



# News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES – COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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## WHAT FUTURE FOR THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE?

Marc Cools, ILDG President

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"Sleeping beauty on the Rhine". This is how General de Gaulle described the Council of Europe in the 1960s. Since then, the influence of the Council of Europe has grown considerably. From ten European countries at its creation in 1949, the Council of Europe has grown to 46 member states (47 until the exclusion of the Russian Federation after its aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022). After 1989, with the fall of the communist bloc and the disappearance of the USSR, the accession to the Council of Europe of all Eastern European countries (except Belarus) showed their will to build their democracies on the principles of the rule of law and human rights. However, the **Council of Europe has been unable to halt the gradual decline in the rule of law in the Russian Federation** over the last 20 years. It

has not reacted sufficiently to the attacks on the independence of the Russian judiciary and its submission to the political power or to the eradication of political competition. Today we see the results of these processes.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe decided to hold the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the member countries. It will be held in Reykjavik and will be a unique opportunity to define the mission of the oldest pan-European organisation, the Council of Europe, in the new European geopolitical architecture and to give it a new impetus.

Article 1 of the founding treaty of the Council of Europe sets out its objective in seeking "greater unity between its members [... and] common action in economic, social, cultural, scientific, legal and administrative matters and in the maintenance and further realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms". This "greater unity", this cooperation between European countries and not only between the member states of the European Union, is more necessary than ever.

Democracy is not only built from above but also from below. Local and regional authorities, because they are the level of power closest to the citizens, are the building blocks of democracy and the best antidote against any authoritarian drift. **Without a lively local democracy there can be no real democracy.** Within the Council of Europe, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities represents 130,000 local and regional elected authorities. It must have the necessary financial and human resources to carry out its tasks of promoting and supporting local democracy throughout Europe. The role and the mission of the Congress must be among the topics to be discussed at the Reykjavik summit. Within the Council of Europe, the **Congress** must be recognised as a political assembly in its own right, as is the Parliamentary Assembly. **It must also become a one-stop shop for local and regional democracy within the Council of Europe.** Council of Europe's action regarding local and regional authorities must be taken either on the initiative of or coordinated by the Congress. Just because the Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organisation does not mean that a whole series of actions can be developed within the organisation without synergies with the Congress. The Congress was created by the Committee of Ministers. It must be the privileged place within the Council of Europe for initiatives concerning local and regional authorities.

The ILDG group wishes you and your loved ones a Merry Christmas and a New Year of hope.

Let us continue to stand with the brave people of Ukraine!

The ILDG group welcomes the €50 million Council of Europe's [Action Plan for Ukraine](#), 2023-2026

We stand with **UKRAINE**  
#SlavaUkraini

## THE 43RD SESSION OF THE CONGRESS (25-27 OCTOBER): ILDG'S CONTRIBUTION BRIEFLY



**Teuvo Hatva, Finland, R, Centre Party**, was elected vice-chairman of the Congress and will replace Andrei Novikov, Estonia. Teuvo Hatva is the chairman of the town board of Kajaani, and a regional councillor in central Finland. Teuvo joined the Congress in 2022 and is a member of the Governance Committee.

He is ILDG's full member on the Bureau of the Congress alongside vice-president Martine Dieschbourg-Nickels, Luxembourg.

### Reports presented by ILDG co-rapporteurs during Congress's plenary debates:



**Wilma DELISSEN VAN TONGERLO, Netherlands (L, ILDG)**

Hate speech and fake news: the impact on working conditions of local and regional elected representatives, [see report](#)



**Carla DEJONGHE, Belgium (R, ILDG)**

Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government in Denmark, [see report](#)



**Jan MARKINK, Netherlands (R, ILDG)**

Smart cities and regions - prospects for a human rights-based governance approach, [see report](#)



**Annika VAIKLA, Estonia (L, ILDG),**

Reception of women and children refugees, [see report](#)



**Harald BERGMANN, Netherlands (L, ILDG)**

Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government in Sweden, [see report](#)



**Viorel FURDUI, Republic of Moldova (L, ILDG)**

Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government in the Czech Republic, [see report](#)



**Matthias GYSIN, Suisse (L, GILD)**

Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government in Belgium, [see report](#)

**See also: reports and debates at the Chamber of local Authorities**

**Stewart Dickson, United Kingdom** (Observation of local [by-elections in Albania](#), 6 March 2022),

**Carla Dejonghe, Belgium** (Observation of local [by-elections in Belgrade](#) and several other municipalities in Serbia, 3 April 2022)

**Anne Colgan, Ireland** ([Manifesto for a New Urbanity](#) in the context of current crisis situations)

[More videos](#)

# TOWARDS A “GREEN READING” OF THE EUROPEAN CHARTER OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT: HUMAN RIGHTS HANDBOOK ON ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Harald Bergmann, spokesperson of the Congress on Human Rights, author of the Human Rights Handbook

On 26 October 2022, the Congress invited the Committee of Ministers to consider drafting an additional protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government to ensure proper recognition for local and regional authorities' role in the environmental field.

As rapporteur and spokesperson on Human Rights, at the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of the Congress, I was proud to present the third volume of the [Handbook on human rights for local and regional authorities](#). This new volume addresses human rights issues at the local level through the prism of climate change and environmental challenges. It also contains practical recommendations to local and regional authorities on how to adopt a human rights-based approach in their efforts to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. The involvement of municipalities and regions in energy and environmental issues must not be underestimated. All these tasks come together at a decentralized level, for example when it comes to nitrogen. Inter-administrative cooperation is therefore

essential to be able to tackle these tasks.

*The third volume of the Human Rights Handbook aims to guide us – local and regional representatives – in our efforts to fight climate change and promote sustainable development based on a human rights approach. It shows that the motto “Think global, act local” is particularly relevant for our environmental action.*

*The book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter outlines international legal framework for human rights and environment protection, explains how subnational authorities contribute to localizing UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and covers the key challenges faced in this regard.*

*Chapters II to VII focus on the main areas of subnational authorities' competences linked to environmental protection such as transport and mobility; infrastructure and housing; employment, inclusion and sustainable economy; education and awareness-raising; services, procurement and local strategies for*



*sustainable development and climate. Every chapter includes examples of good environmental practices and a set of specific recommendations on how to make our communities healthier, greener, better informed, more sustainable, inclusive, prosperous and resilient.*

[Video](#)

## WAR IN UKRAINE AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE ENERGY CRISIS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Alexandr Tarnavski, member of the People's Assembly of the autonomous territory of Gagauzia



The energy crisis in the Republic of Moldova, a small European country severely hit by the consequences of the war in Ukraine, was a serious challenge at the start of the heating season in the country's public institutions.

Pre-school education institutions attended by children aged 2 to 7 are the most vulnerable to the energy crisis. According to sanitary norms, children should be provided with an optimal air temperature of at least 18°C during the cold season.

Early childhood education institutions in the Republic of Moldova are financed by municipalities, through targeted funding from the state budget. Due to a sharp increase in energy tariffs (the cost of natural gas has increased by 600% over the last 15 months), the central authorities

cannot compensate the cost of raising tariffs.

The local authorities, which ensure, according to the legislation, the functioning of pre-school institutions, are faced with a dilemma - to introduce distance learning in kindergartens or to allocate additional funding from their own, other than public, sources.

This challenge has exposed the main problem of local self-government in the Republic of Moldova – the lack of sufficient own revenues, in the conditions when most funds are directed to the central state budget. Currently, a part of municipalities (not more than 10%), which are more self-sufficient, will be able to allocate their own funds to cover energy costs, to ensure access to pre-school education services for the population

(incidentally, instead of developing municipal infrastructure), while the lion's share of municipalities will have to suspend the physical presence of children in educational institutions.

Public authorities should draw the right conclusions and increase the

financial autonomy of local authorities in the Republic of Moldova, so that they can not only be responsible for providing public services, but also ensure their quality and affordability.

Taking this into account and while providing financial assistance to our

country, our European partners could help us to overcome the energy crisis by supporting programmes to increase energy efficiency of public institutions, especially of preschool education.

## CONFERENCES AND EXCHANGES OF VIEWS:

### The Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP):



Strong local self-government is the guarantee of good governance and the best antidote against the return of autocratic regimes. This was recalled by our **President Marc Cools on 3 November 2022 in Liberec, Czech Republic**, at the [Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership](#) of the European Union. He stressed that Ukraine's resilience in the face of Russian aggression is in part linked to the resilience of its local and regional authorities made possible by the administrative reform that the country carried out in recent years. A poignant testimony was offered by the Mayor of Starobilsk, a Ukrainian town in the province of Luhansk currently under Russian occupation. The inhabitants of this town, that was seized by the Russians on 1 March, had stood unarmed in front of the Russian tanks to try to stop them before being dispersed by machine-gun fire. A month after the beginning of the occupation, the mayor had to flee her town but is still in contact with many of its inhabitants who keep her informed about the rigours of the occupation and the illegal annexation referendums.

