

32nd Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities – 28-30 March 2017

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Debate on “European Local Democracy Week (ELDW)”

Strasbourg, 28 March 2017

Madam President, Dear colleagues, Dear friends

I am very happy that this debate is taking place today in the Congress session. Indeed this is a very important year for the ELDW since we are celebrating its 10th anniversary.

This debate gives me the opportunity to present the ELDW as a unique tool which the Congress has launched in 2007 and which is at your disposal for your municipalities and regions as well as for your national associations. The aim is to celebrate and promote our shared values and tools for good local governance and for greater citizen participation that makes our local democracy thrive.

Over the past ten years, the European Local Democracy Week has become a truly pan-European event that presents an opportunity to foster citizen participation and promote participatory democracy at the closest level to citizens. The ELDW is the occasion for all municipalities throughout our 47 member states and even beyond, in Council of Europe neighbourhood countries, to strengthen local democracy.

This is why this initiative, the Local Democracy Week, really falls within the Congress' core mission. It is our shared responsibility to make sure that it becomes a well-known annual event for local democracy.

Each year, during the week around 15 October (the date when the European Charter of Local Self-Government was opened for signature in 1985), local and regional authorities throughout Europe are encouraged to organise participatory events to celebrate local democracy, as a shared value across the European continent.

In a nutshell, I would say that the ELDW aims to foster citizens' awareness of the role played by their local elected representatives, enhancing citizens' understanding of the functioning of their local authorities and also of the role they, as citizens, are invited to take up for a thriving local democracy. The ELDW also contributes to involving citizens of all ages and from all social groups in the participatory democracy processes.

At the opening of the Session, you have received a file which provides you with the most relevant information on the ELDW. Use it as a “toolkit”: it contains the most important you need in order to start thinking about how to become involved as an active ELDW partner, for its 2017 edition of course, but also for the years ahead. Please do join the network of ELDW partners!

Some of you are already partners of the Week, and I wish to warmly thank those of you for your commitment.

Over the past 10 years, 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. They have 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.

What we need to achieve now - our challenge - is to enlarge participation in the Week. In past editions, at the most, only 29 out of our 47 member states were actively involved. We DO need to increase the number of partners involved annually in each member state, and also to have partners within All our member states.

I warmly thank the municipality of Kairouan (Tunisia) for being a partner in the Democracy Week since 2011 and I encourage other municipalities from Tunisia and from Morocco to join this annual event. The specific theme of the ELDW in 2017, as approved by the Congress Bureau, is *"Citizen Participation, Consultation and Commitment: for a thriving local democracy"*. This ELDW 2017 motto is the reflection of the Congress core mission and is fully in line with the Congress priorities for 2017-2020, in particular, the priorities of "enhancing the quality of local and regional democracy" and "building safe and inclusive societies that respect diversity".

This year the Democracy Week will officially take place between 9 and 15 October. I believe you have sufficient time between now and October to prepare yourselves for joining the network of ELDW partners.

All of us, as Congress members, can make good use of the ELDW. Indeed it is our core mission to promote and foster the fundamental values 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. For additional information, please consult our ELDW website and visit the ELDW Stand during the Session in the lobby of the Hemicycle, , where my colleagues are at your disposal to help you and your municipality or region decide how you can get involved and become an ELDW partner.

Madam President, dear colleagues, we will now have the opportunity to watch a short video which will illustrate Why and How you can join this initiative. We are also thankful to two active partner cities which will then talk about their own experiences on participating in past editions of the ELDW. Many Congress members have also been active in the previous editions and they may wish to take the floor in the debate which will take place after these presentations.

Thank you.