



European Local Democracy Week



17 January 2017

EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK – THE WAY FORWARD

Draft Concept Paper

Draft Document to be examined at the Annual co-ordinators' meeting of the European Local Democracy Week on 30 January 2017 (Strasbourg) and the Congress Bureau on 10 February 2017 (Nicosia).

EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK – THE WAY FORWARD

I Background

The European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) is a pan-European initiative created in 2007 with the aim of boosting citizen participation at grassroots level and promoting local democracy at the level closest to citizens.

The Week annually takes place around 15 October – the date on which the European Charter of Local Self-Government was opened for signature in 1985. The Week is hence an occasion to remind of core values and European standards contained in the Charter, to celebrate the fact that the Charter is now ratified by all 47 member states and to illustrate its practical implications at local and regional level.

Local elected authorities and national associations of local and regional authorities are the main Congress partners of the Week. During the Week, cities, regions and their associations across the 47 member countries of the Council of Europe are invited to organise events and activities related to the main theme of the Week and with a suggested annual specific theme. Each year the Congress offers co-ordination of the Week (contacts, information and resource material etc.) as well as publicity and visibility at the European level.

II- Evaluation of past editions

The Week started as a joint initiative of the Congress and the intergovernmental sector in 2006 (Congress Resolution 238 (2007)¹: Proposition for a European Local Democracy Week- appendix 1). The first edition took place in 2007. It was decided to hold the Week around the 15 October in memory and celebration of the opening to signature of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

Since 2007, there have been over 1000 partners from almost 40 European countries and between 2012 and 2016 (when there was a closer monitoring of partners) close to 110 000 000 European citizens were offered to engage in events organised by ELDW partners.

A milestone will be the 10th Anniversary of the Week in 2017. This provides a unique opportunity for evaluation and for giving new impulse and orientations for future editions.

Recently ELDW editions were evaluated on the occasion of an annual meeting of co-ordinators. This was also an opportunity to agree on the annual theme for the following year. The evaluations of the ELDW resulted in successive improvements and new tools being put in place over the years as illustrated below.

Main achievements over 10 years of the ELDW

- *Networking : Progressive build-up of a network of cities and associations committed to fostering participatory democracy at grassroots level*, which has counted a total of about 1000 partners (some of them participated in most editions) having organised more than 2000 citizen participation activities in different editions.
- *Peer-to-peer exchanges* between the cities are facilitated through the yearly assessment meeting organised in Paris.
- Enhanced visibility for the Congress actions and reference texts: the ELDW website and direct contacts with the city administrations and associations allow to directly promote relevant Congress and Council of Europe texts and materials.
- Synergies with other Congress activities have been developed, for instance, with the Congress co-operation programmes (in Ukraine, Armenia, Albania and Georgia) through presentations on the ELDW during the seminars for elected representatives and for the South Mediterranean countries (Morocco and Tunisia) with the development of an Arab Week for Local Democracy in Tunisia since 2011 and possibly in Morocco as from 2017.
- Partnerships between the ELDW and other relevant Council of Europe initiatives and international partners, for example:
 - *the Europe Prize of the Parliamentary Assembly*
 - *the Council of Europe Intercultural Cities Programme*
 - the Council of Europe No Hate Speech Campaign and the intergovernmental Youth sector.
 - *The European Association for Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA)*.
- The ELDW contributes to the development of the international image of partner municipalities and provides a showcase for their good practices on citizen participation towards the rest of Europe. This is particularly valuable for smaller communities and cities with remote location which are among our prevailing partners.
- Technical improvements over the last years: an official website set up in 2010 to ensure visibility for the participating cities to which were added an interactive map (2015) and Twitter and Facebook accounts (2016) to enhance visibility and promote good practices on citizen participation.

In 2016, in the perspective of the **10th anniversary of the Week**, a comprehensive evaluation workshop was organised in **November 2016 in Budapest** with some of the most active partners over the past 5 years. This allowed an in depth evaluation of recent editions of the Week. A report was drafted on the results of this evaluation which contains a number of remarks and recommendations for future editions.

The main findings and suggestions stemming from the ELDW successive evaluations, including the “Budapest Workshop”, point out to the following items.

The very positive side is that **partners clearly underline the benefits they see in taking part in the ELDW**: better understanding and perception by citizens of the role played by local government; creation of local networks of citizens; reaching out to a more diverse audience and opening to new points of views and new issues. In addition, partners underline their satisfaction upon receiving recognition via the “12-star” status diplomas.

On the other side, **a rather limited number of participants within each member states and a limited number of participating countries** can be observed throughout the editions. This is no doubt linked to an insufficient capacity for a year round promotion of the Week resulting in a poor outreach to new participants.

A number of suggestions for improvement resulting from the evaluations:

- Communication efforts should be more evenly spread throughout the year in order to be more effective in involving new partners and giving them sufficient time to prepare;
- The message to partners needs to be simplified with a clearer link to the promotion of local self-government and citizens' participation and with few concrete suggestions of types of events which they can organise; the merits of the choice of an annual or biannual specific theme could be re-examined in this context;
- The need to uphold the involvement in ELDW events of local and regional elected representatives; this links to a targeted communication for increased participation of Congress members and national associations of local and regional authorities;
- Partner municipalities could also mobilise their own networks for promoting the Week (surrounding municipalities, twinned cities, etc.);
- Youth is an important and recurrently targeted public for ELDW events and school teachers are usually very active; however they find it difficult to be ready by mid-October each year after the summer break;
- The opportunity to develop a tool for evaluating the interest and opinion of ELDW partners as well as monitoring the different types of events organised during the ELDW via an online questionnaire where partners will provide feedback on their activities as well as their goals and accomplishments;
- The “12-star” status is a recognition which is widely appreciated but granted on the basis of criteria which could be refined; the label should be awarded on an occasion which would raise the visibility of these most active partners (during a Congress session for instance).

III Suggestions for the 2017 ELDW edition and beyond

The **general focus of the ELDW 2017** should stick to the core message linked to the mission of the Congress; a **central motto** could be suggested such as "***Citizens' participation, consultation and commitment for a living local democracy***". An additional graphic chart could be added to the ELDW **logo** for the 10th anniversary. **Date:** The 2017 edition of the Week will be held from Monday 9 to Sunday 15 October.

The **communication efforts in 2017** should be more evenly spread around the year with two peak periods: one in March 2017 around the 32nd Congress Session and one towards the end of the summer/early September 2017 thereby allowing sufficient time to recurrent partners as well as new ones to prepare. Additional communication efforts should be devoted towards Congress members and national associations of local and regional authorities. Congress Heads of delegations, Bureau members and national coordinators will receive in the spring 2017 information material on the 10th edition as an incentive to uphold their involvement in the Week.

During the March Session of the Congress, a specific item of the agenda in a plenary sitting will be dedicated to the ELDW with the Spokesperson(s) addressing all Congress members from all national delegations to encourage them to take part in this pan-European initiative and providing concrete illustrations of the added value of the ELDW for local authorities through a number of good examples of ELDW activities.

In addition, communication efforts will include a new video with interviews from among our most active partners and the Congress President; wider dissemination of ELDW printed and other visibility material, notably at Council of Europe premises including for CoE visitors, the CoE Youth Centres, CoE field offices, Local Democracy Agencies offices, etc...

It would also be an asset if Congress spokespersons and staff members could take part in missions/study visits in specific countries in order to develop contacts with national associations prior to their annual meetings. This is particularly important for the countries of origin of the Congress Bureau members and for contacts with associations of Council of Europe member states where there were so far very few or no participants (3 promotion events in 2017 and each following year).

For the following years a bi annual specific theme should be clearly linked to the core mission of the Congress, its specific activities at that time, and its priorities. This will ensure that relevant resource material is made available and that the Congress rapporteurs or spokespersons intervene on the given themes and take part in ELDW events and hence cumulate visibility for Congress work.

Main objectives for future years as from 2017 onwards are to:

1. Globally increase the total number of participating associations and cities;
2. Have participating cities from all 47 member states;
3. Each year, ensure the participation of the member State holding Committee of Ministers chairmanship – for the 10th anniversary it will be the Czech Republic;
4. Refine the criteria for “12-star” status, progressively increase their number and uphold visibility of the award of this status;
5. Ensure technical improvements on the ELDW website to further focus on the core message and to ease its use by our partners (simplify the registration process, improve the welcome box for our partners, add a questionnaire for evaluating their contribution, etc...)
6. In addition to the Newsletter, make full use of the social media, ELDW Facebook and Twitter accounts, which should mainly operate during the month of October.

Conclusion

The ELDW is a valuable tool for the Congress and for its partners. Its effectiveness for promoting Congress core messages and reference texts are good reasons to pursue this initiative with some refinements and with sufficient means.

In the years ahead, the Congress will continue playing its coordinating and promotion role. However the above mentioned goals will only be reached if ELDW current partners remain committed to the Week and if new ones become active, in particular from among Congress members from all 47 national delegations as well as Member states’ national associations of local and regional authorities. The success of the ELDW may only be reached via such enhanced commitment and we warmly thank in advance all the current and future new partners.

Appendix

Resolution 238 (2007)1 - Proposition for a European Local Democracy Week

“Reiterating that “local democracy” is a shared value across the continent and thus a constituent part of “European democracy”;

[...]

7. Underlining the importance of increased visibility and transparency of local democracy;
8. Emphasising the need to draw the attention of European citizens to the fact that their participation in local affairs is crucial for the vitality of democracy;
9. Bearing in mind the importance of the involvement of young people in democratic life so that they become aware, as early as possible, of the process of public decision making and democratic representation;
10. Determined to provide guidance to local authorities on presenting themselves to the public and on promoting democratic participation at local level;
11. Aware of the diverse needs, potentialities and sizes of municipalities throughout Europe and thus determined, to make the European Local Democracy Week a flexible instrument which will allow local authorities to develop activities according to their specific interests [...].