



News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES – COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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CONGRESS: AN ASSET FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACY

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15 YEARS OF
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Marc Cools, ILDG President

Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, missions to observe local elections, exchange of good practices, these are different aspects of the Congress's work that all constitute an asset for local democracy.

Because there is no real democracy without a strong local democracy, in 1985 the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted the European **Charter of Local Self-Government**. This Charter has become a reference treaty for safeguarding the rights of local and regional authorities, such as the right to enjoy autonomy, to elect local officials, to exercise their competences, to have administrative structures and financial resources commensurate with their powers.

This Charter is the first document in Europe to put forward the principle of subsidiarity according to which a competence should be exercised by the level of authority closest to the citizen, except when this competence can be assumed more efficiently by a higher level of authority.

The Congress's monitoring of the application of the Charter through field visits to member states allows us to establish a political dialogue with the authorities of these countries and to formulate recommendations that often amplify the demands made by associations of towns and municipalities. Regularly recurring recommendations are those of **sufficient funding and effective consultation** with the representatives of local authorities and a real dialogue with them before any decision is taken on matters concerning municipalities or regions.

Local democracy is particularly important in some European countries in order to establish democracy in an irreversible way. Power must not only be vertical but also horizontal, with local and regional authorities having real competences and political majorities that may differ from each other and from the central level of power. Many co-operation activities have therefore been carried out by the Congress with such countries as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Congress also has partnership activities with Morocco and Tunisia to support reforms aimed at consolidating local democracy.

Thanks to the long-standing efforts of the Congress, it was finally possible to organise communal elections in Mostar, where the separation between communities had long prevented the citizens from holding elections.

In its reports and debates, the Congress also regularly addresses the **situation of mayors under pressure**. A few examples: in Poland the mayor of Gdansk was murdered; in Germany a mayor who had been stabbed survived miraculously; in the Netherlands a mayor, a member of the Congress, had to be given police protection because of threats he received from mafia who were unhappy with his action against drug trafficking; in Turkey many mayors are imprisoned, often without trial...

The Covid-19 pandemic is still affecting all our countries. In October, the Congress could finally meet in Strasbourg and it was great to see each other after a long pause! This gives us hope for the meetings to come.

We wish you a happy holiday season and hope to see you in good health next year!
Get vaccinated and keep healthy!

ILDG RENEWS THE COMPOSITION OF ITS BUREAU

At its meeting on 25 October 2021, the ILDG renewed the mandates of its President Mr Marc Cools (Belgium), Treasurer Mr Ott Kasuri (Estonia) and Vice-Presidents Ms Gabriele Neff (Germany), Mr Thomas Andersson (Sweden) and Mr Stewart Dickson (United Kingdom). Mr Benoît Pilet (France) has joined the Bureau as a new Vice-President.

PRESIDENT:



Marc Cools (Belgium, L),
Municipal councillor of Uccle,
President of the group « Uccle
en avant », former 1st deputy
mayor of Uccle
Member of the Bureau of the
Congress, member of the
Monitoring Committee

TREASURER:



Ott Kasuri (Estonia, L)
Municipal Councillor in Harku,
development manager at the
Association of Estonian Cities
and Municipalities, Reform
Party
Member of the Congress since
2016, member of the
Monitoring Committee

VICE-PRESIDENTS:



Gabriele Neff (Germany, L),
Member of the city Council in
Munich since 2002, FDP,
Member of Congress since
2007, President of the
Current Affairs Committee in
2016-2021, Vice-President of
the German delegation to the
Congress



Thomas Andersson (Sweden,
R), President of the Regional
Council of Jämtland and
Härjedalen, Centre Party,
Member of the Congress since
2018, President of the Current
Affairs Committee since 2021



Stewart Dickson (United
Kingdom, R), 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



Benoît Pilet (France, L), Agir,
Deputy Mayor of Angers, Vice-
President of the Urban
Community Angers Loire
Métropole
Member of the Congress since
2014, ILDG candidate for Vice-
President of the Governance
Committee

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS:



Martine Dieschburg-Nickels
(Luxembourg, L), Communal
councillor of Strassen,
Democratic Party
In the Congress: Vice-President
of the Chamber of Local
Authorities, Vice-President of
the delegation of Luxembourg,
member of the Current Affairs
Committee



Andrei Novikov (Estonia, R),
Deputy Mayor of Tallin, Centre
Party
In the Congress: Vice-President
of the Chamber of Regions,
member of the Governance
Committee

EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH EUROPEAN LIBERALS:

At its meeting on 7 June 2021, the ILDG group held an exchange of views with the President of the Renew Europe group at the European Committee of the Regions, François Decoster, Mayor of Saint-Omer, winner of the 2021 World Mayor Awards for his "sense of municipal public service". Addressing the ILDG members, François Decoster recalled the history and the main areas of action of the Committee of the Regions and spoke about the principle of "active subsidiarity". The President of Renew CoR invited the ILDG to strengthen cooperation and the defence of common humanist values.

