



News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES – COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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DEMOCRACY HAS A PRICE!

by Marc Cools, President of the ILDG



The Council of Europe turns 70. This anniversary is marked by an unprecedented budgetary crisis. The crisis is partly – but not solely – related to the non-payment of its contribution by the Russian Federation. But the Council of Europe has been having financial difficulties for some time due to the decision by the Committee of Ministers to impose a zero nominal growth to the Organisation's budget. In other words, the budget is not even adjusted to the annual inflation rate. The Council of Europe's budget roughly represents ½ euro per year per inhabitant of the 47 member states. In this situation the Council of Europe is obliged to cut whole areas of work putting at risk its very raison

d'être and its capacity to defend our values for which it was created: democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

The Congress's budgetary allocation has been decreasing for years and represents today not more than 2.25% of the Council of Europe's budget. The budget of 7 million euros per year is totally insufficient to make function a pan-European assembly representing 200 000 local communities. Successive budgetary cuts put at risk the work of the Congress whose quality is widely recognised.

The core business of the Congress is to monitor everywhere in Europe and on a regular basis the application and the respect of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. It is also to observe local elections, as those recently conducted in Turkey where the Congress was the only international observer attending.

The work of the Congress is all the more important that in many European countries there is a tendency toward recentralisation to the detriment of the principle of subsidiarity according to which a competence should be assumed by the level of authority closest to the citizen unless it is proven that this competence is better served at a higher level. In other, or the same, countries local authorities do not have sufficient financial or human resources to fulfil their responsibilities in full autonomy.

Affirming that democracy is not a vertical, but a horizontal organisation of power is not enough. It is also important that an assembly of local and regional authorities like ours has the necessary financial and human resources for its functioning to promote local and regional democracy everywhere in Europe. It is up to us to defend this position with our respective governments

INTER-MUNICIPAL AND INTER-REGIONAL COOPERATION

At our last group meeting we held a thematic exchange of views on the ways inter-municipal and inter-regional cooperation is organised in our different countries. Such cooperation is a necessity no matter how big or small our local entities and regions are. (p.3)

ILDG BUREAU ELECTIONS 2019

On 1 April 2019 the ILDG elected its President, Vice-Presidents and Treasurer. Congratulations to all elected members!



PRESIDENT: MARC COOLS (L, BELGIUM)

Mr Cools, ILDG President since October 2014, is a municipal councillor in Uccle and President of the Association of the city and the municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region.

In the Congress: member of the Monitoring Committee, associate member of the Bureau of the Congress and author of numerous reports.

VICE-PRESIDENTS:



Thomas Andersson (R, Sweden)

President and member of the regional council of Jämtland et Härjedalen, Centre Party

In the Congress : alternate member of the Current Affairs Committee, thematic spokesperson on Youth



Liisa Ansala (L, Finland)

Member of the municipal council of Rovaniemi since 2005 ; chair of the town executive since 2017, Centre Party

In the Congress : Vice-President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, member of the Bureau of the Congress,

author of numerous reports



Stewart Dickson (R, United Kingdom)

Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Alliance Party

In the Congress : 1st Vice-President of the Monitoring Committee, thematic spokesperson on local and regional election observation, Congress representative in the

Venice Commission's Council for Democratic Elections, author of numerous reports



Gabriele Neff (L, Germany)

Member of the city Council in Munich since 2002 ; member of its European Affairs Committee, FDP

In the Congress : President of the Current Affairs Committee, member of Congress Bureau, alternate member of the Governance Committee



TREASURER : OTT KASURI (L, ESTONIA)

Municipal Councillor in Harku, president of the Association of Estonian Rural Municipalities, Reform Party

In the Congress : Vice-President of the Estonian delegation, member of the Monitoring Committee

REPORTS PRESENTED BY ILDG MEMBERS AT THE 36TH SESSION OF THE CONGRESS, 2-4 APRIL 2019:

Liisa ANSALA (L, Finland)

- Social rights of young people: the role of local and regional authorities (co-rapporteur)

Marc COOLS (L, Belgium)

- Local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova (co-rapporteur)

Stewart DICKSON (R, United Kingdom)

- Report on the elections of the Cantonal Assemblies in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (7 October 2018)

Wilma DELISSEN VAN TONGERLO (L, Netherlands)

- Fighting nepotism within local and regional authorities

The Greater Region is a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC). The Summit of the Greater Region is supported by a secretariat founded by a Grand Ducal order of 30 July 2013 that concludes an agreement between the different regions and defines the statute of the grouping.

