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2 Current political questions

2.5 Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance

Annual activity report 2025

Item to be considered by the GR-DEM at its meeting on 27 April 2026

¹ This document has been classified restricted until examination by the Committee of Ministers.

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INTRODUCTION

Created by the decision of the Third Summit of the Council of Europe (Warsaw, 16-17 May 2005), the [Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance](#) (CEMG) at the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities](#) helps strengthen democracy and good governance at all levels in Europe. The Centre works to uphold the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) and promote respect for the [12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance](#) through co-operation activities and projects implemented in member states and neighbouring countries.

With the help of demand-driven and result-oriented co-operation projects, the Centre of Expertise works around three different thematic axes. First, it supports member States to reform, after meaningful consultation of all stakeholders involved, legislative and institutional frameworks concerning local and regional government, aligning them with Council of Europe standards and with the best of European practice. Second, through its capacity-development components, its work addresses concrete challenges faced by local and regional authorities, contributing to the development of effective, accountable, transparent and human-rights based public institutions. Third, through various methods and processes, including citizens' assemblies, the Centre supports the effective participation of citizens and civil society into decision making done by their elected representatives.

In 2025, the Centre implemented 14 co-operation projects and 12 targeted activities with a combined budget of approximately €19 million, covering 21 member States, alongside targeted support to the Belarusian democratic forces and to Kosovo*. These activities included both national and multi-country initiatives supporting local government reforms, peer learning, the exchange of good practices among local stakeholders, and better involvement of citizens in democratic processes.

The Centre further consolidated its role as a provider of legal and strategic expertise. It advises, upon request, on draft laws and envisaged or planned policy changes. In 2025, it delivered 16 legal opinions and policy advice documents to seven member States, to help guide legislative reforms and institutional adjustments in line with Congress monitoring findings, relevant Council of Europe standards and European experience. The Centre has also developed well-received discussion and planning formats, such as the ad-hoc Peer Review methodology, the Strasbourg format and the High-Level Dialogue (Ukraine). These were employed also to good results in 2025.

Capacity development remained a core pillar of the Centre's intervention. In 2025, around 3 000 participants – including local and regional elected representatives, public officials at all levels and civil society actors – enhanced their knowledge and practical skills related to Council of Europe standards, multilevel governance and democratic local governance through structured training, peer exchanges and advisory activities. Sixteen members of the Congress also contributed to these initiatives, sharing political experience and peer expertise to support dialogue and capacity development. Most such projects take inspiration from the various toolkits which the Centre developed and tested in various countries.

In parallel, the Centre continued to promote innovative democratic practices in line with the [Reykjavík Principles for Democracy](#) and the Council of Europe's roadmap towards a [New](#)

**All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.*

[Democratic Pact for Europe](#). It organised the European conference “[Resilient Europe through deliberative democracy: Cities and regions in action!](#)”, contributing to implementation of Committee of Ministers Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2023\)6](#) on deliberative democracy and promoting the use of deliberative processes to strengthen democratic governance and citizen participation at local and regional level. Its efforts to help local authorities to better engage citizens were welcomed in South-East Europe and Ukraine.

The [European Label of Governance Excellence](#) (ELoGE), promoted by the Congress remained an important instrument for incentivising high standards of democratic governance at local level.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Centre will continue to support member States in strengthening local and regional democracy through co-operation projects. A portfolio of 14 projects with an overall budget of approximately €20 million will further assist countries in implementing reforms and strengthening multilevel co-operation, promoting good governance and reinforcing citizen participation in line with Council of Europe standards. It is expected that demand for policy advice and legal expertise will increase; capacity-development needs remain high and will be addressed, upon request, within the limits of existing resources. Participatory and deliberative democracy will continue to be advanced, and local authorities will be supported to implement such initiatives[†].

European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE)

The [European Label of Governance Excellence](#) (ELoGE) is a benchmarking tool for local authorities, designed to help measure municipal performance, identify areas for improvement, and promote more efficient local governance practice. ELoGE supports practical implementation of the Committee of Ministers Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2023\)5](#) on the principles of good democratic governance, and is composed of [12 Principles of good democratic governance](#), 36 Targets, and 72 Indicators designed to measure municipal performance. The benchmark is employed as a self-evaluation tool, documented and verified by experts, and complemented by questionnaires addressed to citizens and local council members.

ELoGE is managed by national or regional platforms, accredited by the Congress Accreditation Platform, and hence authorised to deliver the label in member states, based on the Council of Europe tools and methodology.

In 2025, requests for accreditation emanating from associations of local and regional authorities to deliver ELoGE were presented to the 2nd meeting of the ELoGE Accreditation Platform in June 2025 from Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Malta, Romania and the Region of Murcia (Spain). The Accreditation Platform welcomed this renewed interest in ELoGE, acceding to the requests and further expanding the network of accredited implementing bodies.

[†]As an example, following specific MoUs signed during Congress session, the Ukrainian cities of Kyiv, Lviv and Rivne will be helped, in 2026, to organise citizens assemblies on topics of interest.

ELoGE award ceremonies held in Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary and Italy in 2025 resulted in 75 municipalities receiving the Label. These municipalities demonstrated compliance with the benchmark requirements, including evidence-based self-assessment and structured consultation of citizens, elected representatives and municipal staff.

Looking ahead to 2026, further ELoGE award ceremonies are expected in Armenia, Bulgaria, Italy, Malta, Romania, Spain and Türkiye, serving as a reliable vector to promote principles of good democratic governance at local level across Europe.

ALBANIA - SUSTAINING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM AT LOCAL LEVEL

Since joining the Council of Europe in 1995 and ratifying the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 2000, Albania has pursued reforms to strengthen local self-government and democratic governance. A key milestone was the 2015 Territorial and Administrative Reform which consolidated 373 local authorities into 61 municipalities.

Ten years after its implementation, national authorities have launched reflections on the effectiveness of the reform, including considerations related to municipal size, service delivery capacity, financial sustainability and territorial cohesion.

The 2021 Congress [monitoring report](#) on Albania highlighted the need to strengthen financial resources for local authorities, deepen decentralisation and enhance administrative capacity. In response, Albania has continued efforts to modernise public administration and improve multilevel co-ordination between central and local authorities.

In this context, the CEMG has supported the consolidation of public administration reform at local level, notably through digitalisation of human resource management, capacity development for local administration, and the promotion of structured citizen participation, in line with Council of Europe standards and EU accession priorities.

The project "[Sustaining Public Administration Reform at Local Level in Albania](#)" (SPAR); implemented from December 2022 to June 2025 with a budget of €700 000, funded by the German Government, contributed to advance human resource management, professional development and democratic governance at local level.

