

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



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Education for democratic citizenship – tools for cities

Current Affairs Committee
Rapporteur: Dario GHISLETTA, Switzerland (L, SOC¹)

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Summary

Citizens' civil and political awareness is a necessary element in the development of a healthy pluralist democracy and of democratic citizenship. Local authorities have a duty to promote and facilitate active democratic citizenship, good local democracy being an essential building block for effective democracy at regional, national and international levels. By ensuring access to education for democratic citizenship (EDC) in their communities, local authorities will provide citizens with necessary knowledge, skills and understanding of democratic processes, help to develop democratic attitudes and behaviour, and encourage citizens to actively defend their rights and exercise their responsibilities in society. The report takes stock of the tools available to local authorities for developing policies on EDC and establishing frameworks for their implementation. It sets forth recommendations for an intelligent use of these tools.

¹ L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD: European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress



DRAFT RESOLUTION²

1. The quality of a democracy and its proper functioning are dependent on the attitudes and behaviour of its population. The understanding by citizens of their rights and responsibilities, their proactive civic position in the exercise of these rights and fulfilment of these responsibilities, their commitment to and participation in democratic processes are central to the progress of modern democracy and indeed of modern society.

2. The level of the civil and political awareness of citizens that is necessary to ensure the health and development of a pluralist democracy is a crucial element of democratic citizenship. Accordingly, education for democratic citizenship (EDC) is a process of providing citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding, of developing their attitudes and behaviour and promoting their active civic position in order to empower them to exercise and defend their rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life.

3. The Congress is convinced that local authorities have a duty to promote and facilitate active democratic citizenship, the quality of local democracy being an essential building block for the quality of regional, national and international democracy. Europe's cities have the potential to become catalysts for nurturing, developing and spreading the values that lie at the heart of democracy. By developing robust EDC strategies and making intelligent use of the available tools, they can take an important step towards realising that potential and ensure that their cities are places that enable their citizens not only to develop personally but to contribute fully to public life.

4. The Congress reaffirms the crucial link between education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (HRE), on the basis that there can be no democracy without the full understanding and respect for human rights.

5. The Congress is also convinced that the increasing complexity and diversity of society and the increase in the rate of change has the effect that non-formal education and lifelong learning are becoming an important sector for equipping citizens with the skills and understanding that they need to empower them to play their role in society. To explore EDC in its relation to the city, education is best understood in a wide sense, not confined to school and university, but embracing the whole realm of non-formal education and training and covering a wide range of cultural and awareness-raising activities.

6. The Congress considers that local action for education for democratic citizenship should include elaborating appropriate EDC policies and establishing a framework for their implementation, in particular by integrating EDC into the existing programmes of formal education and vocational training, developing programmes of non-formal education, carrying out awareness-raising activities as well as action to encourage and promote greater participation of citizens, in particular through public consultations, representative citizens' structures and participatory budgeting. Citizen participation at local level in general should be considered a crucial EDC element, as it provides learning through experience and practice.

² Preliminary draft resolution and recommendation approved by the Current Affairs Committee on 29 June 2011.

Committee members:

E. Yeritsyan (Chair), B. Toce (Vice-Chair), S. Aliyeva, P.D. Andersen, *A. Antosova, G. Arnardottir, T. Badan, S. Barnes (alternate: F. Butler), B. Belin, A. Beskow, N. Boltenko, A. Bryggare, V. Chilikov, A. Cook, I. De La Serna Hernaiz, M. Fiasella, B. Fleck, D. Ghisletta, V. Groysman (alternate: T. Savchenko), L. Güven (alternate: G. Doganoglu), H. Himmelsbach, P. Hugon, Y. Karayiannis, A. Koopmanschap, A. Kordfelder, L. Kovacs, A. Kurti, J. Landberg, M.S. Luca, F. Madsen, I. Milatic, Y. Mishcheryakov, K. Ölcenoglu, C. Oliver Jaquero, C. Oppitz-Plörer, A. Pellizzari, J. Petusik, N. Pilyus, F. Ramos, A. Ravins, O. Sainsus (alternate: S. Bohatyrchuk-Kryvko), H. Skard, J.-L. Testud, A. Toader, N. Toncev, E. Van Vaerenberghe, J. Warmisham.*

NB: The names of members who took part in the vote are in italics.

