



News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES – COUNCIL OF EUROPE

JUNE 2025

CONGRESS WORK SPRING–SUMMER 2025: A LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE

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Dear Friends of the Liberal family,

March 2025 saw us all gather in Strasbourg for our Plenary Session with a broad range of topics, discussions and reports. We discussed the monitoring procedure of the Congress with Stéphanie Poirer, Executive Secretary of the Congress. We met with Yulia Ovchynnykova, new PACE General Rapporteur on Local and Regional Authorities. We had the honour to welcome to Strasbourg our long-standing liberal colleague Flo Clucas, Chair of the Standing Committee on Gender Equality of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, CEMR. Once again, I wish to place on record thanks to President Marc Cools for the way in which he conducted our proceedings with dedication and untiring attention to the work of Congress.

Many of our members contributed to debates by asking questions or reporting on work that they have been engaged in on behalf of Congress demonstrating our involvement in all aspects of Congress life.

One highlight, which stood out for me, was the presentation of the “Stand Speak Rise UP!” initiative by H.R.H the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg who advocates for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Another keynote debate was the discussion on violence against women in politics, which many of you took part in talking about harrowing and personal experiences.

In addition to my debate in Plenary on Foreign Interference in elections, I have had the pleasure to travel to Vilnius on 15-16 April and speak at the Council for Democratic Elections Conference on Stability of Electoral Law.

This conference was co-organised by the Central Election Commission of Lithuania and the Council for Democratic Elections, a tripartite body of the Council of Europe constituted of the Venice Commission, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress. The aim was to take stock and discuss the application of the principle of stability of electoral law, one of the most important and most quoted principles of the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, including in the recommendations of the Congress following election observation missions.

At the opening of the conference, I particularly stressed that “frequent or late changes in electoral laws undermine citizens’ trust in electoral processes and can lead voters to believe that the game is “rigged”, which is detrimental to democracy at all levels of government.”

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,

Stewart Dickson, ILDG President

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SESSION: ILDG EXCHANGES VIEWS WITH YULIIA OVCHYNNYKOVA



At its group meeting on 24 March, the ILDG met with Yuliia Ovchynnykova, the newly appointed PACE General Rapporteur on Local and Regional Authorities. We were honoured to welcome Yuliia, who is a member of the Ukrainian Parliament and of our sister political group in PACE, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for

Europe. Our discussion focused on three key topics: the role of the General Rapporteur, the Council of Europe's commitment to Ukraine, and environmental protection, a subject to which Yuliia has dedicated many years of her professional life as a professor of ecology.

The General Rapporteur on Local and Regional Authorities is appointed by the PACE Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development and acts as a bridge between local politics and parliamentary decision-making. The mandate focuses on good governance, citizen participation, financial sustainability, and protecting human rights at the local level. Yuliia also sees her role in facilitating information sharing among the different stakeholders and amplifying the voices of local governments at PACE.

As a Ukrainian Member of Parliament, Yuliia expressed her deep gratitude to member states and local

communities for their ongoing support amid Russia's war of aggression. She also highlighted key Council of Europe initiatives, including the special tribunal, the register of damage and the compensation mechanism, as well as the efforts to facilitate the return of Ukrainian children forcibly removed by Russia.

A Doctor of Biology and Professor of Ecology at the Donetsk National University (now relocated to Vinnytsia), Yuliia is passionate about environmental protection. She is actively working towards the recognition of ecocide as a crime and securing the right to a healthy environment. Addressing the ILDG shortly before presenting her report on the Draft Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law, she emphasized that safeguarding the environment is not only an ecological necessity but also a fundamental human rights and justice issue.

ILDG ADDRESS CONGRESS'S HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS

Stewart Dickson addressed the Representative of the Luxembourg CM Presidency, Minister of the Interior of Luxembourg Léon Gloden on lessons to be learnt from Luxembourg's experience in trans-regional cooperation

Martine Dieschburg-Nickels put a question to the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe Bjorn Berge on AI impact for and the new Council of Europe's convention on AI

Jimmy Moloney put a question to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Michael O'Flaherty on the role of local and regional authorities in making sure human rights are respected in the war settlement process in Ukraine.

ILDG REPORTS DURING THE 48TH SESSION – FULL OVERVIEW [HERE](#)

Martine DIESCHBURG-NICKELS, Luxembourg (L, ILDG)

- Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine: Reconstruction of Ukraine
- United Nations Second World Summit for Social Development
- The role of local and regional authorities in combatting human trafficking for purposes of labour exploitation

Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG): Foreign interference in electoral processes at local and regional levels

Teuvo HATVA, Finland (R, ILDG): Water resources under stress: towards better local and regional governance

(Chamber of Local Authorities)

Tanja JOONA, Finland (L, ILDG) : Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in San Marino

Randi MONDORF, Denmark (R, ILDG)

- Observation of local elections in Podgorica, Montenegro (26 September 2024)
- Fact-finding mission on electoral matters, Romania (23 October 2024)



Take a look at the new [Congress Highlights](#) ! On 5 June 2025, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities published its biannual report showcasing its key projects and achievements throughout 2024 and the first half of 2025.