["Advancing Local Governance and Civic Engagement through Institutional Reform in Albania"](#) (ALGORA) project was launched in July 2025 with further funding from Germany and a budget of €800 000. The project aims to strengthen Albania's public administration reform by enhancing multilevel governance, strengthening institutional capacities, and promoting participatory governance practices at local level, in line with European standards. Key partners include the Department of Public Administration (DoPA), the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA), all 61 municipalities, and the central institutions responsible for public administration and local government.

In 2025, activities focused on strengthening the practical use of digital human resource management tools across municipalities. The Collaboration Platform (Colab) was relaunched and the Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS) further promoted among local authorities.

A dedicated helpdesk was established within DoPA to support implementation, complemented by user manuals, technical guidance and video tutorials. Regional and online training sessions were delivered to municipal human resource officers.

The Training Needs Assessment (TNA) module was upgraded and rolled out across central and local institutions, enabling a more structured identification of training priorities and capacity development needs. In parallel, the CEMG collected data on citizen participation mechanisms at municipal level, organised a workshop on civil participation and deliberative democracy, and facilitated policy dialogue, including high-level exchanges during Public Administration Week.

These activities produced measurable results:

- More than 500 technical requests were addressed by the DoPA helpdesk; two user manuals and 23 instructional videos were developed to support municipalities.
- 55 out of 61 municipalities uploaded staff data into HRMIS and Colab.
- Five DoPA staff members developed capacities to ensure sustainability of technical support services.
- 320 human resource professionals developed capacities in standardised HR procedures.
- The Training Needs Assessment module was rolled out across 95 central institutions, 40 local government units and 88 health and education institutions.
- 35 municipalities participated in the survey on citizen participation practices.

These results strengthened the digitalisation, transparency and evidence-based management of human resources within Albania's public administration. They also contributed to the first comprehensive inventory of municipal staff since the 2015 territorial reform and supported the development of performance-oriented professional training systems.

In parallel, Albania was actively involved in the regional project [“Promoting deliberative democracy and innovative approaches to citizen participation in South-East Europe”](#) launched in 2024, along with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

The initiative aimed at reinforcing local democracy and fostering innovative citizen engagement across the region. The CEMG established a Community of Practice on deliberative democracy, comprising 43 representatives of 18 local authorities from the six beneficiaries and the seven associations of local authorities.

Four elected representatives and three public officials from the municipalities of Berat, Roskovec, and Tirana, and a representative from the National Association of Municipalities of Albania enhanced their competences on deliberative democracy and how to organise Citizens' Assemblies. The CEMG also formed a regional pool of 33 trainers to support local authorities in planning future Citizens' Assemblies and translated the [guide](#) “How to organise a deliberative process at the local level?” into [Albanian](#).

Building on these results, further action will focus on consolidating digital human resource management systems, strengthening municipal capacities through tailored assistance and peer learning, and enhancing structured citizen participation. Continued co-operation with both central institutions and local authorities will remain essential to ensure sustainable, accountable and resilient local governance.

ARMENIA - FOSTERING DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT, DECENTRALISATION AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Armenia joined the Council of Europe in 2001 and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 2002; Armenia has undertaken far-reaching reforms to strengthen local democracy, with unwavering Council of Europe support. In late 2025, the Territorial and Administrative Reform of Armenia (TARA) reorganised the country into 70 consolidated communities, followed by the approval of a Decentralisation Concept on 7 November 2023 - further aligning Armenia's governance with the Charter principles.

The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#) adopted in 2020, highlighted areas demanding improvement, notably constrained municipal autonomy, limited local financing, and weak consultation mechanisms between central and local authorities.

In this context, the Centre of Expertise supported revision of the Law on Local Self-Government and strengthened structured consultation between central and local authorities, responding to Congress recommendations and ensuring opportunities for local stakeholders to influence drafting of the new legislative framework for local self-government in Armenia.

The project "[Democratic Development, Decentralisation and Good Governance in Armenia – Phase II](#)" implemented from December 2022 to December 2025; with a budget of €1,100,000, in co-operation with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI), supported the alignment of Armenia's local governance framework with Council of Europe standards and strengthened the capacities of consolidated communities.

Key activities included advancing participatory legislative reform through 17 ministerial working group meetings (three held in 2025) and eight Community Consultation Initiative Meetings (five in 2025), contributing to the drafting of 13 chapters of the revised Law on Local Self-Government. This extensive stakeholder consultation, supported through the project, resulted in 590 amendment proposals, of which 362 were incorporated into the draft.

A comparative study on local duties and fees produced 37 recommendations and informed the development of conceptual proposals to revise the Law on "Local Duties and Fees" to support increased financial autonomy of local authorities in Armenia.

Inter-municipal and cross-border co-operation was supported through capacity development and the provision of small grants. Eleven feasibility studies were developed to build an evidence base upon which to pursue further intermunicipal cooperation, including through three inter-municipal co-operation start-up projects and two cross-border initiatives. A peer learning platform facilitated exchanges between communities and the dissemination of good practice.

In parallel, the project "[Support to Communities Hosting Refugees in Armenia](#)", implemented from January 2024 to December 2025 with a budget of €150 000, supported municipalities hosting refugees from the Karabakh region. The initiative promoted resilience-oriented and rights-based responses by linking [Resilience Building Strategies](#) (ReBuS) to targeted municipal grants.

ReBuS strategies were developed in ten municipalities, with 56 local officials developing capacities to strengthen crisis preparedness and inclusive service delivery. A grant scheme open to 43 communities selected four municipalities for targeted support. In Byureghavan, 235 displaced persons (78% women) received financial literacy training, and 30 energy-efficient

stoves were distributed. Other municipalities implemented initiatives combining vocational training, preschool support and economic empowerment programmes for displaced women and girls.

The CEMG, which was among the first international actors to place Armenian municipalities at the centre of the refugee response, convened a final peer-learning exchange in which participating municipalities presented their achievements. These included the adoption of local crisis-preparedness strategies, one-stop service hubs and refugee skills training programmes, demonstrating improved co-ordination, more inclusive services and strengthened local resilience to current and future shocks.

Project results were successfully presented during a [stocktaking dialogue](#) on the Council of Europe [Comprehensive Response Package](#) addressing the influx of refugees to Armenia.

In addition, the Centre of Expertise supported the Communities Finance Officers Association (CFOA) to adapt the [European Label of Governance Excellence](#) (ELoGE) for implementation in the country.

An ELoGE Stakeholders Platform composed of nine representatives from national institutions, professional associations and civil society was established and convened twice to ensure inclusive oversight and validation of the process. The ELoGE [toolkit](#), including the benchmark, assessment questionnaires, was translated into Armenian, contextualised to the national legal framework, adapted and tested.

