51st SESSION

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Intensifying attacks of the Russian Federation against Ukraine

Declaration 15 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to its Declaration 5 (2022) "The Russian Federation's war against Ukraine", Declaration 6 (2023) "The anniversary of Russia's war against Ukraine", Declaration 8 (2024) "The second anniversary of the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine", Declaration 9 (2024) "The destruction of cultural heritage in Ukraine", Declaration 11 (2025) "Recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine", Declaration 13 (2025) "Ukraine: Towards a Just Peace" and Resolution 519 (2026) "A strategic approach to supporting the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine at local and regional levels".

2. It reiterates its condemnation, in the strongest terms, of the ongoing war of aggression being waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, in breach of international law and the Statute of the Council of Europe. At a time when geopolitical assumptions are being challenged and multilateralism is under threat, the Congress reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

3. For more than four and a half years, Ukrainians have defended their country with strength and courage against the Russian Federation's ongoing brutal, illegal, unprovoked and unjustified full-scale military invasion.

4. The Congress utterly deplores and condemns once again the fact that the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine continues to cause the mass loss of innocent lives and human suffering, as well as the targeted destruction of cultural heritage and of vital infrastructure, which represent human rights violations unprecedented in recent European history. Millions of people, the majority of whom are children, continue to be displaced from their homes. The Congress stresses the urgent need for long-term psychological, social and educational rehabilitation of children affected by the war, including children of veterans, of fallen defenders and of persons who are missing or held in captivity, and underlines the key role of local and regional authorities in providing such support. Furthermore, thousands of Ukrainians are still in captivity and subject to violence, inhuman treatment and torture.

5. The Congress expresses its deep concern at the increasingly intensive and continuous missile and drone attacks launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in recent months, targeting Ukrainian cities, communities, critical infrastructure and civilian facilities. It deeply deplores the growing number of civilian victims of these attacks.

[1] Debated and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-26), co-rapporteurs: Cecilia DALMAN EEK, Sweden (R, SOC/G/PD) and Mihkel JUHKAMI, Estonia (L, EPP/CCE).

6. The Congress commends the work of Ukraine’s local and regional authorities to ensure the provision of emergency support and the functioning of public services in the most difficult of circumstances, and commends the support subnational authorities from other member states have provided for this. Now, as another harsh winter approaches and energy infrastructures are again placed under strain, the resilience of Ukraine’s local and regional authorities, as well as their capacity to ensure essential services for citizens under constant security threats, remains a matter of urgent concern. The Congress draws particular attention to the situation of Ukraine's frontline regions and communities adjacent to the line of contact or to the state border with the Russian Federation, which are subjected to systematic artillery shelling, missile and drone attacks, forcing local and regional authorities to perform their functions and to deliver essential humanitarian, educational and health services under a daily threat to life.

7. Recalling the principles of distinction and proportionality under international humanitarian law and Article 9 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the Congress calls on member States, the Council of Europe Development Bank and other international partners to address the specific needs of frontline regions and communities in recovery and reconstruction programming. This should be done in co-ordination with the national authorities and in line with the principles of multilevel governance set out in Resolution 519 (2026).

8. Such an approach requires funding that is predictable, multi-annual and reaches regional and local authorities. It also requires investment in the protection and energy resilience of basic public services, and the involvement of these authorities in recovery planning as part of the follow-up to the Ukraine Recovery Conference (Gdansk, June 2026).

9. The Congress also invites local and regional authorities of member States to develop direct partnerships with Ukraine's frontline regions and communities through existing formats, including the Cities4Cities platform established under the patronage of the Congress, the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, the Assembly of European Regions, and region-to-region co-operation agreements.

10. The Congress strongly supports efforts to bring an end to the Russian Federation’s war of aggression, in the understanding that only a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, based on the UN Charter and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within internationally recognised borders extending to its territorial waters, can be a sustainable peace whereby Ukraine’s territory and communities can prosper in safety and security.

11. The Congress underlines that free and fair elections are a cornerstone of representative democracy and require genuine political pluralism, freedom of expression, association and assembly, access to independent information and meaningful political competition. It unequivocally condemns the illegal organisation by the Russian Federation of so-called “elections” in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. Such processes, conducted under occupation and coercion, have no legitimacy or legal effect, cannot constitute a free expression of political will and must not be recognised. No purported mandate arising from them can alter the legal status of the occupied territories or affect Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

12. Recognising that accountability will be required for a just peace, the Congress remains committed to its role in supporting local and regional authorities in Ukraine to contribute, within their competencies, to the work of the Register of Damage caused by the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which records evidence of damage, loss and injury on the ground.

13. The Congress also emphasises that a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine will provide a crucial path to justice for holding accountable those responsible for deciding to invade its territory. Following the signature by the President of Ukraine and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on 25 June 2025 of a bilateral agreement on establishing that tribunal, including its Statute, the Congress welcomes the expression, by 36 States and the European Union on 15 May 2026, of their intention to join the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Management Committee of the Special Tribunal. These are important steps towards ending impunity for those responsible for the crimes that have caused loss, damage and destruction in so many communities across Ukraine.

14. The Congress welcomes the ongoing work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General on the situation of children of Ukraine and stands ready to provide what support it can to Ukrainian local and regional authorities in this field, as well as in supporting the provision of tailored assistance to veterans and IDPs.

15. The Congress expresses particular concern at the situation of IDPs and refugees who have now been displaced for long periods, often without adequate measures to support their long-term integration in the place where they have been living for many years. It also condemns acts of violence committed against Ukrainian refugees in Europe. It underlines the important work being carried out on these matters in its Committee on Social Inclusion and Human Dignity.

16. The Congress welcomes the launch of the Carpathian Integration Initiative at the Summit held in Ukraine on 18-19 September 2026 as a new platform for strengthening regional and transfrontier co-operation, democratic resilience and sustainable development. Recalling its Resolution 315 (2010) and Recommendation 296 (2010) “Sustainable development of mountain regions and the experience of the Carpathian Mountains”, the Congress encourages local and regional authorities of the participating countries to actively engage in this Initiative, building on existing co-operation frameworks, including the Carpathian Convention and the Carpathian Euroregion. It underlines the importance of ensuring that local and regional authorities play a central role in developing practical cross-border partnerships, strengthening territorial cohesion and contributing to the resilience and recovery of Ukrainian communities.

17. The Congress notes that the macro-regional strategies of the European Union have proven to be an effective cohesion policy instrument: they bring together authorities at all levels of governance around the shared challenges of functional territories, promote policy coherence and enable a more efficient use of financial resources. By involving EU candidate countries on an equal footing, in particular Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, they also serve as a practical instrument of the enlargement process, integrating the local and regional communities of these countries into EU policies before accession. It recalls that, as early as 4 December 2019, the European Committee of the Regions, in its opinion “Macro-regional strategy for the Carpathian region” (CDR 3425/2019), called on the European Commission to support the development of a dedicated macro-regional strategy for the Carpathians as the second EU strategy for a mountain region. It welcomes the fact that these calls have gained fresh impetus through the Carpathian Integration Initiative and stands ready to support further integration efforts in the Carpathian region.

18. The Congress reiterates its firm commitment to supporting work on the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine as well as work on decentralisation reforms, through its Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance and its project launched in April 2025 on “Strengthening multilevel governance and local democracy to support Ukraine’s recovery”, as part of its contribution to the Council of Europe’s Action Plan on Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction for Ukraine. It emphasises the importance of financial support, targeted capacity-building and training programmes, together with a sustainable development approach, in this context.

19. At a time of uncertainty, but with the hope that a meaningful peace process to end Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine might be possible, the Congress reaffirms its solidarity with the Ukrainian people and authorities and its commitment to a common, democratic future based on respect for international law and a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

How can we cope with coastal erosion?

Recommendation 552 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No.122, "the Charter"), in particular its Articles 3, 4 and 9;

b. the Council of Europe Landscape Convention (ETS No. 176), as amended by the 2016 Protocol (CETS No. 219);

c. the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (ETS No. 104, "the Bern Convention");

d. Congress Recommendation 536 (2025) "An additional protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government";

e. Congress Resolution 529 (2026) "Congress prioritities 2026-2031";

f. Congress Resolution 500 (2024) and Recommendation 510 (2024) "Local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards: from risk preparedness to resilience";

g. Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Cultural heritage facing climate change: increasing resilience and promoting adaptation;

h. Congress Resolution 317 (2010) and Recommendation 298 (2010) "Coastal towns and cities tackling threats from the sea";

i. Resolution 2493 (2023) and Recommendation 2251 (2023) "Political strategies to prevent, prepare for and face the consequences of natural disasters" of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;

j. the Council of Europe Partial Agreement on the Co-operation Group for the Prevention of, Protection Against, and Organisation of Relief in Major Natural and Technological Disasters (EUR-OPA).

2. The Congress underlines that:

a. Europe's coasts are changing faster than expected, with scientific evidence predicting an acceleration of coastal erosion as a result of climate change, including more frequent and more intense storms;

1 Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-15, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Anthony BUCHANAN, United Kingdom (L, ILDG) and Fanis SPANOS, Greece (R, EPP/CCE).

b. future increased losses of homes, infrastructure and land, as well as landscape change are unavoidable and will have a direct effect on the human rights to life, private life and property;

c. delaying action to address coastal erosion will increase costs and amplify social and economic disruptions, and risks limiting adaptation options in the future;

d. urgent policy solutions are required to reduce emissions and thereby slow and reduce sea level rise;

e. effective multilevel governance is key to the success of coastal erosion adaptation strategies, with local and regional authorities playing a crucial role in their design and implementation;

f. while hard, sediment and ecosystem-based protection may be required in the short-term, especially in low-lying areas, planned retreat – avoiding new development and relocating existing assets – is the key element of anticipatory adaptation to coastal erosion;

g. community involvement and transparent, inclusive planning as well as dedicated funding are essential to protect vulnerable communities, livelihoods and coastal heritage.

3. In the light of the above, the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to invite the respective national authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. prioritise anticipatory adaptation strategies, notably restricting development and relocating people and structures from vulnerable areas (planned retreat), acknowledging that coastal erosion will accelerate on most European coasts in the coming years on a scale that will require a move away from reliance on protection measures;

b. establish and enforce timely, comprehensive and evidence-based adaptation policy frameworks, supported by regularly updated coastal erosion risk maps, and which take into account the long- and short-term costs and benefits associated with protection measures, unplanned (emergency) retreat and adaptation strategies including planned retreat, and systematically monitor and evaluate coastal hazards and strategies so that these can be adjusted as necessary;

c. work with local and regional authorities on the basis of a multilevel governance approach to ensure that national policy is informed by sub-national experience and that there is coherence between national and sub-national strategies, on the basis of their respective and shared responsibilities, including on retreat-related implications for planning, housing and utilities, transportation, business and all other relevant sectors;

d. create or strengthen existing legal policy instruments, including at the European level, strengthening coastal resilience and requiring retreat by avoidance and relocation;

e. develop and support national and European financial instruments, such as setback zones and no-build areas for planned avoidance and buy-out funds, relocation support, use of dismountable development and time-limited leases to facilitate planned relocation including spatial reorganisation, as well as enabling fair and applicable insurance coverage;

f. empower and adequately resource local and regional authorities – including through adequate staff resourcing, training, technical support and expertise – in order that they can play their part effectively in a multilevel governance approach to addressing the impact of coastal erosion;

g. implement educational initiatives across coastal and inland communities and all relevant sectors to raise awareness of anticipated coastal erosion, its impact on coastal communities and the need for adaptation including planned retreat and engage those audiences and others, including civil society, in any relevant consultations or strategy development;

h. foster international cooperation and partnerships with the European Union to promote coastal adaptation practices in Europe and beyond and contribute to and adopt relevant international standards, ensuring follow-up action.

51st SESSION

Risk-alert dashboard on local and regional democracy

Recommendation 553 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

b. Reykjavík Declaration, adopted at the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavík, 16 and 17 May 2023), the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy (Appendix III of the Reykjavík Declaration) and the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of those Principles;

c. Article 2, paragraph 1.b, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that one of the aims of the Congress is "to submit proposals to the Committee of Ministers in order to promote local and regional democracy";

d. Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 on the participation of citizens in local public life;

e. Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)3 on supervision of local authorities' activities;

f. Committee of Ministers' recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 on the principles of good democratic governance;

g. Committee of Ministers' recommendation CM/Rec(2022)2 on democratic accountability of elected representatives and elected bodies at local and regional level;

h. Committee of Ministers' recommendation CM/Rec(2008)2 on efficient domestic capacity for rapid execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights;

i. the Congress monitoring reports and recommendations on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the Council of Europe member States and its reports and recommendations further to the observation of local and regional elections and on recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Congress monitoring and election observation missions;

j. Congress Recommendation 453 (2021) "Ensuring the respect of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in major crisis situations";

k. the Updated Rule of Law Checklist of European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), CDL-AD(2025)002;

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-11, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Kirstine BILLE, Denmark (L, SOC/G/PD) and Kristoffer TAMSONS, Sweden (R, EPP/CCE).

l. the Code of Good Practice on electoral matters of the Venice Commission and related documents, CDL-AD(2002)023;

m. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goals 11 on sustainable cities and communities and 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

2. The Congress:

a. expresses deep concern about recent geopolitical conflicts, emergencies, democratic backsliding and foreign interference affecting local and regional elections in Europe;

b. seeks to contribute to the aims of the Council of Europe New Democratic Pact for Europe, by helping to define and identify nascent threats to democracy at local and regional level in European countries, so as to enable the timely alerting of member States and the adoption of early response measures, both in legal and political terms;

c. recalls that its recommendations on the monitoring of compliance with the Charter and following the observation of elections provide a valuable basis for assessing democratic institutions in member States and represent an important part of the Council of Europe's early warning system that can contribute to pointing to possible democratic backsliding in member States;

d. further highlights that, in order to assess and address emerging risks comprehensively, there is a pressing need for an early warning mechanism defining a broader set of key indicators drawn from Congress monitoring and election observation reports and from other areas of Congress and Council of Europe activity—particularly those relating to human rights, the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and rule of law activities at the local and regional levels;

e. in this respect, considers that the appended Dashboard provides such assessment criteria and may serve as an innovative, structured and comprehensive early warning mechanism as well as a barometer for the health of local and regional democracy in the context of democratic backsliding in Europe.

3. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to:

a. make use of the Dashboard as a relevant early warning mechanism that signals possible erosion of local and regional democracy and identifies areas in which the Organisation may enhance its political dialogue and provide assistance to member States to prevent and respond to democratic backsliding;

b. use the Dashboard as guidance for developing activities, including within Council of Europe action plans, aimed at safeguarding and strengthening democracy and good governance at all levels across the European continent;

c. encourage member States to use the Dashboard as a reference tool to assess whether they properly implement Council of Europe standards on local democracy and, where necessary, address deficiencies by taking timely improvement measures.

4. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this Dashboard in their activities relating to member States.

51st SESSION

The status of national and international observers in local and regional elections in the 46 member States

Recommendation 554 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), and notably, Article 3 of Protocol 1 to the Convention (ETS No. 9);

b. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

c. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

d. the Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, hereafter the Copenhagen Document, adopted by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) on 29 June 1990;

e. the Code of Good Practice on Electoral matters of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission); and its 2024 Report on election observers as human rights defenders;

f. 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;

g. Congress Resolution 306 (2010) "Observation of local and regional elections – strategy and rules of the Congress" and Resolution 274 (2008) "Congress policy in observing local and regional elections";

h. Congress transversal recommendations on electoral matters and notably, Recommendation 543 (2026) "Free elections at local and regional levels: A fundamental right to strengthen grassroots democracy" and Recommendation 525 (2025) "Foreign interference in electoral processes at local and regional levels";

i. Congress Recommendation 518 (2024) "Recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Congress monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and election observation missions (reference period 2021-2024)";

j. the Reykjavik Declaration following the Fourth Summit of Heads of States and Government of the Council of Europe (2023), reaffirming the commitment "to hold elections and referenda in accordance with international standards";

k. the 2026 Paris Call to Action on election observation, endorsed by the participants to the high-level event "Towards trusted and inclusive electoral processes: the role of observers", co-organised by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Congress and the Venice Commission in Paris on 28-29 April 2026 within the framework of the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-13, explanatory memorandum), Rapporteur: Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG).

