

The Bureau of the Congress

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Proposals of reform for the European Local Democracy Week

Introduction

The European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) is an initiative launched in 2007 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and organized around a biennial theme.

The biennial theme for the 2023 and 2024 editions of the ELDW was *"Local communities: putting democratic resilience first"*. Now that this theme has come to an end, future editions need to be prepared.

In order to improve the impact, dissemination and flexibility of the ELDW, as well as the level of participation, a number of substantial and formal changes have become necessary.

The proposed changes are described in this document and submitted to the Bureau for discussion and decision on:

- a. The principle of change of name
- b. The two themes for activities to be chosen for 2025 and 2026 (from the list of proposals)
- c. The proposal to transform the award of certificates into a Prize
- d. The instruction to submit a consolidated draft for adoption to the next Bureau meeting.

Action required: for discussion and decision

¹ This document is classified as confidential until it has been examined by the Bureau of the Congress.

Context

The European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) is a pan-European initiative to promote local democracy and citizen involvement, launched in 2007 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

The biennial theme for the 2023 and 2024 editions of the ELDW was "*Local communities: putting democratic resilience first*". Now that this theme has come to an end, future editions need to be prepared. In order to improve the impact, dissemination and flexibility of the ELDW, as well as the level of participation, a number of substantial and formal changes have become necessary.

The initiative's current name refers to the anniversary of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in October. This title implies a one-off, time-limited event, and does not reflect its annual character, which can give rise to misunderstandings. The name change should underline the importance of involving citizens in the life and decision-making processes of their local communities.

The biennial theme that used to be decided for the ELDW can also be perceived as restrictive, and municipalities don't always realize that they can report on activities they are already organizing for and with their citizens. This can potentially limit their participation.

The new title should thus reflect the desire to promote multidisciplinary projects and initiatives organized throughout the year by local and regional authorities with and for their citizens.

The changes proposed in this document are designed to improve the current ELDW, broaden its scope and visibility, and increase participation.

In addition, this new version dovetails with the initiative taken by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to launch a Pact on Democracy and could form part of the Congress' contribution to this Pact.

A. Renaming the ELDW

1. The new name should reflect both its nature and its purpose

Proposed new name: European Platform on Citizen Participation (EPCP)
(In French : Plateforme européenne sur la Participation Citoyenne (PEPC))

B. Increase its outreach

1. To replace the biennial theme, it is proposed to choose a general theme for the revised ELDW

Proposed general theme: Supporting democracy at the grassroots or Supporting democracy at the local level

The general proposed theme is in line with the theme of the World Democracy Forum 2025: "Democracy at risk: how to revive it?" and with the Secretary General's Pact for Democracy.

The choice of one of this as general theme would also respond to the wish expressed by participants at the February 2025 ELDW coordination meeting to retain the reference to local democracy in the title of the revised ELDW. It may be decided to make it permanent, but it could also be modified if necessary.

2. Two specific themes for activities would also be chosen every two years from a list (according to political priorities)

Proposed themes for activities (2 to be chosen for 2025/2026):

Engaging youth
Sustainable and green governance
Inclusive communities and diversity
Transparency and accountability
Reshaping cities for and with their citizens
Restoring the ability to live together
More democratic and peaceful communities
Digital local democracy
Supporting gender equality

3. The new ELDW could feature a Prize

In the current ELDW, the participants are invited end of each year to submit their candidature to receive the certificate of European Partner of the Local Democracy Week. The new Prize would be an upgrade of this procedure.

