

47th SESSION

Recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Congress monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and election observation missions (reference period 2021-2024)

Recommendation 518 (2024)¹

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

a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

b. The Reykjavík Declaration, adopted at the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavík, 16 and 17 May 2023), highlighting the need to support the essential role of multilevel governance in delivering the Organisation’s vision, including through the role of the Congress with respect to the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;

c. Article 2, paragraph 1.b, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1, 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”;

d. Chapter XVIII, XIX and XX of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress, respectively on the organisation of monitoring procedures, election observation missions, implementation of the post-monitoring/post-electoral political dialogue;

e. the Congress monitoring reports, resolutions and recommendations on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the Council of Europe member States;

f. the reports and recommendations adopted by the Congress further to the observation of local and regional elections as well as reports, resolutions and recommendations on transversal issues in electoral matters;

g. Congress recommendation 455 (2021) “Recurring Issues Based on Assessments Resulting from Congress Monitoring and Election Observation Missions (Reference Period 2017-2020);

h. Congress Recommendation 453 (2021) “Ensuring the respect of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in major crisis situations”;

i. Congress Recommendation 395 (2017) “Recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Congress monitoring and election observation missions (reference period 2010-2016)”.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 16 October 2024 (see document [CG\(2024\)47-20](#), explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Thibaut GUIGNARD, France (L, EPP/CCE) and Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG).

2. The Congress notes that since the issuance of the previous periodic report in 2021, Europe has undergone significant political, economic and social upheavals driven by the COVID-19 crisis, the reception of migrants and refugees, climate change, the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, and subsequent challenges related to the cost of living and energy prices. They have reshaped the environment in which national, local and regional governments operate, profoundly impacting their resources and activities.

3. The Congress regrets that the recurring issues of compliance with the Charter highlighted in the previous report have persisted during the current review period, while some of them have been exacerbated by the effects of successive crises. These include inadequate financial resources available to local and regional authorities, a restricted scope of local self-government, and insufficient consultation processes.

4. Furthermore, the pattern of increasing instances of hate speech, disinformation, threats, both verbal and physical aggression directed against locally elected representatives – especially mayors – throughout Europe, particularly evident during elections, has become more pronounced in recent years and continues to pose significant challenges to the working conditions necessary to fulfil elected mandates and exercise local democracy. This trend may have a paralysing effect on political life at local and regional levels.

5. The Congress also stresses that recurring issues in electoral matters continue to include the inaccuracy of voters lists, the misuse of administrative resources during electoral campaigns, the politicisation of the electoral administration at all levels, the decline in voters' confidence in electoral processes and the unequal playing field for candidates. Over the past several years, the Congress has identified increasingly problematic trends that impact local electoral processes, namely the deterioration of the campaigning environment and the rise in foreign interference, while noting with satisfaction the overall progress made to improve electoral procedures and the inclusivity of local and regional elections in Europe.

6. While election observation constitutes a widely accepted barometer of democratic development and a vital instrument to improve electoral processes, the Congress deplores the fact that many member States did not systematically invite it to observe local and regional elections over the reference period. More systematic invitations to the Congress to observe elections would allow it to fully fulfil its institutional mandate as guardian of local and regional democracy and to bring more regularly into focus best practices, progress and recurring issues observed across all member States.

7. The Congress highlights that the systematically identified shortcomings in the compliance with the Charter and European electoral standards can serve as early indicators of potential democratic erosion and increasing institutional fragility, which have already materialised in some parts of Europe.

8. In the light of the above, the Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to call on the national authorities of the member States to:

a. strengthen their efforts, in line with the Reykjavik Declaration, to fully implement the ratified provisions of the Charter, based on the Congress monitoring resolutions and recommendations, with particular emphasis on addressing the recurring issues identified by the Congress, specifically:

- i. make sure that subnational authorities have adequate and commensurate financial resources to fulfil their competencies and enhance local revenue-raising capacities to secure financial autonomy at the subnational level;
- ii. ensure the right of local authorities to be consulted in due time by the central government, on all matters directly affecting them, both in law and in practice, in line with Articles 4.6, 5 and 9.6 of the Charter;
- iii. refrain from re-centralising local competences, over-regulating, and disproportionate supervision and clearly divide competencies among various levels of government to enable local authorities to manage public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interest of the local population;

- iv. introduce measures to strengthen legal protection for mayors, including extending limitation periods and considering specific offenses for attacks or assaults on them while they are performing their duties;
- b. conduct local and regional elections in accordance with European electoral standards and on the basis of the relevant Congress resolutions and recommendations and notably:
- i. pursue efforts to systematically update voters lists and guarantee their accuracy, as local and regional elections should reflect the will of the electorate actually residing in a specific community;
 - ii. ensure an equal playing field for all candidates through dedicated party and campaign finance regulations, effective regulations and dissuasive sanctions to prevent the misuse of administrative resources and measures to enhance women and youth participation;
 - iii. strengthen the professionalisation of the election administration and the transparency of its work, in order to further eliminate election day irregularities and to increase trust in electoral processes;
 - iv. as a means to decrease polarisation, foster political pluralism by amplifying initiatives towards more inclusive electoral processes, preventing the deterioration of campaign conditions and increasing vigilance towards hate speech, disinformation and foreign interference in electoral processes;
- c. systematically send an invitation of the Congress to observe local and regional elections including early, repeat and partial elections, at the latest 60 days before the election day;
- d. enhance post-monitoring and post-electoral political dialogue with the Congress to develop roadmaps for fulfilling their commitments under the Charter and complying with European electoral standards;
- e. use the findings of the Congress monitoring and election observation reports as an early warning mechanism to prevent and resist democratic backsliding in Europe, recommending timely improvements to safeguard and strengthen democracy and good governance at all levels, in line with the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy;
- f. encourage member States which have not done so to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the Charter on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.