

48th SESSION

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48th SESSION**Recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine**Declaration 11 (2025)¹

1. Referring 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” and Declaration 9 (2024) “The destruction of cultural heritage in Ukraine”, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) 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.

2. The Congress deplores and condemns once again the fact that the Russian Federation’s unjustified and unprovoked war against Ukraine continues to cause massive losses of innocent lives and human suffering, as well as targeted destruction of cultural heritage and of vital infrastructures, which represent human rights violations unprecedented in recent history in Europe. Millions of people, the majority of whom are children, continue to be displaced from their homes. Furthermore, thousands of Ukrainians are still in captivity and subject to violence, inhuman treatment and torture.

3. The Congress further deplores the dramatic long-term repercussions that the war has had on territorial communities in Ukraine. It pays tribute to the crucial role that local and regional authorities in Ukraine have been playing in addressing the disastrous humanitarian consequences faced by their citizens, ensuring the functioning of public services and addressing emergency needs, and welcomes the cohesion and support that local and regional authorities have shown one another.

4. The Congress also welcomes the unreserved support expressed once again towards Ukraine and its people by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and the latter’s determination to continue its efforts to ensure that the Russian Federation is held fully accountable for its aggression against Ukraine, as set out *inter alia* in the decisions adopted by the Ministers’ Deputies following their 1520th meeting on 24 and 26 February 2025.

5. The Congress emphasises once again its readiness to support local and regional authorities in Ukraine to contribute, within their competencies, to the work of the Register of Damages to ensure such accountability.

6. The Congress condemns the fact that the Russian Federation continues to subject Ukraine each day to bombardment and destruction, exacerbating the harm already caused and provoking new and immeasurable suffering and loss of life, as well as further damage to crucial infrastructures. It welcomes efforts towards a ceasefire, emphasising once again in this context the necessity of fully respecting the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

7. Three years after the launch by the Russian Federation of its full-scale aggression against Ukraine, the Congress underlines that Council of Europe member States must not wait for this aggression to end to engage in crucial work with Ukraine to lay the groundwork for its recovery and reconstruction at local

¹Debated and adopted by the Congress on 25 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-12](#)), co-rapporteurs: Martine DIESCHBURG-NICKELS, Luxembourg (L, ILDG) and Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Norway (R, EPP/CCE).

and regional levels as well as at national level, and based on full respect for human rights. The Russian Federation must pay for the reconstruction of Ukraine's regions, and confiscated Russian assets, which are frozen today worldwide, should be a source for such reconstruction efforts.

8. The Congress considers that decentralised recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine should be based on a strategic vision and aspiration towards human-centred, inclusive, transparent and sustainable development, based on European standards and international best practices. Beyond essential work to repair infrastructure, recovery and reconstruction will require inter alia supporting veterans and war-affected populations, reintegrating returning IDPs and populations relocated abroad, and supporting other vulnerable groups, including through supporting the return of children illegally transferred by Russian occupiers. Local and regional authorities will have a crucial role to play in providing such support and in fostering equality and social cohesion. They will also be at the forefront in providing education, health services and public services, and in ensuring that their citizens have access to sustainable housing.

9. The Congress underlines that the process of decentralisation reform currently under way, on which the Congress is working closely with Ukrainian counterparts through its Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance, will provide a critical foundation for recovery and reconstruction efforts, ensuring the strong institutions and empowered communities and citizens that are essential for a sustainable future.

10. The Congress reaffirms its readiness to support Ukraine in local self-government reforms and capacity-building and in the achievement of local democracy standards. It will continue to work closely with Ukrainian local and regional authorities and their national associations to address the needs voiced by them, and emphasises the importance of regular dialogue between the national authorities and all levels of subnational authorities in the context of decentralisation, recovery and reconstruction policies and their implementation. In this context, the Congress acknowledges the Annual Summit of Cities and Regions to be held in Ukraine in June this year under the patronage of the President of Ukraine as one of the most effective platforms for communications aimed at the regional development of Ukraine.

11. Now more than ever, the Congress reaffirms its solidarity with the Ukrainian people and its commitment to a common, democratic future based on respect for international law and a just and lasting peace.

48th SESSION

Dismissals of mayors in Türkiye

Declaration 12 (2025)¹

1. The Congress recalls that the national authorities of Türkiye, one of the founding members of the Council of Europe, recommitted to Council of Europe values in the Reykjavik Declaration (2023). The Declaration was endorsed by all member States and includes Appendix III “the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy”, which applies to all levels of government and states: “We will meet our obligations under international law. We will prevent and resist democratic backsliding on our continent [...] by enhancing our shared commitments as member States of the Council of Europe”.

2. The Congress expresses deep concern over clear signs of degradation of the working conditions of local and regional elected representatives and the weakening of fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in Türkiye, marked by an acceleration of the dismissals, arrests and prosecutions of opposition mayors on grounds of terrorism and corruption. The Congress has repeatedly condemned the practice of dismissals of elected mayors and the appointment of trustees since 2016, calling for its abolition, as it runs counter to the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), ratified by all member States of the Council of Europe, including by Türkiye in 1992.

3. On 19 March 2025, Ekrem İmamoğlu, Mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul and President of the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (UMT), was arrested alongside 106 people, including the district mayors of Şişli and Beylikdüzü and other local officials, media and business leaders. Earlier in 2025, the deputy district mayors of two other districts of Istanbul, Kartal and Ataşehir, had also been arrested with other officials.

4. Reacting to Mayor İmamoğlu’s custody, the Congress strongly condemned his arrest on 19 March and took the view that his case bore all the hallmarks of political pressure on a figure considered as one of the main candidates in forthcoming presidential elections. In three separate elections observed by the Congress, the citizens of Istanbul have democratically elected Mr İmamoğlu. According to the European Court of Human Rights, while freedom of expression is important for everybody, it is especially so for democratically elected representatives, notably if from the opposition. They represent their electorate, draw attention to their preoccupations and defend their interests.

5. The Congress considers that the relentless campaign of judicial harassment targeting Mr İmamoğlu since his first election in 2019, and increasingly since 2022, has been used to restrict his right to stand for elections. This culminated after 18 March 2025 with the sudden annulment of his university degree, a pre-condition to run for presidential elections, and the conditions of his arrest on 19 March, just four days before the presidential primary election of his party (CHP), the main opposition party, which are matters of grave concern. On 23 March, Mr İmamoğlu was placed in pre-trial detention on charges of leading a criminal organisation, which the Congress President qualified as an assault on democracy as the timing of these actions put into question the credibility of the charges brought against the mayor.

6. In addition, as of 24 March 2025, thirteen mayors elected in 2024 – including Congress member Mr Abdullah Zeydan, Mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality of Van sentenced to three years nine months in prison – have been dismissed and replaced by trustees and over four million citizens now live in municipalities governed by appointed administrators. Since 2016, close to 150 mayors had already been dismissed and replaced and millions of people have been denied a democratic voice in Türkiye. The arrest of Mr İmamoğlu runs the risk of the more than 16 million citizens of the largest municipality in Europe being administered by a non-elected administrator.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-18](#)), Rapporteurs: David ERAY, Switzerland (R, EPP/CCE), Bryony RUDKIN, United Kingdom (L, SOC/G/PD).

7. Furthermore, the Congress highlights that freedom of expression and assembly have suffered from extensive restrictions over the last few months in the country. In particular, the Congress condemns the recourse to blanket bans of public demonstrations, as used in municipalities where mayors were removed or arrested, including Istanbul, as well as the increased repression of dissenting voices in the media and political spheres and restrictions on access to social media.

8. As a result, the Congress considers that the above recent events are further damaging local democracy and that the country is currently deviating from democratic norms and standards. Such arrests and dismissals of elected representatives from opposition parties and their replacement by trustees, as well as the silencing of dissenting voices, have become commonplace. It is beyond reasonable doubt that these events have the ultimate purpose of stifling pluralism and limiting freedom of political debate, which is at the very core of the concept of a democratic society. Democratic standards, upheld by the European Court of Human Rights, dictate that such cases must be handled with extreme care.

9. Against this backdrop and bearing in mind past Congress recommendations, the Congress reiterates that the right of voters to express their opinions and choose their representatives is fundamental and genuinely democratic elections mean respecting the will of the people and providing equal opportunities to all candidates regardless of their political affiliation.

10. The Congress also considers that the right to free elections, as enshrined in Article 3 of Protocol No.1 to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 9), should be extended to all types of elections and referendums in order to guarantee fundamental protections for candidates and voters alike, as these elections also represent an essential component of democracy in Europe.

11. The Congress reaffirms that local and regional authorities are key in upholding and defending democracy, human rights and rule of law, not only within their communities, but as part of the system of checks and balances which represents the backbone of a genuine pluralistic democracy. It underlines that the right of local authorities to freely exercise self-government without fear of persecution or retaliation must be guaranteed regardless of the political views of their leaders and representatives.

12. Local authorities must not be put in a position when they are required by law to violate human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Congress reaffirms that effective protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, must be guaranteed.

13. In the light of the above, the Congress calls on the Turkish authorities to:

a. implement Congress Recommendation 519 (2024) “Local elections in Türkiye” and the 2020 Venice Commission Opinion on the replacement of elected candidates and mayors (CDL-AD(2020)011), and abolish the practice of dismissing mayors and appointing trustees;

b. put an end to overly broad limitations on the freedoms of assembly and expression, which curb political pluralism, infringe human rights and undermine the foundations of democracy and are detrimental to local self-government in Türkiye;

c. stop prosecuting and detaining elected representatives from opposition parties based on a broad interpretation and application of the offences of terrorism or defamation, in particular in electoral contexts;

d. in line with the caselaw of the European Court of Human Rights, release the current detainees, including Mayor İmamoğlu, guarantee the rights of the defence and refrain from making extensive use of pre-trial detention when clear evidence of reasonable suspicion is missing.

14. The Congress underlines its commitment to pursuing constructive political dialogue with the authorities of Türkiye, notably in the framework of the post-monitoring roadmap and the organisation of a visit of the leadership of the Congress and the co-rapporteurs on the situation of local democracy in Türkiye.

15. Given the magnitude of current concerns, the Congress will organise a fact-finding visit to Türkiye as soon as possible, seeking face-to-face meetings with mayors who have been detained, including Mayor Imamoglu, and to address the urgent concerns outlined in this Declaration.

