

The Bureau of the Congress

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Reform of the European Local Democracy Week: engaging citizens in local democracy

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Summary

The European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) is a pan-European initiative to promote local democracy and citizen involvement, endorsed by the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Local and Regional Government held in Valencia in 2007 and officially launched in Madrid in 2008 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

A first reform of the initiative took place in 2018 on the basis of Resolution 430 (2018) in order to increase participation in the ELDW and improve its award procedures.

A new reform of the initiative was launched in 2025 to make the initiative better respond to the needs and expectations of local and regional authorities and their citizens. Changes to the structure and functioning of the initiative – including a change of name, the transformation of the award of certificates into a Prize, the adoption of a general and enduring overall theme for the initiative and two biennial sub-themes – are set out in this preliminary draft resolution and explanatory memorandum, submitted to the Bureau for adoption.

Action required: for decision

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

Preliminary draft resolution

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:
 - a. the Declaration adopted by the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Local and Regional Government on 16 October 2007 in Valencia, which recognised the importance of increasing citizen participation in decision making at the grass-roots level and introducing participatory mechanisms into our democratic systems, and which endorsed the launching of the joint initiative of the Congress and the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy, the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW);
 - b. the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);
 - c. Congress Resolution 238 (2007) "Proposed European Local Democracy Week";
 - d. Congress Resolution 326 (2011) "Citizen participation at local and regional level in Europe";
 - e. Congress Resolution 423 (2017) "Ten years of the European Local Democracy Week";
 - f. Congress Resolution 430 (2018) "European Local Democracy Week (ELDW): a new momentum".
2. The Congress underlines that:
 - a. the European Local Democracy Week was officially launched in Madrid on 15 October 2008 following the Valencia conference, to foster dialogue between citizens and local and regional authorities and involve citizens more actively in local decision-making processes;
 - b. it was opened to participation of cities, regions and national associations and coordinated by the secretariat of the Congress, and included elements such as an annual theme, an annual coordination meeting and a dedicated website;
 - c. in 2017, the Congress renewed its commitment to advancing this initiative, and subsequently implemented reforms in 2018, introducing more flexibility for the organisation of events, a yearly award of Partner Status, a renewed list of criteria for participation and a greater involvement of youth.
3. The Congress considers that:
 - a. local democracy is an essential pillar of democracy, which can widely contribute to countering democratic backsliding and restoring citizens' confidence in democratic systems and institutions;
 - b. stepping up its action in favour of local governance and deliberative and participatory democracy forms part of the Council of Europe's efforts to revitalise democracy;
 - c. citizens' growing desire for greater consultation, open dialogue and consideration is reflected in the development of initiatives and projects such as the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW);
 - d. the commitment of local and regional authorities and their associations to the ELDW is essential for it to fulfil its role as a tool for promoting participatory democracy and exchanging good practices among elected representatives in the field;
 - e. the initiative's development should enable increased participation and networking, by making it more relevant, flexible, attractive and adapted both to the constraints of local and regional authorities and to the expectations of their citizens.
4. In the light of the above considerations, the Congress decides to:
 - a. renew its commitment to advancing the aims pursued by the European Local Democracy Week and further developing the initiative, with the aim of promoting the participation and consultation of citizens in the life of their local and regional communities across Europe;

- b. introduce new elements of reform to the initiative, with effect from 2026, and in particular to:
 - i change the name of the initiative to European Local Democracy Action (ELDA) in order to demonstrate that the events it covers may take place throughout the year;
 - ii adopt a restructured thematic framework composed of a permanent overarching theme, “Engaging citizens in local democracy”, and two rotating specific themes, to broaden the range of activities which can be reported;
 - iii upgrade the current award system of certificates of partner status into the ELDA Prize, composed of one general prize and two thematic prizes in order to increase the visibility of the good practices it recognises;
- c. entrust the Congress Bureau with the adoption of more detailed regulations in this respect, where needed.