Next steps include supporting the adoption and implementation of the revised Law and related secondary legislation and piloting the ELoGE in Armenia.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA - INNOVATING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the Council of Europe and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 2002. The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#) adopted in 2019, underscores the need for deeper citizen engagement, stronger municipal autonomy, and more robust frameworks for local self-government.

Since 2020, the Congress has supported [Citizens Assemblies](#) in the country, fostering dialogue between local public authorities and citizens in local decision-making. The CEMG helped associations of local authorities in both entities to strengthen their institutional co-operation and advocacy capacity, aligning its support with the country's open government commitments and European integration priorities.

The CEMG project "[Strengthening democratic innovations and promoting human rights at local level in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)" implemented from July 2024 to December 2025 with a budget of €630 000, financed in the framework of the [Council of Europe Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022-2025](#), aimed to strengthen deliberative democracy, open local governance and the protection of human rights at local level.

The CEMG worked closely with state-level institutions, and the associations of municipalities and cities from both entities.

Through targeted capacity-building activities, peer exchange and standards-based support tools, the project delivered the following key outputs:

- Establishment of a national pool of 10 certified trainers on deliberative democracy.
- 49 local elected representatives and officials trained on deliberative processes.
- Over 300 local authority representatives engaged in peer exchanges on local governance.
- 37 local authority and civil society representatives trained on human rights at local level.
- A practical [guide](#) on organising deliberative processes and a [platform](#) for sharing good practices were developed.
- A draft study on the legal and institutional framework for human rights at local level was prepared containing 16 draft recommendations.

The intervention generated measurable impact:

- 25 local authorities significantly increased their knowledge of deliberative democracy tools.
- The cities of Mostar and Banja Luka implemented recommendations from the 2024 Citizens' Assemblies, resulting in improvements in digital services, environmental initiatives and heritage protection.
- Municipal accessibility and inclusion were strengthened, including through the development of an accessible website in Modriča and increased awareness of good governance and citizen participation among councilors and officials in Travnik.
- Confidence among trained representatives in applying a human rights-based approach to local governance increased substantially.

In addition, the Centre of Expertise supported the [second joint meeting](#) of the presidencies of the associations of municipalities and cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. This strengthened inter-entity co-operation and resulted in joint recommendations submitted by the associations to central authorities on the draft law on public procurement, reinforcing their role as collective advocates for local government interest.

A new four-year project [“Advancing multilevel dialogue, innovative democracy and human rights at local level in Bosnia and Herzegovina”](#) (2026–2029), will enable the CEMG to develop this support focusing on expanding Citizens’ Assemblies; promoting human rights-based policy-making; strengthening legislative advocacy by associations of local authorities; and institutionalising inclusive local governance practices.

CYPRUS - ENHANCING LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Cyprus has been a member of the Council of Europe since 1961 and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 1988. The country embarked on a comprehensive local government reform process, culminating in new legislation that entered into force in 2024.

In 2025, Cyprus focused on consolidating the reform, aimed at improving efficiency, administrative autonomy and financial sustainability at local level. The reform resulted in the merger of 30 municipalities and 63 communities into 20 new municipalities and introduced the direct election of 93 vice-mayors.

The Congress continues to follow developments closely, with a monitoring visit scheduled for 2026.

In 2025 the CEMG completed the project [“Enhancing the Local Government Reform in Cyprus”](#), implemented from January 2023 to June 2025 with a budget of €840 000 funded by the Government of Cyprus. The project supported implementation of the reform and strengthened the capacity of local authorities to provide good democratic governance and high-quality services to their citizens, according to European standards.

In 2025, the Centre of Expertise conducted a [peer review](#) on municipalities’ internal governance (5–7 Mar 2025) and prepared a report with recommendations informing reform discussions.

Representative from the Ministry, local authorities and their associations participated in two international study visits organised by the CEMG on the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE) and Strategic Municipal Planning (SMP). Two pilot municipalities developed Strategic Municipal Plans through CEMG support and the organisation of dedicated training sessions and public consultations. The ELoGE benchmark and survey questionnaires were applied in four municipalities who were awarded the label at a dedicated event.

Through these activities, the project delivered the following key outputs:

- Four municipalities completed the ELoGE process and were awarded the Label.
- Two Strategic Municipal Plans were developed following public consultations involving 252 participants across ten events.
- Two study visits (19 participants) and one peer review (35 participants) were delivered to support policy learning and institutional improvement.

The project strengthened strategic planning capacity and participatory governance in pilot municipalities, with co-created and publicly consulted plans.

Recommendations from the peer review informed legislative proposals, notably concerning the competences of vice-mayors, demonstrating the relevance of CEMG policy advice based on CoE standards and good practice in member states. Learning from study visits further informed policy development and practice within the Ministry and local authorities.

The project contributed to upholding principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and operationalising Congress priorities by fostering citizen participation, promoting human rights at local level and encouraging responsible environmental governance, in line with the follow-up to the [Reykjavík Summit](#).

Building on these results, the Congress will continue supporting the consolidation of the reform and stands ready to provide tailored expertise. The 2026 monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government will provide an opportunity to assess progress and identify further areas for support.

GEORGIA - ADVANCING PARTICIPATORY AND HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Georgia joined the Council of Europe in 1999 and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 2005. Decentralisation reforms and sustained co-operation with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Centre of Expertise have supported participatory democracy, the localisation of human rights and strengthened local governance.

In 2025, activities were implemented in a sensitive electoral environment. The Centre of Expertise therefore prioritised citizen-focused pilot initiatives while maintaining technical dialogue with the Public Defender's Office, ensuring continued engagement at local level.

The CEMG project "[Advancing Participatory and Human Rights-Based Local Democracy in Georgia](#)" implemented from October 2024 to December 2027 with a budget of €3 500 000 is carried out under the [Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2024–2027](#) with financial support from the Austrian Development Cooperation. The project promotes participatory and human rights-based decision-making at local level, combining Congress methodologies and tools with social and behavioural change approaches to strengthen democratic practices in municipalities.

The first implementation phase focused on practical pilot initiatives demonstrating that participation can deliver visible local results.

[School Participatory Budgeting](#) (SPB) was introduced for the first time in Georgia, piloted in Tbilisi School No. 177 and Zestaponi School No. 4. Through this process, 101 students developed project proposals and approximately 900 students participated in voting, resulting in the financing of three student-led projects by the municipality of Zestaponi and three projects by the school in Tbilisi.

Innovative [Community Talks](#) and [Citizens' Workshops](#) piloted in Oni and Ambrolauri to discuss and develop community initiatives. Guided by an adapted version of the Council of Europe [CivicLab methodology](#), participants identified key local challenges and opportunities. The consultations resulted in the development of 15 community initiatives in Oni and 20 proposals in Ambrolauri, several of which were further considered in 2026 municipal budget.