48th SESSION**Congress Budget for 2026-2027**Recommendation 520 (2025)¹

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) refers to its institutional role as the voice of the local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe member States and as guardian of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), which has been ratified by all member States, and reaffirms its responsibility for promoting and fostering the implementation of the Council of Europe's common standards at local and regional level.
2. It welcomes the results of the 4th Council of Europe Summit in Reykjavik and the joint declaration by the Heads of State and Government, recommitting themselves to protecting the democratic foundations of our societies, in particular through the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.
3. The Congress welcomes the decisive support given by the Heads of State and Government in this declaration to the essential role of multilevel governance in achieving the Organisation's vision.
4. It also welcomes the adoption of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy and the commitment made by the Heads of State and Government to guarantee and strengthen democracy and good governance at all levels throughout Europe.
5. The Congress notes with satisfaction the firm commitment of the Heads of State and Government to the system established under the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) as the cornerstone of the Council of Europe's protection of human rights. In this respect, it welcomes their consideration of the essential role played by local and regional authorities in the promotion and protection of human rights.
6. The Congress calls for local and regional authorities to be proactively involved in devising preventive and curative public policies to manage climate and environmental crises, since all major crises will ultimately have an impact on all levels of governance. In this context, it supports the work aimed at promoting the role of local and regional authorities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the areas of competence of the Congress.
7. It underlines the recognition by the Heads of State and Government that local authorities are among those responsible for implementing the Convention and complying with the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and welcomes their call on the Congress to strengthen political dialogue on the implementation of judgments.
8. It also refers to the call by the Heads of State and Government to intensify efforts, at all levels of governance, for the effective protection of the rights of Ukrainian children, in response to the consequences of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine.
9. The Congress reiterates its support for ongoing efforts to involve young people in decision-making processes by helping local authorities to improve their policy and practice in working with young people. It stresses the importance of securing future funding for the “Rejuvenating Politics” initiative, which each

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 48th Session on 25 March 2025, (see document [CG\(2025\)48-09](#)), Rapporteur: Konstantinos KOUKAS, Greece (L, EPP/CCE).

year offers one young person from each Member State the opportunity to participate actively in Congress sessions and in the work of its committees.

10. The Congress underlines the need to review its activities in the light of the decisions of the 4th Summit and new developments in priority areas such as human rights and the rule of law, while strengthening its statutory and cooperation activities and raising the profile of the Congress and strengthening its relations with its institutional partners.

11. The Congress welcomes the regular exchanges of views between the President and the Secretary General of the Congress and the Committee of Ministers, and the support and satisfaction expressed by the member States and the Committee of Ministers regarding the results achieved and the reforms undertaken by the Congress.

12. It recalls the successive budget cuts that the Congress has experienced over the years and the risks that further budget cuts could pose to its statutory, post-monitoring, thematic and co-operation activities, which have been tailored to the expectations and interests of the member States.

13. The Congress further highlights that it has been obliged to discontinue certain activities, in particular those enabling it to respond to the challenges identified in the Secretary General's annual reports on the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and to the priorities of successive Presidencies of the Committee of Ministers.

14. The Congress refers to the series of reforms it carried out in 2010, 2015, 2018 and 2019.

15. It welcomes the Committee of Ministers' decision to strengthen the Secretariat by transferring the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance to the Congress in 2024, as well as the budgetary reinforcements granted under the 2024-2025 budget.

16. It notes that this welcome consolidation is, however, not sufficient to cover the remaining gap between the resources available and the capacity needed to deliver the expected results.

17. The Congress welcomes and fully supports its Secretary General's proposals to increase the resources allocated to the Congress under the Council of Europe's 2026-2027 ordinary budget, in order to provide the Secretariat with human and financial resources commensurate with the institution's mandate and the development of its activities, particularly in the light of the strategic decisions of the 4th Summit.

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

a. confirm the confidence shown at the 4th Summit in local and regional authorities' role in promoting and protecting the values of the Council of Europe at the closest possible level to its citizens;

b. continue to invest in the Congress to enable it to implement the Reykjavik deliverables by strengthening its statutory and co-operation activities;

c. encourage member States to make voluntary contributions for concrete operational activities of the Congress and to make staff available to its Secretariat;

d. take into account the inflation adjustment for the next biennium in order to maintain the Council of Europe as a competent actor in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, so as to enable all its bodies and structures to act in the interest of the citizens of the 46 member States;

e. invite the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to grant the Congress, in the draft programme and budget for the 2026-2027 biennium, an increased budgetary allocation, as set out in the explanatory memorandum accompanying this recommendation (document CG(2025)48-09), and which is fully commensurate with the contribution of the Congress to the priorities of the Council of Europe as a monitoring body and pan-European body for the promotion of territorial democracy, encouraging decentralisation as well as debate and exchanges of good practice between local and regional elected representatives on the main topical issues of our societies.

48th SESSION**Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Liechtenstein**

Recommendation 521 (2025)¹

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe 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 Congress priorities for 2021-2026, in particular priority 6b which concerns the quality of representative democracy and citizen participation;

f. 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;

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

h. 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;

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

j. Congress Recommendation 416 (2018) “Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Liechtenstein”;

k. the explanatory memorandum on the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Liechtenstein.

2. The Congress points out that:

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document CPL(2025)48-02, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Jorge SEQUEIRA, Portugal (L, SOC/G/PD) and Gobnait NÍ MHUINEACHÁIN, Ireland (L, ILDG).

a. Liechtenstein joined the Council of Europe on 23 November 1978, signed the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122, "the Charter") on 15 October 1985 and ratified it on 11 May 1988. In its official declaration, Liechtenstein declared that it was not bound by Article 3 paragraph 2, Article 6 paragraph 2, Article 7 paragraph 2, Article 9 paragraphs 3, 4 and 8 and Article 10 paragraphs 2 and 3. The Charter entered into force in Liechtenstein on 1 September 1988. Liechtenstein has not 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);

b. 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 democracy in Liechtenstein in the light of the Charter. It instructed Xavier Cadoret, France (L, SOC/G/PD) and Marjorie Crovetto, Monaco (L, NR) with the task of preparing and submitting to the Congress a report on the application of the Charter in Liechtenstein;

c. the monitoring visit took place from 18 to 19 June 2024. During the visit, the Congress delegation met representatives of various institutions at all levels of government. The detailed programme of the monitoring visit is appended to the explanatory memorandum;

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

3. The Congress notes with satisfaction:

a. due general implementation of the rights and obligations set out in the European Charter of Local Self-Government;

b. the robust financial situation of local authorities in Liechtenstein due to the high percentage of tax revenues;

c. the introduction of a horizontal equalisation system supporting financial autonomy of local authorities;

d. the existence in practice of well-established procedures for consultation of local authorities;

e. the highly developed direct democracy practices in local matters;

f. the *de facto* compliance with non-ratified provisions of the Charter.

4. The Congress expresses its concerns with respect to the following issues:

a. the current system of *a priori* approval of municipal budgets as a legal condition for their validity, which is disproportionate to the legitimate aim of budget equilibrium;

b. overlapping of some competences, in particular as regards municipal budget approval, issuing of building permits and the approval of community planning and development that does not allow for the powers given to local authorities to be full and exclusive;

c. the lack of formal recognition in the relevant legislation of the mechanisms of consultation with local authorities on matters that directly affect them;

d. the limits of the mayor's spending power, as defined by the law, are no longer adequate in view of the size and importance of the capital city.

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

a. abolish the system of *a priori* budgetary supervision of local budgets and introduce *a posteriori* control in accordance with the requirements of the Charter;

- b. clarify the division of competences between central and local authorities in areas of concern such as urbanism, building and planning law and the school system so as to ensure compliance with the requirements of full and exclusive powers;
 - c. institutionalise the mechanism of consultation through legislation to safeguard local authorities' right to be consulted on all matters that concern them directly;
 - d. review the maximum amount of expenditure that may be incurred by the mayor of the capital city;
 - e. consider ratifying Article 3 paragraph 2, Article 6 paragraph 2, Article 7 paragraph 2, Article 9 paragraphs 3, 4 and 8 and Article 10 paragraphs 2 and 3 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which are complied with in practice in Liechtenstein;
 - f. consider signing and ratifying the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.
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 Liechtenstein and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

48th SESSION**Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in San Marino**

Recommendation 522 (2025)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 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities and Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions;
 - e. the Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2017;
 - f. 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;
 - g. Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on supervision of local authorities’ activities, adopted on 4 April 2019;
 - h. Congress Recommendation 418 (2018) “Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in San Marino”;
 - i. the Explanatory memorandum on the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in San Marino;
 - j. 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.
2. The Congress points out that:
 - a. San Marino joined the Council of Europe on 16 November 1988, signed the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122, “the Charter”) on 16 May 2013 and ratified it on 29 October 2013 with the exception of paragraphs 3 and 8 of Article 9 of the Charter. The Charter entered into force in San Marino on 1 February 2014;

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document CPL(2025)48-03, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Alexander BOOMGAARS, Netherlands (L, SOC/G/PD) and Tanja JOONA, Finland (L, ILDG).

b. when ratifying the Charter, San Marino made an interpretative declaration with regard to Article 9 of the Charter, which reads as follows:

“The Republic of San Marino maintains that Article 9 of the Charter must be interpreted as an article establishing a general principle of financial autonomy, according to which local authorities are entitled to freely dispose, in the framework of the national economic policy, of the resources allocated to them for the exercise of their powers”;

c. San Marino has not 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);

d. 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 democracy in San Marino in light of the Charter. It instructed Tanja Joonas, Finland (L, ILDG) and Alexander Boomgaars, Netherlands (L, SOC/G/PD) with the task of preparing and submitting to the Congress a report on the application of the Charter in San Marino. The delegation was assisted by Professor Eva Marín Hlynisdóttir, from the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and by the Congress Secretariat;

e. the monitoring visit took place from 17 to 18 September 2024. During the visit, the Congress delegation met representatives of various institutions at all levels of government. The detailed programme of the visit is appended to the explanatory memorandum;

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

3. The Congress notes with satisfaction that in San Marino, as a result of the reform process:

a. the principle of subsidiarity was explicitly introduced in Law 158/2020 on Township Councils;

b. some positive developments have taken place since the previous monitoring visit. These include enhanced consultation procedures with local authorities, their entitlement to issue binding opinions on public projects and the possibility of participating in environmental proceedings, the introduction of dedicated maintenance funding, and increased compensation for local officials;

c. the possibilities for Township councils and individual councillors to establish international relations have also been strengthened;

d. foreign citizens have been granted voting rights in local elections.

4. The Congress expresses its concerns with respect to the following issues, which remain relevant since the previous monitoring visit:

a. the continuing situation of limited competencies and decision-making powers at the local level, due to the central organisation of almost all services;

b. the persisting lack of autonomy for local authorities, preventing them from exercising the competencies under their responsibility, and the lack of discretion over the tasks assigned to them;

c. the ineffective use of legally established consultation mechanisms, particularly concerning the distribution of financial resources, which hampers local authorities’ meaningful participation in consultations;

d. the limited resources available to local authorities, who remain heavily dependent on central government financing and financial decision-making, and are restricted in the use of their resources, with their income almost exclusively derived from earmarked grants;

e. the absence of professional staff for local authorities, which are also unable to decide on their internal administrative structures, preventing those authorities from carrying out their tasks effectively;

f. the extensive and overly detailed administrative supervision, in particular given the narrow scope of local responsibilities.

