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GRECO 101st Plenary Meeting

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Congress of Local and Regional Authorities*

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

Strasbourg, 20 November 2025

Session one: Building Transparent, Accountable and Resilient Local Democracy

Local and Regional Governance in Action: The Congress's Contribution to Transparency and Accountability

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- At the Council of Europe's Reykjavik Summit in 2023, European leaders pledged to continue the necessary and relentless fight against corruption – because this crime is an injustice within itself, but also because good governance at every level is central to maintaining human rights, democracy the rule of law: the values that underpin this Organisation
- But the real challenge is not in making commitments. It is in turning those words into action - nationally, regionally, and locally — so that corruption has nowhere to hide.
- GRECO has an impressive record of monitoring anti-corruption efforts and driving real reform — not only across Europe but beyond. GRECO is now recognised around the world for its expertise in strengthening integrity in public life — in parliaments, governments, and the judiciary.
- The GRECO sixth evaluation round provides a new and unique opportunity for local and regional authorities to take a closer look at themselves — through a highly-developed anti-corruption lens. It invites them to examine their systems honestly, to identify weaknesses, and to take focused, practical steps for improvement.
- Equally important, this evaluation round will shine a light on success stories — on the many good practices and effective anti-corruption measures already in place across member States. These examples are not just achievements to celebrate; they are valuable sources of inspiration and guidance for others. They show that transparency, accountability, and integrity in local and regional governance are not just ideals — they are goals within reach.

- Local and regional authorities stand at the very heart of public life. They are the first point of contact with citizens — when applying for a building permit, using local services, or helping shape the future of their communities. This closeness to the people is unique — and it is also an immense responsibility: to lead with integrity, to act with fairness, and to serve with transparency.
- Recognising this, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has long championed the creation of strong ethical frameworks — frameworks designed to meet the real-world complexities and responsibilities in local governance. Through monitoring, thematic reports and technical cooperation, the Congress has stood at the forefront of efforts to build integrity from the bottom up.
- Its monitoring reports on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government offer deep and practical insights into how corruption can be prevented and addressed. They examine the structures of local and regional governance, the division of powers and responsibilities, recruitment and career practices, oversight mechanisms, and the working conditions of both elected representatives and local officials.
- When shortcomings are found, the Congress does more than simply point them out. It offers guidance — practical, constructive solutions — to help national and local authorities strengthen transparency, reinforce accountability, and uphold the trust that lies at the heart of democratic governance.
- The Congress has also adopted a series of thematic reports with the aim of helping local and regional authorities tackle corruption more effectively.
- Nearly twenty-five years ago, the Congress took an important step by adopting the first European Code of Conduct on the Political Integrity of Local and Regional Representatives. For many years, this Code served as a guiding reference for local and regional authorities across Europe.
- But times have changed. Public expectations of honesty and ethical leadership have grown. Digitalisation and the outsourcing of public services have created new challenges — and new risks. That is why, in 2018, the Congress adopted a new European Code of Conduct for all persons involved in local and regional governance.
- This updated Code widens the scope of ethical responsibility. It calls for an explicit integrity policy — one that promotes accountability, transparency, fairness, and the prevention of conflicts of interest. It offers guidance on issues like public procurement, fraud prevention, data protection, and the reporting of wrongdoing. And it highlights the need for real implementation: through education, training, and advice for those facing ethical dilemmas.
- Leading by example, in 2021 the Congress adopted a new Code of Conduct for its members, which introduced a mandatory declaration of conflicts of interest. Signing this Code is now a prerequisite for members to exercise their full rights, and its application has been extended to Congress youth delegates, reinforcing a culture of transparency across generations.
- As part of a road map for preventing corruption, the Congress adopted a thematic report on conflicts of interest, which outlines effective anti-corruption mechanisms based on proactive disclosure, prevention, and resolution procedures, supported by monitoring, guidance, and awareness-raising among local politicians and officials. It also recommends clear rules on

the acceptance of gifts and invitations, together with publicly accessible declarations of interest — practical tools to strengthen accountability and build public confidence.

- Other thematic reports provide practical guidance on key areas such as transparency and open government, public procurement, and whistleblower protection. They underscore not only the importance of transparency itself, but also the need for innovative and participatory ways of engaging citizens in public decision-making.
- The European Urban Charter III is also important here. Adopted by the Congress in 2023, it sets out principles for modern urban policy and includes a dedicated section on integrity and the prevention of corruption as well as others on digitalisation and artificial intelligence. It addresses key areas such as ethical standards, conflicts of interest, public procurement, transparency, and oversight. These principles play a vital role in shaping the behaviour of local and regional elected representatives and officials, while also sending a clear signal of ethical commitment to the public.
- Yet, as the Congress has repeatedly emphasised, standards and rules are only effective if they are rooted in understanding, a shared commitment to good government. We must also educate, motivate, and guide local and regional actors — and indeed the wider public — to value integrity as a shared norm. Building such an ethical culture is essential for the long-term sustainability and resilience of our democratic institutions.
- Through its technical cooperation projects, the Congress has also supported open government and integrity efforts at the subnational level. In particular it helped develop model codes of conduct for local officials — all inspired by the European Code of Conduct adopted by the Congress. Assistance has also been provided through expert guidance, training sessions, workshops, conferences and round tables as well as peer exchanges to help turn principles into practice.
- For example, in Armenia, the Congress built strong partnerships with the Corruption Prevention Commission and the Open Government Secretariat. In Ukraine, it helped create a national platform for dialogue on open government — bringing national and local authorities together around a common vision of integrity.
- The Congress has created a practical tool called Be-Open bringing together international standards and national frameworks to help local authorities identify and manage corruption risks — in Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Kosovo*.
- Importantly, the Congress thematic reports on prevention of corruption have been translated into Albanian, Armenian, Romanian, Serbian, and Ukrainian — helping local authorities across the region put integrity into action.
- The point here is that Congress and local and regional governments across Europe have already done a great deal to stamp out corrupt practices. But there is still more to do to ensure full transparency, accountability and integrity at the subnational level. So, we warmly welcome GRECO's current evaluation round and this event as opportunities to learn more and then to take steps together towards ever-better governance in Europe's communities.