[Youth Labs for Democracy and Human Rights](#), through the [InoHub Platform "Learning, Sharing, Leading"](#) supported 13 youth-led micro-initiatives and convened 28 youth leaders nationally, strengthening knowledge of rights and engagement tools.

These activities helped strengthen participatory practices at local level by delivering the following results:

- Four citizen- and youth-led initiatives were formally channeled to local authorities, including the three participatory budgeting projects financed by Zestaponi municipality.
- 38 local residents (79% women) participated in Community Talks and Citizens' Workshops, contributing to the development of community-driven initiatives.
- Surveys indicated strengthened civic confidence, with 80% of participating citizens highlighting the importance of civic engagement, while 93% of students involved in SPB pilots reported that young people can influence local decision-making.
- Post-event feedback showed that 75% of participants were confident they would apply the knowledge gained to further develop community initiatives.

Building on these results, the next phase will scale up Community Talks and School Participatory Budgeting, including in remote areas, and further strengthen Youth Labs through mentorship and practical toolkits, while maintaining structured engagement with municipal actors.

HUNGARY - DEVELOPING GOOD DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Hungary joined the Council of Europe in 1990 and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 1994. The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#), adopted in 2021, acknowledged progress in local autonomy while highlighting areas for further improvement.

The Centre of Expertise maintains a longstanding partnership with the [Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities](#) (TÖOSZ), supporting initiatives such as the Hungarian Local Governments Best Practices Programme and the [European Label of Governance Excellence](#) (ELoGE).

In 2025 TÖOSZ coordinated implementation of the third ELoGE cycle in the country. Following the launch event on 2 September 2025, more than 20 municipalities expressed interest in participating in the national ELoGE cycle. Eleven municipalities formally entered the process and completed the full Benchmark exercise and structured stakeholder consultation involving residents, municipal staff and elected representatives.

The Hungarian National ELoGE Award Committee validated the results on 19 November 2025. Nine municipalities - Alsómocsolád, Alsóörs, Bácsalmás, Budapest Capital District XIII., Nagykovácsi, Rigács, Szarvas, Tápiószéle and Zalaszentgrót - were awarded the Label at the [national ceremony](#) held in Budapest on 27 November 2025.

Representatives of the awarded municipalities emphasised the value of the ELoGE assessment process for ensuring European standards of democratic participation, public ethics and continuous improvements to local governance.

ITALY - PROMOTING GOOD DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Italy, a founding member state of the Council of Europe, ratified the [European Charter of Local Self Government](#) in May 1990. Italy has embarked upon several significant local government reforms over the years, aiming to enhance efficiency, decentralisation, and reinforce local autonomy.

The latest Congress [monitoring report](#), adopted in March 2024, noted progress in increasing local and regional revenues, improved consultation processes. However, challenges remain including ensuring consistent implementation of reforms across regions and addressing disparities in capacity between different local authorities.

Since 2021, the Centre of Expertise, in partnership with the [Associazione Italiana per il Consiglio dei Comuni e delle Regioni d'Europa \(AICCRE\)](#), has been promoting the principles of good democratic governance at the local and regional level through implementation of the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE).

In 2025, the Centre of Expertise supported AICCRE in promoting and adapting ELoGE to metropolitan cities as an opportunity to enhance democratic governance at all levels, in line with [CM/Rec\(2023\)5](#) and its [explanatory memorandum](#).

A series of capacity development and awareness raising events were organised to present the 12 principles of good democratic governance and guide the municipalities through the ELoGE process. AICCRE piloted a tailored assessment methodology in two metropolitan cities, enabling application of the ELoGE multi-component assessment model within complex governance structures. This innovation demonstrated that sector-based benchmarking can increase democratic accountability and strengthen multilevel governance cooperation in large urban administrations.

To reduce implementation gaps, AICCRE organised targeted “ELoGE coaching clinics” for 8–10 municipalities experiencing organisational or timing constraints. This focused technical assistance enabled administrations to complete the self-assessment phase within the national timeline, ensuring equitable access to the Label.

A major success was the development of a Continuity Checklist, designed to safeguard institutional memory and political commitment during elections or staff turnover. This tool strengthens the sustainability of ELoGE cycles by formalising responsibilities and ensuring stability of governance improvement processes.

MALTA - CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT A KEY ELEMENT FOR GOOD REGIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Malta became a member state of the Council of Europe on 29 April 1965 and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 1993, coinciding with the establishment of its local government sector.

In 2019, the Maltese local government underwent a reorganisation, which was welcomed by the Congress. However, the [monitoring report](#) adopted by the Congress in 2024, among others, recommend increasing the competences of local authorities.

The Centre of Expertise has been supporting good governance efforts in Malta since 2014 through a series of activities and small projects aimed at strengthening democratic governance at local level. A significant milestone was the launch of the [National Training Strategy](#) for local government on 30 January 2025. Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government, Alison Zerafa-Civelli, convened the first meeting of the newly established National Training Council for local government on 13 March 2025 in Valetta. The Council brings together key stakeholders, including the Local Councils' Association, the Institute for Public Service and the Association of Executive Secretaries.

The Centre will continue to support the implementation of the National Training Strategy and to maintain close co-operation with Maltese authorities, including in the context of the [Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers \(May–November 2025\)](#). Under the Presidency, the Centre of Expertise contributed to two high-level events held in Gozo on 12–13 June 2025, focusing respectively on multilevel governance approaches to environmental challenges and on women's participation in politics at local level.

[The International Conference on Multilevel Governance Approaches to Address Environmental Challenges](#) brought together representatives of national, regional and local authorities, experts, and international partners to examine how multilevel governance can enhance environmental policy-making and implementation.

Participants highlighted that environmental challenges — including climate adaptation, biodiversity loss, sustainable land use and waste management — require coordinated action across all levels of government, supported by clear allocation of competences, adequate financial resources and structured consultation mechanisms.

Key reflections emerging from the conference included:

- The need to strengthen vertical and horizontal co-ordination between central, regional and local authorities to ensure coherent environmental policies.
- The importance of empowering local authorities as frontline actors in implementing environmental and climate-related commitments.
- The value of participatory governance tools — including citizens' assemblies, public consultations and deliberative mechanisms — to increase legitimacy and public ownership of environmental decisions.
- The role of multilevel governance in enhancing resilience and long-term sustainability in times of geopolitical instability and economic pressure.

The [Seminar on Women in Politics](#), organised in the context of the Presidency, focused on strengthening balanced representation and advancing the objectives of the Council of Europe [Gender Equality Strategy 2024–2029](#).

The seminar underlined that balanced representation between women and men in political decision-making at all levels is fundamental to representative democracy. Persistent underrepresentation of women in local and regional councils undermines democratic legitimacy and weakens citizens' trust in institutions.