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

a. revise, in consultation with Townships, the system of allocating competences by assigning a substantial share of public affairs to the responsibility of Townships, in order to implement the principle of subsidiarity, set out in law;

b. during this revision, grant local authorities full discretion to exercise their powers within the scope of their responsibilities, which should be devolved fully and exclusively to ensure genuine local self-government;

c. implement consultation procedures in a more systematic and timely manner to ensure meaningful engagement with local authorities on all matters that concern them directly, including the distribution of financial resources;

d. review the financial foundations of local authorities to provide them with adequate and diversified financial resources, on which they can decide independently and which should be commensurate with their responsibilities, and reduce earmarking of transfers;

e. provide local authorities with the necessary human resources and discretion to manage their own internal administrative structures, enabling them to carry out local self-government effectively, in the interest of the local population;

f. make sure that state supervision over local competences is proportionate to the importance of the interests it seeks to protect;

g. sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

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 San Marino and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

48th SESSION**Early Municipal Elections in Podgorica (29 September 2024)**

Recommendation 523 (2025)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), ratified by Montenegro on 12 September 2008;
 - c. Chapter XIX of the Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions;
 - d. Congress Recommendation 506 (2024) “Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Montenegro”;
 - e. the invitation by the authorities of Podgorica, dated 5 September 2024, to observe early municipal elections held in the country on 29 September 2024.
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 Congress’s role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.
3. The Congress acknowledges that, overall, the legal framework in Montenegro is conducive to holding democratic elections at local level.
4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that:
 - a. the election day was overall calm and orderly, the procedures were largely followed in polling stations visited by Congress observers and the use of electronic identification seemed to ensure greater confidence in the identification process;
 - b. all candidates were able to campaign freely, and all electoral contestants fulfilled their financial reporting obligations in a timely manner;
 - c. in line with the gender quota, nearly 40% of the councillors in the newly established City Assembly of Podgorica are women and a portion of public funding for political parties is dedicated to women’s sections;
 - d. the results were accepted by most candidates and the mandates were awarded to the councillors without major delays, in a welcome step compared with the 2022 elections;
 - e. broad arrangements were made to facilitate the exercise of the right to vote by voters in detention facilities or who were unable to vote in designated polling stations due to age or mobility impairments;

¹ Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document [CPL\(2025\)48-05](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Randi MONDORF, Denmark (R, ILDG).

f. the situation of the media in Montenegro improved overall, boosted by updated legislation and a lively public and private media landscape as well as the organisation of many televised debates, which gave the opportunity to all lists to present their programmes.

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

a. the legal framework governing local elections is fragmented across different texts and is very complex, with vagueness and loopholes negatively affecting its readability, while political will to reform it remains low;

b. the legal framework provides for local elections to be held on a rolling basis, resulting in a nearly constant state of campaigning for all stakeholders. In addition, the absence of a residency requirement for local elections, as per the 2020 Constitutional Court decision, raises concerns about the accuracy of voter lists and fuels recurring allegations of electoral tourism;

c. independent candidates are not allowed to stand in local elections, which is not in line with Congress Recommendation 476 (2022) "The situation of independent candidates in local and regional elections";

d. politicisation and last-minute appointments of polling station officials coupled with the lack of compulsory training affected election day performance; in addition, the lack of final oversight of the State Election Commission (SEC) over some critical Municipal Election Commission (MEC) decisions does not allow for effective redress;

e. local issues remained largely overshadowed by national ones and by the high involvement of national-level officials – sometimes leading the candidate lists without planning on accepting the mandate – and the elections were perceived as bargaining tools for national political negotiations, undermining local self-government in Montenegro;

f. the campaign was marred by recurring allegations of misuse of administrative resources, abuse of official positions and politically motivated hiring, which were insufficiently investigated and sanctioned, in part due to insufficient regulations and the limited effectiveness of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (APC);

g. the APC was not sufficiently empowered to fully investigate and sanction violations related to party and campaign finance, notably underreporting and political advertising, in a timely and dissuasive manner;

h. challenges related to the independence and ownership of the media were significant, particularly regarding long-standing allegations of political and foreign influence on local election coverage;

i. on election day, the blurred distinction between polling station officials and party proxies and inconsistencies regarding the number of commissioners present in the polling stations created confusion as to who was responsible for what and instances of interference by unauthorised persons;

j. in some polling stations, other procedural inconsistencies were observed, including breaches of the secrecy of the vote due to inadequate polling station layout, inconsistent sealing of ballot boxes and the sometimes rushed reconciliation of results; access to polling stations for people with mobility impairments was not ensured in many polling stations visited;

k. women and youth continued to be largely under-represented in the media and as heads of lists;

l. the election administration lacks transparency in handling complaints, notably at the level of the Constitutional Court, and the SEC has limited capacity to review lower-level decisions in local elections;

m. last but not least, political deadlocks at local and national levels have negatively impacted local self-government in Montenegro and most notably in the municipality of Šavnik where election results were never finalised despite nine rounds of voting between October and December 2022, effectively leaving the local council elected in 2018 in power.

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

a. urgently recommit to the work of the Parliamentary Committee for Comprehensive Electoral Reform and pursue constructive and open dialogue about local self-government reform and the adoption of a harmonised legal framework to address gaps in the law related to local elections;

b. hold all local elections on the same day to reduce administrative burden and fraudulent registrations of voters; as a minimum, revise the legal provisions on residency requirements for local elections;

c. introduce provisions to enable independent candidates to take part in local elections;

d. depoliticise and professionalise the election administration, which should include systematic and compulsory training by the election administration, as well as measures to prevent last-minute replacements of commission members;

e. strengthen existing legislation and regulations related to the misuse of public resources, including legislative and regulatory provisions on employment, clarify their applicability to national-level officials and increase the capacity of the APC to handle cases in a timely and transparent manner;

f. ensure a level playing field for all candidates and increase oversight and sanctions of the APC, notably on overspending, underreporting and third-party donations;

g. develop the monitoring activities of the Agency for Audiovisual Media Services and its capacities to handle ex officio investigations, and clearly regulate campaigning activities on social media;

h. strengthen electoral integrity by modernising the sealing of ballot boxes, harmonising counting procedures, reviewing polling station layout and introducing a requirement for all accredited persons to wear ID badges; ensure accessibility of polling stations for voters with impaired mobility;

i. specifically monitor the use of party public funding dedicated to women's sections and introduce incentives to strengthen the participation of women and youth in decision-making positions at local level;

j. improve the transparency and adherence to legally prescribed deadlines on electoral disputes and allow for SEC final oversight of the MEC decisions in very specific cases, such as candidate registration and repeat elections, to ensure effective redress and timely decisions;

k. urgently organise new elections in Šavnik in order for the composition of the local council to reflect the will of the voters.

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 2024 early municipal elections in Podgorica (Montenegro) and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

48th SESSION**Fact-finding mission on local elections in Bucharest (9 June 2024)**

Recommendation 524 (2025)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 Romania in 1993, as well as its Additional protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207), ratified by Romania in 2023;
 - c. Chapter XIX of the Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions;
 - d. the Venice Commission Opinion on the Emergency Ordinance regarding some measures for the organisation and conduct of the elections for members from Romania in the European Parliament in 2024 and the elections for local public administration authorities in 2024, adopted on 14 March 2025.
2. The Congress reiterates the fact that genuinely democratic local and regional elections are part of a process of establishing and maintaining democratic governance and that observation of grassroots elections is a key element in the Congress’s role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.
3. The Congress regretted not receiving an invitation to observe the 2024 local elections in Romania, which would have allowed it to base this report on its own observations. It refers to the subsequent circular letter addressed by the Congress on 18 September 2024 to all member States’ Permanent Representations to encourage national authorities systematically to invite the Congress to observe local and regional elections.
4. The Congress acknowledges that, overall, the legal framework is conducive to holding democratic elections at local and regional levels in Romania. However, it considers that the stability of the electoral framework is paramount to ensure trust in the impartiality of the electoral process and deplores the fact that the emergency ordinance to hold local and European Parliament elections on the same day was adopted shortly before the elections, which caused legal uncertainty and implementation challenges, and was not in line with the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters.
5. Based on the findings of the mission and observations made by domestic and international election observers, the Congress notes with satisfaction that:
 - a. despite local and European Parliament elections being held on the same day, the campaign was competitive and predominantly focused on local issues, and voter turnout increased;
 - b. the election administration managed most challenges posed by the emergency ordinance efficiently, and election day was largely held in an orderly and professional manner, with the notable exception of counting;

¹ Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document [CPL\(2025\)48-06](#), explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Randi MONDORF, Denmark (R, ILDG) and Jorge SEQUEIRA, Portugal (L, SOC/G/PD).

- c. the expanded use of technology enhanced transparency at key stages of the electoral process;
- d. measures to monitor campaign financing and prevent illicit funding were welcomed, contributing to increased transparency and in particular, the obligation to publish weekly campaign expenditure.

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

- a. the adoption of an emergency ordinance to amend the legal framework was finalised less than three months before the election day, undermined legal certainty and did not provide enough opportunity for the text to be thoroughly debated and adopted by broad consensus, despite the 2024 electoral calendar being predictable;

- b. while many EU countries traditionally hold European Parliament and local elections on the same day, this change posed considerable challenges to the election administration in Romania;

- c. the legal framework was complex and fragmented across multiple texts, creating potential loopholes, differences in interpretations, which negatively affecting its readability; efforts to reform it were seen as lacking political support;

- d. on election day, the excessive workload placed on polling station commissioners, exhaustion of staff and lack of awareness of the revised procedures led to errors and rushed procedures, especially during counting and tabulation. While some violations may have been deliberate, the tiredness, lack of adequate training and complexity of procedures accounted for most of the preventable errors encountered in these stages;

- e. contrary to good practice, meetings of the election administration were not open to the public and commissions benefited from a wide margin of appreciation, notably with respect to corrections of errors; the electoral dispute mechanism suffered from unrealistic deadlines notably related to candidate registration, recounts and appeals;

- f. the campaign was marked by polarisation, restrictions on posters, instances of early campaigning, media bias linked to party-funded advertising, underregulated campaigning on social media and remaining gaps in transparency of party and campaign finance;

- g. the changes in residency requirements as well as allegations of inaccuracies on voter registers led to confusion about deadlines and may have disenfranchised some voters;

- h. women remained severely underrepresented in local decision-making and were too often placed in unwinnable positions on candidates lists;

- i. citizens must be at least 23 years old to stand in local elections, which is not in line with Congress Recommendation 375 (2015) "Criteria for standing in local and regional elections";

- j. election observation of the handover of ballot papers and tabulation of results, as well as of the activities of county bureaus, is not provided by law.

7. In light of the above, the Congress invites the Romanian authorities to:

- a. refrain from making substantial changes to the legal framework shortly before the elections and from resorting to emergency ordinances to tackle politically sensitive subjects;

- b. develop comprehensive and simplified legislation, in the form of a unified electoral law, to be adopted following open and extensive consultations in parliament and with a broad range of stakeholders;

- c. review procedures applicable to the finalisation of protocols, the handover of electoral materials and tabulation of results to increase transparency and efficiency;

- d. ensure better representation of political competitors in electoral commissions and build the capacity of the election administration to work transparently and professionally, through extensive training of commission members and public meetings of all electoral commissions;

e. simplify the modalities and review all deadlines applicable to complaints, recounts and appeals to provide genuine opportunities and realistic timeframes for valid challenges to be brought by voters and candidates alike and consider introducing mandatory recounts, held in presence of observers, in case of significant deviations;

f. strengthen the oversight and regulatory framework of campaign and party finance, limit the use of subsidies to fund political advertising in the media and ensure prompt investigations and appropriate sanctions, if violations occur; further regulate campaigning on social media and early campaigning;

g. systematically update voter registers based on residency criteria applicable to local elections and consider returning to a six-month residency requirement for local elections;

h. undertake urgent measures to increase the participation of women in politics, notably through the introduction of a 40% gender quota on lists and/or for mayoral positions;

i. review Article 4.1 of the Law on the Election of Local Public Administration Authorities and lower the age-limit for standing in local elections;

j. grant the right for election observers to observe all stages of the electoral process, as a means to increase public confidence in the process.