2. The Congress emphasises that democratic elections at all levels of government allow citizens to freely express their will and to provide legitimacy for elected officials. It points out that the observation of local and regional elections, by both domestic and international observers, constitutes an essential element of the system of checks and balances which supports electoral integrity. It is a cornerstone of grassroots democracy and contributes to strengthening accountability, transparency and public trust.

3. In addition, the Congress believes that election observers highly contribute to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens during electoral processes at all levels. Specifically, these include the right to free elections and the freedoms of expression, association and assembly, as well as the right of citizens to participate in the affairs of a local authority. In this respect, the Congress fully endorses their recent recognition by the Venice Commission and United Nations Special Rapporteurs as human rights defenders, which acknowledges their key role in preserving human rights.

4. The Congress has noted, through the course of over 135 election observation missions, that applicable legislation related to the observation of these elections varies considerably between member States, resulting in many elections not benefitting from this valuable democratic oversight. Even when in place, implementation of the legislation can be uneven. It notes with concern that not all member States have applied in their legislation provisions contained in Article 8 of the Copenhagen Document.

5. Furthermore, the Congress acknowledges the increasingly difficult and complex environment in which elections are held and in which observers operate. Domestic observers are particularly affected, in a context of shrinking of the civic space and democratic and fundamental freedoms backsliding.

6. The Congress believes that observation of local and regional elections requires a renewed commitment and further protection, to ensure the citizens' right to political participation and build their trust in democratic outcomes.

7. It also highlights that election observation is not a purely technical endeavour. It enables the Congress to track and monitor developments related to grassroots democracy, thereby contributing to its role as an early warning system. Moreover, it allows states to reflect on their electoral practices and can serve as a capacity building tool for sharing and implementing good practice across member States.

8. In light of the above, the Congress endorses the Paris Call to Action and invites member States to:

a. review the legislation applicable to domestic and international election observation at local and regional levels, considering the specificities of and emerging threats to these elections. As innovative solutions are often piloted in these elections, particular attention should be paid to the observability of pilot projects related to new technologies, alternative voting methods and other arrangements;

b. if not already in place, define the legal status and rights of observers in relation to subnational elections, with a view to facilitate their work and ensure their free and unhindered access to all stages of the process. Such a framework should include the possibility for observers to file complaints;

c. recognise and raise awareness on the important role that election observation, both domestic and international, plays in enhancing the transparency and integrity of electoral processes and on the fact that election observers act both as watchdogs of democratic processes and human right defenders;

d. effectively facilitate the work of observers through transparent and timely accreditation procedures; in the case of decentralised election administration, consider granting the competency for accreditations of international observers to ministries of foreign affairs or central election management bodies;

e. take resolute steps to guarantee the security and safety of domestic and international observers, refrain from adopting or repeal legislation which restricts their rights, funding sources and working conditions at local level and systematically follow up on allegations of threats against observers and on suspicions of deployment of pseudo-observers in local and regional elections;

f. ensure meaningful and timely follow up to the findings and conclusions of international election observation missions;

g. systematically invite the Congress to observe local and regional elections including early, repeat and partial elections, at the latest 60 days before the election day.

9. The Congress also invites the Committee of Ministers to entrust its Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM), to draft a specific Council of Europe instrument to guarantee, protect and promote electoral observation, that could be elaborated on the basis of the existing Council of Europe related soft law and other relevant material.

10. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and other relevant institutions of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation and of the accompanying memorandum in their activities relating to the member States.

51st SESSION

Checklist on preventing corruption and promoting integrity at local and regional levels

Recommendation 555 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the Council of Europe Reykjavik Declaration "United around our values", and in particular to the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy (Appendix III);

b. the Code of Conduct of Congress members as enshrined in the Congress Charter and provided for in the Rules and Procedures;

c. Congress Resolution 444 (2019) and Recommendation 435 (2019) "The protection of whistleblowers – Challenges and opportunities for local and regional government";

d. Congress Resolution 441 (2019) and Recommendation 428 (2019) "Fighting nepotism within local and regional authorities";

e. Congress Resolution 433 (2018) "European Code of Conduct for all Persons Involved in Local and Regional Governance";

f. Congress Resolution 434 (2018) and Recommendation 423 (2018) "Conflicts of interest at local and regional levels";

g. Congress Resolution 435 (2018) and Recommendation 424 (2018) "Transparency and open government";

h. Congress Resolution 421 (2017) and Recommendation 405 (2017) "Making public procurement transparent at local and regional levels";

i. Congress Resolution 402 (2016) "The misuse of administrative resources during election processes";

j. the Council of Europe Civil Law Convention on Corruption (ETS No. 174) and the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (ETS No. 173);

k. the Committee of Ministers' Resolution (97) 24 on the twenty Guiding Principles for the fight against corruption;

l. the monitoring reports of the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) monitoring reports and the recommendations of its sixth evaluation round on Preventing corruption and promoting integrity at the sub-national level;

1 Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-12, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Aisling MORAN, Ireland (L, SOC/G/PD) and Romek KOSENKRANIUS, Estonia (R, ILDG).

m. the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and especially its Chapter II “Preventive measures.

2. The Congress points out that:

a. corruption destroys citizens’ trust in democratic institutions and undermines the rule of law;

b. democracy and institutional legitimacy require a culture of integrity and accountability at all levels of governance;

c. ethical leadership coupled with effective integrity and anti-corruption systems, transparency and independent oversight is especially important at local and regional levels;

d. the values and tools to prevent corruption are key features defining resilient democracies.

3. In the light of the above, the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to invite the respective national authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. ensure that local and regional authorities have the legal support and earmarked financial, and technical means necessary to implement the checklist;

b. support local and regional authorities in their efforts to implement anti-corruption measures aligned with the United Nations Convention against Corruption, Council of Europe anti-corruption standards and best practices, and GRECO recommendations – particularly those emerging from the sixth evaluation round focused on subnational government;

c. actively involve local and regional authorities and their associations in the design and implementation of national anti-corruption policies.

51st SESSION

Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Albania

Recommendation 556 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. Article 2, paragraph 1.b, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that one of the aims of the Congress is "to submit proposals to the Committee of Ministers in order to promote local and regional democracy";

b. Article 1, paragraph 3, of the above-mentioned Charter of the Congress, stipulating that "The Congress shall prepare on a regular basis country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member States and in States which have applied to join the Council of Europe, and shall ensure the effective implementation of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government";

c. Chapter XVIII of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress on the organisation of monitoring procedures;

d. the Contemporary commentary by the Congress on the explanatory report to the European Charter of Local Self-Government adopted by the Statutory Forum on 7 December 2020;

e. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goals 11 on sustainable cities and communities and 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions;

f. the Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2017;

g. Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of citizens in local public life, adopted on 21 March 2018;

h. Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on supervision of local authorities' activities, adopted on 4 April 2019;

i. Recommendation 468 (2021) "Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Albania";

j. the explanatory memorandum on the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Albania.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-14, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Anders KNAPE, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE) and Sören SCHUMACHER, Germany (R, SOC/G/PD).

2. The Congress points out that:

a. Albania joined the Council of Europe on 13 July 1995. It signed the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122, “the Charter”) on 27 May 1998 and ratified it without reservations on 4 April 2000. The Charter entered into force in Albania on 1 August 2000;

b. Albania signed 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) on 30 May 2016, but has not ratified it to date;

c. the 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 (“the Monitoring Committee”) decided to examine the situation of local and regional democracy in Albania in the light of the Charter. It entrusted Mr Anders Knape, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE) and Mr Sören Schumacher, Germany (R, SOC/G/PD), with the task of preparing and submitting to the Congress a report on the application of the Charter in Albania;

d. the monitoring visit took place from 17 to 19 November 2025. During the visit, the Congress delegation met the representatives of various institutions at all levels of government. The detailed programme of the visit is appended to the explanatory memorandum;

e. the co-rapporteurs wish to thank the Permanent Representation of Albania to the Council of Europe and all those whom they met during the visit.

3. The Congress notes with satisfaction that in Albania:

a. the government has stated its intention to strengthen decentralisation in line with the Decentralisation Strategy for 2023–2030 and to modernise the municipal system through a comprehensive administrative-territorial reform;

b. the Constitutional Court regularly refers to the provisions and principles of the Charter in its case law.

4. The Congress expresses its concerns on the following issues:

a. there is a tendency toward the centralisation of competences, whereby local authorities mainly assume supportive functions in the provision of essential local public services;

b. the financial resources allocated to local authorities are not commensurate with their responsibilities, compelling them to supplement insufficient funding with their own resources, which are often inadequate;

c. the ineffectiveness and lack of inclusiveness of existing consultation mechanisms between central and local governments prevents local authorities’ associations from participating meaningfully at all stages of policy development and potentially hampering the effective implementation of the administrative-territorial reform;

d. the consultation procedure on the proposed local boundary changes was initiated at a rather advanced stage of the reform process and does not appear to have provided for the meaningful and timely participation of the residents of the communities concerned in the decision-making process, as would be consistent with the spirit of Article 5 of the Charter;

e. local authorities lack adequate administrative capacity to collect local taxes effectively, and property ownership is not always accurately and reliably registered;

f. the financial equalisation system lacks effectiveness and transparency, which limits the scope for implementing local initiatives, including business-related projects, at the municipal level;

g. there is a comprehensive shortage of human resources affecting the entire local government system, which significantly restricts local authorities in implementing local initiatives and in providing and developing local public services;

h. given the indirect election of county council members, combined with very limited financial autonomy and a narrow scope of competences, counties cannot be considered genuine subnational authorities within the meaning of the Charter, notwithstanding their recognition under domestic law as an autonomous tier of local self-government.

5. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress requests that the Committee of Ministers invite the authorities of Albania to:

a. implement the administrative-territorial reform on the basis of the principles of subsidiarity and decentralisation to ensure a significantly greater role for local governments in the provision of key local public services;

b. make sure that the financial resources allocated to local authorities are commensurate with the costs of the tasks assigned to them and grant local authorities greater decision-making autonomy, enabling them to leverage their knowledge of local conditions and deliver high-quality local services;

c. review the method for calculating block (non-earmarked) grants, to take better account of the varying income-generating capacities of local governments;

d. organise the consultation process, including through the work of the Consultative Council, in a manner that ensures that all associations are meaningfully involved in consultation and effectively consulted, in due time and in an appropriate manner, on all matters that concern them;

e. ensure that all communities concerned by the proposed boundary changes, including their residents, have a genuine opportunity to express their views effectively and that the outcomes of the consultation are given due consideration before any final decision is taken;

f. provide targeted central financial and methodological support to help municipalities strengthen their administrative capacities for ensuring the accurate and reliable registration of local real estate, which is essential for the effective imposition and collection of local taxes;

g. review the financial equalisation system to make it more effective, transparent and based on objective criteria;

h. improve the conditions of service for local government employees by enhancing the predictability of promotions and ensuring competitiveness with opportunities in the private sector;

i. consider introducing direct election of county council members;

j. ratify 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 Albania signed on 30 May 2016.

6. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation on the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Albania and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

Missing out: tackling school absenteeism in Europe's communities

Recommendation 557 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. Protocol No 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 9), Article 2;

b. the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163), Articles 16, 17, 30 and E;

c. the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28;

d. the Reykjavik Declaration: United for Europe adopted at the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, Reykjavik, 16-17 May 2023;

e. Congress Resolution 493 (2023) "Delivering on the Reykjavik Summit: revised Congress priorities and structures";

f. the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 "Learners First – Education for Today's and Tomorrow's Democratic Societies" (2023);

g. the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (2020);

h. Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2640 (2026) and Recommendation 2303 (2026) "Socialising at schools: for an inclusive and participatory education fostering democratic values";

i. the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 31 January 2011 – Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda;

j. the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

2. The Congress points out that:

a. the right to education is a human right, enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, and the obligation to provide to children and young persons a free primary and secondary education as well as to encourage regular attendance at schools is included in the European Social Charter (revised);

b. an increasing body of evidence shows that while school absenteeism is present in all countries, its prevalence is varied and has risen in many European countries in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with long-term personal, social and economic implications;

c. school absenteeism can escalate quickly from occasional to persistent and severe absenteeism, withdrawal and early leaving from formal education, with each stage of this escalation becoming harder to address;

1 Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-10, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Liesa SCHOLZEN, Belgium (R, ILDG) and Anita SOLLIE, Norway (L, EPP/CCE).

d. patterns of absenteeism often reflect psychosocial distress, exclusion and developmental barriers including with regard to structural vulnerabilities such as poverty, unstable housing, disability and health-related needs, family instability, and refugee status or migration-related barriers, and therefore have the deepest impact on students experiencing those situations;

e. school education provides students with the knowledge and skills that open up future employment opportunities, lead to higher earnings and enable them to make a greater contribution to the economy, as well supporting the development of competences essential for active citizenship, social participation, and equal opportunities within democratic societies;

f. school absenteeism is therefore a barrier to the full realisation of students' well-being, social relationships and human rights and contributes directly to their loss of future opportunities, income and contribution to their communities and societies;

g. it is not possible to draw up a fully accurate and comparative picture of absenteeism both within and between European countries, due to the lack of a standard definition of absenteeism, and wide variations in the way that absenteeism is monitored and recorded;

h. local and regional authorities are crucial in monitoring, preventing and responding to school absenteeism, through multi-agency coordination, early intervention and targeted responses.

3. In the light of the above, the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to invite the respective national authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. agree, in partnership with local and regional authorities from across the member States, on a common European conceptual framework and core definitions for school absenteeism; develop non-binding reference thresholds of severity for member States wishing to use them; and allow thresholds and the responses associated with them to be calibrated to national and local legal frameworks, data systems, population characteristics and service capacities;

b. equally, and by the same means, agree on a common minimum procedure for monitoring and recording school attendance, and commit to making the resulting data publicly available, in accordance with data protection laws;

c. provide local and regional authorities with any support, training and guidance they require to interpret absenteeism data and identify at-risk students as well as putting in place the measures that help prevent absenteeism, including curricula and teaching that engage and support students of all abilities and interests and, where absenteeism does occur, stop its escalation into persistent absenteeism and early school leaving;

d. ensure that national authorities cooperate with local and regional authorities when they coordinate cross-sector interventions designed to tackle absenteeism, especially persistent absenteeism, and to ensure effective school reintegration strategies;

e. ensure targeted support and adequate funding for children and young people from vulnerable groups that are more likely to be absent from school, including those affected by the poverty, migration, disability and special educational needs, family instability, and other structural vulnerabilities;

f. encourage ongoing evaluation, evidence sharing and policy learning on effective strategies for preventing and responding to absenteeism at every level of governance, including the dissemination of good practices, evaluation outcomes and research findings to continuously improve national and subnational responses;

g. undertake these measures as part of a multilevel governance approach to reducing school absenteeism, in line with the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter (revised), and other relevant international standards.

4. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation and its explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to Council of Europe member States.

The application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the smallest States

Recommendation 558 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1);

b. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) ("the Charter") and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

c. the Reykjavík Declaration, adopted at the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavík, 16 and 17 May 2023), highlighting the need to support the essential role of multilevel governance in delivering the Organisation's vision, including through the role of the Congress with respect to the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;

d. Article 2, paragraph 1.b, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that one of the aims of the Congress is "to submit proposals to the Committee of Ministers in order to promote local and regional democracy";

e. Article 1, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that "The Congress shall prepare on a regular basis country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member States and in States which have applied to join the Council of Europe, and shall ensure the effective implementation of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;"

f. Chapter XVIII of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress on the organisation of monitoring procedures;

g. the Congress monitoring reports and recommendations on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the Council of Europe member States;

h. the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969), in particular its Article 27, establishing that "A party may not invoke the provisions of its internal law as justification for its failure to perform a treaty";

i. the Draft articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (2001).