Participants stressed that ensuring women's equal access to political power strengthens democratic resilience and improves the responsiveness of public policies to citizens' daily needs.

The Centre of Expertise supported implementation of the [European Label of Governance Excellence](#) (ELoGE) in Malta through a small grant to the [Local Councils' Association](#) (LCA) as the newly accredited national coordinating body.

The national ELoGE platform in Malta also includes the Local Government Division of the Ministry for Culture, Lands and Local Government.

Implementation focused on the following core actions:

- Capacity-building activities: Training sessions for Local and Regional Councils were organised, with international expertise, to ensure correct application of the ELoGE Benchmark methodology and the [12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance](#).
- Adaptation of the ELoGE toolkit: The Benchmark framework and assessment tools were reviewed, contextualised and standardised in Maltese and English to ensure alignment with the national legal and administrative framework.
- Digitalisation of the process: A dedicated online platform was introduced to support structured self-assessment, stakeholder questionnaires (citizens, elected representatives and staff) and evidence-based data collection, enhancing transparency and comparability.
- Decentralised mentoring structure: A support model involving the six Regional Councils was established to guide and mentor Local Councils throughout the benchmarking cycle, reinforcing subsidiarity and sustainability.
- Independent evaluation: The National Evaluation Committee oversees the assessment and validation of results, ensuring compliance with the ELoGE Benchmark framework and methodological rigour.

The 2025 implementation phase successfully established the methodological and institutional foundations for widespread implementation of ELoGE in the country in 2026.

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA - PROMOTING OPEN LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND CIVIL PARTICIPATION

Republic of Moldova joined the Council of Europe in 1995 and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 1997. The monitoring report of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities adopted in October 2025 welcomed progress in strengthening local democracy, including improved co-operation between central and local authorities, steps towards fiscal decentralisation and commitments to territorial reform under the Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023–2030. At the same time, it identified persistent challenges, notably unclear allocation of competences, limited financial autonomy and insufficient structured consultation mechanisms.

In this context, the Congress and the Centre of Expertise supported efforts to strengthen multilevel dialogue, advance open government and localise human rights standards, in line with European benchmarks and monitoring recommendations.

The project “[Promoting multilevel dialogue, open government and human rights at local level in the Republic of Moldova](#)” implemented from January 2025 to December 2028 with a total budget of €2.5 million. It is funded under the [Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova \(2021-2024\)](#) supports public administration reform and strengthens participatory and human rights-based governance at local level. Implemented in partnership with the State Chancellery, the [Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova](#) (CALM) and the People’s Advocate Office, the project promotes structured consultation and institutional capacity-building.

In 2025, activities focused on facilitating multilevel dialogue through analytical and legal inputs, strengthening capacity on open government and access to information, supporting the co-creation of Local Open Government Action Plans and preparing a comprehensive assessment of human rights at local level. Institutional support was also provided to CALM to reinforce its role as a representative association.

Through these activities, the project delivered the following outputs:

- 692 representatives of central and local authorities and civil society developed capacities on open government principles and access to information.
- Municipality of Leova adopted the first Local Open Government Action Plan (2025–2027) by a local authority in the Republic of Moldova.
- Assessment report on human rights at local level delivered evidence-based recommendations for future policy planning and capacity-development.
- CEMG Legal Opinion aimed at strengthening draft legislative amendments on consultation mechanisms in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government.
- Institutional grant awarded to CALM, accompanied by a renewed organisational capacity assessment.

The project contributed to maintaining institutional dialogue in a context marked by electoral cycles affecting reform processes. The adoption of the Local Open Government Action Plan positioned Leova as the first Moldovan member of the OGP Local initiative, generating interest among other municipalities. Capacity-building activities resulted in measurable improvements

in knowledge and confidence, particularly regarding access to information. In the field of human rights, structured co-operation between CALM and the People's Advocate Office was initiated, reinforcing awareness of local authorities' responsibilities.

The second project "[Promoting Civil Participation in Political Decision-Making in the Republic of Moldova](#)" implemented from May 2024 to April 2026 with a total budget of €700,000 under the [Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova \(2021-2024\)](#), aims to strengthen democratic governance in the Republic of Moldova through effective civil participation, in particular at local level.

Activities included capacity development for local officials and civil society on European standards for participation; piloting innovative participatory approaches in eight municipalities; supporting youth engagement, including school participatory budgeting; and providing technical support to improve regulatory frameworks.

Key outputs included:

- 260 representatives of local and national authorities and civil society developed capacities on civil participation standards and tools.
- Six Council of Europe standards and methodological tools were adapted and translated, including the [Congress Guide on Deliberative Democracy](#) and [CivicLab](#) tools.
- Eight pilot municipalities formalised cooperation agreements to strengthen inclusive participation practices.
- Pool of 26 national experts established and trained to support participatory processes.
- 93% of participants in capacity development activities – mainly local officials and civil society actors - report increased understanding of civil participation standards.
- Pilot municipalities developed civil participation action plans and committed to applying Council of Europe tools.

Together, the two projects contribute to upholding principles enshrined in the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) and advancing [Congress priorities](#) on multilevel governance, open and inclusive decision-making, and the localisation of human rights, in line with the [Reykjavík Declaration](#) and the [New Democratic Pact for Europe](#).

Activities in 2026 will focus on deepening structured consultation on public administration reform; supporting replication of local open government practices; piloting human rights-based approaches in additional municipalities; and consolidating institutional support to CALM to ensure sustainability and scale-up.

MONTENEGRO - PROMOTING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Montenegro became a member state of the Council of Europe in 2007 and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) the following year. The most recent [Congress monitoring report](#) on Montenegro was adopted in 2024.

Montenegro benefits from co-operation activities implemented by the Council of Europe which have played a pivotal role in advancing Montenegro's reform agenda, aligning Montenegro with Council of Europe standards and supporting the country's European Union accession process.

Montenegro was part of the regional project "[Promoting deliberative democracy and innovative approaches to citizen participation in South-East Europe](#)" along with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia and Serbia.

The initiative aimed at reinforcing local democracy and fostering innovative citizen engagement across the region. In this framework, the CEMG established a Community of Practice comprising 43 members (representatives of 18 local authorities from the six beneficiaries and the seven association of local authorities) and formed a regional pool of 33 trainers to support local authorities in planning future Citizens' Assemblies.

The CEMG strengthened the capacities of 59 representatives of four local authorities in the country on deliberative democracy and translated the [guide](#) "How to organise a deliberative process at the local level?" into [Albanian](#), [Bosnian](#) and [Serbian](#).

NORTH MACEDONIA - PROMOTING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

North Macedonia became a member state of the Council of Europe in 1995 and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 1997. The most recent [Congress monitoring report](#) on North Macedonia was adopted in 2021.

