



# News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

Newsletter - May 2013

**Dear ILDG, friends and readers,**

During the last meeting we held the general discussion on the values and principles that bring us all to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and that unite us as a Group. We all come from different parts of Europe and we all have different professional and cultural backgrounds. Yet the principles of individual freedom and allegiance to European values of democracy, human rights and rule of law surpass our differences. I am truly glad that we all agreed on this point.



We invite other members, who are not yet affiliated, to join us if they share our common values. I would be grateful if you could inform your non-affiliated colleagues and friends in the Congress about this invitation.

During the March session 2013, in accordance with the rules and practice, the ILDG elected its Bureau, including the President and Vice-Presidents of the Group. I thank the Group for its support and trust, congratulate the new Bureau of ILDG and invite it to active work.

I am also thankful to Mrs Jon Hermans-Vloedbelg (Netherlands) for having agreed to replace late Mrs Lövgren as Vice-Chair of the Governance Committee.

We are proud to congratulate Mr Keith Withmore, former President of the Group and the Congress, who became honorary member of the Congress.

Finally, on behalf of the Group, I would like to thank our Secretary of the ILDG Mrs Maria Bigday and our young trainee from France Jean-Baptiste Maillard for their work.

**Knud Andersen  
President of ILDG**

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## Composition of the ILDG Bureau



**Knud Andersen, President**

### Vice-Presidents



**Simon James**  
(UK)



**Gabriele Neff**  
(Germany)



**Vyacheslav Rogov**  
(Russian Federation)

### Ex-Officio (Members of the Bureau of the Congress)



**Marc Cools**  
(Belgium), Vice-President of  
the Chamber of Local  
Authorities



**Farid Mukhametshin**  
(Russian Federation),  
President of the Current Affairs  
Committee



**Natalia Romanova**  
(Ukraine), President of the  
Chamber of Regions

## 24<sup>th</sup> Session Highlights: Reports presented by ILDG members

[Resolutions and recommendations](#) adopted during the session



**Nigel MERMAGEN**, United Kingdom (L, ILDG)

Local and regional democracy in Georgia



**Marc COOLS**, Belgium (L, ILDG)

Local and regional democracy in Spain



**Knud ANDERSEN**, Denmark (R, ILDG)

Local and regional democracy in Italy

## Reform of Local Governance: lessons to draw from Spanish experience



### **Marc Cools**

*First Deputy Mayor of Uccle (Belgium), President of the Union of Belgian Cities and Municipalities, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe*

Spain is a democratic state. It is also a very decentralised country. The 17 Spanish regions (“Autonomous Communities”) dispose of a very large degree of autonomy. Today Spain is confronted, like other European states, with a very severe economic, social and financial crisis. This crisis forces Spain to have a more balanced budget.

The cuts in public spending have sometimes heavy consequences for citizens. Many local administrations and autonomous communities face important financial difficulties and are sometimes near bankruptcy. This situation pushed the central government to create in 2012 a Regional Liquidity Fund (*Fondo de liquidez autonómico*), in order to provide urgent financial aid to the regions that had grave budgetary problems.

That is the context in which my Dutch colleague Leen Verbeek and I conducted a monitoring mission to Spain. The report and the recommendations we presented were approved by a very large majority of the Congress during its Plenary Session on 20 March 2013 (documents available on the [web-site of the Congress](#)).

How does Spain react to the crisis? In order to resolve its financial difficulties and to improve the efficiency of services to the population, the Spanish authorities initiated a process of large-scale reform of local institutions. Several draft laws have already been adopted, such as the so-called law on stability which stipulates that competence cannot be transferred to a local level if the necessary funding is not attributed to the responsible authority. Other texts are to follow.

The central point of the envisaged reform of local authorities is to avoid the overlapping of competences. The reform should improve efficiency in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity.

I am convinced that the success of this reform will depend on the quality of dialogue between the Spanish government, the National Association of Municipalities and Provinces and the different autonomous communities, as well as on the capacity to take into account the institutional and historical particularities of some of the communities.