Geographically centered on Luxembourg, the Greater Region regroupes German, Belgian and French territorial entities and is delimited by the rivers of Rhine, Moselle, Saar and Meuse. To be more precise it brings together Wallonia-Brussels, Lorraine, Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate, German-speaking Community of Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

The Greater Region has been created to improve political and economic cooperation and partnerships between the participating regions. Most of the work is done in working groups that deal with quite heterogeneous subjects: forestry and agriculture, environment, energy, land register and cartography, education and vocational training, youth, higher education and research, labour market, international promotion of

THE GREATER REGION AND COMMUNAL PARTNERSHIP PROJECT GEPACO

*Martine Dieschburg-Nickels, Municipal council of Strassen, Luxembourg
(Photo : DP, Luxembourg)*

enterprises, economic questions, health and social questions, security and prevention, tourism, transport, and coordination of the territorial development. This cooperation has proven to be so fruitful that in 2007 the Greater Region became the European Capital of Culture.

In 2011 in the framework of this grouping a new form of intercommunal partnership was launched: cross-border network of which my town Strassen is a part. This innovative project was initiated by the Forum EUROPE foundation. The network was called GEPACO (GEmeindePARTner-communal partners). It brings together the communes of Strassen (Luxembourg), Konz (Germany, Rhineland-Palatinate), Losheim am See (Germany, Saarland), Habay (Belgium) and Montigny-lès-Metz (France).

Strassen (10.71 km²), neighbouring the city of Luxembourg, is a densely populated and dynamic area, characterized by rapid development and cultural diversity. It counts today around 10.000 inhabitants of which over 60% are non-Luxembourgish citizens representing 120 different nationalities!

In 2010 Strassen supported the project of the Forum EUROPA and started developing simultaneous contacts with four towns situated in Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, Lorraine and Wallonia. After a year of preparatory contacts, cooperation was officially launched on 15 June 2011 in presence of the Luxembourgish Minister of the Interior and for the Greater Region and of officials from the five towns.

This cooperation allows systematic exchange of views and "good practices" concerning the challenges local elected representatives have to face: mobility and transport, education, integration and inclusion, sports and associations, communal



programmes for seniors, communication between political office-holders and citizen participation, cultural policies, etc.

GEPACO takes an innovative path, away from the classic "sister cities" that propose social and cultural programmes for citizens from partner towns often situated quite far from each other.

The regularly organised GEPACO days allow local officials and citizens to take part in events and get to know the neighbouring regions, challenges they have to face, their problems but also touristic and cultural attractions. At its traditional « Stroossen wibbelt » (Strassen moves) event, Strassen welcomes representatives from Konz, Losheim, Habay and Montigny-lès-Metz. Since 2014 this is a cross-border festival. Our sports clubs and associations, such as the football club, especially its youth section, the marching band and the seniors club have already had the chance to meet counterparts from across the border and reinforce the links between our towns.

Certainly, much remains to be done to further develop this ambitious intercommunal project and fully benefit from it. Nonetheless, GEPACO may be taken as a model for future cooperation between European regions because it creates a feeling of belonging through very concrete projects. It also helps the Greater Region to get stronger at local level and to become more coherent and visible in the different towns.

“SMARTCITIES”

Martin Fodor, Bristol City Council, United Kingdom



I am the Rapporteur for a new piece of work on Smart Cities by the Governance Committee.

So why is Congress interested in Smart Cities, and what are they? New technologies are bringing us driverless cars, drones, assistant robots, artificial intelligence, the 'internet of things,' and virtual reality. These will change the world and cities must prepare. The technologies can raise the quality of life by using information and communication technologies - but there are risks, too.

Our services can be improved by automation, enhancing the customer experience, or using data to drive better decision making. Smarter technologies can change transportation, energy conservation, monitoring environmental concerns such as climate change and air pollution, public safety, infrastructure, urban manufacturing and farming. As smart cities evolve, services and infrastructure will be more integrated.

Information can be collected in real time by sensors, cameras, wearable gadgets and smart devices which interconnect. We are already putting some of these elements into place in the city of Bristol to try to deal with our polluted and gridlocked city. Health and safety monitoring of vulnerable residents is being added into our city control centre, too.

But the benefits of the smart city technologies can be accompanied by either the use of open, democratized data or the control of data by others. And we need to create 'smart citizens' so everyone is able to be

engaged and empowered and the city remains inclusive for the whole community not just 'early adopters' and wealthier citizens. Data privacy and security also become considerations.

Use of this data can give local governments the opportunity to transform themselves into more transparent, democratic and effective authorities. So a smart city can be a more democratic city if we use the technology well.

Open data can allow new applications to find services, too. A community group in Bristol has created its own Refill App to enable people to access maps that locate the nearest free refilling taps for drinking water, to reduce plastic water bottle waste.

But subjecting citizens to the logic of algorithms can sometimes feel more like a new form of authoritarianism rather than freedom. Being controlled - not being in control. The smart city concept is more a political than a technological challenge. We need to reflect on how it can affect democracy and human rights: Smart cities can create winners and losers. What about those whose interests are not protected by smart city policies? We need to ensure that Smart Cities are cities for all. I strongly believe this as a Green politician.

Smart cities bring more cameras, sensors and connected devices to our daily lives, which expose people to both government and corporate surveillance. As more and more devices are built to track peoples' activities and to generate intelligence for use by public and private actors, this will have detrimental consequences for our democracies.