The country has been actively participating in various initiatives, engaging notably in intergovernmental co-operation and assistance programmes in the fields of legal reform and human rights.

North Macedonia was part of the regional project “[Promoting deliberative democracy and innovative approaches to citizen participation in South-East Europe](#)” (2024-2025), along with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro and Serbia. The initiative aimed at reinforcing local democracy and fostering innovative citizen engagement across the region.

In this framework, the CEMG established a Community of Practice comprising 43 members (representatives of 18 local authorities from the six beneficiaries and the seven association of local authorities) and formed a regional pool of trainers to support local authorities in planning future Citizens’ Assemblies.

The CEMG strengthened the capacities of 54 representatives from the municipalities of Aerodrom, Centar Skopje, and Makedonski Brod, and the Association of the Units of Local Self-Government on how to implement Citizens’ Assemblies, and translated the Congress guide “How to organise a deliberative process at the local level?” in [Macedonian](#).

ROMANIA – PROMOTING GOOD DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Since joining the Council of Europe in 1993 and ratifying the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 1998, Romania has implemented several significant decentralisation and local self-government reforms. These reforms have aimed to enhance local autonomy, improve administrative efficiency, and align local governance with European standards.

The Centre of Expertise has supported Romania through various projects to ensure that legislation aligns with Council of Europe standards. These initiatives have focused on strengthening local administrative capacities, promoting ethical governance, and fostering citizen participation in local decision-making processes. The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#) on Romania was adopted on 23 March 2023.

The Centre of Expertise supported the Association of Communes of Romania (ACoR) in implementing the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE) in Romania.

Following its accreditation in June 2025, ACoR launched the 2025–2028 ELoGE cycle, laying the foundations for two national awarding rounds, aiming to promote the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance and to provide Romanian local authorities with a structured European framework for self-evaluation and continuous institutional improvement.

The following key achievements were delivered:

- Adaptation of ELoGE instruments: The updated Benchmark for Good Democratic Governance and the three stakeholder questionnaires (citizens, elected representatives and civil servants) were translated and adapted to the Romanian legal and administrative framework.
- Digitalisation of the process: A national ELoGE website (www.eloge.ro) and an electronic self-assessment tool were developed, enabling local authorities to complete the Benchmark online and upload supporting evidence, ensuring transparency and efficiency.
- Establishment of the National Evaluation Committee: A multi-stakeholder Evaluation Committee was created, bringing together representatives from the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, the Department for Sustainable Development, academia and the four national associations of local authorities.
- National partnership framework: Cooperation was formalised with the Romanian Association of Municipalities (103 members), the Romanian Association of Towns (216 members) and the National Union of County Councils (41 members), ensuring broad national outreach.

Five promotional events were organised nationwide, mobilising 213 participants (161 men and 52 women), including representatives of communes, towns, municipalities and counties.

18 local authorities (17 communes and 1 municipality) formally registered to participate in the ELoGE cycle and committed to undertake the full ELoGE self-evaluation process.

SERBIA - PROMOTING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Serbia became a member of the Council of Europe in 2003 and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 2007. The country continues to advance public administration reform in the context of European Union accession, with a focus on professionalisation, accountability and performance at local level. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Centre of Expertise maintain close co-operation with Serbian institutions, building on previous interventions in Human Resources Management (HRM) and relevant monitoring findings.

The project [“Human Resources Management in Local Self-Government – Phase III”](#) implemented from February 2025 to November 2027 with a total budget of approximately €1.3 million as a joint initiative of the European Union and the Council of Europe, is carried out in co-operation with the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government (MPALSG), the National Academy for Public Administration (NAPA) and the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM). The project supports modernisation of HRM systems and strengthens institutional capacity at national and local levels.

In 2025, the Centre provided policy advice on amendments to the Law on Employees in Local Self-Government and expert support to MPALSG to reform performance appraisal systems and monitor the state of play in HRM across local authorities. Technical assistance was also delivered to NAPA to strengthen research capacities and develop a revised [Training Needs Assessment](#) (TNA) methodology.

Through these activities, the project delivered measurable outputs:

- HRM analytical tools including draft methodologies and guidelines on performance appraisal, indicators and training systems were developed.
- An analytical report on European standards and good practices in performance appraisal was developed with specific recommendations for adaptation in Serbia.
- Guidelines to support line ministries in designing sector-specific training programmes for employees of local self-government units were developed to strengthen multilevel governance cooperation.
- More than 450 national and local officials participated in project activities, including a high-level MPALSG event, serving to strengthen institutional ownership of HRM reforms.

CEMG activities strengthened strategic human resources planning and reinforced merit-based and performance-oriented practices at local level. Improving appraisal frameworks, training systems and multilevel co-ordination through project support helps enhance transparency, accountability and professional capacity within local administrations.

The project contributes to upholding the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and advancing Congress priorities on good democratic governance and institutional capacity-development.

Building on these results, further action will focus on consolidating performance appraisal reforms, strengthening quality assurance mechanisms and supporting sustainable HRM practices across Serbian local self-governments.

SPAIN - CONSOLIDATING GOOD DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Spain joined the Council of Europe in 1977 and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 1988. The most recent Congress [monitoring report](#) was adopted in 2021.

The Centre of Expertise has a longstanding co-operation with the Basque Association of Municipalities (EUDEL), who have applied the Local Finance Benchmark (LFB) in the region and implemented the [European Label of Governance Excellence \(ELoGE\)](#) since 2017. The Centre of Expertise has also collaborated with the University of Murcia in the implementation of ELoGE.

In 2025, the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE) was implemented through two accredited bodies at regional level: [EUDEL](#) in the Basque Country and the [Federation of Municipalities of the Region of Murcia](#) (FMRM).

In the Basque Country, the sixth edition of ELoGE was completed in 2025 cycle and an [award ceremony](#) held in February 2026. Five municipalities participated in the benchmarking process: Bilbao, Leioa, Errenteria, Urretxu and Tolosa.

Across six editions of ELoGE, 25 Basque municipalities have participated in the process and 16 have been awarded the label.

In the Region of Murcia, the municipalities of Alcantarilla and Cartagena were awarded the Label for a second time, confirming sustained compliance with the Council of Europe's governance standards. The process was the first to be conducted with the updated Benchmark and questionnaires and included a series of awareness-raising events, technical workshops and structured mentoring activities, engaging 62 participants, including elected representatives and municipal staff.

The use of evidence-based benchmarking and the integration of stakeholder consultation have helped strengthened transparency, accountability and participatory governance at local level in the participating regions of Spain.

TÜRKİYE - ENHANCING LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Since joining the Council of Europe in 1950 and ratifying the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) on 9 December 1992, Türkiye has undertaken various initiatives to enhance local self-government. However, as noted in the latest Congress [monitoring report](#) (2022) challenges remain in fully aligning with the principles of the Charter.