Secretariat of the Committee: D. Marchenkov, J. Hunting and M. Grimmeissen.

7. The Congress therefore calls on local authorities of the Council of Europe:

a. to elaborate local policies, strategies and action plans for education for democratic citizenship (EDC);

b. to establish an EDC policy implementation framework in their communities, in particular by developing, where appropriate, their own programmes to provide EDC through both formal and non-formal education, training, awareness-raising and citizen participation;

c. to ensure coordination and examine possible synergies with other stakeholders – national governments, regional authorities, educational institutions, non-governmental and in particular youth organisations, parents, the local media, etc. – in defining and implementing EDC programmes;

d. to promote human rights awareness-raising activities among local populations as an integral part of education for democratic citizenship;

e. to establish a framework for encouraging active citizen participation at local level, including by setting up consultative citizens' structures and tools (citizens' initiatives, referenda, etc.) and introducing, where appropriate, participatory budgeting;

f. to make particular use of the following existing policy texts and action tools for achieving these objectives:

- official texts of the Council of Europe and of the European Union;³

- the Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People ("Compass") and the Manual on Human Rights Education for Children ("Compasito"), as well as specific Council of Europe EDC/HRE materials (available on the Council of Europe website www.coe.int);

- European Local Democracy Week (ELDW), including by organising and engaging in annual ELDW activities in October, using the Week to raise awareness and communicate on their EDC action;

- Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs);

- local youth councils and assemblies, as well as consultative councils of foreign residents and other representative citizens' structures, to promote consultations with and participation of citizens, in particular young people;

- Tools available in the framework of e-democracy and e-participation.

8. The Congress invites national associations of local authorities to act as a catalyst for promoting EDC initiatives and experience-sharing.

9. The Congress mandates:

a. its Current Affairs Committee to undertake further work on this subject and to encourage good practices of education for democratic citizenship at local level across Europe;

b. its Governance Committee to take education for democratic citizenship into account as part of good governance at local level, and to propose integrating EDC into governance methods and practices.

³ European Charter of Local Self-Government and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority; Council of Europe Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level; Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education; Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life; EU Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. Introduction

1. The understanding by citizens of their rights and responsibilities, their proactive position in the exercise of these rights and fulfilment of these responsibilities, their commitment to and participation in democratic processes are central to the progress of modern democracy and indeed of modern society. The quality of a democracy and its proper functioning are dependent on the attitudes and behaviour of its population and on the underlying "culture of democracy" based on the acceptance of difference, respect for the rights of others and for the rule of law, awareness of one's own duties, and understanding of democratic values and mechanisms.

2. "Democratic citizenship" refers to the notion of how people ought to behave in a democratic society, and the level of their civil and political awareness that is necessary to ensure the health and development of a pluralist democracy. Accordingly, "Education for democratic citizenship" (EDC) is a process of providing citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding, of developing their attitudes and behaviour and promoting their active civic position in order to empower them to exercise and defend their rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life.

3. The city is not only a microcosm of democracy, it is also its cradle. People take their first political steps and learn their first democratic experience at the local level, which is also a level with the most opportunities for direct participation of citizens, and where the results of their involvement are the most immediate and tangible. Local authorities have therefore a duty to promote and facilitate active citizenship, the quality of local democracy being an essential building block for the quality of regional, national and international democracy.

4. To explore "Education for democratic citizenship" (EDC) in its relation to the city, education is best understood in a wide sense, not confined to school and university, but embracing the whole realm of non-formal education and training and covering a wide range of cultural and awareness-raising activities.

5. The increasing complexity and diversity of society and the increase in the rate of change has the effect that non-formal education and lifelong learning are becoming an important sector for equipping citizens with the skills and understanding that they need to empower them to play their role in society. This explanatory memorandum looks at the existing tools for local authorities to use in building a framework for EDC in their communities.