2. The Congress:

a. highlights that local democracy is a pillar of any genuine democracy, as enshrined in the Statute of the Council of Europe;

b. emphasises that the Charter, as an international treaty establishing the European standards of local self-government, must be interpreted in accordance with the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties;

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2026 (see document CPL(2026)51-02, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Marjorie CROVETTO, Monaco (L, NR) and Stefan FASSBINDER, Germany (L, SOC/G/PD)

c. points to the geographical, historical, economic and social diversity of the States Parties to the Charter and considers that the open structure of the Charter is intended to accommodate this diversity;

d. notes that some States are notable for their very small size and, for the purpose of this report, the term the “smallest States” shall refer to Andorra, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco and San Marino;

e. points out that the Charter makes no distinction between countries based on their territorial size or on the number of levels of local governance;

f. notes that Congress reports identifying recurring issues in the application of the Charter reveal no specific challenges affecting the smallest States that would distinguish them from other member States with regard to the application of the Charter;

g. emphasises that Article 12 of the Charter allows for an “à la carte” system in the acceptance of the core principles of the Charter at the time of ratification;

h. underlines that monitoring of the application of the Charter is a sui generis procedure, which is not purely legal but also political; it is not intended to sanction non-complying States, but rather to encourage and support all member States of the Council of Europe in applying the principles of local self-government.

3. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to:

a. call on the member States, including the “smallest States” to ratify the provisions of the Charter with which they already comply de facto, by withdrawing the reservations they entered when ratifying the Charter;

b. call on the member States that have not yet done so, including the smallest States, to ratify the Additional Protocol to the Charter on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

Regional exodus in Europe: addressing the causes and creating new opportunities for rural communities

Recommendation 559 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe refers to:

a. the European Social Charter (revised) of the Council of Europe (CETS 163) guaranteeing equal access to social rights to all people residing on the metropolitan territory of each Party without discrimination;

b. Recommendation CM/Rec(2025)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the social, economic and political participation of rural youth, inviting national governments to address the specific challenges faced by rural youth;

c. the Congress Resolution 458 (2020) and Recommendation 448 (2020) on Developing urban-rural interplay, underlining the need for more attention to the interdependence between urban and rural areas, to ensure greater territorial cohesion;

d. the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (UNSDG) under which rural development is seen as playing a critical role for ending poverty (SDG 1), achieving zero hunger (SDG 2), ensuring clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), and developing sustainable communities (SDG 11).

e. the explanatory memorandum on "Regional exodus in Europe: addressing the causes and creating new opportunities for rural communities" (CPR(2026)51-02).

2. The Congress notes with concern that:

a. in the current global and European economic context, many rural areas - comprising both predominantly rural areas that are closer to urban centres and those that are more remote - are lagging behind national average in a number of performance and structural indicators, especially those that are more remote;

b. accordingly, many of the more remote rural areas are experiencing a regional exodus, i.e. a temporary or permanent departure of young people and people of working age to urban centres within the same country or even abroad, in search of better opportunities;

c. the residents of rural areas, representing between 20% and 40% of the total population in Council of Europe member states, are regularly facing lower quality and higher price levels for services, while public institutions and private companies in rural areas are confronted with numerous constraints in delivering services in an equal manner to all;

d. many residents of rural areas therefore do not have full access to social services and social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter (revised) of the Council of Europe, and reduced service levels in rural areas may induce further depopulation in a "vicious circle" of declining offer and demand;

[1] Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2026 (see document CPR(2026)51-02, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Eke FOLKERTS, Netherlands (R, EPP/CCE) and Urs JANETT, Switzerland (R, ILDG).

e. the evident assets of rural areas, often including proximity to nature, a cleaner environment, more space for activities and a livelier community spirit, are currently not outweighing the disadvantages perceived in many places, thus leading to out-migration by some and creating feelings of being left behind among remaining residents;

f. despite various responses developed at all levels of governance, from the European to the local, and numerous good practices observed across Europe, rural development policies are not yet sufficiently coherent and effective to allow more rural areas to thrive, and to retain their local populations.

3. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers therefore invites the national authorities of Council of Europe member states to work with local and regional authorities in multilevel governance approaches to develop tailored, informed and place-based strategies that ensure the long-term viability, resilience and population of rural areas, notably by:

a. Adopting sustainable economic policies - including tax incentives, grants and investments - that are favourable to business success and job creation, in both existing and new and innovative sectors, which harness local industrial legacies, existing skills, and the geographical advantages associated with rural spaces, including more extensive land resources, while assessing and taking into account the impact of new economic activities on the natural environment and the cultural heritage;

b. Maximising the use of EU funding mechanisms and policy instruments available to rural communities in member states and accession countries, and seeking funding for projects from the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) and other relevant international organisations;

c. Investing in the highest standards of transportation and digital connectivity as a priority for rural communities and as a prerequisite for economic success and closer urban-rural linkages and partnerships, to retain the current local population and attract new residents;

d. Supporting education and training via existing national institutions and partnerships with local institutions, towards both traditional and innovative rural economic activities;

e. Setting thresholds for the maintenance of public services in rural areas that reflect the realities of modern rural life and promoting innovations that make those services more accessible and sustainable, for example, via the use of telemedicine or flexible childcare arrangements;

f. Supporting the provision of affordable and sustainable housing for all in rural areas, by investing in national social housing and energy transition programmes, and stimulating private housing investments through favourable fiscal conditions and financial subsidies;

g. Putting in place robust local and regional data collection systems to monitor population changes as a first step to further changes in policy that will attract and retain population;

h. Supporting local and regional data collection and feeding data into national observation systems to monitor trends over time and to analyse the specific challenges and potential of respective local and regional territories to underpin the preparation of further evidence-based and place-based policies.

4. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to maintain an increased level of attention to the situation of rural areas across Council of Europe member states, also mainstreaming their concerns and any responses to specific local and regional situations throughout the Council of Europe standard-setting, monitoring and capacity-building work, for example in the framework of the monitoring and promotion of social rights under the European Social Charter system.

Free to speak, free to meet: guaranteeing the rights of LGBTI persons in local communities

Recommendation 560 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("The Congress") refers to:

a. the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), and in particular its articles 10 and 11, the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association, as well as the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights;

b. the Committee of Minister's Recommendation CM/Rec (2022)16 on Combating hate speech CM/Rec (2022)16);

c. the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec (2010)5 on Measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity;

d. Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2543 (2024) "Freedom of expression and assembly of LGBTI people in Europe";

e. Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2239 (2018) "Private and family life: achieving equality regardless of sexual orientation";

f. Congress Resolution 471 (2021) "The role of local authorities with regard to the situation of LGBTI people in Poland";

g. Congress Resolution 470 (2021) and Recommendation 458 (2021) "Protecting LGBTI people in the context of rising anti-LGBTI hate speech and discrimination: the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities";

h. Congress Resolution 380 (2015) and Recommendation 370 (2015) "Guaranteeing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTI) people's rights: a responsibility for Europe's towns and regions";

i. the explanatory memorandum "Free to speak, free to meet: guaranteeing the rights of LGBTI persons in local communities" (CG(2026)51-17).

2. The Congress notes with concern that:

a. the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons are increasingly coming under pressure in several Council of Europe member states;

[1] Debated and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-17, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Helen BELCHER, United-Kingdom (R, ILDG) and Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, Austria (L, SOC/G/PD).
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b. in particular, the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly of LGBTI persons and concerning LGBTI issues are increasingly undermined by political developments and via legal and administrative instruments in a number of countries, such as legal bans on Pride marches, an increasingly hostile environment and withdrawal of support for LGBTI non-governmental organisations, and various forms of attacks against members of the community and their activists, including via traditional media and online spaces;

c. in an overall context of polarised societal trends, where the exercise of the freedom of expression and assembly by minority groups is often portrayed as a threat to traditional values, local and regional authorities, in particular, face significant challenges in upholding internationally recognised human rights standards especially when they have to act within increasingly restrictive national legislative frameworks;

d. a rise in anti-LGBTI attitudes and violence has been observed in recent years, including in urban areas traditionally seen as open to LGBTI people, leading to a perceived loss of safety within the LGBTI community.

3. In this regard, the Congress requests that the Committee of Ministers call upon the national authorities of member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. guarantee the highest human rights standards to all persons within their jurisdiction, including LGBTI persons, and ensure that national legislation, policies and practices are fully consistent with the rights and freedoms enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and are conducive to the effective participation of LGBTI persons in society in safe and equal conditions;

b. create favourable conditions enabling local and regional authorities to guarantee the human rights and full and equal participation of LGBTI persons, including by providing subnational authorities with the autonomy, competences and resources they need, in line with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;

c. ensure that national legal frameworks do not impose on local and regional authorities any obligations to restrict the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly of LGBTI persons, but rather promote dialogue and co-operation between different levels of government where controversies or conflicts arise and ensure the fundamental rights of LGBTI people;

d. invest in and strengthen independent equality bodies and accessible complaint mechanisms, including Ombudsperson institutions, with a mandate to address, *inter alia*, alleged violations of the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly of LGBTI persons, whether arising from local policies or from the local implementation of national measures;

e. pursue a multilevel governance approach in areas of shared competence, such as policing and education, providing appropriate guidance, training and resources to all authorities and professionals involved;

f. establish robust and systematic national data collection mechanisms to monitor developments in violence, hate speech and other offences affecting LGBTI persons, with a view to identifying trends over time and across the country, including both urban and rural areas, to inform evidence-based policies for implementation at all levels of governance.

4. The Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to welcome and promote, through work done by Council of Europe intergovernmental structures in this area, national initiatives aimed at developing enabling frameworks for the protection of the human rights of LGBTI persons at local and regional levels, involving dialogue, monitoring and capacity-building activities.

5. The Congress calls upon the Committee of Ministers to recognise the essential role of local and regional authorities in safeguarding the freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and equality of LGBTI persons, and to continue involving the Congress as a key stakeholder in protecting and promoting the rights of LGBTI persons in local communities.

51st SESSION

Early and Partial Repeat Elections for the President of the Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina (23 November 2025 and 8 February 2026)

Recommendation 561 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities refers to:

a. Article 1, paragraph 3 of the Committee of Ministers' Statutory Resolution CM/Res (2020)1 on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

b. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) ratified by Bosnia and Herzegovina on 12 July 2002;

c. Chapter XIX of the Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions;

d. the previous Congress Recommendations on local and regional elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and notably its Recommendation 530 (2025);

e. the invitations by the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina (CEC), dated 14 October 2025 and 16 January 2026, to observe the early and repeat elections for the President of the Republika Srpska, held respectively on 23 November 2025 and on 8 February 2026.

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 Congress' role as guardian of democracy at local and regional levels.

3. The Congress acknowledges that the legal framework provides a sound basis for organising the elections for the President of Republika Srpska and that the 2024 amendments significantly improved electoral integrity, despite the lack of local consensus on electoral and constitutional reforms.

4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that:

a. in most of the polling stations visited, Congress observers witnessed a calm election day on 23 November 2025 with procedures being followed in a largely professional, collegial and orderly manner, despite challenging timeframes and difficult weather conditions;

b. although the ruling party initially decided to reject the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and CEC decisions to revoke the former entity President's mandate and to call for early elections, the elections were competitive, with the ruling party and opposition participating freely in the electoral process;

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-19, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: James MOLONEY, Ireland (L, ILDG).

c. voter and candidate registration procedures were inclusive and carried out in a timely manner, despite timelines being compressed due to the early nature of the elections;

d. the CEC worked professionally at the head of a generally well-trained administration. In line with the 2024 amendments, it handled or initiated *ex officio* proceedings on electoral violations and issued numerous sanctions to guarantee the overall integrity of the electoral process;

e. following the election day on 23 November 2025, the CEC took a proactive approach to investigations and recounts, ultimately taking the difficult decision to repeat the vote in 136 polling stations. By dismissing and replacing all polling stations commissions (PSC) members in cases of irregularities and initiating criminal proceedings for severe violations, it demonstrated a clear commitment to reversing patterns of significant electoral malpractice at local level;

f. specifically for the repeat elections of February 2026, electoral stakeholders continued to engage in the process and broadly respected the electoral silence.

5. At the same time, the Congress expresses its concern with respect to the following issues, some longstanding:

a. the inadequate human and financial resources of the CEC, combined with political pressure, obstruction, late release of funds and compressed timeframes to hold early and repeat elections, placed a significant burden on all levels of administration;

b. the electoral campaign was marred by unequal campaigning conditions which disproportionately benefitted the ruling party candidate, a situation exacerbated by the decision to scrap public funding for all contestants, which further disadvantaged opposition candidates;

c. despite a proactive approach to sanctioning campaign violations, the number of allegations of misuse of administrative resources and pressure on voters and public servants remained worryingly high in the weeks leading to the elections;

d. challenges in establishing an accurate voters register persisted, due to the inclusion of a high number of deceased voters or voters living *de facto* abroad but registered to vote, which was perceived as facilitating some cases of voter impersonation and fraud in the early elections;

e. campaign and party finance provisions did not provide full transparency and accountability, as reports were handled only after election day and were perceived as affected by underreporting and third-party campaigning, while sanctions were still seen as not dissuasive, timely or proportional enough to offset the financial benefits of circumventing legal requirements;

f. media coverage, most notably by the entity public broadcaster, was seen as biased, while no media monitoring was conducted by the Communication Regulatory Agency (CRA), leaving large parts of the media coverage unchecked. The lack of transparency of media ownership and political pressure and threats against journalists remained problematic;

g. the pre-election period was characterised by many legal and constitutional disputes, which could not all be concluded in a timely manner. Insufficient transparency and lack of timeliness of decisions created some confusion in the lead up to the elections. The procedure for the appointment of PSC presidents and deputies still lacks final judicial oversight;

h. voters were provided with insufficient information to make an informed choice, as campaign topics focused on the personality of the former entity president, issues related to identity and institutions and exclusionary rhetoric, rather than concrete proposals on regional issues. No debates were held among main contestants, and one case of hate speech was regarded as particularly concerning;

i. online media and campaigning activities were not expressly regulated, leading to issues related to paid advertising and lack of transparency of ownership of online pages;

j. provisions on candidacy rights based on ethnicity have been repeatedly deemed in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and remain unaddressed. Participation of women as candidates was non-existent, with all six candidates being men;

k. the legal framework applicable to early and repeat elections suffered from some gaps, including on campaign finance and campaigning activities in case of repeat elections;

l. the election day on 23 November 2025 was marked by some procedural inconsistencies and irregularities and Congress teams observed breaches of the secrecy of the vote due to the placement of voting screens and important violations, although these were few in number, while accessibility for voters with mobility impairments was not ensured in most PSCs; on 8 February 2026, several cases of intimidating gatherings close to PSCs were noted;

m. although the 2024 change in appointment procedures for presidents and deputies of PSCs were a positive development, the politicisation of electoral boards continued to be perceived as facilitating election day malpractice;

n. the stipulation requiring international and domestic organisations and parties to rely solely on observers accredited for the November elections, limited opportunities for meaningful observation across all locations during the repeat elections;

o. the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina is still perceived as permeable to external influences, in particular during election campaigns.