Explanatory memorandum

1. The creation of European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) was endorsed in October 2007 by the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Local and Regional Government held in Valencia, Spain, which recognised the importance of increasing citizen participation in decision-making at the grassroots level and introducing participatory mechanisms into our democratic systems.
2. The initiative was officially launched on 15 October 2008 in Madrid. The week of 15 October was chosen as the official ELDW date, as it is the anniversary date of the opening for signature of the European Charter for Local Self-Government.
3. With this initiative the Congress intended to foster dialogue between citizens and local and regional authorities, by bringing them together in joint activities to hear each other's concerns, decide on priorities for the community, consult and be involved in the decision-making processes, thus improving the overall functioning of local government.
4. The ELDW was opened to participation of cities, regions and national associations and coordinated by the secretariat of the Congress. It offered participants the opportunity to report on their activities, to share them with other communities and give them a greater visibility at the European level.
5. A dedicated website was set up where participating local and regional authorities or associations could report, present and describe their projects. An annual co-ordination meeting held at the beginning of each year provided the opportunity to bring together the national co-ordinators and ELDW participants from the previous year. An evaluation of this previous edition was presented during the meeting as well as some of the most outstanding initiatives and good practices. The meeting would also establish the theme for the next two years to come.
6. A thematic webinar was also organised each October to mark the official date of the ELDW.
7. In 2017, the European Local Democracy Week marked its 10th anniversary. On this occasion, the Congress, in its [Resolution 423 \(2017\)](#) renewed its commitment to advancing this initiative further and established a Reflection Group to take the European Local Democracy Week forward to a new dimension.
8. The work of the Group resulted in [Resolution 430 \(2018\)](#) adopted in November 2018 and aimed at introducing more flexibility. In order to encourage the holding of a greater number of events, the municipalities were invited to organise events and activities in accordance with the theme of the ELDW during the whole year, culminating in a flagship event in the week of 15 October. The most active participating local authorities taking part in the ELDW could apply to be granted the title of "Partner of the European Local Democracy Week [Year]" and the participation of youth was further supported.
9. In 2023, the Council of Europe held its 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government in Reykjavik (Iceland) to recommit to Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law.
10. Considering that democracy was in danger and that democratic societies were facing major challenges, be they economic, geopolitical, environmental or societal, the Heads of State and Government adopted the Reykjavik Principles of Democracy, which stress the joint responsibility of national, local and regional authorities in strengthening democracy and good governance at all levels.
11. In 2025, considering the urgent need to confront democratic backsliding in all its forms and address the above-mentioned challenges, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe launched work towards a New Democratic Pact, with the intention of bringing the vision of the Reykjavik Principles of Democracy to life and turning them into action. As the Secretary General underlined, the new Pact "hinges on our ability to restore trust in democracy by making it tangible in people's daily lives through participation, accountability and equal access to rights".²
12. In line with this general move to restore citizens' confidence in democratic systems and institutions and convinced that local democracy is an essential pillar of democracy, the Congress has stepped up

² Secretary General of the Council of Europe, [Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe: Report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, 2025](#), Strasbourg, Council of Europe, May 2025.

its action to further support local governance and develop deliberative democracy as well as participatory democracy.

13. The Congress is convinced that the involvement and participation of citizens in the life and decision-making processes of their communities is essential for strengthening social cohesion and the commitment to common democratic values.

14. Proximity and closeness of local governance can restore trust and rebuild confidence. It can dramatically improve the quality of life, the cohesion and the citizens' commitment to the democratic functioning of their communities.

15. Consequently, it is important to give a new impetus to the action of the Congress in support of participative democracy and more specifically to its European Local Democracy Initiative.