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 2024 local elections in Romania and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

48th SESSION**Foreign interference in electoral processes at local and regional levels**

Recommendation 525 (2025)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. Recommendation (2003)⁴ of the Committee of Ministers on common rules against corruption in the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns;

c. Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)51 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on standards for e-voting;

d. the Committee of Ministers’ Guidelines on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in electoral processes in Council of Europe member States (2022);

e. Resolution 2390 (2021) “Transparency and regulation of donations to political parties and electoral campaigns from foreign donors” of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;

f. the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (2002), the Venice Commission, Guidelines on Political Party Regulation, (Second Edition, 2020) and its Opinion on the Prohibition of Financial Contributions to Political Parties from Foreign Sources (2006);

g. 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)”;

h. Congress Recommendation 498 (2023) “Local and regional media: watchdogs of democracy, guardians of community cohesion”;

i. Congress Recommendation 478 (2022) “Hate speech and fake news: the impact on working conditions of local and regional elected representatives”;

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 and take all appropriate measures against any interference in electoral systems and processes”, and the revised Priorities of the Congress for 2021-2026;

k. United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

2. The Congress points out that:

a. local and regional elections, while attracting modest interest from authoritarian actors, are not immune to the threat of foreign interference in electoral processes to influence the results of an election,

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-10](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG).

via instances of disinformation, opportunistic cyber-attacks and illicit funding. Despite foreign interference being an old and complex phenomenon, recent geopolitical changes and new technological developments have increased the scale, the number of involved actors and the reach of such actions, making it even harder to attribute these attacks to a state actor;

b. grassroots elections should be decided by the voters residing in a community and having the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority and therefore, national, regional and local authorities should take steps to protect the integrity of electoral processes and to ensure that voters form their opinion free from interference and according to their convictions and have the freedom to express such opinion on election day;

c. while refraining from overemphasising the issue and feeding narratives about rigged electoral systems, a careful examination of recent cases reveals the emergence of many challenges in the handling of potential foreign interference, such as the corrosive effect of small incidents, the increasing manipulation of the concept for political purposes, the growing importance of non-state actors (private companies, individuals, transnational groups, etc) and domestic actors and the potential multiplier that artificial intelligence could represent.

3. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to call on member States to:

a. increase efforts to gather scientific and technical knowledge about the issue of foreign interference prior to, during and after local and regional electoral processes, especially in highly contested elections;

b. acknowledge the potential risks associated with foreign interference in local and regional elections and support local and regional authorities in developing infrastructures and expertise to deal with potential threats and disruption;

c. strengthen political party and campaign finance regulations and oversight to prevent illicit funding of contestants by foreign donors and if not already the case, consider prohibiting foreign and anonymous donations to both political parties and candidates, including in local and regional elections;

d. explore ways of fostering open debate at local and regional levels, work towards debunking alternative narratives and addressing the impact of alternative information environments;

e. reinforce behavioural change by promoting voter education and awareness, in particular of new voters, or from vulnerable groups, to build capacity to identify deceptive foreign information manipulation and to encourage critical thinking, in collaboration with civil society and political parties;

f. promote capacity-building of local and regional authorities, in particular lower-level election administration bodies, on cyber security related to various aspects of the electoral process, in particular to voter registers and results management, in order to detect, understand and counter new threats to the integrity of elections;

g. build the capacities of political parties and candidates in local and regional elections to detect and prevent foreign interferences and protect their systems potential cyberattacks;

h. refrain from taking hasty measures such as enacting overly restrictive foreign influence laws, that could clearly jeopardise certain actors, including civil society, and support fact-based journalism, including in minority languages;

i. avoid holding local and regional elections on the same day as national ones, to better monitor and protect these elections from large-scale malicious operations.

4. 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 explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to member States.

48th SESSION

The situation of local and regional democracy in Georgia

Recommendation 526 (2025)¹

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

a. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), which was ratified by Georgia in 2004, as well as the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the rights to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207), ratified by Georgia in 2019;

b. Congress Recommendation 477 (2022) “Local elections in Georgia (2 October 2021)”;

c. Congress Recommendation 476 (2022) “The situation of independent candidates and the opposition in local and regional elections”;

d. Congress Recommendation 426 (2018) “Local and regional democracy in Georgia”;

e. Congress Declaration 10 (2024) “The situation in Georgia”, adopted during the 47th Session of the Congress, in which its members expressed deep concern over clear signs of democratic backsliding and the weakening of human rights in Georgia, marked by increased polarisation of society and the enactment of legislation that ran counter to Council of Europe standards;

f. the statement adopted by the Congress Bureau on 10 February 2025 on the urgent situation in Georgia, which called on the government of Georgia “to fully respect European standards [...] paving the way to free and fair repeat elections at the national level, free and fair elections at the local level and the just treatment of all Georgians including locally elected representatives”, as well as the statements of the Congress President with respect to Georgia on 15 May 2024, 18 September 2024 and 27 October 2024;

g. the report of the Parliamentary Assembly on the Observation of the parliamentary elections in Georgia, 26 October 2024;

h. the statement of the Council of Europe Secretary General on his country visit to Georgia, released on 20 December 2024, and subsequent declarations;

i. the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice on Electoral Matters (2002), its interpretative declaration on the stability of electoral law and recent Venice Commission opinions on Georgia;

j. the statement made by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights following his country visit to Georgia in January 2025, “Protect freedom of assembly and expression, ensure accountability for human rights violations and end stigmatisation of NGOs and LGBTI people”.

2. The Congress recalls the Reykjavik Declaration (2023), endorsed by all Heads of State and Government, including the then Prime Minister of Georgia, in particular Appendix III on the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy (2023), which applies to all levels of government and states “We will meet our

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 48th Session on 26 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-17](#)), co-rapporteurs: Cecilia DALMAN EEK, Sweden (R, SOC/G/PD), Bernd VÖHRINGER, Germany (L, EPP/CCE).

obligations under international law. We will prevent and resist democratic backsliding on our continent [...] by enhancing our shared commitments as member States of the Council of Europe”;

3. The Congress reaffirms that local and regional authorities are key in upholding and defending democracy, human rights and rule of law, not only within their communities, but as part of the system of checks and balances which represents the backbone of a genuine pluralistic democracy. It underlines the crucial importance of ensuring and guaranteeing a secure and trust-based environment for genuine, open and constructive dialogue, as well as space for the opposition, as is required in a pluralist democracy. It stresses that the right of local authorities to exercise self-government without fear of persecution or retaliation must be guaranteed regardless of the political views of their leaders and representatives.

4. The Congress also reiterates that genuine local democracy allowing all citizens to freely form and express their opinion on the matters closest to them cannot be achieved unless a wide range of other human rights and fundamental freedoms can be exercised without discrimination.

5. It highlights its commitment to pursuing constructive political dialogue with the Georgian authorities, notably in the framework of a high-level visit to Georgia. This high-level visit was carried out on behalf of the Congress by the President and the Chamber Presidents on 3-4 February 2025. On 10 February 2025, the Congress Bureau instructed the Chamber Presidents to present their report on the situation of local and regional democracy in Georgia to the Congress at its 48th Session in March 2025.

6. The Congress wishes to thank the authorities for facilitating the high-level visit, which allowed the delegation to hold open discussions with various institutions at all levels of government. The delegation also exchanged views with representatives of the opposition and civil society.

7. Based on the findings of the above-mentioned high-level visit of its three Presidents, the Congress expresses its concern on the following issues:

a. amid deepening polarisation in Georgia, the rapid and dramatic democratic backsliding observed over the past two years, has affected local democracy in Georgia increasingly: this has intensified in the aftermath of the 2024 parliamentary election, which were rejected by all opposition parties, domestic and some international election observers, notably due to concerns over their integrity, and of the decision to halt Georgian EU accession on 28 November 2024;

b. the progressive marginalisation of the opposition from the political scene and the lack of dialogue between the authorities and the opposition has led to a *de facto* absence of political pluralism, including in municipal councils. This situation has led to an excessive concentration of power by the ruling party, and has prompted the opposition to boycott all decision-making bodies, shrinking the space for negotiation and mediation;

c. following the highly controversial adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence and the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) adopted in first reading, there has been increased intimidation and stigmatisation of NGOs and dissenting voices in the media, which work under increasingly challenging conditions, undermining their freedom of association and freedom of expression. In a democratic society, freedom of expression must be protected, supported and promoted irrespective of whether it is critical of the government, and even if it is influenced by international discourse;

d. the brutal repression of peaceful protesters and opponents by law-enforcement authorities in many cities and particularly in the capital city of Tbilisi, has violated both the freedoms of expression and assembly. Moreover, freedom of assembly in Georgia has been negatively affected by recent legal amendments to increase sanctions and offences related to public demonstrations, which according to the Venice Commission introduced “vague and broadly framed provisions, granting the authorities [including local authorities] excessively broad discretion in their application”. This situation forced to local authorities to take decisions that are not compliant with democratic standards;

e. the instrumentalisation of public institutions including at local level, has resulted in numerous reports of dismissals, intimidation and pressure on civil servants, facilitated by the adoption of amendments to the Law on Public Service;

f. the recent findings by both international and domestic observers have also raised concerns regarding the politicisation of public administration, widespread misuse of administrative resources and pressure on voters during electoral campaigns, unduly tilting the playing field between candidates and distorting voters' will;

g. the legal framework applicable to local elections in Georgia has been amended repeatedly, more than 20 times since the last elections without extensive consultations and broad consensus, which is not in line with the principle of stability of electoral law. The amendments have reinforced the dominant position of the ruling party in the Central Election Commission, undermining its independence, and have also wound back fundamental rules pertaining to the electoral system, gender quotas and the establishment of electoral districts;

h. consequently, the many shortcomings and challenges affecting the respect of democracy, rule of law and human rights have led to a collapse in public confidence in democratic institutions for large parts of the Georgian population, and notably the young people, and damaged local democracy, which is not conducive to holding the 2025 local elections in a trust-based environment; in fact, it risks exacerbating the situation.

8. In the light of the above, the Congress invites the Georgian authorities, as regards the overall situation of local and regional democracy, to:

a. urgently resume political dialogue at all levels of government, through an inclusive political process which engages all stakeholders, including local authorities, opposition and civil society, to reduce polarisation, restore the checks and balances essential in a pluralist democracy and regulate the participation rights of the opposition;

b. repeal legislation in breach of human rights, in particular the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, and refrain from enacting the FARA adopted in first reading, and avoid taking any actions that would further impede the indispensable work of civil society and have a chilling effect on media outlets or undermine the foundations of democracy, all of which would be detrimental to local self-government in Georgia;

c. thoroughly investigate instances of arbitrary arrests and violent actions towards non-violent protesters and journalists at local level, as recommended by the Human Rights Commissioner, release those who are detained including Ms Mzia Amaghlobeli, and, as requested by the Venice Commission in its urgent opinion on amendments to the Code of administrative offences and the Law on assemblies and demonstrations CDL-PI(2025)004, ensure lawfulness, necessity and proportionality in the sanctions for offences related to public demonstrations in municipalities;

d. repeal the contentious amendments of the Law on Public Service and reintegrate employees of local public service dismissed on the basis of these provisions.