6. In light of the above, the Congress invites the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to:

a. re-open, broad and inclusive negotiations on comprehensive electoral and constitutional reform to address longstanding discriminatory provisions, including on candidate registration, and tackle remaining shortcomings, notably in cases of early and repeat elections;

b. urgently consider measures and funds to strengthen the capacities of the election administration and fully empower the CEC to investigate and sanction violations in a transparent, timely and proportional manner;

c. take steps to mitigate the advantages of incumbency, notably consider reintroducing public funding for contestants, limiting public announcements of benefits or public projects starting from the call for elections and increasing and extending sanctions in case of misuse of administrative resources to a broader range of public office holders;

d. pursue efforts to clean up and make public the Central Voters Register; for all public services in charge of data collection, notably at municipal levels, prioritise the updating of civil registries with a view to the 2026 general elections;

e. regulate third party campaigning, publish and audit interim and final reports in a timely manner and introduce more proportional sanctions in cases of non-submission of reports, false statements and underreporting; build the capacities of the audit department of the CEC to conduct proper checks and, in line with past GRECO recommendations, give the CEC the power (and the necessary human resources) to supervise the expenditures of political parties outside campaign periods;

f. enhance the transparency, independence and professionalism of the election administration; on dispute resolution, increase the capacity of the CEC legal department to handle proceedings in a timely manner and introduce judicial review of PSC appointments; grant observers the right to submit complaints;

g. fully implement existing media legislation in a timely manner, including as regards the monitoring, oversight and sanctioning powers of the CRA, promote programme-based and inclusive debates, refrain from further weakening freedom of expression in the entity via the criminalisation of defamation and introduce measures to protect journalists from political pressure;

h. promote transparency on ownership of traditional and online media and set up oversight mechanisms and rules of conduct for online coverage of electoral campaigns;

i. review and strengthen provisions aimed at increasing the participation of women and young people in decision-making positions;

j. improve the accessibility and review the layout of polling stations; improve the training provided to lower-level commissioners; facilitate the accreditation of observers for repeat elections; continue to review the CEC appointments of presidents and vice-presidents of PSCs to curb politicisation of the boards;

k. conduct an analysis of potential influence by foreign actors in the 2025 elections;

l. finally, given that political actors bear a crucial responsibility to strengthen electoral integrity, engage with all political actors to secure a clear and public commitment to integrity, so as to foster citizens' confidence in their democratically elected institutions; consider more direct measures and sanctions in case of repeated and coordinated electoral offences.

7. Furthermore, in view of discussions on the deployment of IT tools in future elections, the Congress would like to reiterate Recommendation 530 (2025) and invites the CEC to particularly focus on strengthening the reliability of electronic systems by refining related procedures and organising well ahead of elections comprehensive training and information on the technologies deployed, both for electoral officials and voters.

8. 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 early and repeat elections for the President of Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

Municipal Elections in the Netherlands (18 March 2026)

Recommendation 562 (2026)[1]

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 the Netherlands on 20 March 1991;

d. Congress Recommendation 488 (2022) "Municipal Elections in the Netherlands (16 March 2022)";

e. the invitation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, dated 15 January 2026, to observe the municipal elections held in the country on 18 March 2026.

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 recognises that the legal framework provides a sound basis for the conduct of democratic elections in the Netherlands and welcomes the introduction of recent amendments to the Electoral Act to reinforce integrity and accessibility of the electoral process, while noting their entry into force close to the election day.

4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that:

a. the election day was well organised, transparent and inclusive, with committed staff ensuring a high level of trust in the procedures; the smaller ballot paper pilot was deployed smoothly, with additional staff dedicated to making voters and commissioners well aware of the new procedures;

b. the decentralised election administration conducted its tasks in a professional, timely and impartial manner and the electoral staff underwent systematic training ahead of the elections. The amendments granting a supervisory role to the Electoral Council further streamlined the work of municipalities;

c. the elections demonstrated a strong commitment to genuine and inclusive local democracy from both voters and the election administration, as evidenced by an increased turnout and the greater accessibility of polling stations for voters with various disabilities;

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-21, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Konstantinos KOUKAS, Greece (L, EPP/CCE).

d. candidate and voter registration procedures were conducted in a timely, inclusive and transparent manner, with no complaints raised;

e. the campaign was competitive and centred mostly on local issues. Voters were presented with locally relevant alternatives on topics close to their daily lives, due to the vibrant local political landscape and the fact that more than 1 000 political entities took part in these elections;
f. media coverage, supported by a pluralistic and diverse media landscape, was balanced and extensive, providing voters with opportunities to compare programmes and make an informed decision through various debates, voting guides and interviews.

5. At the same time, the Congress highlights the following issues, some of them longstanding:

a. past Congress concerns over the universal use of proxy voting and risks of fraudulent voter solicitation have proven pertinent, as evidenced by the extraordinary decision to repeat elections in Gorinchem due to serious issues related to proxy voting on election day;

b. women continued to be underrepresented in local politics, due to socio-economic factors and important differences in internal party policies, while also having to face increasing levels of intimidation, online abuse and threats;

c. the digital campaigning sphere remains largely underregulated and reports of online and in person intimidation and hate speech have increased since the last Congress mission. Growing polarisation in the public debate has resulted in a deterioration of the campaigning environment;

d. different rules applied to different political entities, with significant differences between parliamentary and local parties, resulting in some imbalances in the level playing field, particularly regarding public funding of parties, online political advertisement and media airtime;

e. since 2022, no significant improvement has been made to political finance regulations for local campaigns, leaving large aspects of the campaign unregulated. The absence of a spending cap, the lack of a requirement to submit a dedicated and timely campaign report and the still high amount for disclosure of donations, did not fully ensure a level playing field among political subjects nor provide voters with full information, thereby limiting transparency and accountability;

f. on election day, while the physical design of ballot boxes was functional and secure, their resemblance to rubbish bins was perceived as sending the wrong message about the symbolic value of a vote. Minor inconsistencies were also noted regarding the identification of non-Dutch voters, the sealing of ballot boxes and the secrecy of the vote while the large size of ballot papers continued to hinder both secrecy and ease of voting for some voters;

g. even though perceived as neutral and independent, mayors continue to be selected following a recruitment procedure rather than elected via democratic elections, limiting democratic accountability.

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

a. reconsider the universal use of proxy voting in view of possible risks to electoral integrity, particularly for vulnerable groups of voters, and consider alternatives to proxy voting;

b. adopt proactive legal measures to improve gender representation at the local level, notably a 40% gender quota, regardless of political parties' internal policies, and strengthen the legal framework to protect female politicians from gender-based violence, intimidation and online harassment;

c. introduce effective measures and strengthen the legal framework to better regulate and monitor the online campaigning environment, notably on paid advertisements, hate speech and intimidation during election campaigns;

d. to ensure a more balanced level playing field, consider the introduction of an official campaign period and review provisions which tend to disproportionately impact or benefit some political subjects, notably on online campaigning, allocation of airtime and public funding of campaigns;

e. urgently strengthen the regulatory framework and oversight bodies and mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability of campaign and party finances at the local level and notably, introduce campaign reporting requirements for all competing actors, set an expenditure cap, review donations thresholds and consider the introduction of a level of public funding for local political parties;

f. review the design of ballot boxes, continue to experiment with smaller ballot papers and develop election day guidance in order to harmonise procedures;

g. consider introducing democratic elections for mayors instead of an appointment system, in order to ensure citizens' right to participate in the conduct of local public affairs and comply with fundamental principles of democracy.

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 2026 municipal elections in the Netherlands and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

Elections in 10 Municipalities of Serbia (29 March 2026)

Recommendation 563 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. Article 1, paragraph 3 of the Committee of Ministers' Statutory Resolution CM/Res (2020)1 on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

b. Chapter XIX of the 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), ratified by Serbia on 6 September 2007;

d. Congress Recommendation 482 (2022) "Partial local elections in Belgrade and several other municipalities in Serbia (3 April 2022)";

e. the invitation by the Speaker of the Serbian Parliament, Ms Ana Brnabić, received on 12 March 2026, inviting the Congress to observe the local elections in 10 municipalities scheduled on 29 March 2026.

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 of the role of the Congress as guardian of democracy at local and regional levels.

3. The Congress acknowledges that the legal framework in Serbia broadly enables the holding of democratic elections at local level.

4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that:

a. the increased turnout in the 10 municipalities voting on 29 March 2026 demonstrated a renewed interest in local elections and showed that voters were not dissuaded by intimidation and pressure;

b. some positive steps have been taken to address persistent concerns about the integrity and accuracy of the electoral register notably through the establishment of the innovative Audit Commission to verify the accuracy of the Unified Voter Register and the recent introduction of a six-month residency requirement to vote in local elections, allowing for a genuine link between voters and their municipality;

c. the highly decentralised election administration carried out the necessary tasks ahead of the elections on 29 March 2026 in a timely manner; inside polling stations, procedures tended to be often largely in line with provisions, despite some significant inconsistencies;

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-22, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Emvin BARTOLO, Malta (R, EPP/CCE).

d. young people showed willingness to engage as voters, candidates, and observers, a positive development which should be encouraged regardless of political affiliation;

e. the campaign was competitive and presented voters with different political alternatives;

f. the 40% gender quota for female representation on electoral lists successfully ensured a certain level of female representation at local level and additional measures and incentives could further promote their participation in decision-making positions;

g. following suggestions from multi-agency working groups and several OSCE/ODIHR opinions, the amendments passed in May 2026 introduced mandatory training for polling board staff, a long-standing Congress recommendation aimed at harmonising procedures.

5. At the same time, the Congress noted the following issues:

a. the Election day unfolded in an atmosphere rarely observed by the Congress and was marred by reports of highly condemnable election-day violence against journalists, party activists and domestic observers, and of voter intimidation by large groups of men in the close vicinity of polling stations. No large-scale investigations into the perpetrators of attacks have taken place, despite evidence being collected. This situation sends the message that voter intimidation, violence and electoral violations can go mostly unpunished, which contributes to weakening trust in democratic institutions and the rule of law;

b. the campaign environment had visibly deteriorated since 2022, becoming more polarised and unbalanced. It was dominated by the ruling party and negatively affected by numerous reports of misuse of public resources and officials positions as well as serious allegations of vote buying, pressure on employees and intimidation;

c. the line between the ruling party and public authorities, including at municipal level, has become increasingly blurred. Local issues were largely overshadowed by national topics while the presence of numerous national-level officials on the campaign trail fostered the impression that the local elections were regarded as a path for national political objectives, thereby undermining local self-government;

d. frequent and partial amendments of the electoral framework do not promote legal stability or foreseeability;

e. notwithstanding the establishment of the Audit Commission, the full accuracy of the Unified Voter Register for the 2026 local elections could not be guaranteed, while the Audit Commission faced challenges, delays and obstructions in accessing necessary information;

f. while the candidate registration process was completed on time, it was characterised by the presence of over a third of candidate lists suspected of being inauthentic, as well as by disputes and issues related to the collection and certification of support signatures. Independent candidates are not permitted to stand in local elections;

g. the varying degrees of professionalism and independence of the election administration, notably Local Electoral Commissions (LEC) and polling station boards, led to the at times inconsistent application of the legal framework;

h. taken together, different aspects of the campaign and political party finance framework failed to ensure a level playing field or support transparency and accountability. These included a high donation threshold, an early interim report submission deadline, allegations of underreporting, the absence of expenditure caps and the lack of timely and dissuasive sanctions from the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption;

i. media coverage continued to be perceived as biased, while no media monitoring was conducted by the currently dysfunctional Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM Council), leaving much of the campaign unchecked; online campaigning remains underregulated;

j. in parallel, the growing number of attacks on journalists and reports of political pressure on local and critical media outlets were particularly alarming;

k. on election day, a wide range of inconsistencies and irregularities were observed, including issues relating to the secrecy of the vote, the sealing of ballot boxes, voter identification and inking procedures and the taking of photographs in polling booths. Most polling stations visited were not accessible to voters with disabilities;

l. the presence of thousands of pseudo-observers, including some international ones, who seemed to lack a clear methodology and at times were exerting varying levels of influence on the procedures is concerning, particularly when credible domestic observers faced restrictions and attacks. In addition, the decentralised accreditation of observers created an excessive administrative burden for observer organisations.

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

a. systematically condemn all violence directed at electoral stakeholders and in parallel, thoroughly investigate all cases of violence, strengthen measures against perpetrators and strictly regulate access rights within a specified distance of polling stations. Further training of members of law enforcement bodies could also be envisaged to handle intimidating groups;

b. as a precondition to build the trust of voters, ensure that citizens can form their opinions and stand in elections free from pressure and intimidation, address polarisation, foster dialogue and take steps to prevent and investigate major campaign violations. The use of children in electoral campaigns should be banned;

c. re-open discussions on comprehensive electoral reform, preceded by broad consultations, with a view to strengthening electoral integrity and to addressing all pending recommendations;

d. urgently introduce provisions to clearly guarantee the independence and impartiality of public and municipal administrations, including by banning public announcements of projects and one-off benefits during the official campaign period and step up the effectiveness of existing legal provisions to prevent misuse of administrative resources and official positions to ensure a level playing field for all candidates;

e. fully cooperate with the Audit Commission and provide all the necessary information to enable it to fulfil its mandate and ensure that any impediments to its work are dealt with immediately so that public trust in the register is restored; strengthen the capacities of the local administration to review the accuracy of the data at the municipal level;

f. improve training of LECs on candidate registration to ensure consistent application of the law; proactively investigate suspected inauthentic lists and take steps to introduce randomised placement of candidate lists on ballot papers; provide guidelines on the naming of lists, including by shifting the emphasis to list leaders likely to accept the local mandate if elected and by discarding names which could deceive voters;

g. take steps to depoliticise the election administration and to guarantee its independence, particularly at municipal level, and consider clauses for the removal of commission members in cases of family ties with candidates or other conflicts of interest; consider granting members of the extended composition of polling boards the status of accredited observers, to limit overcrowding and politicisation;

h. strengthen the oversight, legal obligations and investigative powers of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption as well as its capacity to issue timely and dissuasive sanctions; lower the donation thresholds for individuals and legal entities, review the timeliness for interim reports, introduce realistic campaign expenditure thresholds and investigate, and sanction if proven, cases of underreporting;

i. fully implement existing media legislation including the monitoring, oversight and sanctioning powers of a fully-staffed and independent REM Council and promote programme-based and inclusive debates; consider steps to introduce clear provisions and oversight of online campaigning activities;

j. urgently introduce stronger measures to protect journalists and domestic observers from attacks, particularly women, and conduct systematic and timely investigations to sanction violent acts and online abuse targeting them;

k. introduce further integrity safeguards, such as the use of numbered ballot box seals, voter information on electoral offences and improve procedures on counting and on the use of ink and UV lamps; grant the Republic Electoral Commission (REC) supervisory and oversight powers over lower levels of election administration to further harmonise procedures; to prevent pressure on voters, introduce a ban on taking photos in the ballot booth; improve the layout and accessibility of polling stations;

l. consider granting the accreditation of citizen and international observers to the REC, provided they intend to observe in more than one municipality; address the proliferation of pseudo-observers by requesting clear methodologies and track records and establish a clear code of conduct for observers.

7. On the overall state of local democracy in Serbia, the Congress also expresses concern with the high level of concentration of power at local level, which challenges pluralism and creates a sense of alignment between local and central authorities. The Congress also deplores the lack of a democratic solution to the 2025 Zaječar elections as well as the absence of an elected council in this municipality until June 2026.

8. Moving forward, the delegation also encourages the authorities to examine the possibility for a single election cycle for local elections, to reduce risks of manipulation of the voters list and a state of constant campaigning and to allow for a country-wide emphasis on local democracy.

9. The Congress expresses its readiness to strengthen its political dialogue with the authorities of Serbia with the aim of improving the situation pertaining to local democracy and local elections in the country in the light of the provisions of the Charter and electoral standards.

10. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and other relevant institutions of the Council of Europe to take account of this Recommendation regarding the 2026 local elections in 10 municipalities of Serbia and of the explanatory memorandum relating to this member State.

51st SESSION

Local Elections in England and Scottish and Welsh Parliaments (United Kingdom – 7 May 2026)

Recommendation 564 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. Article 1, paragraph 3 of the Committee of Ministers' Statutory Resolution CM/Res (2020)1 on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

b. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) which was ratified by the United Kingdom on 24 April 1998;

c. Chapter XIX of the Congress Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions;

d. the decision of the Congress Bureau on 17 February 2026 to observe local elections in England and Scottish Parliament and Welsh Parliament elections, held on 7 May 2026, following interest expressed by the authorities of the United Kingdom to welcome such mission.

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 democratic elections at both local and devolved levels.