Spain is not the only country where dialogue between all the different concerned entities is the key to the successful reforms. Later this year I will present a monitoring report on Ukraine. There again, a dialogue on the territorial re-organisation has been launched. The necessary constitutional amendments will however require a large consensus over the contents of the reform.

For the public institutions the times of crisis are an occasion to confront their shortcomings, modernise and improve their functioning. While facing this challenge every European state has to respect democratic principles and, where necessary, reinforce local and regional autonomy.

Farid Mukhametshin

Chairman of the State Council (Parliament) of the Republic of Tatarstan (Russia)

## Promotion of Active Citizenship and Youth Participation: Preparation of the Universiade-2013



### **Farid Mukhametshin**

*President of the Current Affairs Committee of the Congress, Chairman of the State Council (Parliament) of the Republic of Tatarstan (Russia), member of the Russian delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe since 2001.*

In July 2013 the city of Kazan, the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, will host the 27<sup>th</sup> World University Summer Games. During the 24<sup>th</sup> Congress Session, Tatarstan organised an exhibition on “Sport as a Factor of Unity” devoted to the forthcoming Universiade.

Promotion of active citizenship and youth participation in decision-making process at local and regional level is a multi-dimensional challenge. It requires a very careful and comprehensive approach. The work with student communities is one of the key areas of local and regional youth policy.

The capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, Kazan, is one of the leading scientific and educational centres of the Russian Federation. There are 86 institutions of higher education with more than 200.000 students. The major priority of these institutions is to bring up not only young competitive professionals fluent in foreign languages, but also active citizens open to the world.

This year, we are hosting the 27<sup>th</sup> World University Summer Games (Universiade). More than 13.500 athletes and members of official delegations, around 1.500 journalists and more than 50.000 supporters are expected to participate in this international sports festival.

The World Universiade is considered to be the second biggest multi-sport event after the Olympic Games. The announcement of the Universiade in Kazan has given a strong impetus to the student sport movement: since five years the number of students who regularly participate in sport activities more than doubled (from 25.7% to 61.9%). Today, one can rightly call Tatarstan “the Sports Republic”.

The Universiade is not only an international sports contest; it also proves the great diplomatic role of sports and youth in the reinforcement of international humanitarian cooperation. Volunteers contribute greatly to make it happen. More than 53.000 volunteers from 53 universities of 30 Russian regions and 15 NGOs applied to participate in the organisation of the games, but only 20.000 will be selected.

Active citizenship, comprehensive practical knowledge and broad international experience gained through involvement in such international events constitute a real basis for future leaders of Tatarstan.

## European Local Democracy Week in Budești

Nina Costiuc

Mayor of Budești  
(Republic of Moldova)



On 28 January 2013 in Paris, the general meeting dedicated to the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) launched the themes for 2013. “Active citizenship: voting, sharing, participating” was selected as the leading theme. On 15 – 21 October all over Europe and beyond the citizens will be invited and encouraged to involve in the decision-making at the grassroots level. On 26 March 2013 I signed an order “With regard to the authorization of ELWD implementation in Budești” providing for an action plan for the preparation of the ELDW.

As the ELDW-2013 is dedicated to active citizenship, we set the following objectives:

- ✓ To encourage participation of citizens in the local and municipal elections;
- ✓ To combat political apathy;
- ✓ To insure maximum transparency and to inform citizens on the activities of the local public administration via the local newspaper and the web-site of the town hall;
- ✓ To get citizens actively involved in the decision-making process.

We put a special emphasis on the participation of citizens in the decision-making process, especially of youth, including pupils and students, who will be reached via the youth councils, lyceum, colleges and universities. We will hold a seminar on “A step towards democracy” in the local Palace of Culture, launch the campaign on the promotion of democratic European values, organise a round table “Your vote counts” for local pupils and open in the town hall an information point on the rights and the role of citizens in problem-solving instruments.

We are proud to announce that Budești joins other local communities from 47 member states of the Council of Europe, where the ELDW dedicated to active citizenship will take place. On this occasion I would like to quote Mrs Dubravka Suica from Dubrovnik (Croatia), Political Co-ordinator of the ELDW, who underlined the importance of the interaction between citizens and local politicians, crucial for the functioning democracy at the local level and implying active participation of both citizens and their elected representatives.

Budești already participated in the ELDW in 2011. We can affirm that the ELDW contributes to the greater involvement of citizens in local public life, evaluates perception of democratic participation and offers networking possibilities for consolidation of local democracy. During the week, the local residents are informed about the Council of Europe and the role it plays in the development and consolidation of democracy all over Europe.

The local public administration are invited to think about their responsibilities in view of achieving a more active civic participation in the decision-making process. As the international travel becomes less accessible, and the Schengen visas are issued with more and more suspicion, Moldovan citizens tend to distrust political decisions taken at the highest level, more specifically those related to open borders and freedom of movement. After 20 years of democratic transition and desire to integrate the European Union, the lack of progress undermined the trust of citizens in the implementation of these decisions.

“You become responsible for what you've tamed”, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote in “Little Prince”. I refer to this quote hoping to be understood correctly: what I mean is that both the European Union and the European non-EU states should share responsibility in making the idea of building a common Europe with its values a reality. This effort should be palpable, real and not only declarative.

Civic participation can be improved in the areas of peace, protection of the environment, tolerance, improvement of the living conditions, etc. I would like to express my deep appreciation of the efforts of our friends from Ale Kommun, Sweden, who joined their hearts in a campaign to help Moldovan children Renat and Daniela to get appropriate medical treatment, and offer 100 local children from disadvantaged families a possibility to spend their vacations in a summer camp at the local community school. These efforts are a fine example of real and very helpful transnational civic engagement.

I would like to finish this message with the firm conviction that with unity and involvement we can change things to better in spite of any crisis.

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Alexandru Ambros

Head of the Moldovan  
Delegation to the  
Congress,  
mayor of Ungheni

### **Moldovan Cartoonist Alexandru Placinta in the Congress: “Smile – a real value for life”**



Mr Placinta, Mr van Staa, Mrs Parvu and Mr Ambros

During the 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Moldovan Delegation in cooperation with the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Moldova to the CoE, organised an exhibition of caricatures “Smile – a real value for life”. The drawings (in total 51) represented the leading figures of our organisation, including the President, the Vice-Presidents and the Secretary General of the Congress, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova and the heads of all national delegations to the Congress.

The idea of this exhibition was to bring a breeze of good mood and laughter to the members of the Congress and to make us more creative, more tolerant and more involved. Inaugurating the exhibition, the President of the Congress Mr Herwig van Staa said that “If you get difficult situations with a smile, things become easier”. The Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova, Mrs Tatiana Parvu, highly appreciated the work of Alexandru Placinta, while stressing that the main purpose of such an unusual manifestation was to bring more smiles and humour to the Congress. As the head of the Moldovan Delegation, I greatly supported the idea of the exhibition and decided to offer the caricatures as a gift from the Moldovan Delegation to the Congress in sign of friendship and cooperation.

During the inauguration, the characters of the caricatures could also meet and thank for the delightful humour the author of the works, Alexandru Placinta. The success of the exhibition was confirmed by the positive reception from the Congress members, new proposals for collaboration and of course by the smiles and laughter all around.



Mrs Romanova and Mr Placinta



Mr Placinta



Mrs Parvu and Mr van Staa

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## Agenda

- **Bureau of the Congress:** 18 June 2013, Yerevan, Armenia
- **Bureau of the Congress:** 13 September 2013, Strasbourg, France
- **25<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session and ILDG meeting:** 29-31 October 2013
- **Bureau of the Congress:** 2 December 2013, Strasbourg, France



Tel: +33 3 88412682

[maria.bigday@coe.int](mailto:maria.bigday@coe.int)

Fax: +33 3 88 41 37 61

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