



News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES – COUNCIL OF EUROPE

MAY 2024

UNITED AROUND OUR VALUES:

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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Stewart Dickson, ILDG President

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I write this introduction to our newsletter on the 75th Anniversary of the foundation of the Council of Europe. It was on 5 May 1949 that the treaty signed in London by representatives of the founding states brought the Organisation into existence. Later, on 26 September 1952, the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe decided to set up a Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs which would afterwards become the Congress of Local and Regional authorities.

As we look back on the history of our organisation, we should take time to reflect on where we came from in the aftermath of the Second World War, to where we are today. Our world has been ravaged by wars and conflicts over many painful and difficult years and yet our great organisation offers a place to embrace democracy, the rule of law and for us local self-government. The challenges of today's world were particularly highlighted during the fourth CoE Summit in Reykjavik.

I would like to warmly thank again Marc Cools who has led us in our ILDG group and is now six months into his Presidency of the Congress. I also thank all of you for giving me your support as your new ILDG Chair, and a warm welcome to all those who have taken on new or returning roles in our political group in Congress.

I am grateful to representatives of the Venice Commission, Simona Granata-Menghini, Secretary General, and Pierre Garrone, Head of Division - Opinions and Reports, who came to our last meeting and shared information about the work of the organisation. I hope that it proved an interesting insight to their work and that of the Venice Commission's Council for Democratic Elections which I have the honour to Chair. We will look to bring other speakers and aspects of Congress and Council of Europe's activities to further meetings. We also plan to arrange a visit to the European Court of Human Rights at a future occasion.

Please encourage colleagues and friends at Congress who are not members of other political groups and who you believe share our liberal values to consider joining us, they can contact me or our secretariat so we can discuss membership further with them.

Looking forward to seeing you all soon.



Human Rights: Camera, Action! - Photo and video competition ⇒ [spread the word in your local communities](#)

70 key achievements of the Council of Europe ⇒ [share with your voters](#)

Impact of the European Convention on Human Rights ⇒ [discover](#)

Key facts about the Council of Europe ⇒ [learn here](#)

ILDG RENEWS THE COMPOSITION OF ITS BUREAU

At its meeting on 25 March 2024, the ILDG renewed the mandates of its President Stewart Dickson (United Kingdom), Treasurer Ott Kasuri (Estonia) and Vice-Presidents Jimmy Moloney (Ireland), Gabriele Neff (Germany), Benoît Pilet (France) and Liliia Pashynna (Ukraine). Martine Dieschburg-Nickels (Luxembourg) and Randi Mondorf (Denmark) are ex officio members of our bureau.

PRESIDENT:



Stewart Dickson (United Kingdom, R), Alliance Party, Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, In the Congress: Congress representative in the Venice Commission, Council for Democratic Elections

TREASURER:



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

VICE-PRESIDENTS:



Jimmy Moloney (Ireland, L), Fianna Fail; Member of the County Council Kerry Member of Congress since 2021 and head of the Irish delegation to Congress, Vice-President of the Social Inclusion Committee, deputy thematic spokesperson on ethics and prevention of corruption



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



Liliia Pashynna (Ukraine, L), Servant of the people, Member of the Kyiv City Council since 2020 In Congress: head of Ukrainian delegation to Congress, member of Monitoring Committee



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

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS:



Marc Cools (Belgium, L), Councillor Uccle, President of Congress since 2023



Martine Dieschburg-Nickels (Luxembourg, L), Democratic Party, Communal councillor of Strassen, Vice-President of the Chamber of Local Authorities



Randi Mondorf (Denmark, R), Venstre, Councillor Capital Region Copenhagen, Vice-President of the Chamber of Regions

SIX MONTHS INTO PRESIDENCY OF CONGRESS

Marc Cools, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe



Chairing the Congress is a demanding and exciting job. It involves chairing the Congress sessions, the Bureau, and various other meetings. It means meeting a lot of people. It is an opportunity to be the spokesperson for the defence and promotion of local and regional democracy in Europe and to raise the profile of the Congress.

For the past six months I have been committed to strengthening the synergies between the Congress and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union and with other institutions representing local authorities. For me, these synergies start with the exchange of information and the communication of reports and

publications on subjects of common interest. They also involve close contacts between rapporteurs who deal with similar subjects within different organisations. The cooperation between the rapporteurs of the Congress and the Committee of the Regions on ethics and the fight against corruption is an exemplary case in this regard.

At its March session, the Congress amended its rules of procedure to simplify them and reflect the conclusions of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, which took place in May 2023 in Reykjavik. One new feature is the establishment of posts of a Standing Rapporteur and two deputy Standing Rapporteurs on Human Rights. Under the leadership

of these rapporteurs, the Congress's involvement in monitoring human rights at local and regional level will increase in the coming months. These [Standing rapporteurs](#), including Mélanie Lepoutier who is a member of our group, as well as all the [Congress spokespersons](#), were appointed at the Congress Bureau meeting on 28 March.

The Reykjavik Summit recognised the importance of local democracy in the European democratic model. The institutional reform resulting from this summit has strengthened the Congress by incorporating most of the Council of Europe's activities aimed at local and regional authorities. The Centre of Expertise for Good Governance has been attached to the Congress since January 1st of this year. This Centre is responsible for 16 very important cooperation projects, enabling the Congress not only to formulate recommendations but also to support their implementation in several countries.

Over the past six months, the Congress has continued to give its full support to Ukraine. It has also expressed its support to the democratic forces in Belarus.

One of the highlights of this year's 30th anniversary of the Congress and the 10th anniversary of its youth initiative will be the conference with national delegations on 6 and 7 June.

CONGRATULATIONS TO NEW SPOKESPERSONS, RAPPORTEURS AND REPRESENTATIVES

The Bureau of Congress has appointed the following members to serve as its rapporteurs, thematic spokespersons and special representatives:

HUMAN RIGHTS



Mélanie Lepoutier
Deputy Standing Rapporteur on Human Rights

CREDENTIALS



Martine Dieschburg-Nickels
Rapporteur of the Bureau on Verification of credentials of new members and new appointment procedures

VENICE COMMISSION / ELECTIONS



Stewart Dickson
Representative to the Venice Commission Council for Democratic Elections



Jimmy Moloney
Deputy Spokesperson for Ethics and
Prevention of Corruption



Carla Dejonghe
Deputy representative to the North-South
Centre

BRINGING COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S MESSAGE HOME

Randi Mondorf, Denmark



Political parties in Denmark hold their general assemblies in winter. This is also the case of my Danish Liberal Party. The general assembly gives the possibility to discuss important political topics, such as the war in Ukraine, migration policy or the situation of refugees.

I took the opportunity and proposed to give a brief presentation on election observation missions in the Congress, with special attention to the mission to Republic of Moldova in November 2023 in which I took part. The situation in Moldova is closely followed in Denmark, including by the Liberal Party, since Denmark plans to open an embassy in Chisinau in 2024 and because the Liberal Party

strongly supports EU membership for both Moldova and Ukraine.

It was a very interesting evening, and the audience followed the presentation with a lot of attention. The whole idea and our methodology of carrying out election observation missions were new to most people present. I can only recommend arranging events like this.

Now during the run-up to the European Parliament elections there is a strong focus on democratic issues in Europe, and we should benefit from this attention and promote the work of the Congress.

46TH CONGRESS SESSION REPORTS PREPARED BY ILDG MEMBERS

Once again, we welcome very active participation from ILDG members in preparing and defending reports during the 46th session of the Congress, held in Strasbourg from 26-28 March 2024. We thank all our rapporteurs. All documents can be accessed on this [website](#).

Christine CHEVALLEY, Switzerland (L, ILDG)

Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Andorra

Carla DEJONGHE, Belgium (R, ILDG)

Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Norway

Christian DEBÈVE, France (R, ILDG)

Local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards: from risk preparedness to resilience

Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG)

Local and Regional Authorities as Actors and Guarantors of the Rule of Law

Martine DIESCHBURG-NICKELS, Luxembourg (L, ILDG)

Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine

Randi MONDORF, Denmark (R, ILDG)

Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Italy

Gobnait NI MHUIMNEACAIN, Ireland (L, ILDG)

Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Croatia.

ENHANCING UNDERSTANDING OF CoE INSTITUTIONS: ILDG HOSTS VENICE COMMISSION REPRESENTATIVES



One of ILDG's roles is to provide its members with instruments to understand and make good use of the different institutions of the Council of Europe. At its meeting on 25 March, the ILDG had the honour of receiving Simona Granata-Menghini, Secretary of the European Commission for Democracy through Law, better known as the [Venice Commission](#), and Pierre Garrone, Head of the Opinions and Reports Division. They joined us to present the work of the Commission to the ILDG members.

The Venice Commission plays a crucial role in providing legal advice to its 61 participating states, including 46 members of the Council of Europe (CoE) and 15 non-CoE members. Its

mission is to assist member states in aligning their legal and institutional frameworks with CoE standards, particularly in democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

While the Commission's primary focus is advising national

governments, we invited Ms Granata-Menghini to discuss its role concerning local authorities and the integration of our Charter of Local Authorities into national legal systems.

One of the well-known functions of the Venice Commission, especially relevant to us, is its assistance with local electoral standards. The Congress, under the leadership of Stewart Dickson, President of the Bureau of the Venice Commission's Council for Democratic Elections, greatly benefits from the Commission's support in election observation. This collaboration has proven invaluable in ensuring fair and democratic local elections.

However, the scope for cooperation is far broader. During the session, the Congress adopted a resolution and a recommendation based on Stewart Dickson's report, "Local and Regional Authorities as Actors and Guarantors of the Rule of Law." The resolution seeks to enhance the role of local authorities in upholding the rule of law within our countries, potentially making it a cornerstone of our Congress's monitoring activities.

Through strengthened collaboration with the Venice Commission, local authorities can significantly contribute to the democratic and legal integrity of our states. We look forward to exploring and expanding this partnership to better serve our communities and uphold the principles of democracy and the rule of law.



POLICY INNOVATION: CARLA DEJONGHE PERSUADED HER BELGIAN MUNICIPALITY TO EVALUATE ITS POLICY FOR PEOPLE LIVING ALONE

Carla Dejonghe, Région de Bruxelles-Capitale



For almost 20 years, Carla Dejonghe (Belgian member of the ILDG, member of regional parliament of Brussels and local councillor for Woluwe-Saint-Pierre, one of Brussels' 19 communes) has been defending the interests of singletons. She denounces the fact that single people are often at a disadvantage, either because of higher household expenses or because of the preconceived idea that they are more available and flexible professionally (evening and weekend work). She succeeded in convincing the Woluwe-Saint-Pierre municipal council to unanimously approve the charter "Towards a municipality showing

solidarity with households living on a single income" on 23 January 2024. It is therefore the first municipality in the country, and indeed in Europe, to consider the impact of its policies on those living alone.

"This is a real step forward," said Carla Dejonghe, who is also president of all1, Belgian association that defends the interests of people living alone. "For the first time, a local government is making a commitment to examine its policy through the eyes of these people."

Indeed, many policies regard the so-called "traditional" family as the cornerstone of society, despite the fact that there are more and more

households with just one income: single people, divorcees or widowers, with or without children. This inconsistency has many negative repercussions for these households. This category of the population is systematically ignored by politicians, according to Carla Dejonghe, probably because of the great diversity it encompasses. "When we talk about living alone, everyone thinks of the series 'Sex and the City', for example. But that is not the reality," she added.

This is why Carla Dejonghe has drawn up a charter with golden rules that local authorities should follow so that everyone is treated equally in services, regulation and communication, including those who do not fit into the 'traditional' family frame. What measures does the Charter contain?

- "Isolated" mainstreaming: systematically assess policy measures in terms of their impact on people living alone and aim for measures that are neutral in terms of lifestyle.

- Working with the local catering sector: there are already good examples of establishments offering communal tables where single people can join others.

- Paying attention to singletons in the workplace: for example, making staff aware that they should not systematically turn to people living alone when it comes to working nights or weekends, or forcing them to take vacations outside school holidays.

- Proposals for new building projects, including the provision of spaces that encourage social contact.

- Making municipal activities accessible and affordable.

- Eliminating the use of "Mr and Mrs" on letters and invitations, and inviting "plus ones" instead of spouses or partners.

- Involving people living alone in politics, giving them more room to express their views.

"We need to modernise our tax system, make it more neutral and take a different view of today's society. The 'traditional' family can no longer be the

norm for drafting new laws. We need to propose more neutral legislation. Woluwe-Saint-Pierre is now setting an example," said Carla Dejonghe.

In the European Union as a whole, the number of single adult households, with or without children, has risen by 30% in just over a decade. By 2022, nearly 72 million people in the EU were living alone, representing the largest household type, according to Eurostat. Belgium is following the European trend, which does not look set to reverse in the near future. As expected, the latest data from the Belgian statistics office Statbel shows that the number of single-person households rose again in 2023. In June 2023, there were 1,842,018 one-person households in the country, or 35.9% of the 5.1 million private households.