4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that:

a. election day was calm, orderly and well organised in the polling stations observed by the delegation, with no significant complaints raised or systematic irregularities; procedures significantly differed across elections, embodying the devolved nature of the United Kingdom's electoral framework, but no systematic issue was found overall;

b. the professionalism, impartiality and commitment of the highly decentralised election administration was reflected in high stakeholder confidence and the wide acceptance of the results by all candidates;

c. the guidance of the Electoral Commission, also relying on the practical experience of election management bodies of Wales and Scotland, enabled electoral standards to be applied successfully and facilitated the broad coordination and harmonisation of electoral procedures;

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-23, explanatory memorandum), rapporteurr: Jani KOKKO, Finland (L, SOC/G/PD).

d. elections to the parliaments of Scotland and Wales have particularly inclusive voting rights, enfranchising all residents over 16 years of age, to promote youth involvement and increase democratic participation; in Wales, the increase in voter turnout and active participation of young voters was particularly welcome, while in Scotland, in line with human rights standards, recent changes have enfranchised both short-term prisoners and some people detained on mental health grounds;

e. changes to the electoral system in Wales were handled in a smooth and transparent manner and were preceded by extensive voter education;

f. candidate registration was inclusive and the pluralistic campaign environment provided voters with meaningful political alternatives thanks to a high number of candidates for local and devolved assemblies;

g. the vibrant and dynamic media environment in the United Kingdom provided general and balanced information to voters including via televised debates that attracted large audiences; investigative and local and regional media constitute a real source of fact-checking and enhance the accountability of political leaders;

h. the elections showed a strong commitment to accessibility, with independent access and assistive devices for voters with disabilities available in nearly all polling stations visited, in addition to some voter information in multiple languages;

i. although foreign information manipulation was only reported to a limited extent, authorities seemed well equipped to counter disinformation and foreign influence at local and regional levels;

j. very few cases of family voting and intimidation outside polling stations were witnessed; all were handled in a prompt and appropriate manner by the electoral staff.

5. At the same time, the Congress notes the following issues:

a. the legal framework remains somehow complex and fragmented, with different rules applying to different elections, and could benefit from future comprehensive review;

b. growing polarisation of the public debate, a phenomenon not limited to the United Kingdom, has resulted in a deterioration of the campaigning environment, with an unacceptably high trend of intimidation, abuse and aggressive behaviour towards incumbents and candidates;

c. the campaign was marked by significant negative campaigning, and national topics and personalities at times overshadowed local priorities; in England and Scotland, the low or decreasing turnout reflected a worrying level of voting apathy and lack of interest of voters in local matters; independent candidates described an unfavourable campaigning environment;

d. in the absence of institutionalised mechanisms, progress on gender representation has stalled and relies primarily on voluntary measures by political parties, leading to significant disparities between them, while men still substantially outnumber women among candidates and party leaders and in media coverage; the increasingly hostile campaign environment contributes to deterring women’s political participation;

e. the active voter registration system in addition to the lack of a centralised and unified voter register can lead to errors, delays and disenfranchisement of some voters; the blanket limitation on prisoners' voting rights regardless of the duration of their sentence seems excessive;

f. provisions regulating the campaign and party finance framework could be improved to provide for full transparency and equal campaigning conditions, as allegations of past unreported donations were raised during the 2026 campaign;

g. on election day, the use of serial numbers on ballot papers and the layout of some polling stations were perceived as potential challenges to the full secrecy of the vote. A few cases of voters being denied the right to vote in England due to the lack of proper ID and intrusive campaigners near polling stations were noted as well as some staff shortages at peak hour and rushed closing procedures;

h. the universal use of postal and proxy voting methods carries some risks related to voting secrecy and late or lack of delivery of ballot papers;

i. even if not applied in the 2026 elections, election petition procedures may be lengthy, complex and costly, while the right to file a complaint is limited to few actors; in the absence of statutory deadlines to handle complaints, the effectiveness of a potential remedy could be reduced.

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

a. pursue efforts aimed at improving clarity, modernising and simplifying the legal framework, following a comprehensive legal review and broad consultations;

b. intensify efforts to effectively fight abuse, intimidation and aggressive behaviour as well as online abuse, particularly targeting women and candidates from minority backgrounds, notably via stronger reporting and enforcement mechanisms on online platforms and higher sanctions; strengthen safeguards against disinformation and harmful online campaigning, through increased transparency of digital campaign material and stronger reporting and enforcement mechanisms;

c. foster positive campaigning practices and take measures to counter negative or false discourse as well as encourage broader voter engagement strategies and targeted outreach to first-time voters, young voters and under-represented groups;

d. take stronger measures to promote gender-balanced candidate selection and consider introducing additional incentives for political parties to support women's participation in political life and to ensure a safer and more inclusive environment for women candidates. In elections using proportional systems, introduce a zipper system or at minimum a 40% gender quota, regardless of party internal policies. In first-past-the-post contests, consider party incentives to promote equality and women's participation in local political life;

e. improve the completeness, accuracy and accessibility of voter registration by considering the introduction of automatic registration of voters, the establishment of a central voter register or other simplified registration models; consider expanding the right to vote in local elections to 16 and 17 years old in England, as already possible in Wales and Scotland, and harmonising the enfranchisement of local residents and prisoners across the United Kingdom;

f. expand the list of IDs or attestations accepted for voter identification and strengthen voters' awareness through broad information campaigns;

g. strengthen provisions on and oversight of campaign and party finance, including via the introduction of annual donation caps, interim campaign reporting, limitation on third-party campaigning, timely publication of reports and dissuasive sanctions, and ensure that the Electoral Commission is provided with effective supervisory and enforcement powers;

h. on election day procedures, consider the use of signed voter registers instead of numbered ballot papers, introduce mandatory protocols on closing procedures, notably in England; reflect on possibilities to proceed with counting directly in polling stations, harmonise ballot box sealing, review polling station lay-out and increase the number of polling staff officers in urban areas; introduce additional measures to limit campaign activities in the close vicinity of polling stations to protect voters from possible pressure or undue influence;

i. review the universal use of postal and proxy voting and continue pilot projects to provide for alternative voting methods, including early voting;

j. simplify and strengthen the election dispute mechanism with clear statutory rules specifying deadlines for submitting and considering complaints, as well as reducing or abolishing the cost for submitting an election petition;

k. promote and support the engagement of domestic and international election observers on all aspects of the electoral process and continue to deploy training and clear guidance to polling station staff on observer access and roles.

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 7 May 2026 local elections in England and Scottish Parliament and Welsh Parliament elections in the United Kingdom and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Switzerland

Recommendation 565 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. Article 2, paragraph 1.b, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that one of the aims of the Congress is "to submit proposals to the Committee of Ministers in order to promote local and regional democracy";

b. Article 1, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that "The Congress shall prepare on a regular basis country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member States and in States which have applied to join the Council of Europe, and shall ensure the effective implementation of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.";

c. Chapter XVIII of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress on the organisation of monitoring procedures;

d. the Contemporary commentary by the Congress on the explanatory report to the European Charter of Local Self-Government adopted by the Statutory Forum on 7 December 2020;

e. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goals 11 on sustainable cities and communities and 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions;

f. the Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2017;

g. Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of citizens in local public life, adopted on 21 March 2018;

h. Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on supervision of local authorities' activities, adopted on 4 April 2019;

i. Congress Recommendation 407 (2017) "Local and regional democracy in Switzerland";

j. the explanatory memorandum on the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Switzerland.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-25, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Jani KOKKO, Finland (L, SOC/G/PD) and Katrien PARTYKA, Belgium (R, EPP/CCE).

2. The Congress points out that:

a. Switzerland joined the Council of Europe on 6 May 1963. It signed the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122, "the Charter") on 21 January 2004 and ratified it with reservations on 17 February 2005. The Charter entered into force in Switzerland on 1 June 2005;

b. Switzerland signed and ratified 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) on 18 July 2017;

c. the 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 ("the Monitoring Committee") decided to examine the situation of local and regional democracy in Switzerland in the light of the Charter. It entrusted Jani Kokko, Finland (L, SOC/G/PD) and Katrien Partyka, Belgium (R, EPP/CCE) with the task of preparing and submitting to the Congress a report on the application of the Charter in Switzerland. The delegation was assisted by Professor Angel Moreno, President of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government and by the Congress secretariat;

d. the monitoring visit took place from 18 to 20 November 2025. During the visit, the Congress delegation met the representatives of various institutions at all levels of government. The detailed programme of the visit is appended to the explanatory memorandum;

e. the co-rapporteurs wish to thank the Permanent Representation of Switzerland to the Council of Europe and all those whom they met during the visit.

3. The Congress notes with satisfaction that in Switzerland:

a. local self-government enjoys a very high degree of autonomy and municipalities generally benefit from adequate financial resources as well as a substantial degree of fiscal, financial and organisational autonomy;

b. all the Charter provisions ratified by the country are respected as well as some that are not ratified;

c. local direct democracy is particularly well developed and constitutes one of the most distinctive and advanced features of Swiss local governance;

d. the domestic legal order provides effective judicial protection of the principles of local self-government through remedies available before cantonal and federal courts.

4. The Congress notes that the following points call for particular attention:

a. the current militia system tradition where citizens fulfil public responsibilities on a voluntary, honorary basis, outside their regular professional activities and for little or no remuneration, together with the growing complexity and time demands involved in holding local public office, may discourage certain categories of citizens from standing for such office;

b. despite ongoing reforms, the country still has a large number of municipalities, many of which are very small, which might impact their capacity to address population needs effectively;

c. the City of Bern does not benefit from a comprehensive framework reflecting the specific responsibilities associated with its status as *de facto* federal capital;

d. the cantons remain outside the scope of the Charter, despite previous Congress Recommendation 407 (2017).

5. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress requests that the Committee of Ministers invite the authorities of Switzerland to:

a. launch, in cooperation with all the tiers of government and their associations, a comprehensive review of the militia system, with a view to adapting it to the growing responsibilities and complexity of local public office and making it more accessible to a broader range of citizens;

b. continue and further encourage the process of municipal mergers by providing adequate financial and institutional incentives in order to increase the capacity of municipalities to carry out their responsibilities;

c. consider, in consultation with the authorities of the City of Bern, establishing specific arrangements that reflect its particular situation as the seat of federal power, taking into account the presence of the Federal Government, the Parliament as well as diplomatic missions, and the specific constraints these entail for the municipality;

d. consider extending the scope of the Charter to the cantons, in consultation with them;

e. consider ratifying Articles 6.2 and 9.5 of the Charter, which are already applied *de facto* in Switzerland.

6. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation on the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Switzerland and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

51st SESSION

Towards a healthy environment from the local level up

Recommendation 566 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5) and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights regarding the environment;

b. the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163);

c. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

d. the Reykjavík Declaration - United around our values, adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government in May 2023, and its Appendix V "The Council of Europe and the environment";

e. Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)20 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on human rights and the protection of the environment, adopted on 27 September 2022;

f. the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment (2025-2030) and its Action Plan;

g. Congress Resolution 529 (2026) "Congress priorities 2026-2031";

h. Congress Recommendation 536 (2025) "An additional protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the environment".

2. The Congress notes with deep concern that:

a. climate-related data show that the triple planetary crisis posed by pollution, climate change and the loss of biodiversity is intensifying. August 2026 was the warmest month ever recorded, 1 in 8 animal and plant species is now threatened with extinction, and sea-level rise is accelerating and could increase by a full meter by 2150;

b. in Europe alone, at least 50,000 excess deaths were recorded during the summer 2026 heatwaves, sea and sea-surface record temperatures were broken and drought-related wildfires devastated communities throughout the continent, including in areas not previously affected by such fires;

c. in the absence of new environmental action, further damage to people's homes, communities and livelihoods and increased losses of life will continue to erode public authorities' capacity to uphold human rights standards, and thereby also erode public confidence in those standards and the ability of democratic institutions at all levels to uphold them and to protect their way of life.

[1] Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-28), rapporteur: Meropi-Spyridoula YDRAIOU, Greece (L, EPP/CCE).

3. Against this backdrop, the urgency of the moment requires political actors and institutions, at every level, to do all that they can to reverse the trajectory of environmental harm: this is a moral and practical challenge for multilevel governance.

4. As the level of governance closest to the citizens, sub-national authorities have a central role to play in this and must use their powers, to the fullest extent possible, to protect their local environment.

5. In light of the above, the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to:

a. draw up a draft legally binding instrument in consultation with the Congress, recognising, at Council of Europe level, the autonomous right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment;

b. move forward with the Congress proposal set out in Recommendation 536 (2025), to draft an additional protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the environment that would commit member States to raising local and regional authorities' awareness of their powers and responsibilities to protect the environment, so that all levels of government play their part in meeting agreed international standards.

51st SESSION

Verification of new members' credentials

Resolution 528 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the provisions of Articles 5, 6 and 7 of the Charter of the Congress appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress;

b. Rules 1, 3 and 6 of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress;

c. the composition of the national delegations as set out in document CG(2026)51-04;

d. the Bureau decision of 26 October 2026 based on the opinion of the rapporteur responsible for the verification of the credentials of new members, concluding that the national delegations as proposed in the above-mentioned document comply with the criteria of the Charter of the Congress.

2. The Congress:

a. notes that the provisions of Rule 3.6 of the Rules and Procedures, which allow for the term of office of a delegation to be extended due to local or regional elections taking place in the relevant State less than 4 months before or 2 months after the opening of the renewal session, have been applied to the delegations of France, Iceland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. It welcomes the renewal of the delegations of France, Netherlands and United Kingdom in time for the second session of the new mandate, in accordance with Rule 3.6 of the Rules and Procedures, but regrets the absence of a new delegation from Iceland;

b. notes that 460 of the 578 members proposed by the authorities of the member States have already signed the Code of Conduct for Congress members and submitted the Declaration of Interests in accordance with the provisions of Rule 6 of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress;

c. notes that 34 seats remain vacant;

d. regrets in particular in this context that all of the seats in the delegations of Serbia remain vacant.

3. The Congress emphasises that the ratification of a delegation's credentials in no way constitutes the taking of a position on the state of local democracy in the country concerned.

4. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress:

a. approves the credentials of members of national delegations as set out in document CG(2026)51-04, subject to the signature of the Code of Conduct and submission of the Declaration of Interests of Congress members;

b. calls on those members who have not yet done so to sign without delay the Code of Conduct and the Declaration of Interests, in accordance with the provisions of Rule 6 of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress;

[1] Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-02), rapporteur: Mélanie LEPOULTIER, France (L, ILDG).

c. invites Iceland and Serbia to appoint their delegations as soon as possible.

Congress Priorities 2026-2031: Democracy, human rights and the rule of law start locally

Resolution 529 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the Charter of the Congress appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, providing a European platform where local and regional authorities can work together towards the implementation of the ideal of European unity;

b. the Reykjavík Declaration "United around our values", adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, Reykjavík, 16-17 May 2023;

c. Congress Resolution 493 (2023) "Delivering on the Reykjavík Summit: revised Congress priorities, working procedures and structures";

d. the increased role attributed to the Congress since 2024 in providing expertise in the field of multilevel governance;

e. the ongoing work of the Council of Europe towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe;

f. ongoing discussions at the level of the Committee of Ministers on reform of the Council of Europe to strengthen its added value, effectiveness and political role by 2040.

2. The Congress notes with concern that the international order is being placed under increasing strain and that issues such as climate change, growing inequalities and the use of artificial intelligence are posing increasing challenges to societies across Europe. At the same time, public trust in democratic systems is becoming increasingly fragile, and citizens' readiness to invest in the values at the heart of the Council of Europe – human rights, democracy and the rule of law – is ebbing.

3. The Congress emphasises that no single local, regional or national authority can face up to these profound geopolitical and societal challenges alone. The issues at stake cross borders, and so must our response. Today more than ever, the Congress needs to speak with urgency and act with purpose to defend and promote the values of the Council of Europe at the levels closest to citizens.

4. The Congress is firmly convinced that when human rights, democracy and the rule of law are stronger at local and regional levels, they will be strengthened across Europe as a whole.