2. Charter on education for democratic citizenship

6. In May 2010, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education⁴. This major framework policy document is the product of a period of deliberation within the Council of Europe that began in 1997 when, at the second Council of Europe Summit, the Heads of State and Government decided to launch an EDC initiative to promote "citizens' awareness of their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society" (Final Declaration). The attention given to EDC at this Summit reflects the belief that it is an essential weapon in the battle against the rise in extremism, xenophobia and intolerance.

7. The new Charter deliberately links Education for democratic citizenship with Human Rights Education (HRE), on the basis that there can be no democracy without the full understanding and respect for human rights. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has taken the same stance with respect to local democracy in its texts on "The role of local and regional authorities in the implementation of human rights"⁵, when it agreed on the importance of promoting human rights and raising awareness of the human rights situation at the grassroots level, where the necessary conditions must be created for their full exercise.

⁴ Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 of 11 May 2010

⁵ Recommendation 280 (2010) and Resolution 296 (2010) of 17 March 2010

8. The EDC Charter defines “Education for democratic citizenship” as “education, training, awareness-raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law”.

9. “Human rights education” is defined as “education, training, awareness-raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

10. An essential element of all education for democratic citizenship is the promotion of social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and citizen participation. Local authorities, being at the level closest to the citizen, have a key role to play in this process, in partnership with other stakeholders – regional authorities, national governments, educational institutions, non-governmental and in particular youth organisations, parents, the local media, etc.

11. The EDC Charter also recognises that educational systems in Council of Europe member states are extremely varied, ranging from very centralised systems to those where local authorities have considerable autonomy. Since local authorities are one of several major stakeholders when it comes to EDC, it is important that, when formulating their EDC policies and strategies, they take full account of the role of other actors in this field, both in the public and the voluntary sector, and seek to create synergies between them. In some cases, it might be more appropriate for local authorities to support other partners than to organise their own EDC programmes.

3. Core activities at local level

12. Local action for education for democratic citizenship should include elaborating appropriate EDC policies and establishing a framework for their implementation, in particular by integrating EDC into the existing programmes of formal education and vocational training, developing programmes of non-formal education, carrying out awareness-raising activities as well as action to encourage and promote greater participation of citizens, in particular through public consultations, representative citizens’ structures and participatory budgeting.

13. Participatory budgeting in particular can be useful for creating a junction between public local authorities and the local population. Participatory budgeting is a term used to describe the process of involving citizens – through consultations with their associations and social groups – in the preparation of and decisions on local budgets. This process is based on pulling together the various initiatives and proposals of citizens and civil society at local level, organising them into clusters corresponding to local budgetary priorities, and including them into local budgets. The experience of local authorities using this practice, for example in Germany, shows that participatory budgeting is cost-effective, produces savings, benefits all the stakeholders involved, and represents a powerful tool for increasing citizen participation.

14. Citizen participation at local level in general should be considered a crucial element of education for democratic citizenship, as it provides learning through experience and practice. The Congress is currently preparing a separate report on citizen participation at local and regional level in Europe.⁶

4. Tools

15. In addition to specific proposals for local authorities in the fields of social cohesion, local participation and integration, and intercultural relations at local level, put forward in relevant Congress resolutions, a variety of tools for promoting democratic citizenship are available to local authorities that are of direct interest to them. They are essentially of two types: key policy texts on the one hand, and education and awareness-raising activities, teaching materials and e-tools on the other.

16. Local authorities, in order to formulate effective policies to support the education and training activities in their areas, need to be fully aware of these tools.

⁶ Rapporteur Marjan HAAK-GRIFFIOEN (The Netherlands, R, EPP/CD).

17. The tools presented in this report are not intended as an exhaustive list, but give an indication of the resources that are available and the texts that are important for EDC at the local level.

4.1 Key texts for democratic citizenship at the local level

European Charter of Local Self-Government (CETS 122, 1985)

18. The European Charter remains the single most important and powerful tool for defining the legal basis of democratic citizenship at the local level in Europe. The preamble of the Charter states that all citizens have the right to participate in the conduct of local affairs.