9. As regards elections, the Congress urges the Georgian authorities to restore the conditions for a democratic environment ahead of the 2025 local elections, in accordance with the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice on Electoral Matters and previous Congress Recommendations, as these constitute preconditions for the holding of free and fair elections, and in particular to:

a. repeal the amendments adopted in December 2024 to return to the ratio of proportional and majoritarian seats established following the 2021 broad political agreement, and, in accordance with Congress Recommendation 390 (2016) "Women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels", reinstate the gender quota applicable for candidates in local elections;

b. undertake comprehensive legislative reform to address the major shortcomings identified in this field;

c. stop cases of voter intimidation, pressure on public employees, vote buying and electoral violence and proactively investigate and sanction any such cases when they occur;

d. guarantee the independence of the election administration and return to consensus-based decision-making involving the opposition parties in the election administration, and step up the effectiveness of existing legal provisions to prevent misuse of administrative resources;

e. take steps to encourage the opposition to take part in political processes and guarantee fair speaking time in all the media, especially the public media, for all the political parties;

f. secure the right of domestic election observers and continue to regularly invite the Congress to observe local elections in the country and in particular the upcoming local elections;

g. carry out civic education programmes for all stakeholders to mainstream democratic principles.

10. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation and the explanatory memorandum contained in document CG(2025)48-17 in their activities with respect to Georgia.

48th SESSION

Empowering cities and regions to combat human trafficking for labour exploitation

Recommendation 527 (2025)¹

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

a. the explanatory memorandum “Empowering cities and regions to combat human trafficking for labour exploitation” (CG(2025)48-13);

b. Congress Recommendation 165 (2005) “The fight against trafficking in human beings and their sexual exploitation: the role of cities and regions”, and the Declaration on the fight against trafficking in human beings, opened for signature during the 13th Plenary Session of the Congress in 2006;

c. the Council of Europe’s Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No.197);

d. the Reykjavik Declaration adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (2023), which recalls the necessity of fighting trafficking in human beings;

e. Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)21 of the Committee of Ministers on preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation and its explanatory memorandum asking member States to facilitate multi-agency and multi-disciplinary co-operation with regional and local authorities to combat trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation;

f. the work developed by the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, notably the “Guidance note on preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation” (GRETA(2020)12), and the “Compendium of good practices in addressing trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation” (GRETA(2020)08);

g. Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2536 (2024) of the “Precarious and irregular work situations of migrant seasonal and domestic workers” ;

h. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth, and its Target 8.7 to eradicate forced labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking.

2. The Congress notes with concern that:

a. trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation has been on the rise in many Council of Europe member States, particularly affecting vulnerable populations who are often exploited in sectors including agriculture, construction and domestic work;

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 48th Session on 26 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-13](#), explanatory memorandum, co-rapporteurs Cecilia DALMAN EEK, Sweden (R, SOC/G/PD) and Martine DIESCHBURG-NICKELS, Luxembourg (L, ILDG).

b. children, especially unaccompanied and separated migrant children, are increasingly exposed to human trafficking, notably in a context of conflict, economic hardship, family disfunction and inadequate child protection measures;

c. human trafficking has a profoundly negative impact on local communities, undermining the enjoyment of human rights and social cohesion, perpetuating poverty and contributing to the normalisation of exploitative labour practices, not only harming the victims but also destabilising local and regional economies and straining public services;

d. human trafficking should be a key issue on local and regional authorities' agendas as it occurs within their jurisdictions, exploiting local infrastructures and regulations and affecting residents directly, and as they are the level of governance most likely to be able to identify and provide support to potential victims and vulnerable populations;

e. local and regional authorities, despite being the first point of contact for many victims of trafficking, frequently lack the necessary resources, training and coordination mechanisms to effectively prevent and combat human trafficking, including for the purpose of labour exploitation;

f. victims of human trafficking, including for the purpose of labour exploitation, face significant barriers to accessing legal, psychological and social support systems, especially in smaller municipalities and rural areas where such services may be scarce, impacting the likelihood of reporting and identification of victims;

g. the social and economic harm caused by human trafficking, including for the purpose of labour exploitation, necessitates a robust response at local and regional levels, including the involvement of local businesses, civil society and community members to combat these practices and support the reintegration of victims;

h. the complex and organised nature of human trafficking networks require a coordinated, multi-level approach that integrates local, regional and national efforts to dismantle these networks and provide support to victims.

3. The Congress asks the Committee of Ministers to invite the respective national authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. enhance vertical coordination by ensuring that national anti-trafficking actions and strategies are developed in consultation with local and regional authorities and their associations and by providing clear guidance on the implementation of new actions;

b. promote and support the collection and sharing of disaggregated data on confirmed and suspected cases of human trafficking, including for the purpose of labour exploitation, by actors and services involved at all levels in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the state of human trafficking and high-risk areas across the territory;

c. develop a coherent national approach to anti-trafficking efforts that clearly defines the duties and mandates of different authorities, prioritises human rights and victim protection, and encourages safe reporting, particularly for undocumented migrants, unaccompanied and separated children and other persons in precarious situations, ensuring that authorities at different levels of governance receive the means and support needed to carry out their responsibilities;

d. support the improvement of assistance to victims and potential victims by facilitating the creation of multidisciplinary networks and teams at local and regional levels, ensuring they have adequate funding and means to provide specialised support to victims and offer low-threshold outreach services to vulnerable populations.

48th SESSION

The role of local and regional authorities in protecting and promoting social rights and fostering social development

Recommendation 528 (2025)¹

1. On 4-6 November 2025, the United Nations will convene the Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha, Qatar (“the Summit”). This Summit will provide renewed momentum for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (“the 2030 Agenda”) and will build on the legacy of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen.
2. The Summit aims to adopt an action-oriented political declaration, which will advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and strengthen international co-operation, fostering inclusive social development and well-being for all. The event will also be a platform for all stakeholders to collaborate on creating policies and strategies that promote inclusivity, equity and sustainability.
3. For the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”), the Summit provides an opportunity to support the role of local and regional authorities in creating an enabling environment that facilitates the promotion of social rights and delivers effective policies for social development at the level of government closest to the citizen.
4. The Council of Europe has been a pioneer in setting social rights standards since the adoption of the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35) in 1961 and the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) in 1996.
5. The Reykjavík Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in May 2023 reaffirmed that social justice is crucial for democratic stability and security and stressed the need for member States to fully commit to the protection and implementation of social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system.
6. Subsequently, the Vilnius Declaration, adopted by the representatives of Council of Europe member States during the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter held in Vilnius on 3-4 July 2024, affirmed the central position of social rights by calling on member States to promote a rights-based approach to social policy and to share knowledge and good practice in responding to persistent and emerging common challenges.
7. As a political assembly of local and regional authorities from all 46 member States of the Council of Europe, the Congress considers that current and future global challenges in the field of social rights and social developments can only be addressed by harnessing the power of local and regional governments.
8. The Congress draws attention in this regard to the relevant Council of Europe treaties and conventions, and in particular the European Convention of Human Rights (ETS No. 5), the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), the European Social Charter (revised), the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law (CETS No. 225) as well as the Reykjavik and Vilnius Declarations referred to above.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 48th Session on 25 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-11](#)), co-rapporteurs: Martine DIESCHBURG-NICKELS, Luxembourg (L, GILD) and Harald SONDEREGGER, Austria (R, PPE/CCE).

9. It underlines the particular relevance and importance in this field of the Pact for the Future, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 22 September 2024 (A/RES/79/1).

10. It refers in addition to its own previous recommendations in this field, in particular Recommendation 511 (2024) “The UN Pact for the Future: The essential role of local and regional authorities in global sustainable development”, Recommendation 493 (2023) “Localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, Recommendation 450 (2021) “Youth work: the role of local and regional authorities”, and Recommendation 449 (2020) “Fighting sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional level”. It also refers to the Congress Human Rights Handbook for local and regional authorities, Vol. 2, Social Rights.

11. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress calls on the member States of the Council of Europe to support the role of local and regional authorities in protecting and promoting social rights and fostering social development, by:

a. with regard to social development:

- i. recognising the advantages of local authorities, thanks to their proximity to citizens, in developing policies that are needs-based and geographically and culturally grounded, and the importance of working towards the fair and equal fulfilment of social rights at local and regional levels;
- ii. promoting a rights-based approach to social policy and the sharing of knowledge and good practice in responding to persistent and emerging common challenges, especially in relation to inequalities, low incomes and social exclusion, access to housing and demographic change;
- iii. accelerating the process of localising the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring that local and regional authorities have due autonomy for action and decision-making, which includes the necessary competences and the financial and budgetary autonomy required to achieve goals in their respective areas of responsibility;
- iv. involving local and regional authorities in the design, development and implementation of national SDG action plans – ensuring that no one is left behind and that the needs of persons furthest from experiencing equality are addressed first;
- v. developing methodologies and tools to allow the monitoring and assessment of the social impacts of digitalisation including data privacy, digital literacy, access to digital technologies, information asymmetry and information security, as well as putting in place indicators capable of measuring the impact of digitalisation on social cohesion, social inclusion, social capital, and social mobility (in line with the requirements of Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law);
- vi. recognising in the above methodologies that no group can be considered as homogeneous and that each individual has different characteristics, including their gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnic origin, religion, age, disability and socio-economic status, which must be taken into account;

b. with regard to social inclusion, integration and leaving no one behind:

- i. empowering citizens and ensuring all voices are heard, by reaching out to elderly populations, children and youth, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups;
- ii. guaranteeing equal, safe, secure and low-threshold access to public services for all, without discrimination, while ensuring that social rights are upheld;
- iii. committing to strengthening multilevel and multistakeholder work towards inclusive societies without marginalisation, exclusion, racism or intolerance;
- iv. in line with Action 2 of the United Nations Pact for the Future, taking comprehensive and targeted measures to eradicate poverty by addressing the multidimensional nature and

intergenerational transmission of poverty, including through rural development strategies and investments and innovations in the social sector, especially education and health, and by taking concrete action to prevent people from falling into poverty, including by establishing well-designed, sustainable and efficient social protection systems for all that are capable of responding to crises;

- v. creating environments where older persons, hard-to-reach groups and persons with disabilities can live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life;

c. with regard to the implementation of social rights as human rights:

- i. acknowledging the obligations to recognise, respect, and fulfil economic, social and cultural rights, including by meeting “minimum core” obligations, ensuring non-discrimination, as well as enacting legislative measures, developing appropriate policies and committing the maximum available resources towards the progressive realisation of these rights;
- ii. affirming a full commitment to the protection and implementation of social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system;
- iii. establishing relevant indicators and tools that allow local and regional authorities to effectively monitor and assess the implementation of human rights in their activities;

d. with regard to youth and future generations:

- i. highlighting the importance of the active, meaningful and inclusive participation of youth in political and public affairs and committing to strengthening effective youth engagement in policymaking and decision-making processes at the local, regional, national and global levels;
- ii. increasing the involvement of young people in decision-making and in all activities leading to the achievement of SDGs;
- iii. investing sufficient human and financial resources in youth work, whether provided by the authorities or by non-governmental actors, and integrating a future-proofing approach into their planning, with procedures to regularly assess the impact of legislation, policies and activities related to youth work;
- iv. preventing premature school dropouts by adopting strategies tailored to the needs of youth in specific communities, facilitating the transition from youth into adulthood for youth in vulnerable situations and taking an interdisciplinary and multicultural approach to municipal educational offers, and introducing sustainable alternatives to traditional educational paths;

e. with regard to gender equality:

- i. promoting inclusive gender equality with equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for all individuals irrespective of their characteristics including their gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnic origin, religion, age, disability and socio-economic status, to ensure that all individuals live in dignity, safety and security;
- ii. promoting women’s full participation in public and political life and supporting them in accessing active and passive voting rights, at all levels, as an essential precondition for equality and justice;
- iii. recalling that gender equality and the full, equal and effective participation of women in public and private decision-making processes are essential to the rule of law, democracy and sustainable development;
- iv. taking action against sexist attacks targeting women, introducing or revising codes of conduct so as expressly to prohibit sexist behaviour and speech in assemblies; being vigilant during election periods with regard to sexist attacks against women and monitoring candidate nomination procedures for inequalities;

- v. training police officers, social workers and judicial authorities to effectively detect and prevent violence and discrimination against LGBTI people and provide support to LGBTI victims of violence or discrimination, and financing specific programmes to support LGBTI people, including by providing emergency shelters.

12. The Congress will continue its work to promote and support a social rights and social development approach to addressing global challenges at the local and regional levels, in accordance with the principles of the relevant Council of Europe treaties and declarations. It will ensure that citizens remain central to its action and will pursue a collaborative approach including through its involvement in the work of the Committee of Ministers, and other bodies, as well as through co-operation with member States.

48th SESSION**Water resources under stress: towards better local and regional governance**

Recommendation 529 (2025)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”), especially its Articles 3, 4 and 9;
 - b. the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities and Authorities (ETS No. 106), along with its Additional Protocol (ETS No. 159); Protocol No. 2 (ETS No. 169) and Protocol No. 3 (CETS No. 206);
 - c. the Priorities of the Congress 2021-2026, specifically Priority d: Environmental issues and climate action in cities and regions;
 - d. Congress Resolution 500 (2024) “Local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards: from risk preparedness to resilience”;
 - e. Congress Resolution 489 (2022) “A fundamental right to the environment: a matter for local and regional authorities - Towards a green reading of the European Charter of Local Self-Government”;
 - f. Congress Resolution 278 (2009) “Public water and sewer services for sustainable development”;
 - g. Congress Resolution 183 (2004) “The quality and quantity of drinking water”;
 - h. Congress Resolution 163 (2003) “The role of territorial authorities in the management of river basins”;
 - i. Recommendation Rec(2001)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the European Charter on Water Resources;
 - j. The European Green Deal, EU Water Framework Directive, Drinking Water Directive (revised), Groundwater Directive, Floods Directive and Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive;
 - k. United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/169 (2016) “The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation”;
 - l. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development of the United Nations, in particular SDG 1 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”, SDG 3 “Good health and well-being”; SDG 6 “For clean water and sanitation for all”; SDG 11 “Sustainable cities and communities”; SDG 12 “Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns”, SDG 13: “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” and SDG 14 “For life below water”.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document CG(2025)48-14, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Heiða Björg HILMISDÓTTIR, Iceland (L, SOC/G/PD) and Teuvo HATVA, Finland (R, ILDG).

2. The Congress points out that:

- a. fresh water is a vital resource for European societies, economies and the environment; sustainable use and conservation of freshwater resources - including lakes, rivers, groundwater and wetlands - are essential for sustainable development and are key to eradicating poverty and ensuring human development, health and wellbeing;
- b. access to drinking water and sanitation is recognised by the United Nations as a human right; however, many people still lack access to drinking water and sanitation, which exacerbates inequality and poses health and safety risks;
- c. Europe's water situation is increasingly precarious due to extreme weather conditions and climate-related disasters, as well as population growth, placing cities and regions at risk of water shortages, flooding and pollution;
- d. the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has far-reaching environmental consequences for water resources and infrastructure, highlighting the need for resilient water systems and robust water infrastructure protection;
- e. sustainable water governance which addresses scarcity, abundance, and quality is crucial; it requires a strategic and inclusive watershed-based approach that uncouples economic growth from water consumption, and emphasises protection, reuse, and recycling of freshwater resources;
- f. effective water governance requires a strategic, multi-level and multidisciplinary approach with local and regional authorities, national authorities and stakeholders - including civil society, academia and the private sector - collaborating to manage water resources and preserve ecosystems and biodiversity;
- g. local and regional authorities are uniquely well-placed to develop water governance frameworks that meet their communities' specific needs.

3. In the light of the foregoing, 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. adopt and implement effective and sustainable water governance policies, with permanent coordination, planning and cooperation among central, regional, and local authorities across sectors (such as agriculture, industry, and energy) and on the respect of principles and standards on human rights, democracy and social inclusion;
- b. prioritise water security in political agendas to support public health, economic stability and sustainable development while taking into account regional and cross-border resource management needs;
- c. promote river basin and aquifer management policies and foster collaboration between urban and rural areas, engaging a wide range of stakeholders - including businesses, civil society, and youth - to address water-related challenges;
- d. create an enabling environment through legislation, funding and research that empowers local and regional authorities to effectively implement water policies and drive innovation;
- e. implement educational initiatives to raise awareness of the water cycle and include water governance in national curricula, providing training for professionals and the general public on sustainable water governance;
- f. support universal access to water and sanitation, the protection of water resources and infrastructure and promote international cooperation and partnerships for sustainable and human rights-oriented water governance in Europe and beyond, advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

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 in the field of management of water resources.

48th SESSION**Local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina (6 October 2024)**

Recommendation 530 (2025)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) 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 Recommendation on local and regional elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
 - e. the invitation by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, dated 15 May 2024, to observe the local elections held in the country on 6 October 2024.
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’s role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.
3. The Congress acknowledges that the legal framework provides a sound basis for organising local elections and that the 2024 amendments significantly improved the integrity of the process. The Congress regrets that such a decision had to be made only a few months before the election day by the High Representative due to the absence of locally owned consensus on electoral and constitutional reform.
4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that:
 - a. the 2024 amendments significantly improved the integrity of the electoral process and contributed to a less hostile election campaign with fewer instances of hate speech and disinformation;
 - b. the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) worked professionally, handled or initiated ex-officio over 2 000 proceedings on electoral violations, issued numerous complaints and strived to guarantee the overall integrity of the electoral process, despite facing challenges to implement the significant new tasks introduced in the 2024 amendments;
 - c. the introduction of CEC-appointed chairpersons and deputy-chairpersons of polling station commissions, while very sensitive to implement, significantly reduced the long-standing issue of trading of seats;
 - d. the election day was overall calm and organised in a professional manner and the four pilot projects deployed to introduce the use of new technologies in the electoral process were overall assessed positively and perceived as an additional safeguard to the integrity of the process;

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-16](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Marcin GOLASZEWSKI, Poland (L, EPP/CCE).

e. the introduction of the electronic procedure for candidate registration, via a dedicated online platform, significantly facilitated the candidate verification and registration procedures;

f. the legal framework allows for the participation of national minorities in local elections, as voters, candidates and members of the election administration;

g. despite important societal obstacles to their participation, numerous young and female candidates stood in elections for local councils and to participated in the work of polling station commissions (PSC).

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

a. in a context marked by social and political fragmentation, the lack of political will to complete negotiations on much-needed electoral reforms led the High Representative to adopt wide-ranging amendments shortly before the election period, undermining the stability of the electoral framework;

b. the inadequate human and financial resources of the CEC, combined with political pressure and tight timeframes to implement extensive amendments, placed a significant burden on all levels of administration and left some important legal provisions partially or fully unfulfilled, notably on the appointments of PSC chairpersons and deputies;

c. despite a more proactive approach to sanctioning campaign violations, the number of allegations of misuse of administrative resources and other violations by political subjects remained worryingly high in the weeks leading to the elections;

d. challenges to establish 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 in local elections, which is not in line with Congress Recommendation 369 (2015) "Electoral lists and voters residing *de facto* abroad";

e. election dispute resolution was negatively affected by an increase in the number of disputes, important backlogs and insufficient transparency, notably on the publication of some decisions and the proportionality and justification of sanctions, which resulted in hundreds of proceedings pending on election day and limited the right to an effective remedy; the procedure for the appointment of PSC chairpersons and deputies lacked final judicial oversight;

f. while disillusionment with electoral processes is widespread in Bosnia and Herzegovina, voters were provided with insufficient information to make an informed choice, as media coverage was limited and political subjects often failed to appear in debates or to explain their plans if elected;

g. the media landscape was negatively affected by the worrying situation of the public broadcasters, the lack of transparency of media ownership and increasing political pressure and threats against journalists in Republika Srpska;

h. the election day was marked by some technical and procedural inconsistencies and irregularities and Congress teams observed significant breaches to the secrecy of the vote, some delays due to technical issues in stations piloting IT solutions and a relatively high number of important violations, while accessibility for voters with mobility impairments was not ensured in most polling stations;

i. campaign and party finance provisions still did not guarantee full transparency and accountability as reports were handled only after the election day and were marred by allegations of underreporting, while sanctions were perceived as not dissuasive, timely or proportional enough to counterbalance the financial benefits for political parties that circumvent legal provisions; at the same time, newly established spending limits were considered unrealistically low in some municipalities;

j. participation of women and youth in local democracy was limited, in particular in local leadership positions, and amendments to promote gender equality in the media and campaign events were broadly unsuccessful;

k. provisions on the right to be elected based on ethnic criteria have been repeatedly deemed in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights and were not addressed by the latest amendments;

l. due to its ethnic-based political structure, the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina is still perceived as permeable to external influences, in particular during election campaigns.

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

a. re-open, in view of the 2026 general elections, broad and inclusive negotiations on comprehensive electoral and constitutional reform to address longstanding discriminatory provisions and tackle remaining shortcomings;

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; raise awareness of political entities as regards the new provisions of the law and applicable sanctions, as a means to mainstream the fight against electoral corruption;

c. pursue efforts to clean up and make public the Central Voters Register and address the lack of residency requirement to vote in local elections;

d. take steps to enhance transparency and professionalism of the election administration in particular on election dispute resolution, increase capacity of the legal department of the CEC to handle all proceedings in a timely manner and introduce judicial review of PSC appointments;

e. fully implement existing media legislation in a timely manner including oversight and enforcement powers of bodies responsible for media monitoring, and promote programme-based and inclusive debates; in Republika Srpska specifically, refrain from further weakening freedom of expression in the entity and introduce measures to protect journalists from political pressure;

f. improve the accessibility and review the layout of polling stations, reinforce the training provided to lower-level commissioners in order to increase their knowledge of counting procedures and consider the introduction of more dissuasive sanctions in case of electoral violations;

g. on IT pilot projects specifically, strengthen the reliability of electronic systems by refining related procedures and organise well ahead of elections comprehensive training and information on deployed technologies, both for electoral officials and voters;

h. limit the use of cash transactions in campaigns, publish interim reports upon reception and introduce more proportional sanctions in cases of non-submission of reports and underreporting; in line with past GRECO recommendations, give the Central Electoral Commission a mandate to supervise the expenditures of political parties outside electoral campaigns;

i. review provisions aimed at increasing the participation of women and youth in decision-making positions, as mayors or heads of lists, and consider quotas in seat allocation and de-registration of lists not complying with gender quotas;

j. conduct an analysis of potential influence by foreign actors in local elections and identify steps to prevent violations related to voters lists, campaign events and campaign finance.

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 2024 local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

48th SESSION**Verification of new members' credentials**Resolution 506 (2025)¹

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

a. the provisions of Article 7 of the Charter of the Congress appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress;

b. Rule 6 of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress;

c. the Bureau decision of 24 March 2025 based on the opinion of the rapporteurs responsible for the verification of the credentials of new members, concluding that the national delegations as proposed comply with the criteria of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

2. The Congress:

a. notes that 426 of the 544 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;

b. notes that 68 seats are still vacant.