5. In the light of the foregoing, it adopts the Congress Priorities 2026-2031: Democracy, human rights and the rule of law start locally, as appended to the present resolution.

[1] Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-05), co-rapporteurs: Cecilia DALMAN EEK, Sweden (R, SOC/G/PD) and Konstantinos KOUKAS, Greece (L, EPP/CCE).

Appendix

Congress priorities 2026-2031
Democracy, human rights and the rule of law start locally

1. Throughout its 2026-2031 mandate, the Congress will pursue its work not only through its statutory organs and by drawing up shared standards, but also through the provision of expertise on multilevel governance and through its co-operation with local, regional and national authorities in member States and other internal and external counterparts.

2. Foresight and preparedness to face current and future challenges are at the heart of the Congress's work.

3. It will carry out its mandate bearing in mind in particular the priorities set out below.

4. As it does so, it will pay attention to ensuring that its own functioning and working methods are effective, as well as to the visibility of its action vis-à-vis local and regional authorities and at national and international levels.

1. Stand with Ukraine

5. The Council of Europe as a whole is working unceasingly to ensure accountability for the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, while placing democratic resilience at the centre of long-term recovery and reconstruction.[2]

6. The Congress has remained steadfast in its support for Ukraine. It has consistently condemned the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine and the devastation and destruction it has caused, and acknowledged the key role played by local and regional actors in providing support to the populations affected. The Congress will maintain its stance of support for Ukraine in this context, including as regards the role that can be played by local and regional governments in ensuring that victims have access to the Register of Damage and, ultimately, the International Claims Commission.

7. The Congress will pursue its work with the Ukrainian authorities throughout this mandate, notably through the mechanism of High-Level Dialogues, jointly tackling questions such as open government, guaranteeing human rights and the rule of law, deliberative democracy and preparation for future elections at local and regional levels.

8. It will continue to stand with Ukraine's local and regional authorities, supporting decentralisation reforms in line with Council of Europe standards, as part of Ukraine's path to EU accession. It will help shape a recovery and reconstruction grounded in the European Charter of Local Self-Government, bearing in mind that these processes must rebuild more than infrastructure: they must also, crucially, maintain and strengthen trust in democratic institutions. In line with the strategic approach approved at its 50th Session, it will also follow up on specific issues, such as economic recovery and the situation of refugees, to address the needs of Ukrainians now and in the future.

[2] Report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (2026), "The New Democratic Pact for Europe in Times of Rupture", introduction.

2. New Democratic Pact for Europe: stronger democratic security at local and regional levels

9. European States face multiple challenges to democracy, including from foreign information manipulation and interference both during and outside electoral periods and from increasing violence and intimidation directed against elected officials at all levels. In some countries, national authorities exert pressure against local politicians, even overtly threatening or imprisoning them.

10. In parallel to these challenges, citizens' trust in democratic institutions – and with it, their engagement in democratic processes – continues to wane. Electoral abstention remains high and genuine political debate and exchange are increasingly replaced by sterile wars of words, carried out through online media.

11. As the Council of Europe Secretary General has underlined, "real security begins with institutions people can trust and democracies that can withstand pressure."[3] In a time of seemingly permanent crisis, democratic accountability and resilience are more crucial than ever, including at local and regional levels. The Congress has been highly active in contributing to the preparation of a New Democratic Pact for Europe since Council of Europe-wide reflexions were launched in 2025. Mainstreaming this work – and the subsequent implementation of the Pact – throughout its activities will remain a key priority during its current mandate. Key initiatives of the Congress in the context of the Pact – covering areas such as election observation, deliberative democracy and combating violence against politicians – are integrated in the priorities below.

3. Renew democracy and uphold trust at local and regional levels

12. Democratic trust cannot be demanded from citizens; it must be earned through accountable institutions, meaningful political choice and government that is demonstrably responsive to the communities it serves.

13. The Congress will contribute to strengthening democratic security at local and regional levels. The European Charter of Local Self-Government is the Congress's strongest tool, safeguarding the political and financial autonomy of local and regional authorities. Monitoring its application provides vital indications as to the health of local and regional autonomy in member States. The Congress will continue to prioritise and develop this work. The Congress will challenge unnecessary centralisation and promote the exercise of public responsibilities by the authorities at the level closest to citizens, bearing in mind that the transfer of additional responsibilities to local authorities should be accompanied by adequate financial and administrative resources commensurate with the responsibilities entrusted to them.

14. The monitoring and election observation activities of the Congress will also serve as an early warning system against democratic backsliding, in particular through the application of the new risk-alert dashboard on local and regional democracy, drawn up as part of the Congress's contribution to the New Democratic Pact.

[3] Report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (2026), "The New Democratic Pact for Europe in Times of Rupture", introduction.

15. Citizens expect public decision-making processes to be transparent, trustworthy and responsive to new challenges. Representative democracy is the cornerstone of European democracies, meaning trust in elections is essential. With the agreement of member States and in co-operation with external partners, the Congress will expand its work in the field of election observation in the 46 member States, identifying both recurring problems and good practices. The Congress will work to counter foreign interference in electoral processes and to strengthen the status, rights and protection of election observers, in line with the Paris Call to Action[4] aimed at ensuring trusted and inclusive electoral processes at all levels.

16. The Congress will continue to pay particular attention to the rights of political minorities and opposition representatives at local and regional level, recognising that effective opposition, scrutiny and political pluralism are indispensable components of democratic governance.

17. Ethical and transparent governance matter because corruption destroys trust faster than any campaign can rebuild it. The Congress will pursue its work to strengthen the fight against corruption at local and regional levels, in particular through the application of the Checklist on Preventing Corruption and Promoting Integrity at Local and Regional Levels.

18. The Congress will also pursue its work to put into practice its recommendations on countering hate speech and preventing violence against local and regional politicians.

19. New democratic challenges require innovative solutions. Local and regional authorities are best placed to experiment with and implement new democratic practices. Through its work, the Congress will continue to promote and support deliberative democracy, including the organisation of citizens' assemblies and other democratic innovations.to foster citizens' engagement in democratic process and their participation in decision making at local and regional level.

20. A democracy that excludes the next generation has no future. Young people must be given space to participate meaningfully in democratic systems and to contribute to their renewal. The Congress has led progress in this field, notably through its Rejuvenating Politics initiative and its active role in the drafting of the 2026 European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life. Implementing this initiative and the Charter will remain firmly anchored in the priorities of the Congress.

4. Strengthen democracy and good governance at all levels throughout Europe

21. Democratic innovation is required to address increasingly complex policy challenges that extend beyond traditional political arenas and affect all levels of governance. The role of the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance at the Congress is vital in this context. It works with member States and local governments on reforms in areas including public finance, ethics and constitutional structures, serving as a co-operation and consultancy hub. It will continue to deliver advice and support to national authorities preparing and implementing reforms while helping to develop capacities and strengthen institutional structures at local level.

22. The Centre of Expertise can be the vector through which Council of Europe standards are disseminated in support of effective multilevel governance cooperation on transversal topics. Piloting the application and implementation of the Reykjavik Parameters for Democracy and promoting the European Label of Governance Excellence will enable the Congress to take the pulse of democratic governance at local level and help local authorities engage better with citizens.

[4] Parliamentary Assembly, Congress and Venice Commission "Paris Call to Action", April 2026

5. Uphold the rule of law where power is exercised locally

23. The Congress will intensify its work to mainstream and strengthen the rule of law pillar across its activities, building on Resolution 493 (2023)[5] and contributing to the implementation of the Reykjavik Declaration as well as through the fulfillment of the Congress Strategy on the Rule of Law at Local and Regional Levels (2025-2028).[6]

24. By reinforcing local and regional authorities' awareness and capacity to uphold the rule of law within their fields of competence, in close co-operation with national governments, the Congress will help secure local democracy and good democratic governance at subnational level. Upholding the rule of law is not only an essential precondition for good governance but also provides citizens, businesses and organisations with confidence, security and certainty in their daily interactions. This empowers local communities and strengthens local economies. Drawing on its work on local and regional authorities as actors and guarantors of the rule of law,[7] the Congress will pursue the following strategic objectives: Strengthening the role of local and regional authorities as guarantors of the rule of law; Promoting the rule of law as a safeguard of local self-government, and deepening partnership and synergies with the Venice Commission and other internal and external partners on this matter.

6. Operationalise human rights where people live

25. Human rights cannot be safeguarded only by national governments and courts but must also be protected at local and regional levels. Every day, citizens' rights may be respected, or violated, in housing decisions, in policing, in schools, in social services, in the day-to-day work of local administration. The European Court of Human Rights has frequently found violations of human rights caused by decisions taken at local or regional level, and major challenges remain in this field.

26. The Congress will continue to pursue the Human Rights Strategy adopted following the Reykjavík Summit.[8] Building on the Reykjavik mandate, the Congress will turn human rights commitments into local practice: training elected representatives and civil servants on the human rights consequences of their decisions, supporting the execution of Court judgments where structural change has to happen on the ground, and bridging national human rights institutions with the local level, where most citizens encounter public decision-making processes.

27. Drawing from the provisions of the European Social Charter (Revised) and on the decisions and conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights relating to the role of local and regional authorities, the Congress will identify the key trends, patterns and challenges to the implementation of social rights at local and regional level and will recommend measures to improve compliance and implementation of social rights so that the people and communities who live, work and depend on services in Europe's municipalities and regions can fully enjoy those rights in practice.

[5] Resolution 493 (2023) "Delivering on the Reykjavik Summit: revised Congress priorities, working procedures and structures".
[6] Resolution 517 (2025) "Congress Strategy on the Rule of Law at Local and Regional Levels (2025-2028)".
[7] Recommendation 502 (2024) and Resolution 499 (2024) "Local and regional authorities as actors and guarantors of the rule of law".
[8] Resolution 493 (2023) "Delivering on the Reykjavik Summit: revised Congress priorities, working procedures and structures", Appendix III, "Congress Human Rights Strategy".

7. Build resilient and cohesive communities

28. In a world increasingly shaped by conflict, climate change and difficulties in defining global solutions to common problems, crises continue to strike at the heart of local communities. Resilient and cohesive communities grow where local and regional authorities have the powers, the resources and the political backing to act.

29. Confidence in inclusive local democracies cannot be presumed: it is vitally important that democratic values and practices – and the benefits of living in democratic communities – are communicated, especially to younger people. The Congress will follow up its recent reports on regional history teaching, contested memories and school absenteeism with further work on education and culture.

30. Social exclusion and growing inequalities are a threat to hard-won social cohesion in local communities, and at every level of governance. Discrimination on the basis of gender, origin, religious beliefs or other personal characteristics harm those who are targeted or excluded and damage the social and economic fabric of societies. The Congress will continue to respond to emerging threats and to support local authorities to uphold existing human rights standards and introduce innovative policies in this field, aiming to build more inclusive cities and regions, so that communities become stronger.

31. Over recent years, many European societies have also experienced the strain caused by economic hardship and inequalities, manifesting in increased poverty as well as lower quality of and reduced access to public services, including health, housing, education and skills and training. Geography, demographics and population movement all affect these dynamics, particularly in insular, isolated and less accessible areas. The experience of and impact on local communities is wide but varied. Following up on its work on social housing and regional exodus (depopulation), the Congress will continue to give priority to addressing the inequalities that harm living standards, undermine human rights and weaken trust in democracy.

8. Support sustainable futures

32. Climate change and environmental damage are already reshaping European cities and regions. Local and regional authorities are on the front line of adaptation and of the fight to protect the right to a safe, clean and healthy environment, including where the benefits that may be brought through increased touristic and other economic activities place strains on residents' quality of life and sustainable local development. They need practical tools, peer networks and a Council of Europe that supports their right to act when national policy lags.

33. Building on its recent work on water, coastal erosion and biodiversity loss, the Congress will develop further guidance and propose standards for local and regional authorities, building networks and offering discussion platforms to share proven good practice across member States, and advocating for competences and means to design and implement innovative local policies that respect the environment and address climate change.

9. Put digital transformation at the service of democracy and human rights

34. Digital tools and artificial intelligence are revolutionising how public administrations work and how political debates take place. Used well, they make services more accessible and participation easier. Used improperly, they enable surveillance, manipulation and exclusion.

35. The Congress will work to enable local and regional authorities to seize the opportunities offered by artificial intelligence and other digital technologies while safeguarding citizens' freedom, integrity and fundamental rights, and while strengthening, not weakening democracy. Transparency, effective protection of personal data, cybersecurity and the integration of human rights safeguards are crucial to ensure that technology serves citizens and that ensures accountability.

36. The Congress will contribute to the work undertaken in this field within the Council of Europe and to its implementation at the local and regional levels, inter alia through risk-assessment training for local leaders (Huderia).

10. Lead by example on gender equality

37. Gender equality is still far from a reality across European societies, and progress in this field is slow. The composition of local and regional authorities is moreover lagging behind that of national parliaments. The Congress will pay greater attention during this mandate to gender equality as a policy area, supporting local and regional authorities to improve policies and outcomes in this field.

38. At the same time, the Congress cannot credibly defend inclusive democracy if it does not practise it within its own structures. The current composition of the Congress and gender balance in key roles are the most gender equal ever. However, this progress is fragile, resting on goodwill rather than binding rules. Equality must not be left to chance. During this mandate the Congress will strengthen its legal provisions on gender equality across delegations and leadership role, treating parity not as a target to aspire to, but as the democratic norm.

51st SESSION

How can we cope with coastal erosion?

Resolution 530 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122, "the Charter"), in particular its Articles 3, 4 and 9;

b. the Council of Europe Landscape Convention (ETS No. 176), as amended by the 2016 Protocol (CETS No. 219);

c. the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (ETS No. 104, "the Bern Convention");

d. Congress Recommendation 536 (2025) "An additional protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government";

e. Congress Resolution 529 (2026) "Congress prioritities 2026-2031";

f. Congress Resolution 500 (2024) and Recommendation 510 (2024) "Local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards: from risk preparedness to resilience";

g. Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on "Cultural heritage facing climate change: increasing resilience and promoting adaptation";

h. Congress Resolution 317 (2010) and Recommendation 298 (2010) "Coastal towns and cities tackling threats from the sea";

i. Resolution 2493 (2023) and Recommendation 2251 (2023) "Political strategies to prevent, prepare for and face the consequences of natural disasters" of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;

j. the Council of Europe Partial Agreement on the Co-operation Group for the Prevention of, Protection Against, and Organisation of Relief in Major Natural and Technological Disasters (EUR-OPA).

2. The Congress underlines that:

a. Europe's coasts are changing faster than expected, with scientific evidence predicting an acceleration of coastal erosion as a result of climate change, including more frequent and more intense storms;

b. future increased losses of homes, infrastructure and land, as well as landscape change, are unavoidable and will have a direct effect on the human rights to life, private life and property;

1 Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-15, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Anthony BUCHANAN, United Kingdom (L, ILDG) and Fanis SPANOS, Greece (R, EPP/CCE).

c. delaying action to address coastal erosion will increase costs and amplify social and economic disruptions, and risks limiting adaptation options in the future;

d. urgent policy solutions are required to reduce emissions and thereby slow the rate and reduce the amount of sea level rise;

e. effective multilevel governance is key to the success of coastal erosion adaptation strategies, with local and regional authorities playing a crucial role in their design and implementation;

f. while hard, sediment and ecosystem-based protection may be required in the short-term, especially in low-lying areas, planned retreat – avoiding new development and relocating existing assets – is the key element of anticipatory adaptation to and living resiliently with coastal erosion;

g. community involvement and transparent, inclusive planning as well as dedicated funding are essential to protect vulnerable communities, livelihoods and coastal heritage.