A workshop designed to discuss questions posed by the Roadmap Towards a [New Democratic Pact for Europe](#) was organised by the Union of Turkish Municipalities (TBB) with support from the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance in [Ankara in September 2025](#).

The European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE) programme, successfully piloted by the Argüden Governance Academy in Türkiye in 2022, was implemented for a 4th cycle in 2025. The increasing engagement of the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (TBB) in the national ELoGE Platform since 2024 has delivered year-on-year growth in the level of participation by local authorities, helping to raise awareness and encourage respect for principles of good democratic governance.

Some 40 municipalities formally registered and submitted pre-applications to participate in the 2025-2026 ELoGE cycle. Of these, 20 municipalities passed the eligibility threshold of 67% and, following the evaluation by the independent Jury, 16 municipalities were awarded the ELoGE Label at the ceremony organised in February 2026. The awarded Municipalities are: Adana, Ankara, Balıkesir, Eskişehir, and Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipalities, plus Avcılar, Bağcılar, Bakırköy, Bornova, Etimesgut, Fatih, Kadıköy, Manisa, Odunpazarı, Sultanbeyli and Tepebaşı.

The 2025 cycle also saw increased efforts to develop capacities and raise awareness among interested local authorities. Four dedicated information and training events were organised, reaching a total of 157 municipal representatives. These activities focused on interpreting the updated benchmark, improving the quality of evidence submitted, and strengthening municipalities' understanding of Council of Europe standards on good democratic governance.

The continued upward trajectory — from two municipalities awarded in 2022, to six in 2023, 13 in 2024 and 16 in 2025 — demonstrates the interest of local authorities in Türkiye in demonstrating their respect for principles of good democratic governance.

A significant indicator of impact is the high rate of re-application by previously awarded municipalities, reflecting sustained commitment to continuous improvement and voluntary self-assessment.

UKRAINE - STRENGTHENING MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND GOOD DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

Ukraine joined the Council of Europe in 1995 and ratified the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) in 1997. The country continues to pursue decentralisation reforms while facing the dual challenge of defending its sovereignty and advancing reforms required for European Union accession and post-war recovery. The most recent monitoring report of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities was adopted in 2013, with a new visit scheduled for 2026. In this context, the Centre of Expertise remains a trusted adviser to the Government, Parliament, local and regional authorities and their associations, supporting alignment of decentralisation reforms with the Charter and strengthening multilevel governance during wartime and recovery.

The project “[Strengthening multilevel governance and local democracy to support Ukraine's recovery](#)” implemented from April 2025 to December 2026 with a total budget of €2 577 000, within the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine “[Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction](#)”, aims to improve legal and institutional frameworks, enhance the quality of local and regional governance and promote democratic innovations grounded in human rights and open government principles.

In co-operation with a broad range of partners at all levels of government, the CEMG has delivered key outputs:

- High-level policy dialogue and consensus building on sensitive legislative issues, including facilitation through “Strasbourg format” in-camera negotiations and the High-Level Dialogue on good democratic governance.
- Legal expertise: delivering opinions on legality supervision over local authorities’ acts and an expert analysis on European systems for the registration and transmission of local acts, as well as amendments to the legislative framework on intermunicipal co-operation (IMC).
- Capacity development: developing capacities of over 110 000 public officials’ workshops and training programmes on community recovery, open government, spatial planning, and local finances.
- Institutional support to strengthen metropolitan governance: operational consolidation of the Lviv Agglomeration; its expanded membership; and the pilot development of a joint waste management strategy as an instance of IMC for sustainable public service delivery.
- Democratic innovation: 6,200 children empowered through adoption of regulations 11 municipalities to enable school participatory budgeting; and agreements signed with Congress to launch citizens’ assemblies in Kyiv, Rivne, and Lviv Agglomeration.

The CEMG supported a major policy breakthrough with the Cabinet of Ministers’ approval of the [revamped Decentralisation Reform Concept](#) on 12 December 2025, which establishes a strategic vision for local self-government reform and decentralisation in view of the EU accession process and post-war recovery.

Structural reform was further advanced by the entry into force of amendments to the [legislative framework on IMC](#) (prepared with the support of the CEMG), introducing the “agglomeration” as a legal form of co-operation.

The CEMG provides comprehensive expert and methodological support for the organisation and implementation of [citizens’ assemblies in the Rivne community, the Obolon District of Kyiv, and the Lviv Agglomeration in 2026](#). In October 2025, the respective [Memorandums of](#)

[Understanding were signed in Strasbourg](#). The Centre will also assist implementation of community-based initiatives on transparency, accountability, participation and human rights in eight municipalities; and provide consultancy support to potential and existing agglomerations to boost IMC and metropolitan governance.

At the local level, the CEMG's work on school participatory budgeting and the production of an [online course](#) for local authorities, teachers, and students helped institutionalise youth participation and has empowered thousands of students to influence decision making.

The project directly advances the Congress priorities of promoting good democratic governance and localising human rights by ensuring that Ukraine's recovery framework adheres to the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#). Fostering deliberative democracy through citizens' assemblies and strengthening metropolitan governance is in line with the Congress goal of building resilient, inclusive communities that can withstand crisis while preparing for a European future.

Moving forward, there will be a strong focus on designing an Action Plan to fulfil the updated Decentralisation Reform Concept, defining specific actions, deadlines and responsible parties. CEMG will deliver advice to support improvement of the legal framework on the principles of the division of competences and on the division of the sectors of competence of local self-government.

The fifth edition of the High-Level Dialogue on good democratic governance (1–2 April 2026) offers a constructive platform to discuss key policy areas involving all relevant stakeholders with the Council of Europe in the role of trusted adviser and facilitator of the reform process.

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

The two-year project "[Promoting Deliberative Democracy and Innovative Approaches to Citizen Participation in South-East Europe](#)" concluded in 2025. This initiative aligned with the [Reykjavik Principles for Democracy](#), the Council of Europe recommendation on [deliberative democracy](#) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities' recommendation on the [use of deliberative methods in European municipalities](#). Funded by a voluntary contribution from Germany (€700 000), it focused on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Project partner was the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe.

The project established a regional Community of Practice, comprising 43 representatives from 18 local authorities and seven associations. It supported peer learning, good practice exchange, and capacity development. The CEMG built capacities of 225 representatives from 53 local authorities and eight associations, focusing on topic of citizens' assemblies. Local authorities throughout South-East Europe now benefit from a pool of 33 regional trainers on deliberative democracy, creating a sustainable mechanism for further integration of deliberative practices in the region.

Local authorities and residents in South-East Europe now have access to the Congress [guide](#) "*How to organise a deliberative process at the local level*" in four regional official languages and the related [e-course](#). This promotes long-term learning and replication throughout the region and beyond.