19. By entrusting the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities with monitoring the implementation of this treaty, which is now in force in all but two of its member states, the Council of Europe ensures a minimum level of local democracy across the continent.

Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS 207, 2009)

20. Recognition of the increasing importance of citizen participation in local affairs led the Council of Europe to draw up a protocol to the European Charter to give a legal basis to the right to participate. Article 1 of the Protocol guarantees that all persons have the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority. Article 2 requires States Parties to take the necessary measures to give effect to this right.

21. To transform this tool into an effective international treaty, local authorities should, via their national associations, petition their governments to ratify this landmark text.

Council of Europe Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (CETS 144, 1992)

22. This Council of Europe convention, in force since 1997, provides for foreigners to exercise their political and democratic rights at the local level. Article 6 grants foreign residents the right to vote and stand for election in local authority elections after five years of residency preceding the election.

23. The explanatory report underlines that most European countries have seen a marked increase in foreign residents in recent years. In order to engage these immigrants fully and encourage them to participate actively in the life of the city, the first and symbolic step is to grant them rights.

24. The civic participation of newly arrived migrants, as well as asylum seekers and refugees, local organisations can help them to settle in and to develop a social network. Participation in the political decision-making process also promotes integration. The granting of political rights is a democratic means of expression and at the same time gives responsibilities to voters. The right to vote at the local level should be granted to all immigrants and refugees who have resided regularly for a specific period of time in the country.

25. Since, despite its importance with respect to political life at the local level, the Convention has only been ratified by eight of the Council of Europe's 47 member states, the Congress is firmly committed to encouraging further ratifications of this text.

Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (2003)

26. The disaffection and disengagement of young people is widely recognised as a serious challenge for today's society. The Congress's Youth Charter has achieved wide recognition as a tool for engaging youth in political life. It is now translated into eleven languages. A manual and interactive CD - "Have your say!" - has been produced to support its use and implementation.

27. The Charter sets out a range of policies in which local authorities should incorporate a youth participation approach. It describes in detail tools and practices to support the participation of young people such as training courses, counselling centres and local media by and for young people, and gives guidance on setting up and running local and regional representative structures for young people, such as youth councils, assemblies and parliaments.

28. The Congress pursues its promotion of the Charter's implementation in member states, together with the Council of Europe's Youth Department and NGOs such as the European Youth Forum which regularly organise training and awareness-raising events in order to make this tool more widely known.

29. In addition, the Council of Europe youth sector has elaborated a Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People ("Compass") and a Manual on Human Rights Education for Children ("Compasito"), which are available in several languages on the dedicated website <http://www.coe.int/compass>, and can be used for EDC programmes at local level.

Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7)

30. As mentioned above, this is a framework policy document, which defines and sets out the aims and scope of both EDC and Human Rights Education, the need to involve all stakeholders, to provide skilled teachers and to continue to research the subject and evaluate the results. The Charter calls on governments to ensure that EDC is available to everyone and that it is available on a lifelong basis.

EU Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2006)

31. Key Competences for Lifelong Learning is a joint recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (Official Journal of the EU, 30 December 2006/L394).

32. Eight areas of competence for life-long learning are identified to enable citizens to participate actively in society:

- 1) Communication in the mother tongue;
- 2) Communication in foreign languages;
- 3) Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- 4) Digital competence;
- 5) Learning to learn;
- 6) Social and civic competences;
- 7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and
- 8) Cultural awareness and expression.

33. It is notable that these competences, which have become a key feature of the EU's education and training work programme, combine skills needed for personal fulfilment and political participation, skills which serve to improve employment prospects and competitiveness and intercultural skills, which reflect the changing needs of contemporary European societies.

34. They reflect a determination to move from a knowledge acquisition approach to education, to a broader competence-based cross-curricular approach, with emphasis on acquiring skills and attitudes. In this respect, the "learning to learn" competence is particularly important: today's citizens need to have the capacity and skills to continue learning, to continue to adapt and to be open to change throughout their lives.

