



# News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES – COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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## SOLIDARITY, SUPPORT AND MUTUAL HELP

by Marc Cools, President of the ILDG

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The coronavirus pandemic hits our countries hard. The work of our Congress is also affected. The March session had to be cancelled.

The pandemic results in sanitary crisis, but also an economic and a social one – in many countries its violence is unprecedented since the Second World War. In every country, but also on the international level, public authorities take measures and prepare recovery plans to limit the fallout.

Our group expresses its support to all those who suffer from this sanitary crisis and its economic and social consequences. This crisis shows the limits of globalisation and the necessity to repatriate to our European continent certain strategic industrial activities. It also shows how important it is not to cut down, but on the contrary to apply additional efforts in the public health sector.

Europe was not expecting the 2008 financial crisis which started in the USA. Now it was caught unaware by the coronavirus pandemic which originated in China. Tomorrow other big crises can happen. It may be in the digital area, or in another. **Europe must be capable to anticipate major crises**; it has to prepare for them to be able to react efficiently. And when I speak about Europe, I do not mean the European Union, but the larger Europe composed of 47 Council of Europe member states. Personally, I regret that the Council of Europe has not been more active in the context of the coronavirus crisis.

When it will be over, the moment will come to ask ourselves if everything was done on every level of authorities, and whether it was done swiftly enough. But one positive conclusion can already be drawn today. It is about the **great solidarity of which our citizens are capable during the crisis**. Everywhere, in every country solidarity initiatives blossomed. For example, in my town of Uccle in the Brussels region of Belgium, voluntary aid workers from a charity similar to the Red Cross started to buy groceries for lonely people who were unable to do it themselves under lockdown.

**One of the dangers is that sanitary lockdown introduced in many countries may be followed by a lockdown of democracy.** This is why it is important, including at the local level, that the meetings of our institutions continue, for example through videoconference. It also applies to our Congress. Our three Committees will meet on 21 September 2020, and our next session is planned for 26-29 October 2020. We insisted that in case pandemic will make such meetings impossible, we immediately hold them through videoconference. We made a similar proposal for the Congress Bureau meetings.

Hope to see you all soon in good health and please take care of yourselves!

## THE CONGRESS DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

The March Congress session had to be cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. The next plenary session of the Congress will take place in Strasbourg on 26-29 October 2020.

The Congress Bureau decided to postpone the renewal of the Congress and asked the Committee of Ministers to allow member States to submit proposals for new delegations until 31 December 2020. The current mandate of Congress members would thus be extended until the spring session 2021 (currently provisionally scheduled for 23-25 March 2021).

The three Committees of the Congress will meet in parallel on 21 September 2020 to examine and approve reports.

# HUMAN RIGHTS HANDBOOK

by Harald Bergmann, Congress Spokesperson on Human Rights at Local and Regional Level, Middelburg, Netherlands

During this time of uncertainty and fear around the spread of COVID-19, I hope you and your families are well. This ILDG newsletter is a wonderful moment to stay in contact with each other and share our work for our Congress.

At the Monitoring Committee meeting in Metz, early this year, I presented a detailed outline of the upcoming Human Rights Handbook with social rights as the theme. We put a lot of effort to get this outline ready at the beginning of this year because we are planning to finalise the Human Rights Handbook in 2020.

Social movements against the rise in inequality have amplified over the recent years. I am convinced that we as local elected representatives, must act urgently within the sphere of our competences, in the area of social rights. We should overcome inequality between social groups in health, education and social mobility. We must contribute at our level to building fair and inclusive societies. The Handbook will guide us on how to do it.

In the outline submitted to your attention you can read that we will open the edition with an introduction to explain why social rights are the overarching theme of the Handbook and, more specifically, why they are relevant to us, the local and the regional authorities.

In the next chapters we will define more precisely the responsibilities of local and regional authorities across the Council of Europe member States in implementing social rights. This may cover a large range of different related issues, such as the right to education, to work, to housing, to health and to social security. Further we will analyse the key challenges faced by local authorities when they implement social rights. Just like in the previous Handbook we will draw on examples of good practices of social rights implementation at local level in the Council of Europe member states. We will conclude with a set of practical recommendations to local and regional authorities on how to embrace social rights in their activities.



Those who have seen the outline know it already contains some fine examples. From my previous experience, I know that collecting examples of good practices of implementing social rights at grassroots level will probably be the most time-consuming task. I need your help to accomplish it successfully. I invite everyone of you to share with me your experience or good practices from your countries that we could include in this Handbook. Please send your proposals at your earliest convenience to the Congress Secretariat.

If for some reason we have too many examples - and I hope so - we may decide later on whether prioritising of sub-categories of social rights will be useful.

The staff and I will continue from a distance to work on our Handbook based on this outline to come back to you with the first draft as soon as the sanitary situation in Europe becomes clearer.

I wish you all good health!

## >NEXT MEETINGS:

ILDG: 26 October 2020  
Congress: 39th Session on 27-29 October 2020

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