On 25 October 2021, the ILDG continued its series of meetings with liberal groups in Europe. This time, the ILDG met with Jacques Maire, Member of the French National Assembly, President of the ALDE Group of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Jacques Maire presented the main achievements and projects of the liberal presidency of PACE and welcomed ILDG's initiative to strengthen contacts between centrist politicians in the Council of Europe and within national delegations.



RENEW EUROPE CoR LAUNCHES PODCAST FOR LOCAL & REGIONAL POLITICIANS

Sean O'Curneen, Secretary General of the Renew Europe Group in the European Committee of the Regions



The Renew Europe Group in the European Committee of the Regions has launched a 15-minute podcast for mayors, councillors, and regional political leaders. Called Letter from Brussels, it aims to offer subnational politicians of the Renew Europe/ILDG political family news about the EU that is relevant to them, and will help them and their citizens connect with EU decision-making.

Every episode also includes a story about the city of Brussels, capital of the Union as well as of Belgium, and home to more than one million people, providing an insight into its history

and people for those who do not know it well or will never get a chance to visit.

The first episode, "Einstein and the priest", came out in March 2021 and focused on debates in the CoR plenary with the President of the European Council, former liberal Belgian Prime Minister, Charles Michel, about the Conference on the Future of Europe, as well as debates with European Commissioner Ylva Johansson on prevention of radicalisation and combating hatred and initiatives to defend LGBTIQ persons in Poland and Hungary, and how to develop integrity systems to combat corruption at the local level. This first episode also tells a fascinating story of the encounter between Albert Einstein and a Belgian priest in the Parc Leopold, next to the CoR, in 1927 during an international conference for physicists.

Episode 4, "The skeletons, the musicians, and two great cities", was a special extended edition lasting 25 minutes, on the occasion of the 2021 World Mayor Awards, and profiling two of the winners: François Decoster, Mayor of Saint-Omer (France) and

President of Renew Europe CoR who spoke at the ILDG group meeting in June, and Matus Vallo, Mayor of Bratislava. They won the Public Service and Futures awards respectively, for how the interests of Saint-Omer are defended and promoted at local, regional and European level, and for the detailed forward looking plan Mayor Vallo wrote for Bratislava and has quickly implemented since his election. The episode carried many amazing stories about both mayors, as well as connections between Brussels, Saint-Omer, and Bratislava.

Most recently, episode 5, "The crime and the lone crusader", focused on the work of Renew Europe rapporteurs. Alexia Bertrand, leader of the liberal group in the Brussels regional parliament, wrote a report for the CoR on the rights of consumers in a post-COVID and decarbonising

world. In particular, the report contained the proposal to label products that empower consumers to make choices based on how long the items will last, how much of them can be repaired, and how respectful of the environment and society their production methods have been. Irish councillor Kate Feeney, of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Council, authored a report on the EU's LGBTIQ Strategy 2020-2025, and delivered a passionate speech in the face of homophobic amendments tabled by members of Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban's Fidesz party. Feeney was supported by members from most other political groups and the amendments were resoundingly defeated. Finally, this episode tells the story of the "lone crusader" who fought to prevent the destruction of some of the buildings of Brussels designed by Victor Horta,

one of the founding fathers of the Art Nouveau architectural style, and how he failed and succeeded, and what his surprising legacy has been.

Episode 6 of the podcast is currently in production and is scheduled to be published around 7 December 2021. The podcast appears approximately every six weeks, usually following a plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions, and is written and narrated in English by Sean O'Curneen, the Secretary General of Renew Europe CoR, who started off his professional career as a journalist. The podcast can be found on most major podcast platforms (Apple, Spotify, Soundcloud, Google Podcasts), as well as YouTube. On any of these platforms, interested listeners can subscribe to be notified when a new episode is published. The podcast can also be found on the Renew Europe CoR website.

REGIONS AND DIASPORA. OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT.

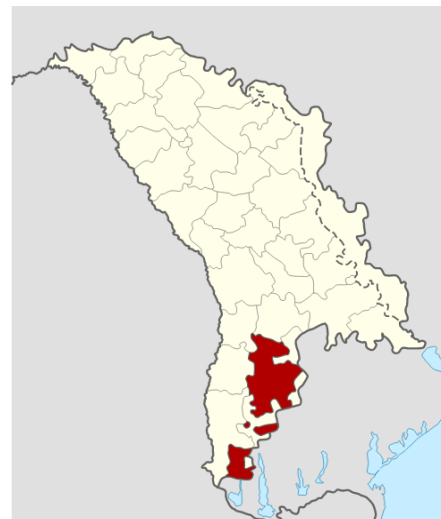
Alexandr Tarnavski, Member of the People's Assembly of the autonomous territory of Gagauzia, Republic of Moldova

It would be impossible to describe the participation of diaspora in the development of a region without taking into account the national context. More than a half of the working population has left the Republic of Moldova since its independence. Some of these people have joined the diaspora, while others work abroad and periodically return to their homeland. The main reason for this deplorable state of affairs is the economic situation in our country, characterised by hidden unemployment and low levels of professional motivation. The Republic of Moldova is one of the world leaders in terms of the share of the diaspora in the national economy: money

transfers from abroad constitute 16% of GDP.

