

35th Session – Strasbourg, France, 6-8 November 2018

Statement by John WARMISHAM (United Kingdom, SOC)

Check against delivery - Seul le prononcé fait foi

Debate on “European Local Democracy Week (ELDW): a new momentum”

Strasbourg, France, 6 November 2018

Firstly I'd like to pay tribute to ex Congress President and UK Delegation Leader Keith Whitmore, who was at the forefront of setting up and leading on the European Local Democracy Week. He was very proud of how it was accepted and how the week grew across the member states.

Keith then passed on the privilege to me to lead on the ELDW from 2010 to 2014.

I'm not sure you're all aware of what the ELDW is?

Its background

The European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) is an annual pan-European event where local and regional

Authorities from all the 47 member states of the Council of Europe and beyond organise public events to meet and engage with their citizens on issues of current interest. The aim is to promote and foster democratic participation at local level.

The week around 15 October has been chosen for holding this event as a tribute to the European Charter of Local

Self-Government, opened for signature on that date in 1985. However, should this coincide with other events such as local elections, local authorities may choose to organise the ELDW on more convenient dates in October where possible.

Its aims

ELDW aims at enabling citizens to meet their elected representatives at local events. Its purpose is to raise European citizens' awareness of how local authorities operate, and inform them of the opportunities available for taking part in decision-making at the local level.

During the ELDW, local authorities are encouraged to reflect on their responsibilities as key actors in democratic societies. The vitality of local democracy improves the quality of life in our communities and enhances the effectiveness of local governance.

Furthermore, the Week creates the opportunity to promote local democracy as one of the common components for

constructing a democratic Europe, and informs the public and elected representatives about the Council of Europe and the Congress's role in this area.

Each year the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities links the Week to a specific theme of interest to local and regional authorities.

As local politicians I'm sure we all know the importance of citizen participation, not just at election time but all year round.

As local authorities we affect people's lives from the cradle to the grave, it is only right therefore in a democratic society that they understand how decisions are made and why. ELDW if used correctly can get that message out.

That is why each year the week has a theme around a topic that is relevant.

For instance last year it was decided to reflect on the changing context of citizen participation and its link to the core mission of the initiative. The theme was "Citizen Participation, consultation and commitment: for a thriving local democracy"

This title was chosen because:

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.

A few examples of events that take place, I'll start with my own Salford City Council.

This year we did something called the Big Day Out, where we held a carnival on the front lawns of the Civic Centre.

This included Music and entertainment, plus attractions for children and young people. Alongside this we held councillors surgeries, meet the elected Mayor, various council services were in attendance so residents could question them, but also see how their service was delivered for the citizen's benefit.

We also promoted our Community Committees for all the areas across Salford and we had our Young Mayor and members of our Youth Council engaging with young people on how important it was that young people have a voice into the City Council.

In Kiev the key activities were centered on participatory budget and the submission of electronic petitions, giving the citizens of Kyiv the chance to express their thoughts on an issue directly affecting them. The development of local democracy and the engagement of young citizens in local decision-making processes were discussed during a round table between representatives of the city, citizens and other stakeholders. A Youth Forum was organized, which decided to establish a Youth platform of co-operation between Youth and city authorities.

In Reykjavik. Administration staff from various Icelandic municipalities attended a conference on citizen consultation in order to exchange their experiences involving effective participatory mechanisms.

In Serbia the municipalities of Sremski Karlovci and Zrenjanin will contribute to the European Local Democracy Week celebration with various events aimed at strengthening youth participation in local public life, fostering development education and raising citizens' awareness of global issues.

I could go on. There are many great examples from across the 47 member states.

Over the last 10 years ELDW has made a difference in those municipalities that have taken part. It's brought citizens and local authorities together for a deeper understanding of local democracy and how it should work for the benefit of both.

As we move into a new phase and a new era for ELDW I would hope that more and more of your authorities would get involved and see the benefits that grow from this amazing project of promoting citizens' participation in Europe.

It's one of the key pillars of what we as Congress stand for. In this time of turmoil and uncertainty it's up to us as members of this body to continue to fight and support local democracy at every opportunity we get and I believe ELDW is a great opportunity to do that.