

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 274 (2008)¹ Congress policy in observing local and regional elections

1. The practice of observing elections in the Council of Europe began after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, as part of the consideration of applications for membership from a number of new democracies.

2. The Congress was notably entrusted with observing local and regional elections in the transition countries, supplementing the work done by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe regarding national and presidential elections.

3. In order to safeguard grassroots democracy and ensure that national authorities devote the necessary attention to local and regional elections, the Congress has adopted measures to make sure that appropriate action is taken in response to its election observation exercises and has agreed principles for enhancing its observation capacity.

4. Recognising the unique role played by the Congress in observing local and regional elections, the new Statutory Resolution and Charter of the Congress adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 2 May 2007 specifically state that, in addition to detailed election observation reports, the Congress now adopts recommendations on election observation to national authorities.

5. Firmly believing in the need to consolidate its experience in monitoring local democracy, the Congress is of the opinion that election observation should first and foremost:

a. help to establish institutional structures in accordance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which sets out the principles underlying local democracy, through synergy with the activities of the Institutional Committee of the Congress and closer co-operation with the Council of Europe's monitoring bodies, in particular the Venice Commission;

b. raise awareness of the importance of local and regional democracy by drawing attention to elections and ensuring that they are taken into account by all stakeholders and strengthening the monitoring of the electoral process at supranational and European level by involving the

European Union's Committee of the Regions and national associations;

c. strengthen the unique role of the Congress in observing elections by reinforcing its partnerships.

6. The Congress draws attention to the collective nature of election observation in which local and regional authority representatives, from different geographical areas and varying political "cultures", share their expertise while addressing situations on the ground and undertake to remain both impartial and to make the election observation process and the conclusions a joint exercise.

7. The Congress wishes election observation to take place against the background of a desire for co-operation between the national authorities concerned and the congress delegation and transparency in the electoral process, with the host country being genuinely committed to ensuring the latter.

8. Recognising the crucial role of national associations in fostering local and regional democracy throughout Europe, the Congress consolidated its co-operation with them in a resolution adopted by the Standing Committee in 2007 inviting them to take part in election observation exercises organised by the Congress.

9. In the light of the above, the Congress therefore:

a. welcomes the development of a real Congress election observation strategy;

b. calls on the Standing Committee to adopt guidelines on methodology on observation of elections by the Congress, taking into account the experience of all other relevant structures and bodies;

c. calls on members of election observations to fully participate in this exercise;

d. calls on outside partners to take part in election observations, in particular associations of local and regional authorities and the EU Committee of the Regions, to help make sure that the national governments concerned take appropriate action on the texts adopted;

e. undertakes, for its part, to contribute to the implementation of this strategy, by ensuring a follow-up to the recommendations adopted by the Congress, in particular through a good co-operation with the Council of Europe's instances involved in this exercise, namely with the Institutional Committee of the Congress, the Venice Commission and the Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly.

1. Debated and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 3 December 2008 (see Document CG(15)35RES, draft resolution presented by V. Moreira (France, R, NR), rapporteur).