MARC COOLS: A NEW MISSION TO KYIV



On 6 June, the President of the Congress, our former group leader Marc Cools, had the honour of receiving from the hands of President Zelensky a 'Golden Heart' award for the unfailing support given to Ukraine by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of

Europe. Marc Cools has been closely following the development of local democracy in Ukraine for the Congress for 12 years, first as rapporteur and then as President. In his speech at the opening of the Third International Summit of Cities and Regions in Kyiv, he stressed the

importance of the contribution made by Ukrainian local authorities to the reconstruction of the country during and after the war, and the support we must give them.

The high-level delegation, including our group member Mélanie Lepouttier who is the Congress Deputy Standing Rapporteur for Human Rights, had numerous meetings with local elected representatives and various authorities. This was part of the Congress' support for the decentralisation process that Ukraine is carrying out despite the war situation. During the visit, the delegation got acquainted with several Congress cooperation projects with Ukrainian municipalities. As witnessed by the Congress delegation, the reforms accomplished, democratic innovation and active citizenship at local level show the world that the democratic spirit, values and European identity are thriving in Ukraine and that, despite the war and destruction, the Ukrainian spirit and identity remain strong.

ELECTION OBSERVATION : FINLAND

Short Mission Report from Mélanie Lepouttier



From 11 to 13 April, an election observation mission took place in Finland. ILDG member Gobnait NI MHUIMNEACAIN headed the delegation, which visited various regions of the country, including Rovaniemi, Tampere and the border region with Russia. The meetings with the various parties, media and NGOs were very interesting, giving us a

better understanding of the workings of this rather unusual ballot, which consists of two elections: one for the municipalities and the other for the wellbeing counties, created in 2021. We were particularly - and pleasantly - surprised by advance voting, which allows many citizens to vote in libraries, swimming pools, supermarkets, hospitals, retirement

homes and even at home. This enables everyone to exercise their right to vote and strengthens democratic participation. We all noted a high level of confidence in the smooth running of the voting process. The members of the polling stations, who are paid, are all delighted to contribute to the democratic life of their country.

HUMAN RIGHTS RAPPORTEURS' MISSION TO AUSTRIA

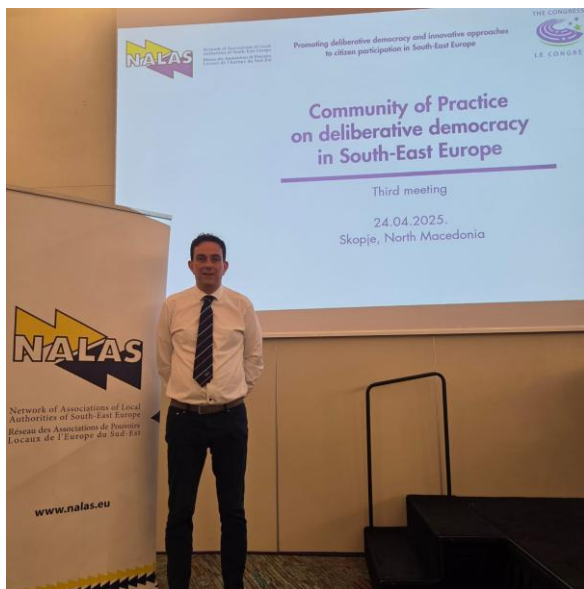
Mélanie Lepoultier, Deputy Permanent Rapporteur of the Congress on Human Rights



On 30 and 31 January, the Congress's three rapporteurs on human rights travelled to Austria. The programme included meetings with representatives of the city of Graz and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in Vienna. The meeting with the Mayor of Graz and her staff proved to be a fruitful one. Graz was awarded Europe's first human rights prize in 2001, and has many years' experience in this area. During our discussions with the Fundamental Rights Agency, we stressed the need to work with local and regional authorities. The agency mentioned the possibility of consulting local elected representatives during the monitoring it carries out in different countries. It is important to constantly remind of the essential role of local and regional authorities in the implementation of human rights

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Jimmy Moloney, Kerry County Councillor, Ireland



local authorities and 7 associations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

The event was organised in the framework of the project "Promoting deliberative democracy and innovative approaches to citizen participation in South-East Europe", implemented by the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance at the Congress. The initiative primarily aims at advancing democracy by fostering innovative approaches to citizen participation in local

Practice provides a platform for peer learning and exchange among local authorities and associations in South-East Europe, dedicated to strengthening deliberative practices. The Community of Practice is co-ordinated by the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe – NALAS.

I was asked to speak in my role as a Congress Member and give an insight into my experience in public participation in the decision-making process as a local politician in Ireland. This was followed on with questions from the floor about what can be done to make the experience better for those involved and what challenges the system presents.

The event was very well attended and enabled much discussion. Fostering dialogue and peer learning are vital tools in the promotion of democracy across Europe.

On 24 April, the third meeting of the "Community of Practice on deliberative democracy" took place in Skopje (North Macedonia). This event convened the representatives of 18

decision-making and enhancing the skills and capacities of local authorities and their associations to effectively organise deliberative processes. The Community of

NEXT MEETINGS: ILDG MEETING 27 OCTOBER, 49TH SESSION 28-30 OCTOBER

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

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