- a. The Prize could be named after a personality (like the Mayor Paweł Adamowicz Prize or the Vaclav Havel Prize) and the country of that personality could be associated with the award.
- b. The Prize would consist of a general prize, linked to the general theme, and two thematic prizes linked to two thematic categories to be chosen every two years from a list.
- c. At the end of each year, a call for applications would be issued to participants who have registered and reported their activities on the Platform's website.
- d. The projects of these candidates would be examined by a jury. One outstanding project in the general category and two thematic projects would receive the Prize.
- e. The Prize would consist of a grant of 2,000 euros for the general prize and 1,000 euros for each of the two thematic prizes.
- f. The former Certificates of Partner status would still be issued to the other projects that have responded to the call for applications and meet the criteria (as in the current ELDW)
- g. Winners' proposals will be submitted to the Bureau at the beginning of the year - February Bureau meeting - for final approval.
- h. The award ceremony would be held in April, at the same time as the annual coordination meeting.
- i. The current list of selection criteria for winning projects will be reviewed and updated.
- j. A jury will be set up to select the overall prize-winning project and the thematic prize-winning projects in each category. It could be made up of (1) the Congress spokesperson for the European Local Democracy Week, (2) the Congress thematic spokesperson on youth, (3) a youth delegate, (4) one or two Congress rapporteurs on the themes of the two chosen thematic categories (they will change each time new thematic categories are decided) and (5) any external partners, under the coordination of the Congress secretariat.
- k. The website and visual identity of the current ELDW will be adapted accordingly.

C. Ensure a follow-up

1. The winners will be invited to Strasbourg for an award ceremony, to be held in April each year for the previous year's edition, as well as a coordination/evaluation meeting.
2. During their visit to Strasbourg, the winners will also be proposed an information program on the Council of Europe and a meeting with representatives of the City of Strasbourg.
3. They could also be invited to a plenary session of the Congress and/or the World Democracy Forum.
4. A network of prizewinners could be created and supported by the Congress.

D. Increase participation

1. As with the current ELDW, the revised ELDW is open to participation by municipalities, regions and national associations of local and regional authorities. The participation of civil society projects (including NGOs, foundations, universities) could also be envisaged.
2. The network of national coordinators should be reactivated
3. The revised ELDW is to be promoted through an active campaign aimed at

- (1) Congress members and partners
- (2) Stakeholders, participants and national coordinators
- (3) The different entities of the Council of Europe

4. It will be distributed to European associations of local and regional authorities, and partnerships could be created.

5. It could be linked to other initiatives and partners (within the Council Europe) and outside (such as IODP and CEMR), including academia and civil society.

6. It could form part of the Pact for Democracy prepared by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

E. Ensuring greater youth participation

1. Congress youth delegates to be involved in the revised ELDW
 - a. Two youth delegates will be invited to implement a local project and submit it to the annual Prize application procedure.
 - b. One youth delegate will be appointed each year as a member of the Prize jury (jury members and prize candidates cannot be the same delegates).
2. Greater involvement of young people in the projects implemented by participants will be added to the list of criteria for the award and "partner status" certificates.
3. Partnerships with universities, youth networks and NGOs could be developed.

F. Supporting participants

1. The revised ELDW will support its participants by providing training materials on its website and access to training sessions.
2. An annual training webinar could be organised in connection the first year with one of the two themes for activities chosen and the next year with the other theme chosen.
3. A concept for a round table or workshop on a local democracy theme could be developed and offered to two or three communities a year (which could be part of the existing program of these municipalities, such as the Democracy Week in Kristiansand (Norway) or the Marmara Urban Forum organised by the Marmara association (Türkiye)). This Round Table would be co-organised and co-financed by the Congress and the municipalities concerned, under the umbrella of the revised ELDW.
4. The annual coordination meeting and award ceremony could be organised outside Strasbourg with a participating municipality to ensure a wider audience (other municipalities in the country concerned would be invited).

G. Improving communication and visibility

The revision of the ELDW involves updating and revising all existing visibility and communication material.

1. Adopting a new name for SEDL will require a complete rebranding, including a new logo, new graphic design elements and a new visual identity.
2. These new visibility elements will also be applied to the ELDW stand, banners, posters, brochures and promotional material, as well as toolkits and video content.
3. The changes will also require a restructuring of the website.