

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 360 (2014)¹ Observation of local elections in Georgia (15 June 2014)

1. Following the invitation by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia to observe the local elections held in the country on 15 June 2014, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities refers to:

a. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) which was ratified by Georgia on 8 December 2004;

b. its Resolution 306(2010)REV on Observation of local and regional elections – strategy and rules of the Congress;

c. its Resolution 353(2013)REV on Congress post-monitoring and post-observation of elections: developing political dialogue.

2. The Congress reiterates the fact that genuinely democratic local and regional elections are part of a process to establish and maintain democratic governance, and observation of political participation at territorial level is a key element in the Congress's role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.

3. The Congress welcomes the fact that – further to a controversial campaign in a heated atmosphere – the local elections held on 15 June 2014 were carried out in a calm and peaceful manner overall, and were generally well run, despite local incidents and individual irregularities.

4. It is pleased to note that the electoral environment, in particular with regard to the working conditions for journalists covering the campaign and the possibility for voters to cast their ballot without the exertion of influence or pressure, has improved since the previous elections.

5. It also acknowledges the efforts made by the Georgian authorities to prevent electoral fraud by the introduction of a

new system of verification of voters' identity including digital photos on the voters' list.

6. The Congress welcomes, in particular, the fact that Mayors and *gamgebelis* (town managers) are now directly elected in Georgia and that by the 50% plus one vote-threshold the heads of local executive bodies were elected by the majority of citizens who used their right to vote. This contributes to the accountability of local representatives and to a competitive electoral environment and is in line with Congress recommendations.

7. The Congress highlights the fact that further improvements can be made in respect of the electoral legislation and the practical side of electoral management and therefore invites the Georgian authorities to:

a. revise the composition of precinct and district election commissions to ensure a more equal representation of parties in power and in opposition;

b. allow for independent candidates to run in the elections through the right of initiative groups to nominate candidates for mayor/*gamgebeli*;

c. strengthen the confidence-building role and the effectiveness of the Inter Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections (IATF) through monitoring of the implementation of recommendations made by IATF and increasing party neutrality at the managerial level of the institution;

d. step up training programmes for members of precinct and district election commissions, in order to improve the electoral documentation and the counting procedures.

8. In addition, the Congress encourages the Georgian authorities to revise specific legal provisions including residence requirements for passive voting rights at local level, equality of the vote and no-confidence procedures against the directly elected mayors and *gamgebelis*.

9. With regard to future elections, pro-active policies should be conceived by the authorities to avoid aggressive rhetoric, violent action and pressure being applied to candidates during the campaign.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 14 October 2014 and adopted by the Congress on 15 October 2014, 2nd Sitting (see Document CPL(27)5FINAL, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Jos Wiene, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE).