



# News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES – COUNCIL OF EUROPE

MAY 2021

## LOCAL DEMOCRACY GUARANTEES THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY

*Marc Cools, ILDG President*

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NEXT MEETING:

7 JUNE 2021

14 H – 16 H 30



Due to the pandemic, the March plenary session of the Congress was held by videoconference. There were two major events during this session: the renewal of the composition of the Congress and the adoption of a report on our priorities for 2021-2026. When there are too many priorities, there are none. The merit of the report adopted after a year of broad consultation with the members of the Congress and the national delegations, is to limit our **priorities to five**:

1. Effective local and regional responses to public health crises
2. The quality of representative democracy and citizen participation
3. Reducing inequalities
4. Environmental issues and climate action in cities and regions
5. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence in the local context

**Local and regional authorities are major actors of change** and their participation is crucial for achieving these objectives.

Liberal democracy and the values on which it is based are now under pressure throughout Europe. It is no longer a unanimously recognised model. **Our commitment to vibrant and effective democracy** is therefore **more important than ever**. Such a democracy is based on the alliance of representative and participatory democracy. A democracy may not work unless citizens are interested in public affairs. We must confront the indifference of our fellow citizens towards politics and encourage them to take part. This is what is at stake in citizen participation, and it can be best organized at the local level. Participatory democracy should therefore not be understood in opposition to representative democracy, but as a complement to it.

Democracy also means that you can address elected officials directly, without having to deal with a heavy and impersonal technocrate. Local elected officials are at the service of their fellow citizens. They are an essential part and guarantors of democracy. Democracy is not only built from above but also from below. That is why local authorities who are the closest to the citizens are so important. Our Congress promotes and defends local and regional democracy by – among other things – monitoring the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the member states and by observing local and regional elections. This is an exciting task that we have as members of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The March plenary session was a renewal session, and many new members joined the Congress and of our political group. I welcome them and I hope that they will be able to take part in the next meeting of our group to be held by videoconference on 7 June 2021 from 2:00 to 4.30 pm CET.

### HANS VAN BAALEN IN MEMORIAM...

The ILDG group is saddened by the passing of Hans van Baalen, ALDE Party President since 2015 and President of Liberal International in 2009-2014. This is a great loss for liberals throughout Europe. Our thoughts are with his family.

## 2021 CONGRESS ELECTIONS

### RENEWAL OF THE BUREAU OF THE CONGRESS

During its 40th session conducted online on 23-24 March 2021 the Congress elected Mr Leendert Verbeek (Pays-Bas, SOC/V/DP) its new President. He succeeds in this function to Mr Anders Knapé (Sweden, EPP).

The ILDG will be represented in the Bureau of the Congress by two members entitled to vote: Ms Mme Martine Dieschburg-Nickels (Luxembourg, Vice-President of the Chamber of Local Authorities) and Mr Andrei Novikov (Estonia, Vice-President of the Chamber of Regions). Two other ILDG members sit on the Bureau with a consultative mandate: ILDG President Mr Marc Cools (Belgium) and Chair of the Current Affairs Committee Mr Thomas Andersson (Sweden).

### THE ILDG CONGRATULATES ALL MEMBERS ELECTED TO LEADING POSITIONS IN THE CONGRESS

#### CHAMBER OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES



Vice-President  
Martine Dieschburg-  
Nickels  
(L, Luxembourg)

#### CHAMBER OF REGIONS



Vice-President  
Andrei Novikov  
(R, Estonia)

#### MONITORING COMMITTEE



1<sup>st</sup> Vice-Chair  
Stewart Dickson  
(R, United Kingdom)



3<sup>rd</sup> Vice-Chair  
Randi Mondorf  
(R, Denmark)

#### CURRENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE



President  
Thomas Andersson  
(R, Sweden)



4<sup>th</sup> Vice-Chair  
Ilsur Metshin  
(L, Russian Federation)

#### GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



3<sup>rd</sup> Vice-Chair  
Franck Cecconi  
(R, France)



4<sup>th</sup> Vice-Chair  
Ines Swaelens  
(L, Belgium)

#### MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES

On 8 April 2021, Stewart Dickson (United Kingdom, ILDG), First Vice-Chair of the Congress Monitoring Committee, participated in the online OSCE [Conference for local councillors in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) "The Work of Cantonal and Municipal Assemblies / Councils during the Covid-19 Crisis".

"Intolerance is rising against all minority and vulnerable groups in our society," warned [Congress Spokesperson on Human Rights](#), Harald Bergmann (Netherlands, ILDG), at the 85th Plenary Meeting of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on 31 March 2021.

## COMMUNAL INTEGRATION PLAN

*Martine Dieschbourg-Nickels, Vice-President of the Congress, municipal councillor, Strassen, Luxembourg*

Luxembourg enjoys a very special demographic situation. Out of 620.000 residents, almost 50% are not citizens of Luxembourg. This percentage is even higher in some municipalities, notably in Strassen, where I am a member of the municipal council. As of 1 January 2021, Strassen counts around 10.200 inhabitants of 112 different nationalities, with the non-Luxembourgish population representing 62% of the total population.

It goes without saying that municipal leaders must take up quite a big challenge: to ensure a good quality of life, well-being and living together while respecting each other. First of all, in collaboration with the Intercultural and social research and education centre (CEFIS), we carried out an analysis of the situation, i.e. the state of play and needs assessment.

All the actors in the field were consulted about their actions and initiatives to promote integration. But it was also an opportunity for them to tell us about the difficulties they encountered. Thus, schools, clubs and associations, childcare and nurseries, municipal administration,

the municipal integration commission, the equal opportunities commission and many others were consulted.

In addition, the entire population of Strassen was invited to participate in an online survey on the subject.

After this first stage of the study, a report was presented at the end of 2020.

Strassen has always been a very welcoming municipality and in 2009 it was the first municipality in Luxembourg to offer services dedicated to integration under the theme "Together better". New residents are offered a "Welcome book" and the head of the service responds to their questions, suggestions and complaints. Many projects and events have been organised to improve the living together: language courses to learn Luxembourgish, a language café, a big popular festival every two years, an old-fashioned fair, a fortnightly market, the neighbours' day, communal projects to create housing, awareness-raising for voter registration to improve democratic participation (five years of residence in Luxembourg are required for local



elections), etc.

But despite all these actions and the services offered, the study has shown that there is still a lot to be done to meet the needs of our citizens. Strassen will therefore draw up its own municipal integration plan based on the results of the preliminary study

### ILDG MEMBERS' REPORTS AT THE STATUTORY FORUM ON 12 FEBRUARY 2021 (DOCUMENTS)

#### **Liisa ANSALA (Finland)**

- Revision of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress (co-rapporteur)

#### **Thomas ANDERSSON (Sweden) and Ilmur METSHIN (Russian Federation)**

- Youth work at local and regional levels (co-rapporteurs)

#### **Marc COOLS (Belgium)**

- Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government: Hungary (co-rapporteur)

#### **Amelie TARSCHYS INGRE (Sweden)**

- The status of capital cities (rapporteur)

### ILDG MEMBERS' REPORTS AT THE STATUTORY FORUM ON 7 DECEMBER 2020 (DOCUMENTS)

#### **Marc COOLS (Belgium)**

- Fact-finding report on territorial reform in Latvia (co-rapporteur)

#### **Harald BERGMANN (the Netherlands)**

- Human Rights Handbook for local and regional authorities Volume II (rapporteur)

#### **Wilma DELISSEN VAN TONGERLO (the Netherlands)**

- Developing urban-rural interplay (co-rapporteur)

and in collaboration with the integration department of the competent ministry. The practical CIP guide developed by the Ministry for Family, Integration and the Greater

Region in collaboration with Syvicol (Luxembourgish towns association) is a valuable instrument that can best support local authorities in developing strategies and actions that allow for

harmonious living together in each municipality. For all those interested, here is the link to this [practical guide](#).

## MUNICIPALITIES CAN AND SHOULD BE THE FORERUNNERS

*Andrei Novikov, Vice-President of the Congress, Deputy Mayor of Tallinn, Estonia*



**Local municipalities and cities have great potential to set the guidelines of state policy or even regional policy.** I believe that Tallinn takes the realization of this potential very seriously. There are not too many other similar local authorities to have developed pan-European initiatives with actual far-reaching impact. One such example is the decisive turn towards the green and sustainable direction taken in Tallinn. In 2006, the Mayor of Tallinn Jüri Ratas proposed the European Commission to introduce the title of European Green Capital in the European Union. Today, Green Capital has become an accomplished trophy, the framework of which encourages and recognizes the efforts of local governments to create a greener environment.

from the previous economic crisis (2008-2009), as well as supported the environment.

Free public transportation for all citizens was a pioneering initiative that has raised awareness in Europe and around the world. The solution adopted in Tallinn was outstanding because with this everyday service, it is possible to alleviate many diverse problems of the population simultaneously. In March 2020, Luxembourg was next to implement the initiative and introduce free public transport.

In many countries, transport is a significant source of expenditure for families. If we look at the daily expenses of the population of different municipalities and regions, a large

The second initiative that has brought Tallinn a wide-spread recognition dates back to 2011, when Tallinn decided to introduce free public transportation for city residents. In our view, it has provided economic and social support to the population when recovering

part of them is related to mobility. In turn, this causes related difficulties, for example, in the previous crisis, we saw situations where job search was sometimes hampered because the unemployed could not pay for a bus ticket to go to a job interview.

Meanwhile, it is clear that the vast majority of countries or municipalities around the world subsidize public transport anyway. The grant is mostly 50-70% of the ticket price. Tallinn also subsidized 70% of urban transport before the transition to free transport - from this to full subsidization was no longer a big step. I believe that in many municipalities, this could also be a matter for political consideration.

In addition to price, much depends on the quality of public transport to improve mobility. The use of old and polluting vehicles affects both the environmental impact and the reputation of public transport in the eyes of the population. Therefore, we saw that more frequent cleaning of public transport vehicles and the introduction of new buses have significantly increased the use of public transportation. I call for similar solutions to be found in other cities that address the various urban complexities and tackle social, economic and cohesion issues.

# THE PANDEMIC HAS ENCOURAGED US TO REVIEW THE WORK OF MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES AND TO DEVELOP VOLUNTEERING

*Evgenii Zabolotnyi, Chairman of the Tyumen City Duma, Russian Federation*

**In 2021, Russia as the whole Europe remains under lockdown. During this tough time the municipal authorities are focusing on finding solutions, the most critical issues being self-organization of municipal authority activities and assistance to the business community and citizens.**

At the pandemic height, the activities of the representative authority, the Tyumen City Duma, have been organized online very swiftly. The digitalization programme implemented before the pandemic helped a lot: the “deputy’s blog” was posted in the Duma official website, where all important documents designed for the work of councillors are published; citizens are invited to consult Duma activities and provide feedback through the tools “proposals to draft resolutions” and “list of mandates”. All councillors’ offices in the city of Tyumen are equipped with necessary equipment for online work with citizens.

New mechanisms were introduced into the Duma rules of procedure to take timely decisions on topical issues. The main objective was to allow online sessions, while some councillors were still able to work in the meeting room in compliance with all epidemiological requirements. During this period, major decisions were made to provide benefits to low-income citizens, assistance for tenants of houses damaged in emergencies, etc. Tax rates were decreased for various businesses; fees for the use of municipal property were reduced for entrepreneurs; businesses using land plots to construct sports facilities and to implement investment projects were exempt from land taxation.

During the pandemic, the use of modern technologies became a well-established practice of e-democracy. The Duma organized continuous communication between councillors and the citizens: city residents sent proposals for Duma draft resolutions via

the official website and could contact any councillor online. When pandemic limitations were relaxed, this time was used to conduct public hearings on the draft budget and other key issues.

Municipal deputies know best how ordinary people live, what problems they have, what they need. The work with the public has different dimensions. The first one is solving macro problems concerning a large group of citizens: additional lighting in residential complexes, new parking spaces, bus stops and more. These and other issues are stipulated in the list of citizen mandates for deputies and must be fulfilled. The second trend is solving micro problems: targeted assistance to vulnerable people, especially seniors and citizens suffering from chronic diseases. During the pandemic, local councillors organized the work of volunteers, they purchased and delivered food, medication, helped to settle household problems.

The Duma Volunteering Centre has become a much-appreciated initiative applying the principles of sharing and



caring, inclusion and help. The Center receives citizens’ requests, sets priorities and monitors their implementation. In many cases people need both material support and human attention: care, kindness and communication. All these requests are relevant at any time and for any city. I believe that our co-operation and experience-sharing in the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress can result in new solutions and improve our efficiency in this area of municipal work.

*Information: the city of Tyumen, the Russian Federation, was founded east of the Urals in 1586. Today the city counts 789 thousand residents. It annually ranks among Top-100 Russian Cities for quality of life. The Tyumen City Duma consists of 36 deputies who work in five permanent commissions encompassing all city spheres.*

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