



# News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES – COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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## HUMAN RIGHTS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

by Marc Cools, President of the ILDG



Democracy, human rights and the rule of law are the fundamental values of the Council of Europe. Nevertheless today, a few European leaders put commitment to human rights into question while opposing the European Convention on Human Rights and the preservation of national identities. Several months ago a Minister in my own country, Belgium, stated that there was a need to “bypass the European Convention on Human Rights”. In my own municipality, during the local electoral campaign several weeks ago, a candidate (even though from a democratic party) posted on Facebook a message saying “F\*ck human rights”. What is targeted through such declarations is migration policy.

Several European countries, going against the principles of international law, consider today that national legislation is above international treaties ratified by their country. This breach allows some European countries to avoid the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, commonly known as the European Convention on Human Rights, entered into force in 1953. Its objective is to guarantee everywhere in Europe the respect of the provisions of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** of which we are celebrating the **70<sup>th</sup> anniversary** this year. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration specifies that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”.

**The principles contained in both treaties do not prevent the states from conducting migratory policies of their choice** and from, for example, restraining access to their territory for migrants driven by economic motives (except for the free movement of persons in the EU in compliance with the European treaties). The obligation to accept exists only for political refugees (i.e., according to international treaties, victims of persecutions and those under grave individual threat to their life).

**There is no contradiction between human rights and preservation of national or cultural identity.** We all have identities, often multiple identities, and we cherish them. These identities are our roots and a part of us, and their multitude in the world and in Europe is a treasure. **We should not let in the name of identities put into question the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family”**, to quote the Preamble of the Universal Declaration. This **dignity results from fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in the Declaration and the European Convention on Human Rights.**



*The ILDG wishes you and your loved ones a happy holiday season,  
a Merry Christmas and a successful New Year!  
Looking forward to meeting again in 2019!*

## CONDOLENCES AND SOLIDARITY WITH STRASBOURG

ILDG members have been shocked by the attack in which five people were killed and eleven wounded at the Strasbourg Christmas Market earlier this month. Our thoughts are with the families of the victims. Strasbourg is a city we love and where we meet with pleasure. In this hour we express solidarity with the population of Strasbourg.

## RENEWAL OF THE BUREAU OF THE CONGRESS

During its 35th session the Congress elected Mr Anders Knappe (Sweden, EPP) as its new President. He succeeds in this function to Ms Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC).

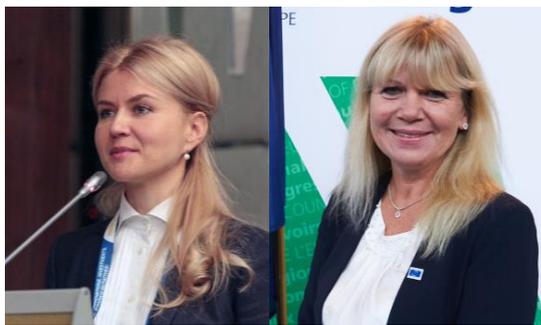
Our group, the ILDG, will continue to be represented in the Bureau of the Congress by two members entitled to vote: Ms Liisa Ansala (Finland, re-elected Vice-President of the Chamber of Local Authorities) and Ms Yuliya Svitlychna (Ukraine, re-elected Vice-President of the Chamber of Regions). Two other ILDG members sit on the Bureau with a consultative mandate: ILDG President Mr Marc Cools

(Belgium) and Chair of the Current Affairs Committee Ms Gabriele Neff (Germany). Ms Neff has also been re-elected for a second term.

Three thematic spokespersons of the Congress also come from the ILDG: Ms Liisa Ansala on youth, Stewart Dickson (UK) on observation of local and regional elections and Harald Bergmann (Netherlands) on human rights at local and regional level. Although thematic spokespersons are not members of the Bureau, they play an important role in representing the Congress and authoring reports related to their thematic mandate.



Liisa Ansala, Finland, Vice-Chair of the Chamber of Local Authorities, Thematic Spokesperson on Youth



Yuliya Svitlychna, Ukraine, Vice-Chair of the Chamber of Regions



Gabriele Neff, Germany, Current Affairs Committee Chair



Stewart Dickson, UK, Thematic Spokesperson on Observation of Local and Regional Elections, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-Chair of the Monitoring Committee



Harald Bergmann, Netherlands, Thematic Spokesperson on Human rights at local and regional levels

## POLICY PROPOSAL: PERSONS LIVING ALONE

by Carla Dejonghe, Member of Parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region

Persons living alone, or “solos”, are citizens who assume alone all aspects of everyday life. Alone they pay their rent, electricity, telephone, water, etc. This group is very diverse: unmarried or widowed persons, single-parent families...