35. It is the sixth area, "civic competence", which is the most relevant for EDC. The EU defines this as knowledge of the concepts of democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and human rights, together with the skills to engage effectively with others in the public domain.

4.2 Activities and educational resources

European Local Democracy Week

36. This event was launched in 2007 to mark the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Conference of Local Authorities of Europe, the body that grew into the Council of Europe Congress. It is held each year in the week including 15 October, the date that the European Charter of Local Self-Government was opened for signature.

37. The Week aims to raise awareness of how local authorities operate, inform them of opportunities for participating in decision-making at the local level and underline the importance of participation in local affairs for the vitality of local democracy.

38. A wide variety of events, such as debates, games and competitions are organised in an increasing number of local authorities, under the common label "European Local Democracy Week". The coordination of the week by the secretariat of the Congress enables a set of common promotional items to be made available and facilitates the dissemination of good practices and ideas through the dedicated website <http://www.coe.int/demoweeek>. A network of national coordinators supports the organisation of the Week in the 47 Council of Europe member states.

Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs)

39. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities began setting up Local Democracy Agencies in South-East Europe in 1993 as part of a strategy to consolidate democratic development in post conflict areas.

40. These agencies promote local democracy and citizen participation by bringing together a number of partners from both the public and the civil society sector. They also act as fund-raisers, serving to obtain and channel grants into projects.

41. The positive experience of the LDAs has led them to continue to expand into other regions, with a model of cooperation which has demonstrated itself to be relevant and effective in promoting active citizenship. One result of their activities was the creation of an Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA).

Council of Europe Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE) materials

42. The Council of Europe has developed a series of tools for EDC and HRE, which are of direct interest to local authorities. These include "*Living and learning democracy*", a series of six teaching manuals, programme materials and good practices (available in several languages).

43. There is also the *EDC/HRE Pack*, a collection of practical instruments designed to provide support to those involved in education, including documents, strategies and approaches; a series of tools and support documents, which address the development and implementation of policy and practice for EDC and HRE across all education sectors.

E-tools

44. E-democracy has brought citizen participation potentially much nearer to home. The Congress report "E-tools: a response to the needs of local authorities" (2008) details a number of emerging technology applications that can be used by local authorities to stimulate and develop citizen participation in local affairs.

45. Online forums and e-petitions can be used to get rapid feedback in a cost-effective way of public comment and opinion. They also have a pedagogic function, teaching participants the rules of public debate, learning to evaluate and compare a variety of opinions and encouraging a more critical attitude to media news coverage. Social networking applications assist citizen to citizen communication, making it easier to interest groups to mobilize and share information and ideas.

46. Local authorities do not need expensive technology to encourage active citizenship. Much can be achieved through the intelligent design of websites, providing clear and timely information, ensuring that citizens can easily inform themselves of the consultation activities of local authorities.

47. When designing websites, local authorities should also make it a rule to apply the principles of web accessibility, to ensure that the elderly and people with disabilities can easily understand, navigate and interact with web-based services.

5. Conclusion

48. The growing range of tools available demonstrates the importance of democratic citizenship as a key concept for the development of modern societies.

49. Europe's cities have the potential to become catalysts for nurturing, developing and spreading the values that lie at the heart of democracy. By developing robust EDC strategies and making intelligent use of the tools presented above, they can take an important step towards realising that potential and ensure that their cities are places that enable their citizens not only to develop personally but to contribute fully to public life.

50. It is recommended that the Congress invite local authorities to:

- draw-up local EDC policies, strategies and action plans;
- establish an EDC policy implementation framework in their communities, in particular by developing, where appropriate, their own programmes to provide EDC through both formal and non-formal education, training, awareness-raising and citizen participation;
- ensure coordination with other actors and examine possible synergies with them in implementing EDC programmes;
- promote human rights awareness-raising activities among local populations;
- establish a framework to encourage active citizen participation at local level, including by setting up consultative citizens' structures and introducing, where appropriate, participatory budgeting;
- make use in particular of the existing policy texts and action tools presented in this explanatory memorandum, for achieving these objectives.