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

a. approves the credentials of members of national delegations as set out in document CG(2025)48-04, 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 of Congress members, in accordance with the provisions of Rule 6 of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress;

c. invites the authorities of the member States concerned to fill the vacant seats as soon as possible, in accordance with the applicable provisions.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 48th Session on 25 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-02](#)), co-rapporteurs: Andrew BOFF, United Kingdom (R, ECR) and Martine DIESCHBURG-NICKELS, Luxembourg (L, ILDG).

48th SESSION**Early Municipal Elections in Podgorica (29 September 2024)**

Resolution 507 (2025)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), ratified by Montenegro on 12 September 2008;
 - c. Chapter XIX of the Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions;
 - d. Congress Recommendation 506 (2024) “Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Montenegro”;
 - e. the invitation by the authorities of Podgorica, dated 5 September 2024, to observe early municipal elections held in the country on 29 September 2024.
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 Congress’s role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.
3. The Congress acknowledges that, overall, the legal framework in Montenegro is conducive to holding democratic elections at local level.
4. The Congress notes with concern that:
 - a. the legal framework governing local elections is fragmented across different texts and is very complex, with vagueness and loopholes negatively affecting its readability, while political will to reform it remains low;
 - b. the legal framework provides for local elections to be held on a rolling basis, resulting in a nearly constant state of campaigning for all stakeholders. In addition, the absence of a residency requirement for local elections, as per the 2020 Constitutional Court decision, raises concerns about the accuracy of voter lists and fuels recurring allegations of electoral tourism;
 - c. independent candidates are not allowed to stand in local elections, which is not in line with Congress Recommendation 476 (2022) “The situation of independent candidates in local and regional elections”;

¹ Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document [CPL\(2025\)48-05](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Randi MONDORF, Denmark (R, ILDG).

d. local issues remained largely overshadowed by national ones and by the high involvement of national-level officials – sometimes leading the candidate lists without planning on accepting the mandate – and the elections were perceived as bargaining tools for national political negotiations, undermining local self-government in Montenegro;

e. challenges related to the independence and ownership of the media were significant, particularly regarding long-standing allegations of political and foreign influence on local election coverage;

f. women and youth continued to be largely under-represented in the media and also as heads of lists;

g. the election administration lacks transparency in handling complaints, notably at the level of the Constitutional Court, and the SEC has limited capacity to review over lower-level decisions in local elections;

h. last but not least, political deadlocks at local and national levels have negatively impacted local self-government in Montenegro and most notably in the municipality of Šavnik where election results were never finalised despite nine rounds of voting between October and December 2022, effectively leaving the local council elected in 2018 in power.

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

a. undertakes to strengthen its political dialogue with the authorities of Montenegro, and in particular the Ministry of Public Administration, 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;

b. invites the rapporteurs to update the Monitoring Committee regularly during its meetings on the latest developments as regards local democracy in Montenegro and, in particular, as regards the shortcomings identified in the recommendation and its explanatory memorandum, as well as in Congress Recommendation 506 (2024) “The Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Montenegro”.

48th SESSION**Foreign interference in electoral processes at local and regional levels**

Resolution 508 (2025)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. Recommendation (2003)⁴ of the Committee of Ministers on common rules against corruption in the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns;
 - c. Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)51 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on standards for e-voting;
 - d. the Committee of Ministers’ Guidelines on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in electoral processes in Council of Europe member States (2022);
 - e. Resolution 2390 (2021) “Transparency and regulation of donations to political parties and electoral campaigns from foreign donors” of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;
 - f. the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (2002), the Venice Commission, Guidelines on Political Party Regulation, (Second Edition, 2020) and its Opinion on the Prohibition of Financial Contributions to Political Parties from Foreign Sources (2006);
 - g. 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)”;
 - h. Congress Resolution 496 (2023) “Local and regional media: watchdogs of democracy, guardians of community cohesion”;
 - i. Congress Resolution 485 (2022) “Hate speech and fake news: the impact on working conditions of local and regional elected representatives”;
 - 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 and take all appropriate measures against any interference in electoral systems and processes”, and revised Priorities of the Congress for 2021-2026;
 - k. United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.
2. The Congress points out that:

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-10](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG).

a. local and regional elections, while attracting modest interest from authoritarian actors, are not immune to the threat of foreign interference in electoral processes to influence the results of an election, via instances of disinformation, opportunistic cyber-attacks and illicit funding. Despite foreign interference being an old and complex phenomenon, recent geopolitical changes and new technological developments have increased the scale, the number of involved actors and the reach of such actions, making it even harder to attribute these attacks to a state actor;

b. grassroots elections should be decided by the voters residing in a community and having the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority and therefore, national, regional and local authorities should take steps to protect the integrity of electoral processes and to ensure that voters form their opinion free from interference and according to their convictions and have the freedom to express such opinion on election day;

c. while refraining from overemphasising the issue and feeding narratives about rigged electoral systems, a careful examination of recent cases reveals the emergence of many challenges in the handling of potential foreign interference, such as the corrosive effect of small incidents, the increasing manipulation of the concept for political purposes, the growing importance of non-state actors (private companies, individuals, transnational groups, etc) and domestic actors and the potential multiplier that artificial intelligence could represent.

3. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress underlines the importance of adopting a coordinated approach and:

a. calls on its members to take into consideration in their activities the potential risks related to foreign interference in electoral processes at local and regional levels, promote voter education and develop tools to support local and regional authorities to effectively counter this issue;

b. invites the Monitoring Committee to draw attention to this issue when contributing to future reviews of the Venice Commission Rule of Law Checklist and to systematically introduce a dedicated section in Congress election observation reports;

c. invites the Governance Committee to mainstream this issue when developing or contributing to activities related to corruption at local and regional levels, including when contributing to the GRECO's sixth round of evaluations on local and regional corruption;

4. On the basis of this document, the Congress commits itself to continued co-operation with the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Venice Commission as well as with international partner organisations in order to collect, compare and evaluate examples of good practice related to foreign interference in electoral processes.

48th SESSION

The situation of local and regional democracy in Georgia

Resolution 509 (2025)¹

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

a. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), which was ratified by Georgia in 2004, as well as the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the rights to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207), ratified by Georgia in 2019;

b. Congress Recommendation 477 (2022) “Local elections in Georgia (2 October 2021)”;

c. Congress Recommendation 476 (2022) “The situation of independent candidates and the opposition in local and regional elections”;

d. Congress Recommendation 426 (2018) “Local and regional democracy in Georgia”;

e. Congress Declaration 10 (2024) “The situation in Georgia”, adopted during the 47th Session of the Congress, in which its members expressed deep concern over clear signs of democratic backsliding and the weakening of human rights in Georgia, marked by increased polarisation of society and the enactment of legislation that ran counter to Council of Europe standards;

f. the statement adopted by the Congress Bureau on 10 February 2025 on the urgent situation in Georgia, which called on the government of Georgia “to fully respect European standards [...] paving the way to free and fair repeat elections at the national level, free and fair elections at the local level and the just treatment of all Georgians including locally elected representatives”, as well as the statements of the Congress President with respect to Georgia on 15 May 2024, 18 September 2024 and 27 October 2024;

g. the report of the Parliamentary Assembly on the Observation of the parliamentary elections in Georgia, 26 October 2024;

h. the statement of the Council of Europe Secretary General on his country visit to Georgia, released on 20 December 2024, and subsequent declarations;

i. the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice on Electoral Matters (2002), its interpretative declaration on the stability of electoral law and recent Venice Commission opinions on Georgia;

j. the statement made by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights following his country visit to Georgia in January 2025, “Protect freedom of assembly and expression, ensure accountability for human rights violations and end stigmatisation of NGOs and LGBTI people”.

2. The Congress recalls the Reykjavik Declaration (2023), endorsed by all Heads of State and Government, including the then Prime Minister of Georgia, in particular Appendix III on the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy (2023), which applies to all levels of government and states “We will meet our

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 48th Session on 26 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-17](#)), co-rapporteurs: Cecilia DALMAN EEK, Sweden (R, SOC/G/PD), Bernd VÖHRINGER, Germany (L, EPP/CCE).

obligations under international law. We will prevent and resist democratic backsliding on our continent [...] by enhancing our shared commitments as member States of the Council of Europe”.

3. The Congress reaffirms that local and regional authorities are key in upholding and defending democracy, human rights and rule of law, not only within their communities, but as part of the system of checks and balances which represents the backbone of a genuine pluralistic democracy. It underlines the crucial importance of ensuring and guaranteeing a secure and trust-based environment for genuine, open and constructive dialogue, as well as space for the opposition, as is required in a pluralist democracy. It stresses that the right of local authorities to exercise self-government without fear of persecution or retaliation must be guaranteed regardless of the political views of their leaders and representatives.

4. The Congress also reiterates that genuine local democracy allowing all citizens to freely form and express their opinion on the matters closest to them cannot be achieved unless a wide range of other human rights and fundamental freedoms can be exercised without discrimination.

5. It highlights its commitment to pursuing constructive political dialogue with the Georgian authorities, notably in the framework of a high-level visit to Georgia. This high-level visit was carried out on behalf of the Congress by the President and the Chamber Presidents on 3-4 February 2025. On 10 February 2025, the Congress Bureau instructed the Chamber Presidents to present their report on the situation of local and regional democracy in Georgia to the Congress at its 48th Session in March 2025.

6. The Congress wishes to thank the authorities for facilitating the high-level visit, which allowed the delegation to hold open discussions with various institutions at all levels of government. The delegation also exchanged views with representatives of the opposition and civil society.

7. Based on the findings of the above-mentioned high-level visit of its three Presidents, the Congress expresses its concern on the following issues:

a. amid deepening polarisation in Georgia, the rapid and dramatic democratic backsliding observed over the past two years, has affected local democracy in Georgia increasingly: this has intensified in the aftermath of the 2024 parliamentary election, which were rejected by all opposition parties, domestic and some international election observers, notably due to concerns over their integrity, and of the decision to halt Georgian EU accession on 28 November 2024;

b. the progressive marginalisation of the opposition from the political scene and the lack of dialogue between the authorities and the opposition has led to a *de facto* absence of political pluralism, including in municipal councils. This situation has led to an excessive concentration of power by the ruling party, and has prompted the opposition to boycott all decision-making bodies, shrinking the space for negotiation and mediation;

c. following the highly controversial adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence and the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) adopted in first reading, there has been increased intimidation and stigmatisation of NGOs and dissenting voices in the media, which work under increasingly challenging conditions, undermining their freedom of association and freedom of expression. In a democratic society, freedom of expression must be protected, supported and promoted irrespective of whether it is critical of the government, and even if it is influenced by international discourse;

d. the brutal repression of peaceful protesters and opponents by law-enforcement authorities in many cities and particularly in the capital city of Tbilisi, has violated both the freedoms of expression and assembly. Moreover, freedom of assembly in Georgia has been negatively affected by recent legal amendments to increase sanctions and offences related to public demonstrations, which according to the Venice Commission introduced “vague and broadly framed provisions, granting the authorities [including local authorities] excessively broad discretion in their application”. This situation forced to local authorities to take decisions that are not compliant with democratic standards;

e. the instrumentalisation of public institutions including at local level, has resulted in numerous reports of dismissals, intimidation and pressure on civil servants, facilitated by the adoption of amendments to the Law on Public Service;

f. the recent findings by both international and domestic observers have also raised concerns regarding the politicisation of public administration, widespread misuse of administrative resources and pressure on voters during electoral campaigns, unduly tilting the playing field between candidates and distorting voters' will;

g. the legal framework applicable to local elections in Georgia has been amended repeatedly, more than 20 times since the last elections without extensive consultations and broad consensus, which is not in line with the principle of stability of electoral law. The amendments have reinforced the dominant position of the ruling party in the Central Election Commission, undermining its independence, and have also wound back fundamental rules pertaining to the electoral system, gender quotas and the establishment of electoral districts.

h. consequently, the many shortcomings and challenges affecting the respect of democracy, rule of law and human rights have led to a collapse in public confidence in democratic institutions for large parts of the Georgian population, and notably the young people, and damaged local democracy, which is not conducive to holding the 2025 local elections in a trust-based environment; in fact, it risks exacerbating the situation.

