

Final declaration

Conference of National Associations of Local and Regional Authorities

Strasbourg, 12-13 September 2024

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Congress, the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe, and the International Day of Democracy, under the auspices of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe,

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe organised a Conference of National Associations of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe Member States and partner-States for local democracy, participating in the work of the Congress, in Strasbourg on 12-13 September 2024.

The Conference was the opportunity to follow up on the outcomes of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, held in Reykjavík in May 2023.

Further to the decisions of the Summit, the Congress and the national associations highlighted:

- the essential role of local and regional authorities as guardians of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law at the level closest to the citizens, in establishing democratic, peaceful, human-rights based, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient societies;
- the critical role of national associations of local and regional authorities and of their representative associations – particularly the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) – in supporting the essential work of grassroots authorities across Europe and in enhancing local self-government as a landmark feature of the European democratic model, based on the principles set forth in the European Charter of Local Self-Government and its Additional protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority;
- the crucial importance of multilevel governance in addressing the problems and challenges faced by European societies today, such as the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, democratic backsliding, political and social polarisation, climate and environmental crises, social injustice, the reception of migrants and refugees, and other current and future challenges that often exceed national boundaries;
- the vital importance of a strong partnership between the Congress, the national associations and their representative associations in protecting and promoting local democracy;
- the unwavering support for Ukraine, its people, and its local and regional authorities, which continue to face the unprovoked war of aggression unleashed by the Russian Federation, in their courageous fight for democratic values, human rights and a just and sustainable peace in Europe;
- their support to other Council of Europe member States facing ongoing violations of their territorial integrity and grave human rights violations.

The Congress and the national associations reiterated their shared commitment to upholding democracy, the rule of law, and human rights at the grassroots level.

Together, they committed to further strengthening cooperation to implement the Reykjavik Declaration, notably on:

Supporting Ukrainian local and regional authorities in close collaboration with the Ukrainian national associations by:

- further developing and strengthening local and regional partnerships and increasing support through cooperation agreements between Ukrainian cities and regions and other European local and regional authorities, contributing to the process of recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine;
- exchanging good practices and providing technical assistance to advance local self-government reform during Ukraine's post-war recovery;
- contributing by all means at their disposal to ensure the safe return of all Ukrainian civilians, particularly children, forcibly deported from occupied areas of Ukraine to the territory of the Russian Federation, and applying pressure on Russia to release Ukrainian local and regional elected representatives held captive by Russian occupiers;

The Congress and the Ukrainian national associations will join efforts to contribute to the work of the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, as a step towards building an international compensation mechanism for the victims of this aggression;

Securing and strengthening local democracy and good governance by:

- ensuring the implementation of the Congress recommendations on the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and its Additional Protocol, to enhance local democracy and prevent and resist possible democratic backsliding in some member States;
- ensuring the implementation of the Congress recommendations on the observation of local and regional elections;
- collaborating in the implementation of the Congress cooperation projects and activities aimed at supporting member and partner States in delivering good governance at all levels;
- promoting citizen participation, with an emphasis on youth engagement, in public life and decision-making processes within their communities, and open government, including through the Congress's Rejuvenating Politics initiative—celebrating its 10th anniversary this year—and the European Local Democracy Week.

Enhancing the shared responsibility of all levels of government to implement human rights and uphold the rule of law by:

- raising local and regional authorities' awareness of their human rights obligations, as public authorities subject to the State's obligations to respect and protect human rights, including those guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter, and other relevant Council of Europe conventions;
- strengthening political dialogue and co-operation with local and regional authorities in order to facilitate the process of executing the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights which concern them
- promoting the role of grassroots authorities in upholding the separation of powers with appropriate checks and balances, thereby preventing any excessive concentration of power.

Taking coordinated action in the protection of the environment by:

- supporting the vital role and initiatives of cities, regions and local communities in protecting the environment and addressing the consequences of climate change, to contribute to global environmental efforts and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.