3. In light of the above, the Congress calls on the local and regional authorities of Council of Europe member States to:

a. regularly update coastal erosion risk maps and/or land use plans that make use of nationally produced coastal erosion risk maps and digital technology, recognising that sea level rise and an increasing number of intense weather events, fuelled by climate change, will result in an increase in coastal erosion on most European coasts in the coming years;

b. prepare protection and adaptation strategies based on sound professional analysis of the extent of coastal erosion and associated land loss that can be expected and what this means for the viability of homes, assets and infrastructure in the vicinity;

c. ensure that strategies take full account of the legal, logistical and financial implications of all possible measures, including in the medium to long-term;

d. prioritise in particular planned retreat – restricting development and relocating people and assets from vulnerable areas – as protection measures become less effective as sea levels rise and erosion increases, and in the knowledge that unplanned, emergency retreat made necessary by delay or inaction comes with a higher economic and social cost;

e. integrate buffer zones and no-build policies into spatial planning, and review them periodically based on sea level rise and erosion trends;

f. innovate with temporary land-use consents, dismountable buildings and assets, and nature-based solutions to maintain economic activity in advance of any planned relocation;

g. make full use of education and outreach initiatives to raise public awareness about the challenges and choices associated with anticipated coastal erosion and consult openly and extensively with residents and businesses affected in planning processes, including adaptation strategies, to take account of environmental needs and communities' ways of life, and build as much understanding and buy-in as possible for any decisions reached;

h. pursue all of this on the basis of a multilevel governance approach, in which municipalities and regions work together where appropriate and with national authorities that can ensure necessary legal frameworks and financial and other resources required, as well as seeking insights, expertise and funding from the European level.

4. The Congress calls on local and regional authorities and their national associations to take account of this resolution and the accompanying explanatory memorandum, on this specific issue. It also asks its statutory bodies to take the present resolution into account in their activities.

51st SESSION

Risk-alert dashboard on local and regional democracy

Resolution 531 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

b. the Reykjavík Declaration, adopted at the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavík, 16 and 17 May 2023), the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy (Appendix III of the Reykjavík Declaration) and the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of those Principles;

c. the Congress monitoring reports and recommendations on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the Council of Europe member States and its reports and recommendations further to the observation of local and regional elections and on recurring issues based on assessments resulting from congress monitoring and election observation missions;

d. Congress Resolution 466 (2021) "Ensuring the respect of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in major crisis situations";

e. Contemporary commentary by the Congress on the explanatory report to the European Charter of Local Self-Government adopted by the Statutory Forum on 7 December 2020;

f. the Updated Rule of Law Checklist of European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), CDL-AD(2025)002;

g. the Code of Good Practice on electoral matters of the Venice Commission and related documents, CDL-AD(2002)023;

h. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goals 11 on sustainable cities and communities and 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

2. The Congress:

a. expresses deep concern regarding recent geopolitical conflicts, emergencies, democratic backsliding and foreign interference affecting local and regional elections across Europe;

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-11, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Kirstine BILLE, Denmark (L, SOC/G/PD) and Kristoffer TAMSONS, Sweden (R, EPP/CCE).

b. seeks to contribute to the aims of the Council of Europe New Democratic Pact for Europe, by helping to define and identify nascent threats to democracy in European countries at local and regional level, so as to enable the timely alerting of member states and the adoption of early response measures, both in legal and political terms;

c. reiterates that its recommendations on monitoring compliance with the Charter and following the observation of elections represent an important element of the Council of Europe's early warning system that can point to possible democratic backsliding in member States;

d. further highlights that in order to assess and address emerging risks comprehensively, the early warning mechanism should define a comprehensive set of key indicators drawing both from Congress monitoring and election observation results as well as from other areas of activity of the Congress—particularly human rights, execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and rule of law activities at the local and regional levels.

3. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress:

a. adopts the appended Risk-Alert Dashboard to serve as an early warning mechanism and a barometer for the health of local and regional democracy, with the specific aim of identifying trends indicating possible democratic backsliding in Europe;

b. entrusts the members of its Committee on Monitoring the Implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and on Respect for Human Rights and the Rule of Law at Local and Regional Levels ("Monitoring Committee") to use the Dashboard in their respective countries as a reference tool enabling them to identify potential risks and early signs of democratic deterioration at the local and regional levels and then to share this information and bring it to the attention of the committee where appropriate;

c. invites the Monitoring Committee and country rapporteurs to use the Dashboard as a supporting resource when considering communications related to alleged violations of principles and standards of the Charter and when proposing possible follow-up actions, including enhanced political dialogue with national and/or local and regional authorities, fact-finding missions or closer monitoring cycles;

d. further invites the Monitoring Committee to share and disseminate the Dashboard among the internal and external partners of the Council of Europe, including civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders engaged in monitoring the health of local democracy;

e. urges all relevant Congress bodies to contribute to the feeding and regular updating of the Dashboard and use it as guidance when engaging with national and subnational authorities of Council of Europe member States as well as when deciding on more targeted support to member States within the framework of cooperation activities.

The status of national and international observers in local and regional elections in the 46 member States

Resolution 532 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), and notably, Article 3 of Protocol 1 to the Convention (ETS No. 9);

b. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

c. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

d. the Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, hereafter the Copenhagen Document, adopted by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) on 29 June 1990;

e. the Code of Good Practice on Electoral matters of the European commission for democracy through law (Venice Commission) and its 2024 Report on election observers as human rights defenders;

f. 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;

g. Congress Resolution 306 (2010) "Observation of local and regional elections – strategy and rules of the Congress" and Resolution 274 (2008) "Congress policy in observing local and regional elections";

h. Congress transversal resolutions on electoral matters and notably, Resolution 521 (2026) "Free elections at local and regional levels: A fundamental right to strengthen grassroots democracy" and Resolution 508 (2025) "Foreign interference in electoral processes at local and regional levels";

i. Congress Resolution 505 (2024) "Recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Congress monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and election observation missions (reference period 2021-2024");

j. the Reykjavik Declaration following the Fourth Summit of Heads of States and Government of the Council of Europe (2023), reaffirming the commitment "to hold elections and referenda in accordance with international standards";

k. the 2026 Paris Call to Action on election observation, endorsed by the participants to the high-level event "Towards trusted and inclusive electoral processes: the role of observers", co-organised by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Congress and the Venice Commission in Paris on 28-29 April 2026 within the framework of the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-13, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG).

2. The Congress emphasises that democratic elections at all levels of government allow citizens to freely express their will and to provide legitimacy for elected officials. It points out that the observation of local and regional elections, by both domestic and international observers, constitutes an essential element of the system of checks and balances which supports electoral integrity. It is a cornerstone of grassroots democracy and contributes to strengthening accountability, transparency and public trust.

3. In addition, the Congress believes that election observers highly contribute to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens during electoral processes at all levels. Specifically, these include the right to free elections and the freedoms of expression, association and assembly, as well as the right of citizens to participate in the affairs of a local authority. In this respect, the Congress fully endorses their recent recognition the Venice Commission and United Nations Special Rapporteurs as human rights defenders, which acknowledges their key role in preserving human rights.

4. The Congress has noted, through the course of over 135 missions, that applicable legislation related to the observation of these elections varies considerably between member States, resulting in many elections not benefitting from this valuable democratic oversight. Even when in place, their implementation of the legislation can be uneven. It notes with concern that not all member States have applied in their legislation provisions contained in Article 8 of the Copenhagen Document.

5. Furthermore, the Congress acknowledges the increasingly difficult and complex environment in which elections are held and in which observers operate. Domestic observers are particularly affected, in a context of shrinking of the civic space and democratic and fundamental freedoms backsliding.

6. It firmly believes that observation of local and regional elections requires a renewed commitment and further protection, to ensure the citizens' right to political participation and build their trust in democratic outcomes.

7. It also highlights that election observation is not a purely technical endeavour. It enables the Congress to track and monitor developments related to grassroots democracy, thereby contributing to its role as an early warning system. Moreover, it allows states to reflect on their electoral practices and can serve as a capacity building tool for sharing and implementing good practice across member States.

8. In light of the above, the Congress:

a. invites the Congress Monitoring Committee and the Congress members, when they act in the capacity as Heads of delegation of election observation missions, to systematically review the status and rights of domestic and international election observers, to prepare recommendations to address shortcomings in regulation or practice and to include an assessment of the situation of domestic observers in its risk-alert dashboard;

b. tasks the Monitoring Committee with developing a training curriculum for Congress members to enable them to monitor the observance of their rights and status as international observers within the framework of Congress missions;

c. tasks the Monitoring Committee with ensuring follow up and dissemination of the Paris Call to Action and continuing to raise awareness of the observation of local and regional elections across member States;

d. entrusts the Monitoring Committee with the task of expanding and intensifying its activities in the field of observation of local and regional elections, particularly with regard to missions, post-electoral dialogue and fact-finding electoral missions;

e. commits to continued cooperation with the Parliamentary Assembly and the Venice Commission as well as with international partner organisations and domestic observers in order to share comparative expertise, coordinate findings and continue to review applicable standards for election observation at local and regional levels.

Checklist on preventing corruption and promoting integrity at local and regional levels

Resolution 533 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the Council of Europe Reykjavik Declaration "United around our values", and in particular to the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy (Appendix III);

b. the Code of Conduct of Congress members as enshrined in the Congress Charter and provided for in the Rules and Procedures;

c. Congress Resolution 444 (2019) and Recommendation 435 (2019) "The protection of whistleblowers – Challenges and opportunities for local and regional government";

d. Congress Resolution 441 (2019) and Recommendation 428 (2019) "Fighting nepotism within local and regional authorities";

e. Congress Resolution 433 (2018) "European Code of Conduct for all Persons Involved in Local and Regional Governance";

f. Congress Resolution 434 (2018) and Recommendation 423 (2018) "Conflicts of interest at local and regional levels";

g. Congress Resolution 435 (2018) and Recommendation 424 (2018) "Transparency and open government";

h. Congress Resolution 421 (2017) and Recommendation 405 (2017) "Making public procurement transparent at local and regional levels";

i. Congress Resolution 402 (2016) "The misuse of administrative resources during election processes";

j. the Council of Europe Civil Law Convention on Corruption (ETS No. 174) and the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (ETS No. 173);

k. the Committee of Ministers' Resolution (97) 24 on the twenty Guiding Principles for the fight against corruption;

l. the monitoring reports of the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) and the recommendations of its sixth evaluation round on Preventing corruption and promoting integrity at the sub-national level;

m. the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and especially its Chapter II "Preventive measures.

1 Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-12, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Aisling MORAN, Ireland (L, SOC/G/PD) and Romek KOSENKRANIUS, Estonia (R, ILDG).

2. The Congress points out that:

a. corruption destroys citizens' trust in democratic institutions and undermines the rule of law;

b. democracy and institutional legitimacy require a culture of integrity and accountability at all levels of governance;

c. ethical leadership coupled with effective integrity and anti-corruption systems, transparency and independent oversight is especially important at local and regional levels;

d. the values and tools to prevent corruption are key features defining resilient democracies.

3. In light of the above, the Congress calls on the local and regional authorities of Council of Europe member States to:

a. adopt and implement the checklist on preventing corruption and promoting integrity, paying proper regard to all seven points and their key criteria, in line with European and other international standards and best practices for human rights, democracy and the rule of law;

b. ensure to the greatest extent possible that the checklist is implemented fully across all areas of local and regional authority competence and practice;

c. treat the checklist as a living tool, subject to regular review and revision in response to evolving regulations, operational challenges, best practice developments, and feedback from stakeholders at national and European levels;

d. share lessons learned, good practices, and implementation challenges with peers at regional, national, and European levels to foster a learning community, as encouraged by Congress standards and GRECO recommendations; disseminate experiences through structured peer exchanges and digital platforms wherever possible.

4. The Congress calls on local and regional authorities and their national associations to take account of this resolution and the accompanying explanatory memorandum, on this specific issue.

5. The Congress asks its statutory bodies to take the present resolution into account in their activities.

Missing out: tackling school absenteeism in Europe's communities

Resolution 534 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. Protocol No 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No 9), Article 2;

b. the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No.163), Articles 16, 17, 30 and E;

c. the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28;

d. the Reykjavik Declaration: United for Europe adopted at the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, Reykjavik, 16-17 May 2023;

e. Congress Resolution 493 (2023) "Delivering on the Reykjavik Summit: revised Congress priorities and structures";

f. the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 "Learners First – Education for Today's and Tomorrow's Democratic Societies" (2023);

g. the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (2020);

h. Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2640 (2026) and Recommendation 2303 (2026) "Socialising at schools: for an inclusive and participatory education fostering democratic values";

i. the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 31 January 2011 – Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda;

j. the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

2. The Congress points out that:

a. the right to education is a human right, enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, and the obligation to provide to children and young persons a free primary and secondary education as well as to encourage regular attendance at schools is included in the European Social Charter (revised);

b. an increasing body of evidence shows that while school absenteeism is present in all countries, its prevalence is varied and has risen in many European countries in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with long-term social and economic implications;

1 Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-10, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Liesa SCHOLZEN, Belgium (R, ILDG) and Anita SOLLIE, Norway (L, EPP/CCE).

c. school absenteeism can escalate quickly form occasional to persistent and severe absenteeism, withdrawal and early leaving from formal education, with each stage of this escalation becoming harder to address;

d. patterns of absenteeism often reflect psychosocial distress, exclusion and developmental barriers including with regard to structural vulnerabilities such as poverty, unstable housing, disability and health-related needs, family instability, and refugee status or migration-related barriers, and therefore have the deepest impact on students experiencing those situations;

e. school education provides students with the knowledge and skills that open up future employment opportunities, lead to higher earnings and enable them to make a greater contribution to the economy, as well supporting the development of competences essential for active citizenship, social participation, and equal opportunities within democratic societies;

f. school absenteeism is therefore a barrier to the full realisation of students' well-being, social relationships and human rights and contributes directly to their loss of future opportunities, income and contribution to their communities and societies;

g. local and regional authorities are crucial in monitoring, preventing, and responding to school absenteeism, through multi-agency coordination, early intervention, and targeted responses.

3. In light of the above, the Congress calls on the local and regional authorities of Council of Europe member States to:

a. commit to the measures required to reduce school absenteeism to the minimal level possible, ensuring that where the rate has risen since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, these increases are reversed and that a culture of school attendance is rebuilt and reinforced;

b. ensure that schools falling within their competence therefore conduct systematic and comprehensive monitoring and recording of school attendance for every pupil and make the resulting data available to all levels of governance, in accordance with data protection laws, as the first step in addressing the problem;

c. provide schools with the support and training they need to interpret attendance data and to take the measures known to help prevent absenteeism, including teaching that engages and supports students of all abilities and interests and fostering inclusive school climates with a sense of belonging, safety, and engagement among all students and a focus on anti-bullying initiatives and family engagement;

d. mandate schools to put in place early warning systems that identify students at risk of absenteeism and ensure coordinated support from services within and outside the school environment, including mentoring, as a means to support individual students and prevent absence patterns becoming entrenched and more difficult to address;

e. define clear escalation pathways to address chronic, persistent and severe absenteeism and, where it occurs, establish and fund coordinated structures for communication and cooperation between the "triangle" of the student, parents and school concerned and between schools, social services, health professionals, and community actors to deliver tailor-made, inclusive strategies that foster strong relationships and address the multiple drivers of absenteeism involved – such as illness, special educational needs, safety concerns, unstable living conditions, family obligations, and economic and transport barriers – as well as flexible, return-to-school programmes that meet individuals' needs;

f. balance these support, welfare and multi-agency measures with any enforcement-oriented obligations and sanctions, including with regard to parental responsibility and legal obligations;

g. guarantee that attendance data are not only collected, but used on a continuous basis to inform adjustments to absenteeism policy;

h. enable and undertake this monitoring, support, and intervention approach to uphold human rights standards, including the positive obligation to ensure effective access to education for all, consistent with the European Social Charter (revised) and the case law of the European Committee of Social Rights.

4. The Congress asks its statutory bodies to take the present resolution into account in their activities.

The application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the smallest States

Resolution 535 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1);

b. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) ("the Charter") and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

c. the Reykjavík Declaration, adopted at the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavík, 16 and 17 May 2023), highlighting the need to support the essential role of multilevel governance in delivering the Organisation's vision, including through the role of the Congress with respect to the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;

d. Article 2, paragraph 1.b, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that one of the aims of the Congress is "to submit proposals to the Committee of Ministers in order to promote local and regional democracy";

e. Article 1, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that "The Congress shall prepare on a regular basis country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member States and in States which have applied to join the Council of Europe, and shall ensure the effective implementation of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;"

f. Chapter XVIII of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress on the organisation of monitoring procedures;

g. the Congress monitoring reports and recommendations on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the Council of Europe member States;

h. the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969), in particular its Article 27, according to which "A party may not invoke the provisions of its internal law as justification for its failure to perform a treaty;"

i. the Draft articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (2001).

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2026 (see document CPL(2026)51-02, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Marjorie CROVETTO, Monaco (L, NR) and Stefan FASSBINDER, Germany (L, SOC/G/PD)

2. The Congress:

a. highlights the geographical, historical, economic and social diversity of the signatory States to the Charter;

b. notes that, for the purpose of this report, the term the “smallest States” shall refer to member States with a very small territorial size, namely Andorra, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco and San Marino;

c. notes that the Charter makes no distinction between countries based on their territorial size, or on the number of levels of local governance;

d. points to the absence of specific issues that would significantly distinguish the “smallest States” from other member States, based on the findings of reports identifying recurring issues in the application of the Charter;

e. highlights that Article 12 of the Charter allows for an “à la carte” system in the acceptance of its core principles at the time of ratification;

f. underlines that monitoring of the application of the Charter is a sui generis procedure, which is not purely legal but also political; it is not intended to sanction non-complying States, but rather to encourage and support all member States of the Council of Europe in applying the principles of local self-government.

3. The Congress invites its 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) to:

a. continue monitoring the application of the Charter, taking into account the geographical, historical, economic and social diversity within the Council of Europe;

b. continue operating strictly within the limits established by the Charter and in full compliance with international law, ensuring that no double standards are applied in the interpretation of the Charter, including in relation to the smallest States;

c. update the Contemporary Commentary on the Explanatory report to the European Charter of Local Self-Government in light of modern-day realities with particular attention to the smallest States.

Regional exodus in Europe: addressing the causes and creating new opportunities for rural communities

Resolution 536 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the European Social Charter (revised) of the Council of Europe (CETS No.163) guaranteeing equal access to social rights to all people residing on the metropolitan territory of each Party without discrimination;

b. Recommendation CM/Rec(2025)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the social, economic and political participation of rural youth, inviting national governments to address the specific challenges faced by rural youth;

c. Congress Resolution 458 (2020) and Recommendation 448 (2020) "Developing urban-rural interplay" which underlines the need to pay more attention to the interdependence between urban and rural areas, to ensure greater territorial cohesion;

d. the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (UNSDG) under which rural development is seen as playing a critical role for ending poverty (SDG 1), achieving zero hunger (SDG 2), ensuring clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), and developing sustainable communities (SDG 11).

e. the explanatory memorandum on "Regional Exodus in Europe: addressing the causes and creating new opportunities for rural communities" CPR(2026)51-02).

2. The Congress notes with concern that:

a. in the current global and European economic context, many rural areas - comprising both predominantly rural areas that are closer to urban centres and those that are more remote - are lagging behind the national average in a number of performance and structural indicators, especially those areas that are more remote;

b. accordingly, many of the more remote rural areas are experiencing a regional exodus, i.e. the temporary or permanent departure of young people and people of working age to urban centres within the same country or even abroad, in search of better opportunities;

c. the residents of rural areas, representing between 20% and 40% of the total population in Council of Europe member states, are regularly facing lower quality and higher price levels for services, while public institutions and private companies in rural areas are confronted with numerous constraints in delivering services in an equal manner to all;

[1] Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2026 (see document CPR(2026)51-02, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Eke FOLKERTS, Netherlands (R, EPP/CCE) and Urs JANETT, Switzerland (R, ILDG).

d. many residents of rural areas therefore do not have full access to social services and social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter (revised) of the Council of Europe, and reduced service levels in rural areas may induce further depopulation in a vicious circle of declining offer and demand;

e. the evident assets of rural areas, often including proximity to nature, a cleaner environment, more space for activities and a livelier community spirit, are currently not outweighing the disadvantages perceived in many places, thus leading to out-migration by some and creating feelings of being left behind among remaining residents;

f. despite various responses developed at all levels of governance, from the European to the local, and numerous good practices observed across Europe, rural development policies are not yet sufficiently coherent and effective to allow more rural areas to thrive, and to retain their local populations.

3. The Congress calls on local and regional authorities to make every effort to halt the significant loss of population affecting many rural communities by:

a. playing a leading role in multilevel governance approaches to ensuring the tailored, sustainable and long-term viability of rural economies and social and public services, with the involvement, consultation and leadership of people from those communities;

b. exploiting their powers – including over planning, development and investment and business promotion - to ensure the best conditions for sustainable economic success and job creation, drawing on the economic heritage, local skills-base and natural assets of their territories as well as their potential to take advantage of new economic opportunities in rural areas, such as the green transition, food security and sustainable tourism sectors, while assessing and taking into account the impact of new economic activities on the natural environment and the cultural heritage;

c. ensuring that rural communities are well connected, prioritising their transport infrastructure and links and high-speed digital connectivity as prerequisites for economic success and closer urban-rural linkages and partnerships, both to retain the current local population and attract new residents;

d. creating or supporting education and training both for traditional and innovative economic sectors, and via new local and regional partnerships, for example between universities, businesses and local and regional authorities;

e. setting thresholds for the maintenance of public services in rural areas that reflect the realities of modern rural life, and innovating in ways that make those services more accessible and sustainable, for example via the use of telemedicine or modern childcare arrangements involving family members as service providers;

f. supporting the provision of affordable and sustainable housing for all, by investing in social housing, stimulating private housing investments, and striking a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and urgent responses to housing shortages caused by price-inflating second or holiday homes;

g. ensuring that these and other policies guarantee the social rights of people living in rural areas in line with the European Social Charter system;

h. making best use of European Union policy instruments and funding mechanisms available in member states and accession countries and exploring funding opportunities provided by the Council of Europe Development Bank and other relevant international organisations;

i. putting in place robust local and regional data collection systems to monitor population trends as a first step to further policy measures that will attract and retain population and recognising local and traditional ecological knowledge as an input into rural development planning.

4. The Congress commits to maintaining an increased level of attention to the situation of rural areas across Council of Europe member states, and to support the delivery of equal social rights guarantees across national territories, including by mainstreaming any considerations and measures concerning rural areas throughout its thematic reports.

Free to speak, free to meet: guaranteeing the rights of LGBTI persons in local communities

Resolution 537 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("The Congress") refers to:

a. the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No.5), and in particular its articles 10 and 11, the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association, as well as the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights;

b. the Committee of Minister's Recommendation CM/Rec (2022)16 on Combating hate speech CM/Rec (2022)16);

c. the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec (2010)5 on Measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity;

d. Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2543 (2024) "Freedom of expression and assembly of LGBTI people in Europe";

e. Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2239 (2018) "Private and family life: achieving equality regardless of sexual orientation";

f. Congress Resolution 471 (2021) "The role of local authorities with regard to the situation of LGBTI people in Poland";

g. Congress Resolution 470 (2021) and Recommendation 458 (2021) "Protecting LGBTI people in the context of rising anti-LGBTI hate speech and discrimination: the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities";

h. Congress Resolution 380 (2015) and Recommendation 370 (2015) "Guaranteeing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTI) people's rights: a responsibility for Europe's towns and regions";

i. the explanatory memorandum "Free to speak, free to meet: guaranteeing the rights of LGBTI persons in local communities" (CG(2026)51-17).

2. The Congress notes with concern that:

a. the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons are increasingly coming under pressure in several Council of Europe member states;

[1] Debated and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-17, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Helen BELCHER, United-Kingdom (R, ILDG) and Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, Austria (L, SOC/G/PD).
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b. in particular, the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly of LGBTI persons and concerning LGBTI issues are increasingly undermined by political developments and via legal and administrative instruments in a number of countries, such as legal bans on Pride marches, an increasingly hostile environment and withdrawal of support for LGBTI non-governmental organisations, and various forms of attacks against members of the community and their activists, including via traditional media and online spaces;

c. in an overall context of polarised societal trends, where the exercise of the freedom of expression and assembly by minority groups is often portrayed as a threat to traditional values, local and regional authorities, in particular, face significant challenges in upholding internationally recognised human rights standards especially when they have to act within increasingly restrictive national legislative frameworks;

d. a rise in anti-LGBTI attitudes and violence has been observed in recent years, including in urban areas traditionally seen as open to LGBTI people, leading to a perceived loss of safety within the LGBTI community.

3. In this regard, the Congress calls upon local and regional authorities of Council of Europe member States to:

a. uphold the human rights of LGBTI persons to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, as guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights and the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights and take specific and proactive measures to achieve their full enforcement, including by mitigating restrictive national policies or the negative impact of hostile environments;

b. authorise Pride marches and other LGBTI-related public events, without imposing deliberate hindrance, and protect such events effectively, including through the provision of adequate security arrangements, implemented in collaboration with competent local and regional law enforcement authorities, and in consultation with the organisers;

c. ensure access to objective information and education concerning sexual orientation and gender identity, in line with international human rights standards, including through formal school curricula and informal education, according to their respective competences in this area;

d. provide political, logistical and, where possible, financial support for LGBTI-supportive organisations, including non-governmental advocacy organisations, and for social and cultural meeting spaces and community resource centres, cultural institutions and other spaces conducive to participation and visibility, and build supportive partnerships with these organisations and institutions as appropriate;

e. designate equality focal points to maintain sustained engagement with LGBTI communities and provide appropriate training for public sector employees in dealing with LGBTI-related events and organisations, including municipal staff, teachers and local law enforcement officers, to ensure that they effectively protect the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly of LGBTI persons, ensuring their safety in all public spaces;

f. engage in national and international assemblies and networks of local and regional authorities committed to equality and human rights, in order to exchange good practices, strengthen peer support and enhance collective resilience in restrictive political environments;

g. continuously collect data at local and regional levels to identify related trends emerging over time regarding violence, hate speech and other offences affecting LGBTI persons.

4. The Congress calls upon its statutory bodies, including its chambers and committees, to continue prioritising and supporting the protection of the human rights of LGBTI persons at local and regional levels in their future work, with particular attention to safeguarding freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly and reinforcing capacities to respond to restrictive or discriminatory trends.

Request of the Congress to intervene as a third party in Application no. 37204/25

Resolution 538 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress"):

a. underlines its role as the only consultative political assembly of the Council of Europe entrusted with the mandate to represent and support local and regional elected representatives, and to promote and defend local democracy, human rights and the rule of law at the grassroots level across Europe;

b. draws attention to its regular monitoring, fact-finding and high-level missions and reports concerning the situation of local elected representatives in Türkiye, particularly regarding instances of dismissal and prolonged detention of such representatives;

c. refers to:

i. the Opinion on the provisions of the Emergency Decree Law No. 674 of 1 September 2016 which concern the exercise of local democracy in Turkey (CDL-AD(2017)021), prepared by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) at the request of the Congress, notably as regards "the impact of the Provisions of Emergency Decree Laws on Local democracy in Turkey and the Long-Term effects of the dismissal and detention of local elected representatives";

ii. the Report of the Venice Commission on the impact of pre-trial detention of mayors on local democratic governance (CDL-AD(2025)045);

iii. Application no. 37204/25, *Ekrem İmamoğlu against Türkiye* lodged on 10 November 2025 with the European Court of Human Rights, which addresses the dismissal and detention of a Turkish local representative and raises issues at the intersection of human rights protection and local democracy;

iv. Article 36, paragraph 2, of the European Convention of Human Rights which, in the interest of the proper administration of justice, allows the Court to invite any person concerned who is not the applicant to submit written comments or take part in hearings where their special knowledge or expertise may contribute to the Court's understanding of the broader legal and factual context;

d. highlights the value for the Court of receiving information, observations and analyses from bodies whose specialised experience and involvement at the institutional level in relevant fields may enlighten its deliberations;

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-27, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, Austria (L, SOC/G/PD).

e.
f. underlines in this respect the value of the Congress's extensive experience, expertise and first-hand observations, thereby contributing specialised knowledge and institutional insight for local democracy and the rights of local elected representatives.

2.The Congress expresses its readiness, pursuant to Article 36(2) of the European Convention of Human Rights and Rule 44(3) of the Rules of the Court, to make available to the Court written observations in the context of an intervention as a third party in the Application no. 37204/25, thereby ensuring that the Court's assessment is supported by comprehensive and context-specific information on the situation of local democracy and human rights in Türkiye.

3.Subject to a positive decision by the Court, the Congress instructs its Standing Rapporteurs on Human Rights, in co-operation with the rapporteurs on local democracy in Türkiye, to submit written observations on behalf of the Congress within the deadline set by the Court, based on the reports adopted by the Congress.

51st SESSION

Contested memories: how local and regional authorities can manage controversial cultural heritage

Resolution 539 (2026)[1]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No.122, "the Charter");

b. the European Cultural Convention (ETS No.18);

c. the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (ETS No.199), Faro Convention;

d. Congress Resolution 529 (2026) "Congress prioritities 2026-2031";

e. Congress Resolution 474 (2021) and Recommendation 463 (2021) "Culture without borders: Cultural heritage management for local and regional development";

f. Congress Resolution 379 (2015) "Jewish cemeteries: the responsibility of local authorities";

g. Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)1 on the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st century;

h. Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2280 (2024) "Countering the erasure of cultural identity in war and peace";

i. Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2149 (2019) "The value of cultural heritage in democratic society";

j. Cultural Routes Programme and Resolution CM/Res(2010)53 establishing an Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes;

k. Council of Europe and European Union European Heritage Days (EHD) Initiative and its 2026 Theme: Heritage at Risk - Revive, Resist, Reimagine.

2. The Congress underlines that:

a. contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage is a structural and dynamic feature of Europe's historical landscape;

b. such legacies are complex and multifaceted, reflected in tangible monuments, sites and place names, as well as in intangible traditions, narratives and collective memories;

1 Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-24, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Keith BROWN, United Kingdom (R, ILDG) and Anita SCHNEIDER, Germany (L, SOC/G/PD).

c. they are essential for shaping collective identity, fostering democratic dialogue, advancing historical learning and transmitting European values;

d. the ongoing politicisation and instrumentalisation of such heritage demonstrate the urgency for robust and democratic responses;

e. considering their central role in managing contested, conflicting, and forgotten cultural heritage as well as their proximity to communities, local and regional authorities are strategically positioned to facilitate structured, inclusive and participatory dialogue, plural and critical historical narratives, reconciliation and inclusive education.

3. In light of the above, the Congress calls on the local and regional authorities of Council of Europe member States to:

a. establish advisory and/or consultative mechanisms e.g. public consultations to evaluate and contribute to decision-making on contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage through transparent, participatory and expert-informed processes;

b. ensure that these mechanisms are inclusive of all relevant local stakeholders, including marginalised communities, youth, and civil society;

c. support museums, cultural institutions and programmes that present multiple perspectives and promote critical reflection on the past and challenge simplistic or exclusionary narratives;

d. support schools, universities and youth organisations in providing excursions, courses and interactive resources that engage and inform young people about complex and contested heritage often represented in their communities;

e. engage in cross-border and transregional cooperation especially in borderlands or areas with entangled histories to discuss contested memories and foster reconciliation and mutual understanding;

f. support interdisciplinary research and the sharing of best practices on the management of contested, conflicting, and forgotten cultural heritage;

g. promote heritage tourism that aligns with the broader goals of building social cohesion underpinned by the values of human rights, democracy and civic participation, including participation in the Council of Europe Cultural Routes Programme.

4. The Congress calls on the local and regional authorities and their national associations to take account of this resolution and the accompanying explanatory memorandum, on this specific issue. It also asks its statutory bodies to take the present resolution into account in their activities.