

GRECO 101st Plenary Meeting

*Side-event organised in cooperation with the Council of Europe
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities*

Strengthening Good Governance : Consolidating Integrity and Accountability at the Sub-National Level

Strasbourg, 20 November 2025

Session Two: Driving Local Reform – Synergies between GRECO and the Congress

Speaking points for *Jimmy MOLONEY, member of the Kerry County Council, Head of the National Delegation of Ireland, Deputy Thematic Spokesperson of the Congress on Ethics and Prevention of Corruption*

- Poll after poll shows that local and regional authorities are the level of government most trusted by the public. That trust is vital, because subnational authorities deliver essential services, manage public funds, and embody democracy where citizens experience it most directly — in their communities.
- The Congress regularly adopts periodic reports that highlight recurring issues on how member States apply the Charter of Local Self-Government, whose application is central to the good local governance that underpins that trust. These reports showcase good practices and positive developments to encourage constructive trends. On the flip side, the reports also serve as an early warning mechanism to detect negative developments and to recommend improvements to prevent and resist democratic backsliding.
- The third periodic report, published in October 2024 and covering 2021–2024, emphasised the ripple effects of recent crises on both the application of the Charter and the conduct of local and regional elections, undermining public confidence in democratic institutions and representative democracy at all levels.
- Added to this, the operations and resources of national, local, and regional governments have been profoundly affected by the rapidly changing environment in which they operate. They increasingly face very challenging conditions — population displacement, inflation, cyberattacks, disinformation, and foreign interference - and very often quite extreme budgetary constraints.
- In this fast-evolving political environment, it is vital that we remain clear-eyed – and on the look-out – for how the threat of corruption is evolving and what must be done to counter it.
- This is true of every level of government, which must of course work together.

- But the situation of local authorities is unique. To function effectively, they need well-defined competences, appropriate conditions of office, adequate financial resources and administrative capacity, as well as autonomy and accountability — the ability to make decisions close to citizens while remaining transparent and answerable for those decisions.
- What problems do we see across Europe in this respect?
- In many countries, there remains a lack of meaningful consultation with local authorities on issues that affect them, which blurs lines, weakens transparency and prevents proper accountability,
- In other situations, we see local politicians threatened by the prospect of arbitrary prosecution, which undermines their ability to act independently.
- And in a context of persistent political volatility and growing polarisation at all levels of government, local and regional elected representatives increasingly face disinformation, hate speech, threats, online abuse, and even physical attacks — all of which undermine their working conditions and capacity to fulfil their mandates.
- In Congress we believe that openness and transparency are not only key for good governance, but that they can help prevent and counter divisions of this kind. When the public believes that government — at any level — is honest and accountable, it makes polarisation, suspicion and conspiracy theories less likely.
- Transparency and integrity are essential to preventing corruption at the subnational level, so it is particularly positive that GRECO's Sixth Evaluation Round focuses on these issues too. There is certainly no shortage of issues to address.
- Transparency in decision-making remains a major challenge. For example, citizens often do not understand how contracts are awarded or why certain projects are prioritised. When politics appears closed, inaccessible, or self-serving, trust erodes — and in the digital age, perception matters more than ever.
- Conflicts of interest are also an important challenge to address — especially in smaller municipalities where everyone knows everyone else, and councillors may also be business owners or volunteers. Ethics rules are required, but rules alone are not enough. They must be integrated into daily institutional practice, with training, guidance, and visible leadership supporting them.
- This really is crucial. From practice, we see that integrity systems are most effective when leadership and institutional culture align with rules. Laws are essential, but leading by example remains the strongest form of enforcement.
- When embedded in planning, procurement, and communication, integrity enhances both effectiveness and public trust.
- The Congress has adopted thematic reports on transparency and open government, conflicts of interest and nepotism in recruitment of staff as well as on transparency in public procurement and protection of whistleblowers. These too are all very relevant for the GRECO work in the sixth evaluation round.

- The findings of Congress' monitoring are also important in this respect. For example, the Congress has observed that in several member States the conditions necessary for the free and effective exercise of local mandates are not fully in place — particularly where fair and transparent financial compensation is lacking.
- Finally, the Congress technical cooperation projects contribute to enhance corruption prevention policies. For instance, with Congress support, pilot municipalities in Moldova and Ukraine have co-created, local open-government plans involving both officials and citizens.
- The Congress' efforts to build networks of integrity champions, together with GRECO's Sixth Evaluation Round converge on the same goal: strengthening integrity and reinforcing democratic resilience. The need has never been greater, nor the timing any better than now.
- By working together and drawing lessons from past activities and previous evaluation rounds, we have at hand a solid foundation for the ongoing Sixth Evaluation Round by GRECO.
- And there is no doubt about their value. By highlighting good and inspiring practices at local and regional levels, this evaluation round will drive change, because peer learning is transformative. Municipalities learn best from one another and the Congress stands ready to support the implementation of GRECO's recommendations.