Living alone is not a choice, whatever the age. Persons willingly living alone are quite rare; most find themselves in this situation due to the vagaries of life. It is important to come up with a policy for single people, because this situation may concern everybody at some point in their existence.

In Belgium every third household is composed of a single person. In big cities, such as Brussels, it is every second household. According to all available studies, this tendency will only get stronger in Europe in the decades to come. The situation is unequal in different EU member states. In Sweden, for example, more than 50% of households are composed of single childless adults, while in southern European countries married couples remain predominant.

Persons living alone still have to face prejudice. The media often reproduce



stereotypes with on the one hand “happy singles” and on the other isolated and unhappy people living

alone. The reality is much more nuanced and complex.

In spite of the growing number of single persons, they suffer from disadvantageous measures (compared to “classic” families) in terms of taxation, housing, inheritance, etc. For example, it is more difficult for a “solo” to rent or buy a house or a flat. He or she has to pay more when travelling; his or her purchasing power is lower, and after her or her death, except direct family, inheritance taxes are much higher. There are other examples of big and small injustice suffered by “solos”.

Politicians need to take into account these inequalities and adopt new measures. It is important to take stock

of existing policies in European states to identify good practices and apply them everywhere. Luckily, many NGOs in Europe tackle this issue.

Living alone is a topic touching upon many different policies. The Current Affairs Committee will prepare a report on this subject in the near future. The rapporteur will identify problems and propose measures to be taken. The objective should be moving towards a non-discriminatory policy which does not privilege one or another life situation at the expense of another.

## REPORTS PRESENTED BY ILDG MEMBERS DURING THE 35TH SESSION, 6-8 NOVEMBER 2018:

### Marc COOLS (L, Belgium)

- A Code of Conduct for Congress members - revision of the Congress Rules and procedures (co-rapporteur)
- Revision of the Congress Charter (co-rapporteur)

### Stewart DICKSON (R, United Kingdom)

- Local and regional democracy in Georgia (co-rapporteur)

## LIBERAL SUCCESS IN SWEDEN!

by Thomas Andersson, Vice-President ILDG, President of the Jämtland Härjedalen Region, Sweden



The nationalistic plague spreads out over Europe and makes the work with human rights and democracy the most important task for local and regional politicians since the end of World War 2. But all around our continent there are exceptions from this devastating development. The Swedish elections in September 2018 are one of those. The election campaign was clearly affected by the last year's migration flows to Europe and Sweden. In 2015 over 160 000 refugees came to Sweden and the country did not succeed to give the newcomers the right support in the right time. This lead to a clear change in the Swedish migration policy. From being the most open and solidarity orientated country

in Western Europe Sweden closed its borders. From all to nothing, you can say.

In this process a nationalistic party, the Swedish Democrats, grew in the opinion polls and the socialist and conservative parties started to compete to be more against migrants than

the nationalistic party. Our two liberal parties, the Center Party and the Liberals, kept their open attitude to the people in need fleeing from war. But even these two parties had to agree on harder regulations to avoid misuse of the welfare system of Sweden.

The result of the elections on 9 September 2018 was interesting. Socialists, conservatives and greens lost a lot of votes. Even though the nationalistic party gained votes, the Center Party and the Liberals also came up strong.

The Center Party and the Liberals have been successful all around Sweden. On the local and regional level these two parties are stronger

than on the national level. As the result, the Center Party will be in lead of around 200 of our 294 municipalities and in the majority of our 21 regions!

In my region Jämtland Härjedalen the result was even more impressive. The Center Party made our best result ever and obtained 20.4 % of votes. After intense negotiations we have succeeded to form a coalition with five parties to take over the power in the region after 77 years of social-democratic majority. I became the first elected President of our region from the Center Party.

Out of eight municipalities in our region we grew in seven and are now in lead in five. We are making our region liberal!

This is the result of a campaign that we conducted throughout the whole Sweden with a clear message. We wanted to move our society forward with a clear stand for human rights, liberal values and to keep the country together between the countryside and our cities. Together we can make a change at home and in other parts of Europe!

### >NEXT MEETINGS:

ILDG: 1 April 2019 & 28 October 2019

Congress: 36th Session on 2-4 April 2019 & 37th Session on 29-31 October 2019

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