



# News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES – COUNCIL OF EUROPE

APRIL 2016

## FIGHT AGAINST BARBARITY

*The first day of the spring session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, 22 March 2016, was marked by a series of deadly terrorist attacks in Brussels. This article was written only a few days following the attacks that killed dozens of people...*

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by Marc Cools



32 dead, 340 injured. After London, Madrid, Paris, Tunis, Istanbul and many other towns, on 22 March 2016 terrorists targeted Brussels, my city. Nothing can justify such barbarity. Our thoughts go to the victims and their relatives.

No city in Europe, no capital city in the world, is safe from such terrible acts. Following the attacks, the people of my country chose not to give way to fear, not to hide at home but to continue living as they like.

The response to these attacks should be multi-facet. Security is the first focus. We must fight

relentlessly and use all available instruments to find and bring to justice those responsible for the attacks and those who helped to perpetrate them. We should strengthen the capacity of our justice department, security forces and intelligence services to allow them to do their job and ensure our security. But this capacity strengthening must be done in respect of our fundamental freedoms. We must be careful not to go into extremes as was done after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 with the US "Patriot Act". At the same time, we should realise that we all may become target for terrorists and will have to accept such security measures as bag searches in places of large public gatherings.

But the security response is not sufficient. We must detect as early as possible the risks of radicalisation among young people and try to bring those youngsters back into our society. The "Islamic state" is a destructive sect and like all organisations of this type it relies on brainwashing. It is not only in Iraq, Syria or Libya that we should combat ISIS; it is also at home, in our countries and towns. This will require policies of prevention and detection of radicalisation, area where local authorities have a key role to play.

Those who committed the attacks in Brussels want to turn our people against each other; they especially want to oppose Muslims to non-Muslims. We must not fall into this trap. We must not hold the whole community accountable for the acts committed by criminals.

It is our democratic values that were targeted in Brussels. We must firmly defend and promote these values. As other forms of terrorism in the past, Islamist terrorism will be defeated.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CONGRESS:

**Marc Cools:** "The Congress must be a forum for discussion and direct exchanges between local politicians. We should all think how to make our work in Strasbourg more efficient. Listening to expert reports is not sufficient; we must reinforce our capacity to discuss with one another, between local elected politicians from all over Europe".

## EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH ALDE-CoR PRESIDENT BAS VERKERK

At its meeting on 21 March 2016, the ILDG held an exchange of views with Bas Verkerk, leader of the liberal group in the EU Committee of the Regions, Mayor of the city of Delft in the Netherlands.

“ALDE-CoR is our natural partner in the Committee of the Regions, all the more that several members of our group work in both organisations. In recent years, we

have come to understand that the Congress and the Committee of the Regions confront similar challenges in the field of local democracy. Our groups took the initiative to hold this exchange of views precisely because we believe that we have areas of common interest where our cooperation may bring good results. One of the issues that most of our members have to face today is the management of refugee flows and the role that local elected politicians can play in combatting intolerance and xenophobia,” stated Marc Cools, ILDG President, opening the debate.

In his address to the ILDG, Bas Verkerk presented the organisational structure of the Committee of the Regions. “The CoR Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX) chaired by François Decoster (ALDE-CoR, France) is perhaps the body that focuses more closely on issues discussed in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. We definitely can learn from each other and sometimes avoid unnecessary duplication in our work,” said Bas Verkerk.

“Regarding the refugee situation, in the end of the day, we all



Bas Verkerk, Marc Cools

understand that it is up to us, local governments, to contribute to tackling the crisis. Local politicians should play a key role in policies of integration and prevention of radicalisation. There are many people who want to help, but there are also those who are afraid of newcomers. Local governments can help to find solutions. The states must give us more instruments and possibilities to do this job,” concluded Bas Verkerk.

ILDG and ALDE-CoR decided to have regular contacts. Andris Jaunsleinis (Latvia, ILDG and ALDE-CoR) will regularly report to ILDG members about ALDE-CoR activities.

## APPOINTMENTS & MEMBERSHIP:

**Sergii Chernov** (Ukraine) replaced Natalia Romanova as Vice-President of the Chamber of Regions

**Harald M. Bergmann** (the Netherlands) appointed Congress Thematic Spokesperson on human rights at local and regional levels

**Natalia Romanova** (Ukraine), **Nigel Mermagen** (UK) and **Raymond Svensson** (Sweden) finished their mandates with the Congress and were thanked by the group

ILDG welcomed new delegates:

Estonia: **Tarmo Tammiste** (Mayor of Narva)

Ireland: **Cathy Bennet** (Monaghan County Council)

Spain: **Marta Pascal** (Vice-President of the ALDE Party, Parliament of Catalonia)

Sweden: **Thomas Andersson** (Regional Council of Jämtland and Härjedalen)

UK: **Helen Carr** (London Borough of Brent), **Julian German** (Cornwall County Council), **Peter Thornton** (South Lakeland District Council), **Linda Gillham** (Runnymede Council);

Ukraine: **Olena Pasevich** (Lviv Local Council); **Sergii Chernov** (Head of the Kharkiv Regional Council)

## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT ALDE-CoR:

**ALDE-CoR** with 85 members is the 3rd largest political group in CoR

**CoR:** 6 political groups, 6 commissions, 5 plenary sessions per year

**CIVEX** commission is chaired by François Decoster (ALDE-CoR, France). On 19 April 2016, CIVEX adopted an opinion prepared by Bart Somers (ALDE-CoR, Belgium) on radicalisation and its prevention. The opinion will be debated in the plenary on 15-16 June.

## IN BRIEF:

### Knud Andersen becomes honorary member of the Congress

On the initiative of the ILDG, Knud Andersen, former President of the group, Denmark, has been granted honorary membership in the Congress. "I am immensely proud that the group decided to put my name forward. We should all realize that the right to think, talk and vote freely are the fundamental rights of our democracy. Being in the Congress allows us to promote these rights internationally. I had the chance to work with you and I thank you for this," said Knud Andersen addressing the group on 21 March 2016.

### Reports presented during the 2016 spring session

Bert Bouwmeester, Netherlands (L, ILDG), co-rapporteur on a joint report by the Governance and Current Affairs Committees "Organising intercultural and interreligious activities: a toolkit for local authorities". Resolution 397(2016) instructs the Congress to prepare a toolkit to combat radicalisation.

**In October 2015, the Bureau approved my appointment as the Congress Thematic Spokesperson on human rights at local and regional levels. I replaced Lars O. Molin who did an excellent job as spokesman but who is, unfortunately, no longer member of the Congress. I am truly honoured to have been granted this responsibility.**

Having been a mayor, I am deeply convinced that human rights are a crucial issue in local policy-making. I use this personal conviction in my daily work. In Middelburg, human rights are at the basis of a large number of policies, for example in the field of healthcare. Every year we meet with other local representatives of our Association of Municipalities to discuss issues related to human rights and local policy-making. In December 2015, the 6<sup>th</sup> [International Human](#)

## Human Rights Action Plan 2016-2017



*By Harald M. Bergmann, Netherlands*

[Rights Education Conference](#) which took place in Middelburg featured a session on local government and human rights.

I actively participated in the Human Rights Forum in Graz which led to the adoption of the [Graz Declaration](#) on the implementation of Human Rights by the Congress' participants in May 2015. This declaration aims, as you know, at raising politicians' and civil servants' awareness on the importance of human rights at local and regional level.

In order to meet the goals set in the declaration, I prepared a proposal for a Human Rights Action Plan of the Congress 2016-2017 – and I would like to thank the secretariat of the Congress for their assistance. On 12 February 2016, I presented the results of my work at the Monitoring Committee meeting in Paris.

The action plan for 2016-2017 has four dimensions: participation of researchers and experts, preparation of the Congress Human Rights Manual for Local Authorities, organisation of a colloquium on the implementation of human rights at the local level and creation of a network of research institutes on human rights at local level.

It is a small group of experts who will be writing the Manual. In order to establish a list of human rights topics to be explored, the experts will draw on the experiences of the past, and will look at relevant human rights issues which make up the local political agenda today. They will try to identify recurrent

**Harald M. Bergmann** (L, ILDG) is a Dutch politician of the VVD. Since 27 August 2012 he has been Mayor of Middelburg, capital of the province of Zeeland. Before that, he served as Mayor of the municipality of Albrandswaard since 2005.

challenges and general trends in different Council of Europe member states.

The Manual will provide a straightforward approach to the implementation of human rights at the local level with clear procedures to follow on human rights in specific areas. The Manual will also set the basis for the exchange of initiatives between local authorities to foster incentives to develop policies that respect and promote human rights. Further, the Manual will help monitor the implementation of recommendations, especially concerning the effective citizen participation and possible violations of human rights standards by newly adopted measures. It should be published in February 2017.

Following the Conference in Graz, a colloquium on the implementation of human rights at the local level will be organised. During the colloquium and its workshops, representatives of local authorities and experts will identify the main human rights challenges and share experience.

In order to further support this Action Plan, I do believe a network of research institutes who have expertise in the domain of human rights is necessary.

This Action Plan is subject to change, and any contribution from your part would be more than welcome. The more brains we are to think together, the stronger we will be, and as the Spokesman of the Congress, I see my role as being the voice of this collective work.

## YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The ILDG pays very special attention to youth participation in local democracy. Last April, our electronic bulletin featured an article by Kenny van Minsel, youth delegate at the 28<sup>th</sup> session of the Congress. This time, on the initiative of Viacheslav Rogov, ILDG bureau member, we give the floor to Vladimir Svobodin, young politician from Pokrov. The Russian town of Pokrov has the population of 17.700 people and is located about 100 km east of Moscow.

*“Vladimir is very interested in the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. When he decided to run for office, I immediately supported him. Vladimir was elected to our town council in 2011 when he was 29. Today he is one of the most active young councillors in our town. That is why I invited him to contribute to our newsletter.”*

Viacheslav Rogov  
Council of the Petushinski district, Vladimir Region, Mayor of Pokrov in 1991-2011,  
member of the Congress and ILDG since 1996

## YOUNG PEOPLE WORKING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN RUSSIA

*By Vladimir Svobodin, Pokrov, Russia*

**I know that the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has been very active on youth participation. The Congress has discussed and adopted reports on the different forms and best practices of youth participation. The Congress regularly invites youth delegates to take part in the sessions. The 30<sup>th</sup> session continued paying attention to these topics.**

In Russia we try to create favourable conditions for young people to get involved in local democracy and to be able to use their skills and creativity for innovation and decision-making. Although we still lack young politicians, the work on strengthening youth participation starts to give positive results. The main political forces in Russia are also interested in working with young, talented and active people in order to create a pool of politicians and managers for local politics. To foster continuity, the Russian local government association is now working on putting together a “bank of best practices”, which will be an additional way of learning for young local politicians.

Young people involved in local self-government in Russia face a number

of problems. We may have difficulties with the implementation of our decisions, such as the lack of budgetary funds and the lack of interest in our proposals on how to find alternative financial sources for local projects. Sometimes we also don't have the required powers to help our citizens. Although these problems are not really wide-spread, they do exist.

I would like to say a couple of words about the results of my work at the town council of Pokrov, where I have been re-elected for a second mandate. The most recurrent questions to me as a town councillor are related to housing: renovation of buildings and communications and the tariffs for municipal services. I have to deal with a lot of requests and be the bridge between the citizens and the town administration. Thanks to this work, we have been able to replace and renovate roofs on several apartment buildings, restore several staircases, build playgrounds for children and pave areas around a big apartment building. In the near future I will continue working for young people of my district with the project to create a sports club in place of the old House of Culture. Last year

we have been able to restore the monument to fallen soldiers situated in my district, and I am particularly proud of this work.

We, young local representatives, can look at problems from a different perspective, and this is our comparative advantage. We are ready to engage into work, especially if it brings results. I am certain that young people can be very helpful and can contribute to the development of local self-government.



Working with local children in Pokrov

### NEXT MEETINGS:

ILDG : 18 October 2016

31th Session of the Congress: 19-21 October 2016

Bureau of the Congress: 13 June; 20 September; 18 October 2016

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