

Thematic debate on

“Are our towns and regions equipped to respond to the multiple crises they are facing?”

Organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities during the

PLATFORMA Political Council Meeting 8-10 March 2022

Date: 9 March 2022 -14.35 – 15.30

Venue: Strasbourg, France, Room 9

It will be hybrid

Kudo link to join as participant: <https://vmeeting.coe.int/k8/241112119087/join>

Kudo link to join as viewer <https://vmeeting.coe.int/k8/771114975049/join>

Interpretation in English, French and Spanish (provided by CEMR)

The Congress of local and regional authorities has been working over the past two years and the COVID-19 pandemic on the impact of major crisis situations on the functioning of local and regional democracy. It has identified the most acute issues subnational authorities have been confronted with during the sanitary crisis that has put the exercise of local democracy under unprecedented pressure and constraints. It has also underlined that the pandemic impact has varied greatly across regions and municipalities, while the areas of public health, delivery of social services and economic activities have been most strongly affected.

Today the world is facing multiple crises, requiring response at all levels of governance. Being closest to citizens, local and regional authorities act as “first responders” in the challenges to their communities. Beyond the pandemic, climate change and energy, migration and the challenges brought in by digitalisation and artificial intelligence, environmental degradation and the need for better integration and cohesion within our communities all compel local and regional authorities to act. Are they equipped with the necessary autonomy and resources to respond to these crises?

The war in Ukraine has triggered a political, economic and humanitarian crisis unprecedented since the World War II. The invasion, bombing and destruction of major cities, bringing millions of Ukrainian citizens to flee the conflict and search for safety in neighboring countries. An important part of the management of this major crisis rests and will continue to rest for a long time on the cities and regions affected by the conflict or by the arrival of the millions of refugees it has generated. While solidarity with refugees is being organised all over Europe, the citizens remaining within the country need to be provided with the basic services such as food, water, heating, health care. Resilience and sustainability of cities and regions are at stake in this situation more than in any other major crisis.

The core message of the Congress is that there is an urgent need for a more effective multilateral co-operation and multi-level governance to help cities and regions face the challenges raised in times of major crisis and ensure the fundamental rights and needs of their citizens. It calls on national

governments to support local authorities in their efforts to tackle the crisis democratic societies are facing, while preserving the autonomy, resilience and sustainability of European cities and regions.

Reference documents:

Ensuring respect of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in major crisis situations

24 March 2021

Rapporteurs : Leendert VERBEEK, Netherlands (R, SOC/G/PD) | Robert-Csongor GRÜMAN, Romania (R, EPP/CCE)

- [Report CG\(2021\)40-07](#)
Other languages: [FRA](#)
- [Recommendation 453 \(2021\)](#) - [Reply of the Committee of Ministers](#)
Other languages: [FRA](#) - [DEU](#) - [ITA](#) - RUS
- [Resolution 466 \(2021\)](#)
Other languages: [FRA](#) - [DEU](#) - [ITA](#) - RUS

Local and regional elections in major crisis situations

28 September 2020

Rapporteurs: Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG) | Jos WIENEN, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE)

- [Report CG-FORUM\(2020\)01-05](#)
Other languages: [FRA](#)
- [Recommendation 444 \(2020\)](#) | [Reply by the Committee of Ministers](#)
Other languages: [FRA](#) - [DEU](#) - [ITA](#) - [RUS](#)
- [Resolution 455 \(2020\)](#)
Other languages: [FRA](#) - [DEU](#) - [ITA](#) - [RUS](#)

Statements on the war in Ukraine

By the President of the Congress

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/statement-by-the-president-of-the-council-of-europe-congress-on-the-russian-military-attack-against-ukraine>

By the Bureau of the Congress

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/bureau-of-the-council-of-europe-congress-adopts-a-declaration-on-the-situation-in-ukraine>

Programme

Opening at 14.35 by moderator Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General of the Congress

Introduction by the moderator (5 min).

The moderator asks each panellist a question to be answered in 5 mn

Panellists are:

- Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC/G/PD)
- Sevdia UGREKHELIDZE, Georgia (L, EPP/CCE)
- Belinda GOTTARDI, Italy (L, SOC/G/PD)
- Cecilia DALMAN EEK, Sweden (R, SOC/G/PD) *tbc*

The presentations by the panellists will be followed by a discussion with the audience (PLATFORMA Political Council members) until 15.30

The moderator draws the conclusions

Proposed questions to panellists:

Xavier Cadoret, France (L, SOC/G/PD)

Les médias sociaux sont devenus une partie intégrante de nos démocraties, offrant de nouvelles formes de participation en ligne, de pétitions et de campagnes. Dans le même temps, les médias sociaux peuvent également servir à véhiculer de fausses informations et des discours de haine, contribuant ainsi à la polarisation de la société et à l'émergence d'une société du « clash » dans laquelle la confrontation est la norme. L'introduction de nouvelles formes de violence individuelle et collective peut même conduire dans le pire des cas à la violence physique et aux crimes de haine contre les élus.

Les élus locaux ne sont plus épargnés non plus et la crise sanitaire a aggravé la situation. En 2021 en France, par exemple, plus de 600 maires ou maires adjoints français ont été victimes d'agressions physiques, soit une augmentation de près de 50% par rapport à l'année précédente. Cela constitue une menace réelle pour nos démocraties et pour la démocratie locale.

Que peuvent faire les autorités locales et régionales pour contrer ces nouvelles formes de violence et assurer la sécurité de leurs représentants élus ? Ont-elles les outils et les cadres dont elles ont besoin pour agir ? Qu'attendent-elles des gouvernements nationaux à cet égard ?

Sevdia UGREKHELIDZE, Georgia (L, EPP/CCE)

Cities and Regions have been key actors in managing the two-years COVID-19 crisis. In Georgia, there has been a regular dialogue and consultation process set up during the pandemic between the central government and the association of local and regional authorities. Such dialogue is essential for the good functioning of any democratic society and the system of multi-level governance, and especially so in times of crisis which require coordination, consultations and proper distribution of resources.

Can you share this example of good practice with us and what lessons can we draw to better prepare for the next such crisis?

Belinda GOTTARDI, Italy (L, SOC/G/PD)

In the context of the pandemic, many associations of cities and regions stressed that the UN Sustainable Development Goals must be used as a framework in order to ensure the post-Covid recovery. The United Nations and the OECD have also recognized the importance of the SDGs in crisis recovery.

From your experience, have the SDGs helped set a framework to manage the pandemic in your city? How do you think SDG implementation at local and regional level can help make cities and regions more resilient to future crises?

Cecilia DALMAN EEK, Sweden (R, SOC/G/PD) *tbc*

Throughout Europe, border regions and transborder communities have to deal with different legal regimes and political realities across borders and are the first to be impacted by developments in neighboring countries. These issues become even more clear in times of crisis. During the pandemic, we have seen border communities cut off from families, employment and services. Today, with thousands of Ukrainians fleeing their country, border regions are the first point of contact and will need to be among the first to act.

Coming from a Swedish border region with Norway, could you tell us more about your experience in crises situations? What needs to be done so that border regions can act and share the burden in major crisis situations?