

The Bureau of the Congress

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13 March 2023

## European Local Democracy Week – proposal for the 2023-2024 Biennial Theme

### *Introduction*

The European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) is a pan-European initiative, launched in 2007 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and organised under a biennial theme.

In 2021-2022, the ELDW was organised under the theme “Protecting the environment: local communities take action”, approved by the Congress Bureau in March 2021. It is proposed that the Congress Bureau approve a new biennial theme of the ELDW for 2023-2024.

Action required : for decision

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

During the ELDW webinar held in October 2022, the general theme of “Local communities: putting democratic resilience at the forefront” was proposed for the first time by ELDW Spokesperson Bryony Rudkin during the discussion on possible themes for the 2023-2024 ELDW editions.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of strengthening democratic resilience of our societies to withstand major crisis situations has been increasingly recognised. The international community is also at a crossroads when it comes to implementing the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations and achieving the 17 SDGs, to ensure a more inclusive, diverse, sustainable and fair society. In fact, SDG 11, which aims to build sustainable and resilient cities and communities, was taken into consideration under the ELDW theme for 2021-2022, which focused on environmental protection. The biennial theme for 2023-2024 could thus continue on this path and focus on strengthening democratic resilience of local and regional communities by promoting citizen participation, in line with SDG 11, drawing on the lessons learnt from the pandemic and other current crises that have negative impacts on many countries around the world.

**The theme for 2023-2024 was further discussed during the ELDW annual coordination meeting on 28 February 2023. The participants unanimously supported the proposal by the ELDW spokesperson to have as the general theme for 2023-2024 “Local communities: putting democratic resilience at the forefront”.**

## CONCEPT

In today's world, communities are facing global challenges, perhaps more than ever before, occurring at a very fast pace. The Covid-19 pandemic, which left a strong imprint on our societies over the past few years and adversely affected people from almost every region and group, has abated but remains a challenge. Furthermore, climate change and global warming are existential threats to humankind that need to be mitigated to the greatest possible extent and to which lifestyles and habits must be adapted.

These crises that people and communities are already struggling with are aggravated by Russia's war against Ukraine, which has triggered a domino effect of humanitarian crisis, soaring energy prices, rising inflation and migration flows in the globalised world.

In addition, two major earthquakes hit the south-east of Türkiye on 6 February 2023, killing tens of thousands of people in Türkiye and Syria and leaving tens of thousands homeless in the harsh winter conditions. Besides the search and rescue teams coming from many countries around the world, local governments from almost every part of Türkiye mobilised and showed great solidarity to save human lives and to provide infrastructure, technical vehicles, shelter, clothing, and food aid.

Under these circumstances, the role of local and regional governments as the bedrock on which citizen participation and local democracy are built, and their influence on the wellbeing of communities, is at its highest and most important point. When crises hit, citizens first rely on their local governments for support and help.

This is why building democratic resilience of societies and increasing the protection of citizens must be a priority. Thanks to its 16 years of experience, the ELDW initiative has the capacity to support local and regional governments in taking action to increase their resilience, in response to these crises. It is therefore proposed that in 2023 and 2024, the ELDW should focus on the general theme of “Local communities: putting democratic resilience at the forefront”.

Activities organised under this theme could touch upon a wide variety of issues. For instance, the restrictions and lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic have brought about a strong technological transformation and digitisation. Digital platforms and other applications and tools developed in response to the pandemic have an important role to play in building stronger communities that are more democratic, transparent, and supportive of citizen participation. However, developments in information technologies have also brought along new possibilities for spreading fake news and disinformation, especially through social media. It is a challenge in modern society and a necessity for local democracy to ensure that citizens have access to accurate information through reliable platforms.

In addition, to ensure sustainable and fair societies, it is important that communities be democratically resilient. This means that, even in times of crises, local and regional governments should be open and transparent, and commit to upholding democratic processes, rule of law, separation of powers, and checks and balances. They must keep being accountable to citizens. Only by doing so is it possible to maintain trust between citizens and their elected representatives, and thus deal effectively with major challenges.

Moreover, to ensure good citizen participation, access to information and resources for citizens, who may be marginalised, excluded and/or underrepresented, needs to be improved. This may include women, the elderly, people with disabilities, as well as children and young people. In doing so, local and regional governments will play a key role in building resilience, by engaging all stakeholders at the grassroots level, in a bottom-up approach.

Finally, to build resilient communities, it is of the utmost importance that citizens are involved in the decision-making process at an early stage, and at the closest possible level, including at the level of their neighbourhood. Only by giving citizens the opportunity to exercise their full political and democratic rights, at local, regional, and national levels, can local and regional authorities sustain resilient communities. Indeed, if citizens feel left behind and are not included in the political process, the risks are that societies will become polarised and fragmented, rather than united, strong, and able to use their diversity in the best possible way. As a result, when crises hit, coordinated and efficient responses will not come up.

Only resilient communities can recover quickly from crises. Indeed, resilient communities are those that actively prepare for economic, social, and environmental challenges and do everything they can to mitigate the risks and consequences in case of disaster or crisis. In difficult times, resilient local authorities can draw on all the useful resources that they have developed together with citizens.

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Congress Bureau approve as the ELDW theme for 2023-2024 “**Local communities: putting democratic resilience at the forefront**”.

## APPENDIX

### PROGRAMME OF THE ANNUAL CO-ORDINATION MEETING

**09.00 Introduction**

Dmitri MARCHENKOV, *Head of Co-operation and External Relations*

**09.10 Welcoming remarks**

Mathieu MORI, *Secretary General of the Congress*

**09.20 Opening of the Meeting**

Bryony RUDKIN (United Kingdom, SOC/G/PD), *Congress Thematic Spokesperson on the ELDW*

**09.30 Evaluation of the ELDW 2022 Edition**

Erdem GÜNEY, *ELDW Coordinator*

**09.40 Presentations of good practices (Part 1)**

Moderated by Bryony RUDKIN, *Congress Thematic Spokesperson on the ELDW*

1. Valongo Municipality, Portugal
2. Büyükçekmece Municipality, Türkiye
3. City of Kharkiv, Ukraine (Video)
4. Beşiktaş Municipality, Türkiye

**10.30 – 10.45 Coffee Break**

**10.45 Presentations of good practices (Part 2)**

Moderated by Bryony RUDKIN, *Congress Thematic Spokesperson on the ELDW*

5. Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, Serbia
6. Lüleburgaz Municipality, Türkiye (Video)
7. Local Councils' Association, Malta
8. Buca Municipality, Türkiye

**12.00 –13.30 Lunch break**

**13.30 Presentations of good practices (Part 3)**

Moderated by Bryony RUDKIN, *Congress Spokesperson on the ELDW*

9. Ahmetbey Municipality, Türkiye (Video)
10. Ramnicu Valcea Municipality, Romania
11. Çiğli Municipality, Türkiye
12. City of Fastiv, Ukraine (Video)
13. Nilüfer Municipality, Türkiye

Exchange of views

**14.30 Presentation of proposals on a possible theme for the ELDW Editions 2023 and 2024**

Bryony RUDKIN, *Congress Spokesperson on the ELDW*

Discussion on a possible theme

**15.15 Closing remarks**

Bryony RUDKIN, *Congress Spokesperson on the ELDW*

**15.30 Award Ceremony in the Hemicycle Lobby**

“Partner of the European Local Democracy Week 2022”

Presentation of certificates to the awarded municipalities and associations

**16.00 Group photo on the stairs in front of the Hemicycle**