first time. At counting, Congress teams were informed that the number of invalid ballot papers was much higher than in previous elections, with many cases of voters using the municipal candidate's number in county elections and vice versa (see below).

107. In conclusion, the Congress delegation noted with satisfaction that election day, from opening to counting, was orderly and well-managed and polling station staff were committed to carry out their responsibilities effectively and professionally, despite the increased workload of having to handle two elections. At the same time, it regretted that the dual voting procedure was not always understood by the electorate, who often confused the two distinct candidate numbers for candidates running in both elections, leading to unusually high invalid ballot papers, especially for WSC elections, and increased workload for the staff.

108. While the delegation perceived the electoral system as grounded in trust and experience, they noted some shortcomings regarding ballot handling and security safeguards. These included the lack of provisions requiring the total number of ballot papers to be counted upon opening the ballot box, instances of ballot papers being left unattended during counting, diverging opinions on polling station set up and inconsistencies in sealing of ballot boxes.

109. In the light of the above, the delegation recommends introducing mandatory training for all members of the election administration to ensure consistent electoral practice, enhancing safeguards for handling of sensitive electoral materials before and after election day and improving reconciliation procedures. The delegation also encourages to communicate widely on the voting procedures when two elections are held on the same day and consider steps such as double ballot booths, clearer ballot paper design and increased technical assistance to limit the number of invalid ballot papers. Consideration should be given to having at least one member of the polling station staff speaking the other official language.

## **XVI. TURNOUT, RESULTS AND POST-ELECTION DAY DEVELOPMENTS**

110. The preliminary results were published shortly after the close of polls on 13 April 2025. Despite both elections being held on the same day, no major delays were witnessed. Advance ballots were counted on election day and added to the total results. The final results were confirmed by the Ministry of Justice on 16 April following the completion of control checks conducted at municipal and WSC levels, which were also responsible for announcing and certifying their respective results. The results were quickly accepted by all political parties and stakeholders and the post-election environment was peaceful and orderly, reflecting a high level of public confidence in the electoral process.

111. One formal challenge was submitted to the Administrative Court of Turku by a candidate of the Finns Party to request a recount, as he had received zero votes in some polling stations and believed a mistake had been committed. The Administrative Court dismissed the request on 18 June 2025, based

on the fact that the request had been received 16 days after finalisation of results and not 14 days, as prescribed by law.<sup>71</sup>

112. Voter turnout reached 54.2% in the municipal elections and 51.7% in the WSC elections, marking a slight decrease for municipal elections – the lowest turnout since 1945 – but an increase for WSC elections compared to previous ones.<sup>72</sup> Advance voting was widely used, with more than half of all voters casting their ballots before election day (52.4% in municipal elections and 52.6% in WSC elections) and no major issues were raised on the counting and tabulation of these votes. Participation was much lower among non-Finnish residents entitled to vote, with only 19.4% voting in municipal elections and 16.9% voting in county elections.

113. An unusually high number of invalid ballots was recorded: 39 188 (1.6% of total votes) in the municipal elections and 81 966 (4% of total votes) in the WSC elections. Compared to the previous elections, this rate increased fourfold for the municipal elections and elevenfold for the WSC elections. The biggest share of rejected votes was attributed to candidate numbers being marked in such a way that it was not clear which candidate it referred to.<sup>73</sup> Numbers of blank ballot papers or marked with names or inappropriate markings were also quite high.<sup>74</sup> Voters appeared to have mixed up candidate numbers, since for candidates running in both elections, their candidate number on the municipal list differed from the one on the WSC list. Prior to the elections, the Ministry of Justice had recommended using one single booth for both elections assuming that the queues would be long but municipalities were free to test and select the setup they deemed more appropriate. In municipalities where a two-booth tactic was used, the number of invalid ballots was slightly lower.<sup>75</sup> Some municipalities also provided more booths and offered additional training to handle the two-booth system, relying on past experiences in church elections.

114. Public debate on the high number of invalid ballots continued well beyond the election day, as it was perceived that even a limited number of invalid ballots could have influenced the results in small municipalities. Both the Constitutional Law Committee of the Finnish Parliament and the Ministry of Justice have announced to launch investigations into the high number of invalid votes. Several parties raised concern over the management of the dual election and advocated against such a solution or more preparedness in the future. Helsingin Sanomat interviewed 200 electoral officials (64% of the MECs) and feedback on the process was rather negative, mentioning chaotic situation, misunderstanding of voters and heavy workload for the staff.<sup>76</sup> Some MEC chairpersons regretted that this issue had been raised in “election clinics”, events to discuss electoral preparations, and after simulations held at municipal level. The election administration mentioned that no such concern or negative feedback was shared in these events. They raised that a major effort was made on communication ahead of the elections but admitted that the voters may not have read the full instructions. At the same time, the Director of elections noted that the law provided for both elections to be held on the same day, which he advised against in hearings as the 1996 dual elections were also marred with high numbers of invalid ballots.<sup>77</sup>

115. A total of 8 586 municipal and 1 379 county councillors were elected. Some candidates were elected with very small numbers of personal votes.<sup>78</sup> The SDP emerged as the leading political force in both elections, receiving 23% of the vote in the municipal elections and 22.5% in the WSC elections, representing a clear gain compared to the 2021 elections. The KOK followed closely with 21.9% of the municipal vote and 20.4% in the WSC vote. The KESK retained a solid presence, winning 16.4% and 19.4% of the vote in the respective contests. The Finns Party experienced the most notable decline in support, particularly in the municipal elections, where its share fell from 14.4% in 2021 to 7.6% in 2025. 296 candidates (2%) supported by voter associations (i.e. independent candidates) were elected in municipal elections and seven (0.6%) in county elections, in a nearly stable situation compared to past elections.

71 Turku Administrative Court “[The Turku Administrative Court dismissed the complaint regarding the municipal elections held in Turku](#)”, 18 June 2025.

72 All results are available on the dedicated webpage of the election administration: <https://tulospalvelu.vaalit.fi>

73 Further media investigation showed that in most cases, the numbers were clearly written and not ambiguous but were just the wrong candidate individual number. See Kivistö M. And Malli V. “[HS's unique simulation illustrates how the large number of rejected votes affected the election result. Election Director Arto Jääskeläinen responds to criticism.](#)”, Helsingin Sanomat, 24 May 2025.

74 Koskinen M. “The Ministry put precise figures on the table – one of the reasons for the rejections of the votes is highlighted”, Iltalehti, 17 April 2025 (in Finnish).

75 See Kivistö M. And Malli V. “[HS's unique simulation illustrates how the large number of rejected votes affected the election result. Election Director Arto Jääskeläinen responds to criticism.](#)”, Helsingin Sanomat, 24 May 2025.

76 Siniauer P. “Election officials open up about April’s electoral deficit: an unreasonable task”, 24 May 2025.

77 See Kivistö M. And Malli V. Helsingin Sanomat, *ibid*.

78 Yle, “[“Quite comical” — Candidate secures seat on Finnish town's council with just two votes](#)”, 15 April 2024.

116. No single party secured an outright majority in most municipal or WSC councils, resulting in coalition negotiations in several regions. In Helsinki, both the SDP and KOK won 21 seats each, prompting discussions on power-sharing arrangements within the city council. According to media reports, these negotiations proceeded in a generally constructive manner. Eventually, Daniel Sazonov (KOK) was elected mayor of Helsinki, after previously serving as Deputy mayor and city councillor. The refusal of some elected representatives to agree to take deputy mayor positions led to some public discussions on this role and political leadership at mayoral level.<sup>79</sup>

117. Most councils successfully formed governing coalitions. No repeated elections or second rounds were required, and no major procedural obstacles were reported. Consequently, the new municipal and WSC councils started their term in office on 1 June 2025, in accordance with the electoral calendar.

118. The Congress commends the prompt and professional publication of the election results. However, the delegation expressed concern over the high number of invalid ballots, which reached 4% in the WSC elections. Given the recent establishment of the WSCs and the first ever organisation of both WSC and municipal elections on the same day, more needs to be done to address the fact that the dual voting procedure was not always understood by the electorate, who often confused candidate numbers, leading to unusually high numbers of invalid ballot papers and increased workload for the staff. It recommends communicating widely on the voting procedures in case of dual elections and consider steps such as double ballot booths, clearer ballot paper design and increased technical assistance to limit the number of invalid ballot papers.

## **XVII. CONCLUSIONS**

119. The delegation concluded that the 2025 municipal and county elections in Finland, held on 13 April 2025, were conducted in a calm and transparent manner and that the legal framework provides a solid platform to hold local and regional elections. The elections were characterised by a high degree of public trust, professionalism and inclusiveness, reflecting the resilience of democratic traditions in the country, despite these elections being held simultaneously for the first time. The delegation also praised the number of women elected to both councils, as Finland approaches parity.

120. In the pre-election period, the delegation welcomed the inclusive nature of the electoral process, facilitated by advance voting procedures and the broad eligibility of non-Finnish residents. The delegation was particularly satisfied by the organisation of advance voting which provided a simple and voter-friendly manner to participate. The election campaign was competitive and centred on local issues. While many posters were vandalised, only a small number of incidents of hostile rhetoric and no systematic disinformation campaigns were reported, in a welcomed improvement compared to national elections.

121. Election day was assessed very positively and procedures were followed professionally and impartially, and polling staff demonstrated commitment, competence and preparedness, despite the increased workload of having to handle two elections concomitantly. Voters participated freely, with polling stations generally accessible to all, including persons with disabilities. Some inconsistencies were noted on sealing of ballot boxes and layout, which could be solved by mandatory training.

122. At the same time, the delegation noted some issues which the authorities could address. First, the dual election caused some confusion among voters on candidate selection, while the roles and responsibilities of the newly established counties remained unclear to most. Such situation resulted in unusually high numbers of ballot papers declared invalid. Second, despite participation campaigns, youth and non-Finnish residents remained underrepresented both as voters and candidates. Voter education campaigns and communication could be envisaged to address both. Additional suggestions include transparency of campaign finance for all contestants and clearer electoral dispute framework.

123. Finally, despite the very popular use of advance voting, turnout was historically low for local elections and the delegation believes that more could be done to advance local and regional democracy in Finland, especially in the aftermaths of the SOTE reform. In this respect, improving public understanding and acceptance of the WSCs, through increased engagement and adequate financial autonomy, along with reinforcing political leadership at local level, by promoting election of mayors and introducing limits on cumulative mandates, constitute pathways to explore for strengthening grassroots democracy in Finland.

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<sup>79</sup> Hirvonen S. “ [Two top politicians refused to take on the leadership role in Helsinki after the elections - this is how a researcher assesses the situation](#)”, Yle, 28 April 2025 (in Finnish).

## APPENDIX I

**CONGRESS ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**  
**County and Municipal Elections in Finland – 13 April 2025**  
**(11-14 April 2025)**  
**FINAL PROGRAMME**

**Thursday 10 April 2025**

Various times      Arrival of the Congress Delegation in Helsinki

Various times      Transfers to the Hotel in Helsinki

**Friday 11 April 2025**

**Venue for the meetings from 08.00 to  
16.00 and from 18.00 to 18.45**  
 Scandic Park Helsinki  
 Meeting Room Vision 1