A telling example of the scale of emigration and the role of the diaspora is last autumn's presidential election, where every sixth voter came from diaspora. In this context Moldova has discovered a new dimension of diaspora influence – the electoral phenomenon.

Coming back to the regional level, I would like to emphasize the opportunities that are offered to regional authorities. The main centres of the Gagauz diaspora are Moscow, Istanbul and Frankfurt. Local authorities should use the potential of this diaspora more actively. This can be done, for example, through



philanthropy, so that successful representatives of the diaspora can

REPORTS PRESENTED BY ILDG MEMBERS AT THE 41ST SESSION OF THE CONGRESS, 26-28 OCTOBER 2021 (SEE [DOCUMENTS](#))

Harald BERGMANN, Netherlands & Zdenek BROZ, Czech Republic

- Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government: North Macedonia (co-rapporteurs)

Marc COOLS, Belgium

- Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government: Cyprus (co-rapporteur)

Carla DEJONGHE, Belgium

- Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government: Albania (co-rapporteur)

take part in the implementation of humanitarian projects in their homeland. Part of the diaspora can also take part in municipal diplomacy and contribute to cross-border inter-municipal development projects. Another important objective is cooperation with the diaspora in the cultural field, especially in favour of the preservation of the Gagauz language and identity.

A regional public structure specifically designed to coordinate communication and cooperation between the authorities and the diaspora would be a very important mechanism for improving collaboration.

In conclusion, I would like to add my subjective opinion: the phenomenon of migration and diaspora formation – despite the rightfulness of its emergence and its positive effect on

the national economy through money transfers and humanitarian projects – is having a devastating effect on our region and our country, due to the drain of the working population, especially the youth, and shows that public institutions at all levels are failing to fulfil their main mission: to improve the quality of life of the population.

MORE THAN 15 YEARS OF WORK IN THE CONGRESS: MY COMMITMENT TO EUROPE'S MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS



Laurent Wehrli, former Mayor of Montreux, member of the National Council of Switzerland

from 2000 to 2011, which I chaired afterwards.

I had the privilege of being member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and its Chamber of local authorities since 2005. I say privilege because I really enjoyed this work in support of municipalities and regions of our continent, in collaboration with all the delegations to the Council of Europe. Sessions in Strasbourg, rapporteurships, election observation, notably in Ukraine, have allowed me to reinforce my own competences through the exchange of good practices and experience reported by colleagues, be it during statutory meetings or informal exchanges. In this short article, I would like to reiterate my sincere thanks to all colleagues who I had the pleasure of meeting. Thank you for our exchanges and common work.

Such cooperation in the Congress is more than useful because it contributes directly to the development of democracy on the European continent. I am convinced – as is Professor Denis de Rougemont – of the fundamental importance of Europe of regions and municipalities. Europe cannot be a democracy if it does not have strong and competent

local and regional authorities who play an active role in harmonious and sustainable development of people and environment entrusted to them. The Congress has an essential role to play in this, through its actions in favour of more democracy, whether through election observations or, of course, regular monitoring reports on the European Charter of Local and Regional Self-Government. Without the Congress, these missions would not be carried out and democracy, as well as the people of the 47 member states, would lose out. The Congress also plays a useful role in training and capacity building of local and regional authorities, which also ensures the quality of their actions.

I will be leaving the Congress on 31 December 2021, as my mandate at the communal level will be coming to an end. But please know that I will always keep in my heart the interest and the pleasure – let's not be afraid to admit it – of my time in the Congress. I will always remain committed to promoting local and regional powers in Europe who play a fundamental role in bringing appropriate and the most rapid response to the evolving needs of the people. They are the strength of democracy on our continent.

My name is Laurent Wehrli, I was elected to the executive of Montreux in Switzerland in 2000, after having been member of the city council since 1997. From 2011 to 2021, I have been the Syndic, as we say in the canton of Vaud, or the Mayor. At the same time, I was elected to the constituent Assembly of the canton of Vaud from 1999 to 2002, to the regional parliament of Vaud from 2002 to 2015 (which I had the honour to chair from 2013 to 2014), then to the National Council of the Federal Parliament of Switzerland since 2015, to which I am still a member. Alongside these elected offices, I also had the mission of operational treasurer in the Assembly of European Regions from 1994 to 2002, secretary general of the Swiss association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions

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