

Chamber of Local Authorities

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Introduction to the debate on:

Direct election of mayors

Discussion document prepared by the Secretariat

Direct election of mayors

The Chamber of Local Authorities has regularly held discussions on the question of the “**Direct election of mayors**”. The subject was discussed in particular when monitoring and observation reports were adopted on local elections in the Netherlands, where mayors are not elected but appointed by royal decree. The Congress has expressed its support for the direct election of mayors, particularly in [Recommendation 151 \(2004\)](#) on advantages and disadvantages of a directly elected local executive in the light of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, in which it argues that such systems strike a better balance of powers between representative and executive bodies.

On 10 February 2023, the Bureau of the Congress adopted the terms of reference for a report which will be presented to the Chamber of Local Authorities in the course of 2024.

Currently, there are three co-existing systems in Europe for the appointment of mayors. In the first, the mayor is elected directly by the citizens in an election in which they vote for a single person by name. Secondly, mayors may be elected indirectly by the municipal council. Lastly, there are mayors who are elected neither directly nor indirectly, as in the Netherlands.

Some large European cities have started thinking about introducing direct election of their mayor – this is the case in particular for Paris, in France. There are many arguments in favour of this method of election. It can be seen as the method which gives the greatest legitimacy, consolidating the roots of local democracy by allowing citizens to express their interests through their vote for an elected representative. In this system, candidates do not have to be in a political party to win, and mayors can disregard partisan pressure as their legitimacy derives solely from the voters. This gives them more freedom to act within the bounds of their responsibilities. For others, direct election poses a threat of paralysing local government in the event of political cohabitation. In addition, some legal systems which provide for the direct election of mayors can cause a risk of excessive concentration of power in one person’s hands. Each system has its advocates. Is there one which is more effective and democratic and makes the mayor in post more legitimate? How does direct, indirect or non-election of mayors impact local democracy and local self-government? What aspects should be considered when changing the method of electing mayors?

All these issues, and others still, which are certain to be raised during the discussion, will be looked at in depth during the thematic debate of the Chamber of Local Authorities. On this occasion, it will welcome Ms Marianne SCHUUMANS-WIJDEVEN, Mayor of Haarlemmermeer in the Netherlands, to discuss unelected mayors and Joanne ANDERSON, Mayor of Liverpool, who was elected directly in 2021, but whose municipal council has now decided to re-establish an indirect vote at the next local elections.