



## European Local Democracy Week 2017

### Why is 2017 a special year for the ELDW?

Launched in 2007 to foster citizen participation and promote democracy at the level closest to the citizens, the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year – officially between 9 and 15 October 2017. On this special occasion, local and regional authorities of Europe and their associations are encouraged to organise participatory events to celebrate local democracy, as a shared value across the European continent.

### What is the focus of this year's edition?

More than 1000 local authorities and their associations from the 47 Council of Europe member states and beyond have participated in this pan-European voluntary initiative since its creation, having organised a large variety of activities to meet and engage with their citizens. Most of these events can be seen on the [official website](#) of the ELDW.

These ELDW partners confirm that a growing number of local authorities and elected representatives see the benefits of getting citizens involved in decision-making processes: increased legitimacy, improved accountability and more efficient delivery of public services among other things. In the past 10 years, local authorities have developed new ways and opportunities available for citizens to participate in public life. Furthermore, we are living the world of internet and e-democracy in which new technologies and emerging political actors are increasingly gaining space in complementarity to the traditional elements of representative democracy. Citizens are invited to express their opinion on public issues through more direct platforms, such as interactive websites, text messaging systems and social media. At the same time, these new opportunities come with new challenges for the work of local and regional authorities, such as issues related to data protection, accessibility, cybercrime, freedom of speech and social inclusion.

In the light of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Local Democracy Week, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe – responsible for the co-ordination of the ELDW – decided to reflect on the changing context of citizen participation and its link to the core mission of the initiative. ***“Citizen participation, consultation and commitment: for a thriving local democracy”*** has therefore been chosen as the main theme of the ELDW in 2017.

**Citizen participation** is the bedrock of democracy and good governance – core values of our society, represented and promoted by the Council of Europe and its Congress. Local and regional authorities are especially well placed to disseminate these values, on account of their proximity to citizens. On the occasion of the ELDW 2017, elected representatives and their citizens may be reminded of the importance of developing and engaging in inclusive participatory processes, in order to ensure effective and sustainable democracy.

**Consultation** of citizens on the issues that concern them is at the heart of citizen participation at all levels of governance. It is important to show citizens the different types of consultation that are available for them and the various ways to participate in decision-making, including the use of new communication technologies and new participatory methods to keep pace with the constantly evolving democratic processes. This is

especially relevant at the local and regional level where citizens can practice their right to participation, as enshrined in the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) and its [additional protocol](#) on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority, on a daily basis on issues that directly affect their lives. Citizens should be aware of the positive effects of raising their voice and engaging in a dialogue for contributing to the development of grassroots policies.

In this context, it is crucial to emphasise that making democracy thrive necessitates a two-sided **commitment** to participatory processes: local authorities and politicians need to offer citizens the right tools and ways for consultation and participation, whilst citizens need to take these opportunities and get actively involved in local affairs.

While focusing on promoting the added value of participatory democracy at the lowest levels of governance, the theme of the ELDW 2017 also intends to raise awareness of the work and the role of the Council of Europe in promoting local democracy and good governance. In particular, it echoes the first of the [12 principles](#) for good governance at local level developed by the Council of Europe, “Fair Conduct of Elections, Representation and Participation”, which requires that citizens are at the centre of public activity and they are involved in clearly defined ways in public life at local level.

Furthermore, the 2017 motto is in line with the Congress priorities for 2017-2020 developed within its role of improving local and regional governance, in particular, the priorities of “enhancing the quality of local and regional democracy” and “building safe and inclusive societies that respect diversity”. Concrete Congress actions for implementing these priorities include the promotion of a toolkit for local authorities ‘Towards a greater citizen participation in community decision’, revising the 1999 European Code of Conduct on the political integrity of local and regional representatives, and debating a report on open data for better public services during its March 2017 Session.

A more extensive list of Council of Europe and Congress reference texts related the 2017 theme of the ELDW is available on the [official website](#).

### **What type of activities to organise under this theme in 2017?**

Events organised could focus on fulfilling the principal mission of the European Local Democracy Week – i.e. to raise citizens’ awareness of how local authorities operate and on how shared values on good local governance elaborated at the European level contribute to improving their practice. The events may also offer accessible information to citizens on how they can effectively take part and make use of local consultation processes – including by using the latest communication tools and new forms of citizen participation as complementary to more “classical” ways of citizen participation.

Activities to achieve a broader understanding of the functioning of public institutions, the roles of elected representatives and ways of participating in public life could include open days in the town halls with multimedia presentations, virtual Question & Answer sessions with the mayor, “speed dating” with local politicians, interactive expositions on participatory tools, mobile participatory budgeting, door-to-door visits, board games on the values of democracy and human rights for youth or online questionnaires to prioritise issues for discussion with the residents.

Activities would valuably target citizens of all ages and all groups of society. Especially the younger generations should be involved in participatory events, through enhanced co-operation with local schools and universities. Educating young people about their rights and responsibilities and helping them developing a critical thinking towards democratic processes will contribute to a thriving local democracy in the years ahead.