Also read: The Guardian: [‘Lens of a singleton’: Belgian council to focus on those who live alone](#)

REGIONAL AUTHORITIES SUPPORT RURAL AREAS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Alexandr Tarnavski, Vice-Chair of the People's Assembly of Gagauzia



The autonomous district of Gagauzia, which I represent, is a small region: in terms of population and territory, it represents around 5% of the Republic of Moldova. It is an agrarian autonomy, with most of the population living in villages.

The task of the regional authorities is to help the inhabitants of the villages to benefit from quality public services, so that they are not obliged to leave their land. This is why the regional authorities have adopted a number of local laws

and policy decisions to support rural areas.

- Allocation of targeted financial resources to ensure night-time lighting in villages
- Priority allocation of financial resources for capital investment in public infrastructure
- Guaranteeing free meals for pupils of all ages in the school system
- Targeted assistance to attract investment for public infrastructure
- Preserving schools in all villages, even the smallest ones

I hope that these and other measures will help support our villages.

WE NEED EVERYONE FOR A STRONG EUROPE

Interview with Brigitte van den Berg, Alderman of Beverwijk

In less than three weeks, more than half of the Council of Europe member states will be conducting elections for the European Parliament. Many local politicians play an active role in the campaign, and some of our members are running as candidates. This is the case for our ILDG member Brigitte van den Berg from the Netherlands, number three on her D66 party list. Although the European Parliament is a different institution, we feel that this is a great opportunity for our Congress members to promote our work and the standards enshrined in the Council of Europe's Charter of Local Self-Government.

Brigitte van den Berg has been interested in politics from an early age. When she was twenty years old, she set up the local social liberal democrats group in Beverwijk. She has been an alderman in this town for six years. She sees the importance of Europe in many of the challenges she encounters at the local level, and of course, her work for the Congress has been helpful in understanding and tackling these challenges also facing other parts of our continent. Now she wishes to continue working on these topics in the European Parliament.

- What will be your key priorities if you are elected to the European Parliament?

- I have three key priorities when it comes to Europe.

As an alderman, I work for a greener economy every day. Beverwijk is right next to a major steel plant, which is incredibly important for the local and national economy, but also causes health concerns among many citizens. Trying to balance these interests as a local politician made me realise the need for European policies to tackle these issues. We want to save the climate, but we need to do so in a way that keeps our economy running and

we are not dependent on imports. This is why Europe needs to focus on our production, for instance by investing in green initiatives, for example from SMEs. In many cases, firms have been applying for subsidies for a very long time and this discourages them."

My second priority is to continue to support Ukraine. Putin will not stop by himself. We have to make sure we are able to stop him. On top of this we don't know how long the US will continue to support us. This creates uncertainty. Our survival depends on our security, which Europe itself will have to ensure. We can do this through a more effective defence policy equipped with greater resources. Further alignment of military structures and procurement policies is necessary.

The third priority concerns how we value practically educated citizens. As an alderman, I see every day how skilled professionals of all sorts are essential to our society: for example, for the green transition, our security, and healthcare. While applied science and university degrees are valid everywhere in the EU, this is not always the case for vocational diplomas. When I talk to vocational students, I note that they feel that Europe is not for them. It is more complicated for them to participate in an Erasmus exchange because they are younger, but also because credits from abroad are not always recognized in their degrees. As such, only 8% of vocational students go on exchange, while among other students, 25% do so. This group is also underrepresented in politics, which eventually reflects in the decisions politicians make. Their perspective is not taken into account, even though they can offer refreshing ideas for politics. Representation of professionals with a vocational education is important, as we are nowhere without them.



- How will you use your background in local politics at the European Parliament?

- Many of Europe's big ambitions cannot be realized without the contribution of local governments. In the Congress we discuss this all the time. This also means that we as local politicians are often most directly confronted with new challenges or the flaws of new policies. Local politics is after all the level of politics that is the closest to our citizens. This means that for European politicians it is crucial to keep looking for and listening to signals from local government. Does a European rule have unintended side effects for granting permits? Is access to EU funding insufficient? Is the national government not doing its part?

Local governments can also play a big role in bringing Europeans together, because they are so close to citizens. The cities4cities initiative is a great example of this. This project aims to support Ukrainian communities through municipal partnerships. I hope to promote these initiatives if I am elected and encourage everyone to participate in this one.

NEXT MEETINGS: ILDG MEETING 14 OCTOBER, 47TH SESSION 15-17 OCTOBER

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

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

