

47th SESSION

Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Finland

Recommendation 516 (2024)¹

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) refers to:

a. Article 2, paragraph 1.b, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that one of the aims of the Congress is “to submit proposals to the Committee of Ministers in order to promote local and regional democracy”;

b. Article 1, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that “The Congress shall prepare on a regular basis country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member States and in States which have applied to join the Council of Europe, and shall ensure the effective implementation of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government”;

c. Chapter XVIII of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress on the organisation of monitoring procedures;

d. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goals 11 on sustainable cities and communities and 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions;

e. the Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2017;

f. Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of citizens in local public life, adopted on 21 March 2018;

g. Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on supervision of local authorities’ activities, adopted on 4 April 2019;

h. the previous Congress Recommendation on the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Finland [[Congress Recommendation 396 \(2017\)](#)];

i. the Contemporary commentary by the Congress on the explanatory report to the European Charter of Local Self-Government adopted by the Statutory Forum on 7 December 2020.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 15 October 2024 (see document CG(2024)47-13, explanatory memorandum, co-rapporteurs Konstantinos KOUKAS, Greece (L, EPP/CCE) and Rachel BAILEY, United Kingdom (R, ECR).

2. The Congress points out that:

a. Finland joined the Council of Europe on 5 May 1989, signed the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122, "the Charter") on 14 June 1990 and ratified it without reservations on 3 June 1991. The Charter entered into force in Finland on 1 October 1991. On 21 July 2021, because of the subsequent changes in the administrative structure in Finland that have taken place after the ratification of the Charter, the Government of the Republic of Finland made a declaration according to which the provisions of the Charter apply to the local authorities, i.e. municipalities ("*kunnat*") of Finland. As regards autonomous regions larger than municipalities, i.e. the "wellbeing services counties" of continental Finland ("*Manner-Suomen hyvinvointialueet*"), Finland considers itself bound by all the provisions, except Articles 4.2, 9.3 and 9.8. Because the above-mentioned changes in the administrative structure do not concern the autonomous region of the Åland Islands, the Charter applies on the Åland Islands to local authorities, i.e. municipalities ("*kommuner*");

b. the Committee on the Monitoring of the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and on the respect of Human Rights and the Rule of Law at local and regional levels ("the Monitoring Committee") decided to examine the situation of local and regional democracy in Finland in the light of the Charter. It instructed Konstantinos Koukas, Greece (L, EPP/CCE) and Rachel Bailey, United Kingdom (R, ECR), with the task of preparing and submitting to the Congress a report on local and regional democracy in Finland. The delegation was assisted by Professor Tania Groppi, vice-chair of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and by the Congress Secretariat;

c. The monitoring visit took place from 16 to 18 April 2024. During the visit, the Congress delegation met the representatives of various institutions at all levels of government. The detailed programme of the visit is appended to the explanatory memorandum;

d. The co-rapporteurs wish to thank the Permanent Representation of Finland to the Council of Europe and all those whom they met during the visit.

3. The Congress notes with satisfaction:

a. the overall positive implementation in Finland of the principles enshrined in the Charter;

b. the creation of a second tier of local government at regional level ("wellbeing services counties");

c. the wide range of responsibilities of the local authorities and the role played by municipalities and well-being services counties in the Finnish welfare system;

d. the culture of consultation and loyal collaboration between central government and local authorities in Finland.

4. The Congress expresses its concerns on the following issues:

a. the weakness of the constitutional basis for the new tier of local self-government at regional level;

b. the unclear procedure of consultation of local communities in the event of obligatory merger or compulsory boundaries change of municipalities in a particularly difficult financial situation;

c. the limited financial autonomy of the new tier of local self-government, due to the lack of resources of a sufficiently diversified and buoyant nature;

d. the lack of special status for the City of Helsinki as regards its specificities as the capital city.

5. In light of the foregoing, the Congress requests that the Committee of Ministers invite the authorities of Finland to:

a. further strengthen the constitutional basis for the wellbeing services counties;

b. establish a consultation procedure of local communities in the event of obligatory merger or compulsory boundaries change of municipalities in a particularly difficult financial situation;

c. give the wellbeing services counties more freedom of action with regard to their own financial resources;

d. grant the City of Helsinki a special status as regards its specificities as the capital city.

6. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation on the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Finland and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.