16. Further reform of the existing initiative should take account of the following findings:

a. the initiative's current name, referring to the anniversary of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in October, may imply a one-off, time-limited event, and does not reflect its annual character. The name of the initiative needs to be changed in order to better promote action at the local level all over the year, through multidisciplinary projects and initiatives involving citizens;

b. the biennial theme that used to be decided for the ELDW could also be perceived as restrictive, and municipalities did not always realise that they could report on any activities they were already organising for and with their citizens. This biennial theme could be replaced by a general overall theme covering all activities and projects involving citizens and by two specific sub-themes;

c. best practices of participating municipalities, regions and national associations have until now rewarded by partnership status, through certificates granted every year during a ceremony at the end of the annual evaluation meeting. This recognition of best practices could be upgraded by the granting of a Prize – with three awards, each of them directly linked to the overall general theme and the two sub-themes;

d. the revival of democracy requires greater involvement of young people in public life. As in the reform of 2017, the Congress youth delegates are encouraged to participate in the ELDW activities of their municipality or even to lead an ELDW event. The project to be undertaken by the youth delegates between the two sessions of the Congress could touch upon this topic;

e. participants can exchange good practice and experiences on the ELDW website and during the annual evaluation meeting. Such exchanges of good practice should be further and actively encouraged and supported by the Congress. Among others, a greater attention could be given to supporting the presentation of projects by participants at events organised by other partners as well as the development of relationships with such partners working to promote participatory democracy.

Conclusions

17. Considering the above elements, the Congress should:

a. strengthen its efforts to promote greater citizen participation in the life and decision-making processes of their communities;

b. strengthen the functioning, scope and visibility of the existing initiative so far known as *European Local Democracy Week*;

c. approve the change of name of the initiative from European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) to European Local Democracy Action (ELDA);

d. adopt a restructured thematic framework composed of a permanent overarching theme “Engaging citizens in local democracy” and two rotating specific themes to be chosen every two years from a list of Congress political priorities;

- e. enlarge the current award system of certificates of partner status into the ELDA Prize, composed of one general prize linked to the permanent theme and two thematic prizes for the biennium's chosen theme;
 - f. continue awarding Certificates of Partner Status to deserving initiatives that have submitted their candidature and were not selected for the Prize;
 - g. establish a jury for the Prize;
 - h. strengthen the involvement of young people in the initiative in particular by ensuring youth delegate participation in ELDA activities, including their eligibility for the Prize and their role on the jury;
 - i. entrust the Bureau to consider at a later date the possibility of giving this Prize a name;
 - j. maintain the annual call for candidatures amongst the participating members in view of the awarding of the Prize and the Certificates.
 - k. Review the criteria for granting these awards as follows:
 - i. the participating municipalities, regions and associations organise every year projects and initiatives to involve and consult their citizens and possibly allocate a budget for citizens' participation;
 - ii. they implement sustainable and innovative initiatives and projects;
 - iii. they promote the engagement of young people and youth organisations, including by creating youth councils;
 - iv. they reach out to different groups of citizens, especially the groups that can feel excluded (children, elderly, women, Roma and Travellers, people with a disability, minorities...);
 - v. they could organise an event during the year involving other national or European partners such as universities, NGOs or other SEDL participants;
 - vi. they use whenever possible the ELDW visual identity provided by the Congress for activities and/or ELDW promotion campaign (posters, promotion of activities at school...);
 - vii. they present their activities organised for and with citizen participation on the dedicated ELDW website and participate in the annual meeting;
 - viii. they reply to the annual call for applications issued by the Congress at the end of each year;
 - l. maintain an annual coordination meeting to present and exchange good practices and devote part of this day to the Prize award ceremony;
 - m. consider the possibility to organise this coordination meeting in a participating municipality or region upon its invitation;
 - n. proceed with a full rebranding including a new visual identity, logo, communication materials, and website;
 - o. reinforce support to participating members by launching a targeted promotional campaign, providing training and support materials, supporting national coordinators, and developing networking of participants under the ELDA umbrella;
 - p. implement this reform for the edition of 2026.
18. The main political lines of this reform are proposed in the attached preliminary draft resolution; the operational details could be set out in a rule to be adopted by the Bureau.