The follow-up project "Strengthening innovative democracy in South-East Europe" (2026-2027), funded by Germany, will provide technical and financial assistance to local authorities to pilot citizens' assemblies, strengthen expertise, and improve legal frameworks to embed deliberative practices.

The CEMG will continue to advance strategic co-operation for resilient and participatory local governance in South-East Europe. Deliberative democracy fosters an environment of mutual respect between local authorities and citizens. By focusing on respect and innovation in local democracy, local authorities can reduce polarisation and foster more resilient societies, thereby contributing to the [New Democratic Pact for Europe](#).

BELARUSIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES

Following the participation of Belarus in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Committee of Ministers [decided](#) to suspend all co-operation with the Belarusian authorities, and launched the [Contact Group on Co-operation with Belarusian Democratic Forces and Civil Society](#). This co-operation was further reinforced by the adoption of the 2023 Council of Europe Reykjavík Summit Declaration.

As an active member of the Contact Group, the CEMG implemented the project "[Leading the change for democracy and human rights at local level with Belarusian democratic forces](#)" in 2024-2025, with a budget of €172 000. Against a backdrop of sustained repression in Belarus, CEMG delivered structured political support and targeted expertise to Belarusian democratic forces and civil society in exile, while strengthening their capacity to embed European standards of local democracy and human rights in their advocacy, policy work and preparations for a future democratic transition.

A landmark achievement was the [establishment](#) of the first-ever deputation of Belarusian democratic forces to the Congress. Composed of elected representatives from the Coordination Council – a representative body of the Belarusian democratic opposition – the deputation participated actively in the 2025 Congress sessions and committee work. The shift to institutionalised co-operation was reinforced by the appointment of a Congress Rapporteur for a democratic Belarus, whose [field visit](#) to Poland in December 2025 strengthened ties with Belarusian democratic actors, civil society, and Polish national and local authorities, and led the way toward finding local solutions to transnational repression against Belarusians in exile.

The project delivered critical expert analysis of the "Local Self-Government Concept for a New Belarus", the draft Law on Local Self-Government and relevant provisions of the draft Constitution, to further align these foundational texts with the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Furthermore, a direct and tangible impact of the work of the CEMG was the launch of Prastora in late 2025, a platform for public consultation on these and other laws.

To democratise knowledge beyond expert circles, the project translated core texts in Belarusian, including the Charter, its Additional Protocol, and the Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the principles of good democratic governance. The '[Leaders for Change](#)' workshops and targeted training for the [Personnel Reserve](#) – a training programme for future civil servants – equipped a wide range of actors from the Belarusian democratic forces and civil society, both inside the country and abroad, with a practical understanding of local governance, trust-building, and human rights.

Building on these results, the [2026–2027](#) phase will seek to deepen institutional engagement through a renewed deputation of the Belarusian democratic forces to the Congress (following the elections to the Coordination Council in May 2026), the introduction of a Belarusian Youth Delegate to the Congress, and expanded CEMG support to develop a roadmap for reform of the local self-government system once conditions allow.

KOSOVO* - STRENGTHENING MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE

[The European Charter of Local Self Government](#) is referred to in Article 123 of the Kosovo[‡] Constitution, indicating that local self-government bodies shall respect, observe and implement it to the same extent as that required of a signatory state. Despite a volatile political context and parliamentary stalemate in 2025, co-operation with the Congress remains robust. The CEMG has established itself as a key source of normative guidance, particularly in good democratic governance, in operationalising open government principles, and introducing participatory and deliberative democracy

In this context, the project “[Strengthening multilevel governance and participatory democracy](#)” implemented from January 2025 to March 2026 with a budget of €270 000, supports strengthened co-operation and consultation between central and local authorities in advancing local self-government reform and good democratic governance.

In partnership with a group of 11 local authorities, the Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA) and the Association of Kosovo Municipalities (AKM), the CEMG is focused on advancing local self-government reform and fostering good democratic governance by:

- Drafting a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Charter involving consultations with over 30 interlocutors. A draft report and a roadmap for addressing the findings will be presented in spring 2026.
- Implementing 11 capacity-development activities on open government and deliberative democracy for more than 100 representatives of central and local authorities, and the AKM.
- Establishing a “Forum of Exchange on open local government and democratic innovations” to foster multilevel dialogue and direct co-operation across levels of government.
- Assisting the MLGA with expertise in drafting the second Action Plan on Open Government, ensuring the integration of local commitments.
- Translating knowledge into practice through a grant scheme supporting five pilot municipalities on transparency, youth participation, and women’s leadership.

Through these activities, the CEMG maintained momentum for reform despite political instability, generating increased institutional demand for further technical support. The MLGA formally requested assistance to draft a new Strategy on Local Self-Government in 2026.

At the local level, the CEMG delivered capacity building activities on good democratic governance practices. 85% of participants to these activities reported an increased intention to implement open government practices, and seven municipalities expressed interest in piloting citizens’ assemblies.

The intervention is grounded in the Charter, using the Congress as a unique authority to assess its implementation. It advances the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance and Council of Europe standards on deliberative democracy.

Presentation of the report on the implementation of the Charter in spring 2026 will launch a formal dialogue to co-design a roadmap for legislative reform. Future work will also support the first citizens’ assemblies and the drafting of the new Strategy on Local Self-Government.

* All reference to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full name
ACoR	Association of Communes of Romania
AICCRE	Associazione Italiana per il Consiglio dei Comuni e delle Regioni d'Europa
AKM	Association of Kosovo Municipalities
ASPA	Albanian School of Public Administration
AUC	Association of Ukrainian Cities
CALM	Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova
CEMG	Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance
CDDEM	Steering Committee on Democracy
CFOA	Communities Finance Officers Association
Charter	European Charter of Local Self-Government
DDDGGA	Democratic Development, Decentralisation and Good Governance in Armenia
DoPA	Department of Public Administration
ELoGE	European Label of Governance Excellence
EUDEL	Basque Association of Municipalities
HRM	Human Resources Management
HRMIS	Human Resource Management Information System
IMC	Intermunicipal co-operation
LFB	Local Finance Benchmark
MLGA	Ministry of Local Government Administration
MPALSG	Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government
MTAI	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure
NALAG	National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia
NAPA	National Academy for Public Administration
OGP	Open Government Partnership
ReBuS	Resilience Building Strategies
SCTM	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
SOTE	Social and Health Care Reform
SPAR	Sustaining Public Administration Reform at Local Level in Albania
SPB	School Participatory Budgeting
TARA	Territorial and Administrative Reform of Armenia
TBB	Union of Municipalities of Türkiye
TNA	Training Needs Assessment
TÖÖSZ	Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities