



ASSESSMENT OF THE EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK

2013

7th edition

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Promoting Active Citizenship

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has identified active citizenship as the main theme of the seventh edition of the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) which was adopted at the general co-ordination meeting in Paris on 28 January 2013 as a result of the discussion with the national co-ordinators and particularly active partners of the ELDW.

The choice of the theme *“Active citizenship: voting, sharing, participating”* is intended to encourage cities and municipalities all over Europe to promote awareness of the responsibilities that are incumbent on each individual in a democratic society, in particular within the local community, whether as an elected representative, local administrator, public servant or ordinary citizen. Local authorities have a duty to promote and facilitate active democratic citizenship by increasing transparency in local government mechanisms and by providing tools and opportunities to citizens to enhance their own involvement in the life of the community and in the decision-making processes at the grassroots level. Raising citizens’ civil and political awareness is a necessary element in the development of a healthy and effective local democracy, which in turn is the keystone of a functioning pluralist democracy at regional, national and international levels.

Starting in 2007, the week around 15 October – the date on which the *European Charter of Local Self-Government* was opened for signature in 1985 –, has been dedicated to the gathering of local elected representatives and citizens by organizing public events and discussions on issues of current interest. 2013 was a special year for the Charter as it is *25 years ago* that it entered into force. It is the first internationally binding treaty that guarantees the rights of communities and their elected authorities by setting out common European standards for local democracy in a legal manner and ensuring that these principles are

upheld in the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, formally monitored by the Congress. We were grateful to learn about the *activities* organized by some of our partners *particularly to promote the importance of the European Charter of Local Self-Government*.

Activities organized by ELDW partners

Despite of being an evergreen topic, active citizenship still proved to be a very important issue for cities and municipalities across Europe. This is made clear by the abundance of activities that was organised to interest and motivate local communities to get involved in local policy making processes.

Open Days in the Communes

Taking stock of the 2013 edition of ELDW, one of the most popular forms of boosting active citizenship has been to organise “open days” to show citizens where and how civil servants work for their community, to emphasise the role of local authorities as well as the importance of citizens themselves in improving the quality of local life. Opening the doors of public buildings has been seen as a great opportunity for all members of the community, both young and old, to learn about the work behind a well-functioning collectivity, at the same time as it has given officials the opportunity to transmit a message of shared responsibility. The *Albanian Association of Communes (AL)* took this form to connect 12 municipalities in the neighbourhood by using the framework of ELDW, while other partners such as *Mola di Bari (IT)*, *Stockton-on-Tees (UK)* or *Kairouan (TN)*, invited their citizens for a guided tour in the municipal administration buildings.

Citizens speak!

Another commonly used way of engaging citizens has been to launch direct dialogue between citizens and local elected representatives. Seminars, round tables, full council meetings and public debates have been organised across the 28 participating countries, so that inhabitants could learn about their rights and responsibilities as citizens, discuss the issues of concern and expectations with the mayor, politicians or members of the municipal councils. Local officials of *Junta de Andalucia (SP)*, *Neuchatel (CH)* and *Portsmouth (UK)* used these events to talk about their work, share their first-hand experiences about politics, introduce local services and to encourage people to get directly involved in local matters.

Discussions on how to make local Europeans more active in local politics and how to support already committed citizens, as well as on the role local and regional authorities should play in this respect, were topics in municipalities such as *Ille-et-Vilaine (FR)*, *Bydgoszcz (PL)* and *Dionysos (GR)*.

Many of our partners used the occasion of ELDW to set up permanent local councils targeting special groups in the community, such as the Councils of Children, Youth or Women. These institutions allow specific groups of citizens who are often underrepresented to speak with one voice and be more engaged in the local decision-making process. Creating municipal and city councils provides a more sustainable way of discussing concerns, ideas and possible solutions since members come together at regular occasions.

The European Week of Local Democracy has always been a good opportunity to bring communities together to develop regional and inter-regional co-operation. Good examples from the 2013 edition of ELDW include the association of *Poligano R-evolution (IT)*, which

organised neighbourhood meetings in 13 different municipalities, the interactive discussions with neighbouring municipalities held in the initiation of *Ordu (TR)*, and twinning events launched by the municipality of *Büyükçekmece (TR)*, where representatives of twin cities from Germany, South Korea and Sweden were invited to participate.

Focusing on youth and children's rights

The development of a European identity and the efforts to improve citizen participation start right with basic school education. Many ELDW partners recognise this, and subsequently organised school visits where elected officials met students and explained them what it means to be an active citizen and how each of them can contribute to the life of the community. In a number of cities, essay writing, drawing, photography and filmmaking competitions on the subject of local citizenship were announced in schools, workshops, exploratory visits and debates were organised in order to draw young citizens' attention to their rights and responsibilities. These specific events were often accompanied by information campaigns addressed to young people to teach them about international institutions and their role in boosting active citizenship and local democracy, as well as how they can express what they want to say and how can they get help to implement their ideas and plans. *Tbilisi (GE)*, *Domokos (GR)*, *Skydra (GR)*, *Ulyanovsk (RU)*, *Peligros (ES)*, *the Macadam MixTalent Foundation (NL)* and *the Act Integration Association (RO)* are just a few examples which organised events aiming at developing a participatory culture among young people in their school community.

Other municipalities like *Chania (GR)*, *Festos (GR)* and *Södermöre (SE)* organised specific activities to reach the youngest generation with information events on children's rights in the primary schools but also through educational games and activities for kids who could learn about Europe by playing, drawing or enjoying a puppet theatre. The event

“Dancing for Democracy” of *Almelo (NL)* introducing traditional and modern music of the area, the Active Citizenship Kite Festival organised by *Büyükçekmece (TR)* or the theatre workshops in *Strasbourg (FR)* and *Katowice (PL)* offered entertainment for both children and adults.

Other activities

A large number of surveys and interviews were conducted during the Week asking inhabitants about their opinion on a common European identity, how to improve local democracy, how to participate in local issues and how they visionise their community life in the future.

Conferences and exhibitions on the topic of citizen participation, decentralisation and European institutions were organised by the associations *Maison de l’Europe de Provence (FR)*, *Lions Club Ploërmel-Brocéliande (FR)* and the *National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (GE)* among others.

The importance of voting right not only in local and national but also in European elections has been emphasised in many local communities such as in *Chemnitz (GE)*, *Huddinge (SE)* and *Katowice (PL)* by organising trainings and simulations of elections, including running an election campaign, proceeding voting, simulating local decision making in municipal councils or acting as a mayor for one day.

During the 2013 Week of Local Democracy we also have seen many creative and interactive ideas, such as live radio conversations (*Sunbyberg, SE*), internet chat using social media networks (*Stockton-on-Tees, UK*), a “Speakers corner” (*Huddinge, SE*) and a “Solution&Suggestion Table” (*Büyükçekmece, TR*) as examples of real time interaction, video interviews and special products developed on the occasion of ELDW (Democracy Passport of *Falun, SE*).

All these events can be seen by everyone through our ELDW website which not only advertises the events organised across Europe, but can also be used as a “knowledge-network” to inspire and encourage future ideas and activities.

ELDW website and communication campaign

As it was for the past editions, the *European Local Democracy Week website* (www.coe.int/demoweek) has provided key information on the Week in the two official languages of the Council of Europe, English and French. *Logos, posters and leaflets* (provided in several languages), *thematic ideas and reference texts* adapted to the actual theme are available and can be downloaded from the site.

As of June 2012 a new web platform has been implemented to allow local and regional authorities to register their community and take part in the initiative in a more visible manner. Our partners can directly upload (and update) information about their events and activities which – after having translated and verified by the ELDW Team – can be seen under their personal profiles, eventually used for getting more publicity and networking. Events from previous editions back to 2010 are also available which can serve as good practices and generate new creative ideas. Our partners can learn about recent developments through regular newsletters and Congress news related to ELDW posted on the website.

Experience from the two latest editions show that registered partners actively use the tools and materials provided on the online platform. Plenty of posters, booklets, leaflets, caps and t-shirts have been produced and distributed by the communities during the Week of 2013 with using the official logo and image of ELDW.

The information material developed for the theme of active citizenship has been widely used by the participating municipalities, cities and associations in launching a *communication campaign* to promote the Democracy Week through local press and media, visibility events and social networks.

Figures and data¹

This year, the European Local Democracy Week officially took place between *14 and 20 October*. This European initiative, currently living its seventh edition, shows a great interest from committed cities and municipalities of the member states and special co-operation partners of the Council of Europe.

National associations of local authorities, national and international organisations and institutions, youth councils and NGOs have greatly contributed to the success of the week by disseminating information and by raising interest for the themes of the Week among their members and partners.

As a result of this joint effort, in 2013 some *109 partners from 28 countries* registered as ELDW partners. More than *260 activities* have been organized in the framework of ELDW, covering either the leading theme “Active citizenship: Voting, sharing, participating” or other relevant issues of citizen participation.

Among the 109 registered partners, *45 cities, municipalities or regional entities, representing around 15 900 000 inhabitants, and 45 associations* contributed to a successful Week of Local Democracy in Europe. Out of the 28 partner countries, 17 participated in all the seven

¹ Based exclusively on the information registered and uploaded on the ELDW website

editions, while *Iceland* and *“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”* took part for the first time in ELDW (see *Chart 1*).

“12-star cities”

The “12-Star-City” concept was launched in 2010. A “12-Star-City” is a city that decides to participate to the ELDW in a more relevant way, and, at the moment of registering for the ELDW, it takes 5 main commitments:

1. allocate a specific budget to ELDW activities;
2. run an ELDW promotion campaign using the ELDW visual identity;
3. carry out a number of specific activities linked to the leading theme of the year;
4. involve different groups of citizens in the initiatives forming part of the ELDW;
5. organise an event with a European or pan-European dimension.

In 2013, 19 cities decided to give special prominence to their participation by registering as “12 Star Cities” which shows a constant interest on this status compared to the previous years (see *Chart 2*). The “12-star Cities of the seventh edition were: *Büyükçekmece (Turkey)*, *Chania (Greece)*, *Dionysos (Greece)*, *Festos (Greece)*, *Falun (Sweden)*, *Huddinge (Sweden)*, *Iasi (Romania)*, *Katowice (Poland)*, *Kecioren (Turkey)*, *Metz (France)*, *Mola di Bari (Italy)*, *Namur (Belgium)*, *Ordu (Turkey)*, *Reggio Calabria Province (Italy)*, *Junta de Andalucía (Spain)*, *Stockton-on-Tees (United Kingdom)*, *Strasbourg (France)*, *Sundbyberg (Sweden)*, *Tbilisi (Georgia)*.

Special partnerships of the ELDW initiative

Arab Local Democracy Week in Kairouan

In summer 2012, during several institutional meetings, the Congress Secretariat presented the concept of the European Local Democracy Week to Tunisian and Moroccan mayors as a mean of boosting local democracy.

As a result of this, eight municipalities registered as partners of the Week, and involved their citizens in different activities and events. Leaflets and posters of the ELDW were translated into Arabic and distributed in the Arabic communities.

In 2013, for the second year running, *the city of Kairouan from Tunisia* contributed to the ELDW by choosing its special way of improving democracy and participation at local level and organising the “Arab Week of Local Democracy”. The aim of this series of events was to engage citizens in debates, conferences and seminars on local democracy issues and give them the opportunity to meet the local decision-makers and express their opinion.

Combating online hate speech with NHSM

This year, for the first time, the ELDW has linked up with a Council of Europe Campaign, the *No Hate Speech Movement (NHSM)*, to extend actions based on common principles, such as citizen participation and cohesive communities, to new audiences.

For the week of 14-20 October 2013, the NHSM organized the *European Action Week* aiming at raising awareness of hate speech in local politics. The young online activists were invited to report local incidents related to hate speech, and on the other hand, to share good practices of

actions taken by local policy-makers and the civil society to prevent hate speech and to promote participation and intercultural dialogue. The committed team of NHSM organised online activities and debates on ways of combating hate speech at local level and also launched a joint action with the “12 Star City” Katowice (PL) to discuss online hate with young citizens.

This new partnership will continue in the 2014 edition and will hopefully help both initiatives to make their events and efforts more widely known, and further boost participation in Europe and beyond.

Added value of ELDW 2013

The initiative of the European Local Democracy Week was created with the aim to *promote and foster democratic participation at local level*. Local authorities who took part in the ELDW in the past editions said it leads to:

- better involvement of citizens in public life and more interaction with local authorities;
- testing citizens’ acquaintance with the participatory tools and their trust in local institutions;
- improving social cohesion and respect of the others in the community;
- taking part in a network of European municipalities and regions keen to improve local democracy;
- a great opportunity of networking, sharing ideas and good practices with others across Europe.