### The Future of the Council of Europe



On 24 October 2022, ahead of the Congress's plenary debate on the "The future of the Council of Europe and the role of the Congress", the **ILDG group exchanged views with Fiona O'Loughlin, vice-president of the ALDE group in PACE and rapporteur** on "A fourth Summit for a renewed, improved and reinforced Council of Europe". Challenges to liberal democracy and the need for reinforced attention to local democracy were at the centre of the exchange of views. Senator O'Loughlin presented her vision of the future of the Council of Europe and put an emphasis on the system of accountability for Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the new generation of rights (including environmental rights), efficiency of the existing system of rights defence (gender violence and LGBTIQ rights) and the need for member states to re-commit to CoE values. She also spoke about the need to involve civil society and youth to re-connect with the citizens. [Video of the plenary debate](#).

### The World Forum for Democracy

Several ILDG members took part in the 2022 [World Forum for Democracy](#) on 7-9 November 2022 in Strasbourg. **Christian Debève**, President of the Commission for International, European and Cross-border Affairs of the Grand-Est Region, France, and **Pascale Pfeiffer**, Councillor of Alsace, delegate for strengthening democratic ties and European democracy at the European Collectivity of Alsace, France, participated in the opening debate on solutions to increase citizens'



adherence to democracy. **Thomas Andersson**, Sweden, chairman of the Congress's Current Affairs Committee, moderated a panel discussion on Polarisation and Democratic Engagement. Many, if not most, conflicts erupt when dialogue is perceived as impossible. The participants of the panel suggested that future conflicts could be avoided by bridging the gaps, particularly the communication and empathy gaps, an early stage.

## The European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies



**Wilma Delissen Van Tongerlo**, Netherlands, rapporteur on hate speech and fake news, addressed the 19th European [Conference of Electoral Management Bodies](#), organised by the Venice Commission, on 15 November 2022 in Strasbourg. The conference discussed the effects of artificial Intelligence on electoral integrity.

The toxic environment produced by the use of artificial intelligence, in particular bots and trolls, for disinformation campaigns during elections, pushes some local and regional elected representatives to resign from office or to decide not to run for re-election. Political representatives of underrepresented groups and the opposition politicians are particularly vulnerable.

Consequently, hate speech and fake news “damage the very fabric and processes of local and regional democracy, and citizen engagement and participation is weakened”, underlined Ms Delissen.

## WORK IN PROGRESS: COMMUNICATION FROM RAPORTEURS

### LOCAL AND REGIONAL MEDIA AS WATCHDOGS OF DEMOCRACY

*Mélanie Lepoutier, Mayor of Sommervieu, Vice-President of the Departmental Council of Calvados*

**In 2023, the Current Affairs Committee and its co-rapporteurs Mélanie LEPOULTIER (ILDG, France) and Cecilia DALMAN EEK (SOC/V/DP, Sweden), will submit to the Congress a report on "Local and regional media as watchdogs of democracy".**

This report is in line with the Congress's priorities on freedom of expression online and offline and is part of a wider approach to the safety of journalists and press freedom. It will examine how media desertification remains a threat to the functioning of local democracy. By examining the difficulties faced by local media in some member states, this report will seek to provide guidance on the governance, funding and independence of the local and regional press.

To have a realistic picture of the situation of local and regional media in the member states, it will be interesting to collect, in due course, testimonies and feedback from members of our ILDG group. The aim of the report is to provide pragmatic guidelines enabling each country, region or territory to implement them and to ensure both media vitality and democratic dynamism.



### RENEW EUROPE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – LETTER FROM BRUSSELS [\(podcast\)](#)

Renew Europe CoR's podcast “Letter from Brussels” episode 9 takes you west to the middle of the Atlantic with the new President of the Committee of the Regions; south to one of the EU's land borders with Africa; and north to the Arctic, which has become of great interest to China. Plus, why the new female vice-presidents of Renew Europe in the CoR are political leaders you need to follow. And the story of the antique car in Brussels which could have helped change the course of climate history.

**CONTACT:** Tel: +33 3 8841 2682 **email:** maria.bigday[at]coe.int

**Webpage:** <http://www.congress-political-groups.eu/en/5-ildg/>