**Simultaneous/consecutive interpretation  
(EN/FINNISH)**  
**Ms Suvi RAPOLA**  
**Ms Anne HUPLI**

08:00 – 08:45      Briefing for the Delegation by

- **Ms Stéphanie POIREL**, Head of the Department Protecting Local Democracy
- **Ms Gonnait NI MHUIMNEACAIN**, Head of Delegation
- **Ms Nathania TABONE**, Expert

09:00 – 10:00      Meeting with representatives of the diplomatic corps of countries represented in the Congress delegation

- **Ms Katrin WINKLER**, Deputy-Head of Mission, Austria
- **Mr Adam VOJTĚCH**, Ambassador, Czechia
- **Ms Raja RABIA**, Ambassador, France
- **Mr Christoph PELEIKIS**, Deputy-Head of Mission, Germany
- **Mr Paul Richard SHERLOCK**, Ambassador, Ireland
- **Mr Mohamed ACHGALOU**, Ambassador, Kingdom of Morocco
- **Ms Ann-Karin Bjørge SLEE**, First Secretary, Norway
- **Mr Niklas BENNWIK**, Counsellor, Sweden
- **Mr Daniel RÜGER**, Deputy-Head of Mission, Switzerland
- **Mr. Hakan ÖZDEMİR**, Deputy-Head of Mission, Türkiye
- **Mr Maksym KRAVCHUK**, Deputy Head of Mission, Ukraine
- **Ms Kirsti BOURRET**, Deputy Head of Mission, United Kingdom

10:00 – 10:30      *Coffee break*

10:30 – 11:30      Meeting with the Association of Finnish Cities and Municipalities

- **Ms Marianne PEKOLA-SJÖBLOM** - Head of Research
- **Ms Ida SULIN** - Senior Legal Counsel
- **Ms Katriina MARTIKAINEN** - Legal Counsel
- **Ms Maija RUOHO** - Communications Specialist
- **Ms Laura PARSAMA** - International Affairs Manager
- **Ms Taru LEPPÄNEN** - International Affairs Coordinator

- 11:30 – 12:30 Meeting with the delegation of Finland to the Congress
- **Mr Jani KOKKO**, Deputy-Head of delegation (L, SOC/G/PD)
  - **Ms Christa CARPELAN** (R, EPP/CCE)
  - **Ms Ulla SANTTI** (L, SOC/G/PD)
- 12:30 – 13:30 *Lunch break*
- 13:30 – 14:30 Meeting with **Mr Niklas WILHELMSSON**, Director of the Unit for Democracy and Elections, **Mr Arto JÄÄSKELÄINEN**, Director of the election administration, and **Ms Heini HUOTARINEN**, Advisory Official, Ministry of Justice
- 15:00 – 16:00 Meeting with **Ms Kristiina KOKKO**, State Secretary to the Minister of Local and Regional Government
- 16:00 – 16:30 *Travel time*
- 16:30 – 17:30 Meeting with the Municipality of Helsinki
- **Mr Juhana VARTIAINEN**, Mayor of Helsinki
  - **Ms Laura UUTTU-DESCHRYVERE**, Head of International relations
  - **Ms Maria NELSKYLÄ**, Senior Advisor
- Venue: Municipality of Helsinki, Old Town Hall, Meeting room Frey, Aleksanterinkatu 20, Helsinki*
- 17:30 – 18:00 *Travel time*
- 18:00 – 18:45 Technical briefing for the election day for the delegation members by the Congress secretariat

**Saturday 12 April 2025**  
Depending on time of departures, delegation members participate to meetings held in Helsinki  
(see Deployment Plan for more details)