This year the ELDW framework proved to be a useful tool for developing twinning programs, promoting currently running international projects in the community – like civil society and regional development projects

in Azerbaijan, Franco-German Congress of Students organised in Strasbourg (FR) or urban development initiative in Mirano (IT) – and bringing together different generations or people with different social background.

Communities took advantage of the Week to raise awareness of other important issues linked to local democracy, such as elections and the importance of voting, the integration of migrants and discrimination of minorities, the promotion of women's rights and equality.

However, it should be pointed out that improving local democracy and boosting citizen participation is a longer process which doesn't end with the pass of the official Week of Local Democracy. A large number of interviews, surveys, videos have been made, which need to be evaluated, a lot of problems and ideas have been heard which need to be taken into consideration. Written reports developed by the councils established and recommendations of citizens have been handled in to the local offices or collected during workshops and world cafes which require follow-up actions by the local administration.

Thanks to the committed cities, municipalities and national associations (*see Chart 3*), the general aims of the ELDW 2013 were mostly reached: to raise citizens' awareness on the importance of their rights and participation in local politics, to boost direct dialogue between citizens and local elected representatives, and to show citizens many ways of improving local democracy and being an active part of their community life.

Chart 1: ELDW Participation of Countries 2010-2013

2013	2012	2011	2010
28 countries	29 countries	26 countries	24 countries
Albania*	Albania	Albania	Albania
Azerbaijan	Armenia	Armenia	Belgium
Belgium*	Belgium	Azerbaijan	Bulgaria
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Belgium	Croatia
Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Estonia
Finland	Croatia	Finland	France
France*	Finland	France	Georgia
Georgia	France	Georgia	Germany
Germany*	Germany	Germany	Greece
Greece*	Greece	Greece	Italy
Iceland	Hungary	Italy	Macedonia
Ireland	Ireland	Moldova	Malta
Italy*	Italy	Montenegro	Netherlands
Moldova	Lithuania	Netherlands	Poland
Morocco	Morocco	Poland	Portugal
Netherlands*	Netherlands	Portugal	Romania
Poland*	Poland	Romania	Russia
Portugal*	Portugal	Russia	Serbia
Romania*	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia
Russia*	Russia	Slovakia	Spain
Serbia*	Serbia	Spain	Switzerland
Spain*	Slovakia	Sweden	Turkey
Sweden	Spain	Switzerland	Ukraine
Switzerland*	Sweden	Turkey	United Kingdom
"The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"	Switzerland	Ukraine	
Tunisia	Tunisia	United Kingdom	
Turkey*	Turkey		
Ukraine*	Ukraine		
United Kingdom*	United Kingdom		

Chart 2: “12 Star Cities” 2010-2013

2013	2012	2011	2010
19 cities	18 cities	19 cities	17 cities
Büyükçekmece (TR)	Amadora (PT)	Amadora (PT)	Aix-en-Provence (FR)
Chania (GR)	Büyükçekmece (TR)	Angers (FR)	Amadora (PT)
Dionysos (GR)	Brussels (BE)	Belgrade (RS)	Antalya (TR)
Festos (GR)	Candelaria (ES)	Bruxelles (BE)	Belgrade (RS)
Falun (SE)	Chania (GR)	Chania (GR)	Bruxelles (BE)
Huddinge (SE)	Festos (GR)	Gaziantep (TR)	Candelaria (ES)
Iasi (RO)	Huddinge (SE)	Gebze (TR)	Ierapetra (GR)
Katowice (PL)*	Katowice (PL)	Katowice (PL)	Katowice (PL)
Kecioren (TR)	Lüleburgaz (TR)	Lüleburgaz (TR)	Lausanne (CH)
Metz (FR)	Malaga (ES)	Mola di Bari (IT)	Liège (BE)
Mola di Bari (IT)*	Metz (FR)	Mugla (TR)	Mola di Bari (IT)
Namur (BE)	Mola di Bari (IT)	Namur (BE)	Mugla (TR)
Ordu (TR)	Örebro (SE)	Phaistos (GR)	Odessa (UA)
Reggio Calabria (IT)	Reggio Calabria (IT)	Sisak (HR)	Paris (FR)
Seville (ES)	Strasbourg (FR)	Stockton-on-Tees (GB)	Strasbourg (FR)
Stockton on Tees (GB)	Sundbyberg (SE)	Strasbourg (FR)	Tbilisi (GE)
Strasbourg (FR)*	Stockton on Tees (GB)	Sundbyberg (SE)	Unione Terre di Po (IT)
Sundbyberg (SE)	Utrecht (NL)	Tarsus (TR)	
Tbilisi (GE)		Utrecht (NL)	

* Cities participated as « 12 Star Cities » in all editions of ELDW

Chart 3: List of all the partners of the 2013 ELDW edition

Total: 109 partners including 45 partner cities, 45 associations and 19 “12 Star Cities”

Albania	Golem
	Albanian Association of Communes
	Studio D - Centre for Development and Dialogue
Azerbaijan	Aran Humanitarian Development Public Union
	National Association of Settlement Municipalities of Azerbaijan
Belgium	Namur 
	EPP Group in the Committee of Regions
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Crvena Association for Arts and Culture
	Local Democracy Agency of Prijedor
Bulgaria	Primary School "Geo Milev"
	Initiativa Regional Youth Council
Finland	Kianta College
	Lasipalatsi Medical Centre Ltd
France	Metz 
	Strasbourg 
	Ille-et-Vilaine
	Le Mas
	Perpignan Mediterranean Conurbation Community
	Val-de-Marne
	Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA)
	Association PasSages
	Centre d'Information, de Documentation, d'Etude et de Formation des Elus
	Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee – Conference of INGOs
	European Federation of Schools
	European Institute for Professional Reconversion of Women
Institute for Urban Planning and Development of Paris (IAURP) – Ile	

	de France
	Lions Club Ploërmel-Brocéliande
	Maison de l'Europe de Provence
	No Hate Speech Movement (Council of Europe)
	Tous Pour Lyon
Georgia	Tbilisi 
	Saburtalo
	National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia
Germany	Chemnitz
	Advisory Board for Migration and Integration of Trier
Greece	Chania 
	Dionysos 
	Festos 
	Domokos
	Skydra
	The City of Athens Ombudsman
Iceland	Fljótsdalshérað
	Grindavík
Ireland	Cavan
Italy	Mola di Bari 
	Reggio Calabria Province 
	Mirano - Province of Venice
	Associazione Orizzonti Internazionali (AOI)
	Circolo Europei per l'Italia
	CSA - Consiglio Regionale della Lombardia
	Federazione Italiana Donne Arti Professioni Affari (Fidapa) – Distretto Nord Est
	Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso Issocco
	Fondazione Opera Campana dei Caduti
	Polignano R- evolution
Moldova	Altruism Association

Morocco	Arbaoua
Netherlands	Almelo
	Diaspora Forum for Development
	InHolland University for Applied Studies Rotterdam
	Macadam MixTalent WebWorkshop and Foundation
	Menschlichkeit e. V. - Humanity
Poland	Katowice 
	Nysa
	Bydgoszcz
Romania	Iasi 
	Arad
	Campina
	ACT Integration Association
Russia	Admiraltejsky
	Prometey
	Tersky
	Ulyanovsk
	The Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North
Serbia	Vojvodina
Spain	Seville - Junta de Andalucia 
	El Turro
	Jerez
	Malaga
	Peligros
	Setentil de las Bodegas
	AFIES Foundation
Sweden	Huddinge 
	Falun 
	Sundbyberg 
	Örebro
	Södermøre - Municipal District of Kalmar

Switzerland	Neuchâtel
Tunisia	Kairouan
Turkey	Büyükçekmece 
	Kecioren 
	Ordu 
	Associaton for Promoting Local Participation
Ukraine	Lozuvatska
	Zhmerynka
	Agency for Regional Development
	Lviv School45 Euroclub "Harmony"
	Association of NGO Democracy
United Kingdom	Stockton-on-Tees 
	Maidstone
	Melton
	Merton
	Newcastle-under-Lyme
	Peterborough
	Portsmouth
	Rochdale
	Wigan
	Redcar Liberal Democrats
	South Lakeland

European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) is an annual European event, coordinated by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, which invites cities and municipalities from all the 47 member states of the Council of Europe to organise public events in order to meet and engage with their citizens on issues of current interest. Its aim is to promote and foster democratic participation at a local level.

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