8. In the light of the above, the Congress:

a. instructs the Monitoring Committee to continue its work to extend the guarantees for free and fair elections applicable to local and regional electoral processes and to delay the visit to monitor the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government to after the upcoming local elections;

b. stands ready to carry out, if necessary, a fact-finding or high-level visit, depending on the progress made on fulfilling the points raised in Recommendation 526 (2025) and invites the Standing Rapporteur on Human Rights to take part in such a visit to assess the situation of human rights at local level in the country;

c. invites its Bureau and Monitoring Committee to introduce a standing item on the agendas of their future meetings to discuss the situation of local democracy in Georgia until Recommendation 526 (2025) has been fully implemented;

d. continues to support the implementation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia (2024-2027) through dedicated cooperation projects; and in particular, reinforce the capacities of local authorities and their representative association, to work as a fully-fledged intermediary to promote the needs and identify the challenges existing at local level;

e. calls on the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia to ensure that it serves as the representative body of all local authorities, not only those in which the majority of seats are held by the ruling party and that all political actors take part in its work;

9. The Congress stands ready to pursue its political dialogue with the delegation of Georgia to the Congress, in its full composition, to cooperate on the implementation of Recommendation 526 (2025) and the present Resolution.

Empowering cities and regions to combat human trafficking for labour exploitation

Resolution 510 (2025)¹

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe refers to:
 - a. the explanatory memorandum “Empowering cities and regions to combat human trafficking for labour exploitation” (CG(2025)48-13);
 - b. Congress Resolution 196 (2005) “The fight against trafficking in human beings and their sexual exploitation: the role of cities and regions”, and the Declaration on the fight against trafficking in human beings, opened for signature during the 13th Plenary Session of the Congress in 2006;
 - c. the Council of Europe’s Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No.197);
 - d. the Reykjavik Declaration adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (2023), which recalls the necessity of fighting trafficking in human beings;
 - e. Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)21 of the Committee of Ministers on preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation and its explanatory memorandum asking member States to facilitate multi-agency and multi-disciplinary co-operation with regional and local authorities to combat trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation;
 - f. the work developed by the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, notably the “Guidance note on preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation” (GRETA(2020)12), and the “Compendium of good practices in addressing trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation” (GRETA(2020)08);
 - g. Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2536 (2024) “Precarious and irregular work situations of migrant seasonal and domestic workers”;
 - h. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth, and its Target 8.7 to eradicate forced labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking.
2. The Congress notes with concern that:
 - a. trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation has been on the rise in many Council of Europe member States, particularly affecting vulnerable populations who are often exploited in sectors including agriculture, construction and domestic work;
 - b. children, especially unaccompanied and separated migrant children, are increasingly exposed to human trafficking, notably in a context of conflict, economic hardship, family disfunction and inadequate child protection measures;

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 48th Session on 26 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-13](#), explanatory memorandum, co-rapporteurs Cecilia DALMAN EEK, Sweden (R, SOC/G/PD) and Martine DIESCHBURG-NICKELS, Luxembourg (L, ILDG).

c. human trafficking has a profoundly negative impact on local communities, undermining the enjoyment of human rights and social cohesion, perpetuating poverty and contributing to the normalisation of exploitative labour practices, not only harming the victims but also destabilising local and regional economies and straining public services;

d. human trafficking should be a key issue on local and regional authorities' agendas as it occurs within their jurisdictions, exploiting local infrastructures and regulations and affecting residents directly, and as they are the level of governance most likely to be able to identify and provide support to potential victims and vulnerable populations;

e. local and regional authorities, despite being the first point of contact for many victims of trafficking, frequently lack the necessary resources, training and coordination mechanisms to effectively prevent and combat human trafficking, including for the purpose of labour exploitation;

f. victims of human trafficking, including for the purpose of labour exploitation, face significant barriers to accessing legal, psychological and social support systems, especially in smaller municipalities and rural areas where such services may be scarce, impacting the likelihood of reporting and identification of victims;

g. the social and economic harm caused by human trafficking, including for the purpose of labour exploitation, necessitates a robust response at local and regional levels, including the involvement of local businesses, civil society and community members to combat these practices and support the reintegration of victims;

h. the complex and organised nature of human trafficking networks require a coordinated, multi-level approach that integrates local, regional and national efforts to dismantle these networks and provide support to victims.

3. The Congress calls on local and regional authorities in member States to:

a. place the fight against human trafficking high on the political agenda of local and regional councils, by adopting a comprehensive human-rights based strategy that puts victims at the centre of all efforts aimed at protecting, assisting and providing redress, and refraining from using rhetoric that criminalises victims of human trafficking;

b. enhance efforts to prevent human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation through the development and implementation of outreach programmes for at-risk populations, including effective protection measures for unaccompanied and separated children in a context of migration, as well as targeted information campaigns and training about the risks and signs of human trafficking for labour exploitation aimed at political representatives, public servants, employers and civil society organisations who are likely come in contact with potential victims;

c. make use of zoning and licensing regulations and other procedures to erect administrative and financial barriers that disrupt the logistical processes used by human traffickers and exploiters and prevent the establishment of trafficking practices;

d. implement and enforce ethical procurement policies that ensure the supply chains of cities and regions are free from labour exploitation, in collaboration with trade unions, NGOs, and other stakeholders, and monitor compliance and take action against violations, including in public contracting processes;

e. improve detection and referral systems through the establishment of low-threshold services and mobile outreach teams, using risk-profiling to identify at-risk sites or sectors, and ensure the existence of safe, multilingual reporting pathways that protect victims from retaliation or further exploitation;

f. strengthen assistance to victims and potential victims of human trafficking, including for the purpose of labour exploitation, by establishing regional contact points that can offer support to local services dealing with trafficking cases and by setting up intermunicipal collaboration structures to pool specialised services and to standardise practices with a view to ensuring consistent care to victims;

g. establish or strengthen local and regional anti-trafficking networks and multidisciplinary teams that facilitate the exchange of information, the organisation of joint inspections and the coordination of actions among various stakeholders and across different levels of government.

4. The Congress calls on national associations of local and regional authorities to:

a. support capacity-building amongst their members by developing training and resources for local and regional authorities on the prevention and detection of human trafficking, with a specific focus on human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation;

b. advocate for policy consistency by engaging with national governments to ensure that anti-trafficking policies, particularly those addressing labour exploitation, are coherent across all levels of government and that local and regional authorities are adequately supported and involved in national decision-making processes regarding the fight against human trafficking.

Water resources under stress: towards better local and regional governance

Resolution 511 (2025)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”), especially its Articles 3, 4 and 9;
 - b. the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities and Authorities (ETS No. 106), along with its Additional Protocol (ETS No. 159), Protocol No. 2 (ETS No. 169) and Protocol No. 3 (CETS No. 206);
 - c. the Priorities of the Congress 2021-2026, specifically Priority d: Environmental issues and climate action in cities and regions;
 - d. Congress Resolution 500 (2024) “Local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards: from risk preparedness to resilience”;
 - e. Congress Resolution 489 (2022) “A fundamental right to the environment: a matter for local and regional authorities - Towards a green reading of the European Charter of Local Self-Government”;
 - f. Congress Resolution 278 (2009) “Public water and sewer services for sustainable development”;
 - g. Congress Resolution 183 (2004) “The quality and quantity of drinking water”;
 - h. Congress Resolution 163 (2003) “The role of territorial authorities in the management of river basins”;
 - i. Recommendation Rec(2001)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the European Charter on Water Resources;
 - j. The European Green Deal, EU Water Framework Directive, Drinking Water Directive (revised), Groundwater Directive, Floods Directive and Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive;
 - k. United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/169 (2016) “The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation”;
 - l. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development of the United Nations, in particular SDG 1 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”, SDG 3 “Good health and well-being”; SDG 6 “For clean water and sanitation for all”; SDG 11 “Sustainable cities and communities”; SDG 12 “Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns”, SDG 13: “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” and SDG 14 “For life below water”.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document CG(2025)48-14, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Heiða Björg HILMISDOTTIR, Iceland (L, SOC/G/PD) and Teuvo HATVA, Finland (R, ILDG).

2. The Congress points out that:

a. fresh water is a vital resource for European societies, economies and the environment; sustainable use and conservation of freshwater resources - including lakes, rivers, groundwater, and wetlands - are essential for sustainable development and are key to eradicating poverty and ensuring human development, health and wellbeing;

b. access to drinking water and sanitation is recognised by the United Nations as a human right; however, many people still lack access to drinking water and sanitation, which exacerbates inequality and poses health and safety risks;

c. Europe's water situation is increasingly precarious due to extreme weather conditions and climate-related disasters, as well as population growth, placing cities and regions at risk of water shortages, flooding, and pollution;

d. the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has far-reaching environmental consequences for water resources and infrastructure, highlighting the need for resilient water systems and robust water infrastructure protection;

e. sustainable water governance which addresses water-related challenges is crucial; it requires a strategic and inclusive watershed-based approach that uncouples economic growth from water consumption, and emphasises protection, reuse, and recycling of freshwater resources;

f. effective water governance requires a strategic, multi-level and multidisciplinary approach, with local and regional authorities, national authorities and other relevant actors - including civil society, academia and the private sector – collaborating to manage water resources and preserve ecosystems and biodiversity;

g. local and regional authorities are uniquely well-placed to develop water governance frameworks that meet their communities' specific needs.

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

a. prioritise water governance and water security at the local and regional levels;

b. formulate and enforce water governance policies that ensure freshwater availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability, quality, and safety for all, in the light of the human rights principles and standards;

c. integrate water management into planning and development, recognising water's interdependence with ecosystems and accounting for water balances, watershed boundaries and groundwater reserves, while incorporating flood zones into land planning;

d. promote efficiency, effectiveness and trust in water governance through multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder collaboration involving public, private and civil society actors to strengthen local democracy and ensure cooperation between urban and rural areas connected by rivers and aquifers;

e. ensure sustainable freshwater management by setting consumption reduction targets, promoting circular water use, combating pollution and implementing effective water reuse schemes;

f. encourage the development of innovative technologies and business models that promote sustainable water use; and leverage public procurement to support smart water management solutions;

g. ensure that water service providers maintain the security and reliability of networks, invest in long-term infrastructure projects and monitor progress regularly;

h. engage the public through consultation, education and participation for sustainable water use, and regularly communicate the progress and requirements for smart water management.

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