**Venue for the meetings**  
Scandic Park Helsinki  
Meeting Room Vision 1

**Simultaneous interpretation  
(EN/FINNISH)**  
**Ms Suvi RAPOLA**  
**Ms Anne HUPLI**

- 08:30 – 09:00 Briefing for the Delegation by:
- **Ms Stéphanie POIREL**, Head of the Department Protecting Local Democracy of the Congress and **Ms Mathilde GIRARDI**, Election Observation Officer
  - **Ms Gobnait NI MHUIMNEACAIN**, Head of Delegation
  - **Ms Nathania TABONE**, Expert
- 09:00 – 09:30 Meeting with **Mr Maxime LEBRUN**, Senior Analyst, European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats
- 09:30 -10:30 Panel Discussion with representatives of the media:
- **Ms Marjaana VARMAVUORI**, President, and **Ms Salla NAZARENKO**, International Affairs Specialist, Union of Journalists of Finland
  - **Mr Bille SIREN**, Journalist, Hufvudstadsbladet
  - **Ms Riikka LUUKKONEN**, Election producer, Yle (public broadcaster)
  - **Ms Minna HOLOPAINEN**, Editor-in-chief of the Finnish News Agency STT

**10.20** *Transfer to the airport for Team 5 (Joensuu)*

- *Flight at 12.50 – arrival in Joensuu at 13.55*

- 10:30 – 11:00 *Coffee Break*
- 11:00 -12:30 Panel Discussion with representative of NGOs:
- **Ms Anu JUVONEN**, Executive Director, DemoFinland
  - **Ms Julie BRETON**, Executive Director (and others), Moniheli
  - **Ms Silja PORKKALA**, Project Manager, Finnish National Youth Council
  - **Ms Silla KAKKOLA**, Secretary General, Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations
- 12:30 – 13:30 *Lunch break*
- 13:30 – 14:15 Briefing with **candidates/representatives of political parties – ruling coalition (National Coalition Party, Finns Party, Christian Democrats)**:
- **Mr Mikko REKIMIES**, Secretary General, Christian Democrats
  - **Mr Joonas PULLIAINEN**, International Secretary, National Coalition Party
  - **Mr Juhani HUOPAINEN**, Political Planner, Finn's Party

**13.30** *Transfer to the airport for Team 9 (Rovaniemi)*

- *Flight at 16.00 – arrival in Rovaniemi at 17.15*

- 14:15 – 15:00 Briefing with **candidates/representatives of political parties (SDP, Left Alliance)**:
- **Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI**, Member of Parliament and Head of the Finnish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
  - **Mr Henrik JAAKKOLA**, Political and Organisational Coordinator, Left Alliance

**14.30** *Transfer to the airport for Team 7 (Oulu)*

- *Flight at 16.50 – arrival in Oulu at 17.55*

- 15:05 – 15:45 Briefing with **candidates/representatives of Green League**:
- **Ms Anna MORING**, Secretary General

15:45 – 16:00 *Coffee break*

**16.00** *Departure from hotel Team 3 (Tampere) / Team 4 (Pori) / Team 6 (Turku) / Team 8 (Jyväskylä) – travel by car*

- 16:00 – 16:45 Briefing with **Mr Joel SUNDSTRÖM**, political adviser of the **Swedish People's Party**
- 17:00 – 18:00 Briefing with **Mr Markku KORHONEN**, Chairperson of the Finnish association of non-affiliated candidates (*Suomen Sitoutumattomat*) and **Ms Mari PARTANEN**, Chairperson of the local Council Group

**Sunday 13 April 2025 – Election Day**

- 08:15 Departure from hotel  
Opening of polling stations at 09:00 – closing at 20:00
- 23:00 Late night online debriefing  
*Microsoft Teams*