The 'digital divide' of unequal access to resources, technology, education and decision-making also exists - unless we design systems to provide equal access to technologies and resources, and to build in new freedoms and capabilities for everyone. The gender divide also requires attention, beginning with who has power in the household. We should also question: is a system designed by a corporation seeking customers, or designed by local users with a problem they want solved?

The protection of rights on the internet also matters. Threats of violence; illegal data collection, racist and separatist threats can go unchecked, and protection of children is not safeguarded. The informed consent of all affected persons is necessary before any project is implemented. A partnership approach should mean better outcomes.

So, when talking about smart sustainable cities, we must not forget about the protection of human rights and the promotion of democracy. Choosing a specific area and adding technology will not work; we have to involve everyone in the design to make it work, we have to be sure that we are not leaving anyone behind. A smart city relying too heavily on just economic or technological models is not enough. Citizenship cannot be determined by algorithms. Think of our citizens and the next generation, and work to keep people at the heart of smart cities, by keeping human rights, social justice and equality as our priorities.

HUMAN RIGHTS HANDBOOK: TAKE PART IN OUR SURVEY

Harald Bergmann, Middelburg, Netherlands

During the 36th session of the Congress in Strasburg, I had the honour to inform the members of the Monitoring Committee on the progress of the second volume of the Human Rights Handbook. At its meeting in February, the Committee had decided to conduct a survey among all 324 Congress members to gather their proposals of topics to be addressed in the second volume.

The first volume addressed the topic of non-discrimination and was devoted to the rights of migrants, refugees, IDPs, Roma and LGBTI people. The second volume, as I suggested in the survey, could speak about sustainable development with an emphasis on its environmental dimension. I was inspired by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a set of 17 goals are adopted by the international community to guide all countries in areas of critical importance for humanity and our planet. It is a shared global agenda that requires a collective response. The Council of Europe is already [actively contributing](#) to its implementation for the 'people, planet and prosperity'.

I believe that our Congress could join these efforts and through our work on

the Human Rights Handbook specifically target goal 11 'Sustainable cities and communities'. Within this goal we find the rights of vulnerable groups (the rights of children, people with disabilities, elderly people and women's rights), access to social rights (housing, social security, fighting poverty) and sustainable development (environmental rights, energy saving and safe environment). So, there is a wide range of topics to choose from. But members can also propose additional topics. Another question I ask in the survey is about human rights matters currently put on the local and regional agenda. It is important to know what human rights issues we are coping with locally and regionally.

As of March, only 14% of Congress members responded to the survey giving large support to 'sustainable development', followed by 'rights of vulnerable groups' and 'social rights'. The Monitoring Committee decided that we needed more responses



before we decide on the topic of the second volume. During the Strasburg session more members filled in the questionnaire and I am confident that the decisive vote can be held at the meeting of Monitoring Committee in Oslo in June.

As I see it from here, writing these lines at my desk in Middelburg, the second volume of the Handbook will again be the result of team work of all our members. So we, as elected representatives, must show solidarity and responsibility before our citizens in the application of human rights in our towns, cities and regions. To accomplish this task, I endlessly need your support and input and I invite you to respond to my survey.

WHAT IS THE VENICE COMMISSIONS AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

WHAT ROLE DOES CONGRESS HAVE AND WHO REPRESENTS US?



Stewart Dickson, Congress representative on the Council for Democratic Elections, explains the work of the Venice Commission.

The [European Commission for Democracy through Law – Venice Commission](#) is a consultative body of the Council of Europe. Its action is based on the three ground principles of the European constitutional heritage: democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These principles find their expression in three key areas of action of the Commission:

- democratic institutions and fundamental rights;
- constitutional justice and ordinary justice;
- elections, referendums and political parties.

ILDG MEMBERS APPOINTED THEMATIC SPOKESPERSONS OF THE CONGRESS:

Harald BERGMAN (Netherlands)

- Human Rights at Local and Regional Level

Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom)

- Local and Regional Election Observation

Thomas ANDERSSON (Sweden)

- Youth

The Venice Commission's primary task is to provide states (61 member states) with legal advice in the form of "legal opinions" on draft legislation or legislation already in force which is submitted to it for examination. It also produces studies and reports on topical issues. Opinions and studies are discussed and adopted at the Committee's plenary sessions. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is one of the bodies that can request an opinion.

The Council for Democratic Elections

The [Council for Democratic Elections](#) (CDE) is in charge of the analysis of draft opinions and studies of the

Venice Commission in the electoral field before their submission to the plenary session. The aim of the CDE is to ensure co-operation in the electoral field between the Venice Commission and the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe as political bodies in charge of election observation, in order to promote the international common values in this field. Two representatives of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and their two substitutes take part in the work of the CDE, including two ILDG members Stewart Dickson (full member, Chamber of Regions) and Rosaleen O'Grady (substitute member, Chamber of Regions).

NEXT MEETINGS:

ILDG group and bureau: 28 October 2019

37th session of the Congress: 29-31 October 2019

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