

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## Resolution 238 (2007)<sup>1</sup> Proposition for a European Local Democracy Week

The Congress,

1. Having regard to:

a. Committee of Ministers Statutory Resolution (2000) 1 and its appendix, the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe;

b. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122);

2. Referring to its Recommendation 182 (2005) on public participation in local affairs and elections;

3. Welcoming the initiative of the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) to launch a “European Local Democracy Week”;

4. Recalling its motion for a resolution on the same initiative (CG(13)23);

5. Noting that the first Council of Europe body bringing together representatives of local and regional authorities, the Conference of Local Authorities of Europe, was created fifty years ago in 1957;

6. Reiterating that “local democracy” is a shared value across the continent and thus a constituent part of “European democracy”;

7. Underlining the importance of increased visibility and transparency of local democracy;

8. Emphasising the need to draw the attention of European citizens to the fact that their participation in local affairs is crucial for the vitality of democracy;

9. Bearing in mind the importance of the involvement of young people in democratic life so that they become aware, as early as possible, of the process of public decision making and democratic representation;

10. Determined to provide guidance to local authorities on presenting themselves to the public and on promoting democratic participation at local level;

11. Aware of the diverse needs, potentialities and sizes of municipalities throughout Europe and thus determined, to make the European Local Democracy Week a flexible instrument which will allow local authorities to develop activities according to their specific interests,

12. Refers to the attached project proposal on the launch of a European Local Democracy Week;

13. Calls on Congress members to promote the European Local Democracy Week within their countries and in particular to encourage local authorities and their associations to engage themselves actively in the initiative;

14. Calls on the Congress delegation to the 15th Session of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government on 15 and 16 October 2007 in Valencia (Spain) to actively support the initiative so that it can be launched officially on this occasion.

### Appendix

#### **Project Proposal established by the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe Joint Working Group**

#### **What is the “European Local Democracy Week”?**

The “European Local Democracy Week” is a new project consisting of an annual European event with simultaneous national and local events organised by participating local authorities in all member States in order to foster the knowledge of local democracy and promote the idea of democratic participation at a local level. A suitable and somewhat “symbolic” date to hold such events each year could be the week including 15 October, as the European Charter of Local Self-Government was adopted and opened for signature on that date in 1985.

The European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Congress) of the Council of Europe have initiated a work process on this ambitious project and have started to invite partners all over Europe to participate.

#### **Project “philosophy” and contents**

The initiative’s objective is to raise awareness of how local authorities operate and to draw the attention of European citizens to the fact that their participation in local affairs is crucial for the vitality of democracy. Disseminating information on the various opportunities to take part in decision making at local level should lead to increased citizens participation – a major precondition to good governance and a functioning local democracy. Having such local events under the same “label” across the continent would re-inforce the sense that “local” and “European” are not opposites, but complementary. Local democracy is a common European value.

On a practical level, local institutions would open their offices for citizens, during one or several days according to their preference, and organise events for different local publics (general public, young people, elderly people etc.) and on different local issues, but using as a common “label” the “European Local Democracy Week”. Local authorities could issue information material about the possibilities of participation in local development processes. The activities could take the form of presentations, round tables, debates or question times with local leaders and officials, but also be of more playful character (games, competitions etc.). Through such events, particular attention shall be given to the involvement of young people with the aim of raising as early as

possible their knowledge and awareness of public decision making, democratic participation and their possibilities for getting involved into their community.

The initiative would also create an opportunity to inform the public about the Council of Europe's role in the field of local democracy and would contribute to the implementation of its acquis on democratic participation at local level.

### Get the project going ...

The launch of the first European "Local Democracy Week" could take place on the occasion of the 15th session of the Ministerial Conference of European Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government in Valencia on 15-16 October 2007, where the Ministers will also meet with representatives of the Committee of Ministers, the Congress and the Parliamentary Assembly. At this occasion, pilot events in Valencia and other voluntary European cities or towns could take place.

A first launch in 2007 would also mark the 50th anniversary of the Council of Europe's advocacy for local democracy, since the first Council of Europe body bringing together elected representatives of local and regional authorities, the Conference of Local Authorities of Europe, was created in 1957.

After this "kick-off" event in Valencia and other European cities or towns, the "European Local Democracy Week" shall be continuously promoted as a "pan-European" event concerning which new towns, cities and countries can "get on board" at a later stage and even once it has already started. The long-term objective would be to win the support of more and more countries and their local authorities – individually and through their associations –, and to incite them to create a "Local Democracy Week" on national level. Part of this long-term strategy is also to welcome already existing initiatives and projects in different member States, and even at different times of the year, under the common label of the "European Local Democracy Week" in order to give them more visibility and maybe enhance their impact.

### Project partners and participants

At Council of Europe level, the general project outline and communication strategy and tools would be elaborated, and an overall coordination of the "week" would be provided in close collaboration with local governments' associations all over Europe. Such a reference framework is mainly meant to support the development of the "European Local Democracy Week", but should also include the promotion of the Council of Europe's role in the area of local democracy.

At national level, it would be important that both national associations of local authorities and national governments be ready to become partners and promoters of the project and to establish a national framework supporting

participating local authorities. The establishment of national committees for the "week" could be a helpful tool. Local authorities are of course also individually invited to take part in the "week".

At local level, each local authority should be left with a wide degree of discretion to decide the best ways of organising the week, while fitting their activities into the broader national and European frameworks, the latter being communicated and supported by the Council of Europe.

### What has already been done?

At the Council of Europe, a Joint Working Group of CDLR and Congress has been established in 2006 with a view to elaborating and initiating the "European Local Democracy Week" and promoting it amongst European municipalities and their associations.

Congress and CDLR members of the Working Group have started to promote the project in their respective member States and invited the first partners to get "on board", notably European and national associations of local authorities. These first consultations have shown a positive echo and a general willingness in member states to support the project; spontaneous reactions expressing particular interest and assuring full support came from the United Kingdom and Spain – the latter as host of the Valencia Ministerial Conference mentioned above. On the European level, in particular "Eurocities" and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) have expressed their interest to support the project.

Furthermore, the Working Group has started collecting information on existing local democracy events in member states. As a result, a close link to the Local Government Association of the United Kingdom has been established, who has already seven years of practice of organising a "Local Democracy Week" in England and Wales. They are ready to share their expertise with future project partners (for example a list of possible events to organise on local level) and to get actively involved in preparing a "European Local Democracy Week" at European level. Further promotion of the project is currently taking place and any local authority, association of local authorities or other interested partner is invited to support and participate in the project.

For further information on the project, please contact:

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1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 1 June 2007, 3rd Sitting (see Document CG(14)11RES, draft resolution presented by K. Whitmore (United Kingdom, R, ILDG), rapporteur).