**Monday 14 April 2025**

Various times Departure of the Congress Delegation

**Delegation**

**Congress members**

**Ms Gobnait NI MHUIMNEACAIN**, Ireland, ILDG, L, Head of Delegation

**Mr Kristoffer TAMSONS**, Sweden, EPP/CCE, R, Deputy Head of Delegation

**Ms Rachel BAILEY**, United Kingdom, ECR, R

**Mr Zdenek BROZ**, Czechia, ILDG, L

**Ms Jacqueline FEHR**, Switzerland, SOC/G/PD, R

**Mr Zana GÜMÜŞ**, Türkiye, SOC/G/PD, L

**Mr Toralf HEIMDAL**, Norway, ILDG, L

**Mr Konstantinos KOUKAS**, Greece, EPP/CCE, L

**Ms Mélanie LEPOULTIER**, France, ILDG, L

**Mr Dominique LEVÊQUE**, France, SOC/G/PD, L

**Ms Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM**, Austria, SOC/G/PD, L

**Mr Tony Chris SCHULENBURG**, Germany, EPP/CCE, R

**Ms Tamara SNOFL**, Slovenia, SOC/G/PD, L

**Ms Iuliia VUSENKO**, Ukraine, EPP/CCE, L

**Partner for Local Democracy of the Congress**

**Mr Abdelaziz DEROUICHE**, President of the Prefectoral Council of Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco

**Expert**

**Nathania TABONE**, Congress expert on electoral matters

**Congress Secretariat**

**Ms Stephanie POIREL**, Head of Protecting Local Democracy Department

**Ms Mathilde GIRARDI**, Election Observation Officer

**Ms Gratiela DUMITRESCU**, Assistant, Local and Regional Election Observation

**Ms Martine ROUDOLFF**, Assistant, Local and Regional Election Observation

**Youth Delegate**

**Ms Lumi REICHENBACH**

## APPENDIX II

**CONGRESS ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**  
**13 April 2025 elections in Finland**  
**DEPLOYMENT PLAN**

Teams	Composition of the teams	Area of deployment	Hotel Saturday 12/4	Hotel Sunday 13/4	Distance from Helsinki	Driver
<b>Team 1</b>	Gobnait NI MHUIMNEACAIN Nathania TABONE Stéphanie POIREL  Interpreter: Veera VAARALA	Region: Uusimaa/Helsinki	Helsinki	Helsinki	n/a	Driver: Abdul AZIZ
<b>Team 2</b>	Tony Chris SCHULENBURG Martine ROUDOLFF  Interpreter: Jarmo LEINONEN	Region: Kymen Laakso	Helsinki	Helsinki	1h45 by car	Driver: Sale SATTARI
<b>Team 3</b>	Mélanie LEPOULTIER Zdenek BROZ  Interpreter: Mila LAHDENPOHJA	Region: Pirkanmaa	Tampere	Helsinki	2h/2h30 by car	Driver: Markku HEINONEN
<b>Team 4</b>	Abdelaziz DEROUICHE Gratiela DUMITRESCU  Interpreter: Oskari KOSKI	Region: Central Ostrobothnia	Pori	Helsinki	3h by car	Driver: Andrei TAMMI
<b>Team 5</b>	Toralf HEIMDAL Konstantinos KOUKAS  Interpreter: Pentti LILJUS	Region: North Karelia	Joensuu	Joensuu	<b>1h05 by plane</b>	Driver: Mika VIPUVERÄJÄ <b>12 April</b> 12.50 Helsinki – 13.55 Joensuu <b>14 April</b> 05.30 – Joensuu – 06.30 Helsinki
<b>Team 6</b>	Zana GÜMÜS Tamara SNOFL Mathilde GIRARDI  Interpreter: Inkeri PYYLAMPI	Region: Southwest Finland	Turku	Helsinki	2h by car	Driver: Ari SIPOLA

<b>Team 7</b>	Rachel BAILEY Dominique LEVEQUE  Interpreter: Anselm RANTA	Region: Northern Ostrobothnia	Oulu	Oulu	<b>1h05 by plane</b>	Driver: Petri KORVA <b>12 April</b> 16.50 Helsinki – 17.55 Oulu <b>14 April</b> 07.40 Oulu – 08.40 Helsinki
<b>Team 8</b>	Kristoffer TAMSONS Iuliia VUSENKO  Interpreters: Henry LIGHTFOOT (until 14.00) and Erja TENHONEN-LIGHTFOOT (from 14.00 to 23.00)	Region: Central Finland	Jyväskylä	Helsinki	3h by car	Driver: Petri LAPVETELÄINEN
<b>Team 9</b>	Jacqueline FEHR Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM  Interpreter: Emilia AHO	Region: Lapland	Rovaniemi	Rovaniemi	<b>1h15 by plane</b>	Driver: Satu KUUSELA <b>12 April</b> 16.00 Helsinki – 17.15 Rovaniemi <b>14 April</b> 05.30 Rovaniemi – 06.45 Helsinki ( <b>Ms FEHR</b> ) 09.20 Rovaniemi – 10.35 Helsinki ( <b>Ms MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM</b> )

## APPENDIX III

### PRESS RELEASE

#### **Congress : High level of trust in institutions in local elections in Finland**

Elections Finland 14 April 2025

A 19-member Congress election observation delegation, led by Gobnait Ni Mhuimneacain (Ireland, ILDG), concluded yesterday its mission to observe the municipal and county elections which were held in Finland on Sunday 13 April 2025.

On election day, nine Congress teams visited some 110 randomly selected polling stations from opening to closing and counting throughout the country. This on-site mission was preceded by meetings on 11-12 April with key election stakeholders and representatives of the diplomatic corps, the media and NGOs. The delegation also held discussions with political parties and candidates running in the 2025 elections.

Overall, the delegation observed a calm, transparent and well-managed election day, with no major incidents or anomalies and in line with European electoral standards. The delegation commended the professional, transparent and efficient conduct of procedures in all polling stations visited, with these two elections held on the same day for the first time in Finland. However, as the Congress recommended in 2017, the delegation noted that polling station commissioners could benefit from systematic and compulsory training for all staff in order to further standardise the electoral procedures.

Commenting on the overall mission, Head of delegation Gobnait Ni Mhuimneacain noted:

“We welcomed the great inclusiveness of the electoral process in Finland, which provided many opportunities for all residents to vote on election day and in advance, including non-Finnish citizens, voters with disabilities and those in institutions. Our delegation was unanimously impressed by the advanced voting procedure which widened the opportunity for all to take part of these elections.

“In addition to a sound legal framework, these aspects contributed to an open and representative election process and embodied the strong tradition of local democracy in Finland, supported by a high level of trust in institutions and a culture of consensus.

“At the same time, we found that both candidates and voters were uncertain regarding the role and the relevance of the well-being services counties, and we encourage national authorities to implement the [Congress Recommendation \(2024\) 516 on the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Finland](#), on this issue in particular. The high number of candidates running for multiple positions added to the confusion. “

On election day procedure, despite the well organised voting operations, we noted a few areas for improvement, in particular regarding a more standardised use of ballot boxes and additional information on voting procedure in order to reduce the number of invalid ballots in the future. Moreover, some additional integrity safeguards during counting could be considered.

We welcomed that the campaign was competitive, personalised and respectful but marked by many posters being vandalised. The campaign on the ground was partly overshadowed by international and national issues, even though we observed that the media in Finland, in particular the local and regional media, provided fair and balanced information to all voters.

Moreover, as the Congress previously noted, more could be done to improve the transparency of campaign finance, as the current system makes financial reporting voluntary. Only about a fifth of municipal candidates used this opportunity to disclose their funding sources before election day, with large differences between parties. As many candidates seem to rely on private donations to fund their campaigns, voters should be able to obtain this information in time to make a fully informed choice and to ensure no candidate is unduly favoured. We therefore recommend making financial reporting compulsory for all candidates standing in elections.

CG(2025)49-12

Overall, yesterday's election displayed a healthy commitment to local democracy in Finland. Last but not least, we were impressed by the very high number of women standing as candidates, with Finland approaching gender parity, a goal that all Council of Europe member States should strive to achieve.

Further to the Congress mission, a draft recommendation will be discussed at the next Congress session in October 2025 in Strasbourg (France).