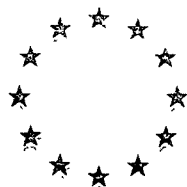


Council of Europe
Conseil de l'Europe



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For debate in the Standing Committee
Pour débat à la Commission Permanente
See Rule 12 (4) - Voir article 12 (4) du Règlement

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe
Congrès des pouvoirs locaux et régionaux de l'Europe

Strasbourg, 23 October 1995
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CG (2) 20
Part II

SECOND SESSION

REPORT

ON LOCAL DEMOCRACY EMBASSIES

Rapporteur: Ms Magdalena TOVORNIK (Slovenia)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

* Objections to the Standing Committee procedure must reach the Head of the Congress Secretariat a clear week before the meeting of the Standing Committee; if 5 members object, the report will be submitted to the Plenary Session.

Les éventuelles objections à l'examen en Commission Permanente doivent parvenir au Chef du Secrétariat du Congrès une semaine avant la réunion de la Commission Permanente; si 5 membres du Congrès présentent des objections, le rapport sera soumis à la session plénière.

Local democracy embassies
Intermunicipal missions organised by European towns
with the support of the CLRAE of the Council of Europe

Proposed by the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe in its Resolution 251 (1993), *local democracy embassies* are aimed at encouraging and/or developing the democratic process at local level, taking due account of material and institutional differences between certain parts of former Yugoslavia. A Monitoring Committee, composed of members of the CLRAE, NGOs and the institutional partners, coordinates the actions of local and regional authorities of Europe in favour of the populations of former Yugoslavia and takes decisions on the award of the title *local democracy embassies*.

The role of LDEs is to promote respect for human rights in general and to foster the implementation and affirmation of a democratic process in all areas concerning local life. They thus attempt to promote human rights and the rights of minorities, the functioning of local democracy and the development of socio-cultural and economic exchanges, as well as provide a framework for information, exchanges and mutual understanding, and a area of dialogue and mediation on a multicultural and pluriethnic basis.

First ensured by an NGO (Causes Communes), the financing of LDEs is guaranteed by the local authorities, the institutional partners (Council of Europe, European Union) or other international organisations. LDEs are also eligible for support under the "Confidence Building Measures" scheme. Usually the host local authorities provide the basic facilities (office, housing). The Monitoring Committee can also, at the request of the partner local authorities, seek additional funds necessary for the functioning of LDEs.

LDEs are the result of an agreement between, on the one hand, a town located within the territory of former Yugoslavia and, on the other, at least three local or municipal authorities in different member States of the Council of Europe, whereby at least one of the partner towns or communities should preferably be located in one of the States of Central or Eastern Europe. These towns agree to concert their practices through a multilateral cooperation approach and ensure the functioning of an LDE through a permanent presence. They are requested, in the framework of their international relations, to take part in small-scale projects in the fields of training and economic co-operation and encourage at their level the development of local activities. **NGOs, among those Causes Communes Belgium, Causes Communes France, Causes Communes Switzerland, ANCI Veneto and Eurocities, are also involved in that project.**

Chosen by a committee composed of the partner towns after consultation with the Monitoring Committee, the LDE Delegate possesses practical experience of the functioning of a local community that enables him to ensure on the spot coordination of the missions that are entrusted to him. Being responsible for collecting and centralising information, he acts as an interface between the local partners, the towns involved, NGOs and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (Council of Europe).

By linking European towns, NGOs and international institutions, LDEs permit the implementation of practical programmes capable of meeting the needs of populations. They also seek to ensure visibility of the action of local and regional authorities and mark the presence and support of European towns in the region concerned.

The activities of the local democracy embassies

The setting up of the *local democracy embassies* (LDE) scheme has led to the actual opening of four embassies (in Osijek, Subotica, Maribor and Tuzla) since 1993. LDEs are aimed at permitting an intercultural and interreligious dialogue, promoting the coexistence of different communities and at favoring the development of human rights, mutual understanding as well as the democratic process at local level. Accordingly, some activities are common to all embassies:

- The exchanges and activities involving partner towns constitute the hallmark of these structures. On the basis of a network, LDEs can appeal to their partners to generate joint operations for the purpose of fostering economic exchanges, training arrangements or the financing of local activities.

- The organisation of round-tables discussions enables dialogue to be reinforced and the participation of representatives of the academic, journalistic and political fields to be secured.

- The Schools for Civil Society, which qualify for support under the Council of Europe's "Confidence-building Measures" scheme, are also becoming a programme common to all LDEs. They deal with problems going beyond the specific context of the countries of former Yugoslavia and cover issues raised by the fall of communism and the need to reconstruct a civil society. The Schools involve the organisation of seminars and night classes enabling citizens to become familiar with such topics as human rights and democracy. They are also aimed at issuing publications and enabling libraries jointly financed by the municipal and/or institutional partners to be set up.

- The publication of a Newsletter is intended to provide a means of exchanging information as well as a source of information for the population and partners. The experiments carried out in Osijek in this connection, especially the graphic medium used, can be mentioned here.

LDEs also develop specific activities, depending on their possibilities and resources.

The LDE in **Osijek** constitutes the most advanced project initiated in 1994. Opened by Patrick Quinet and supported by **Gödöllö (H)**, **Haarlem (NL)**, **Renkum (-NL)**, **Wageningen (NL)**, **Lausanne / "Regional Committee Vaud/Léman"**, the LDE is at present managed by François FRIEDERICH, the Delegate since April 1995. Contacts were also established with the University of **Olomouc (CZ)**. The activities undertaken reflect the diversity of the projects that can be conducted and the evolution of local demand. Thanks to the organisation of public events such as Europe Day on 5 May 1995 the LDE is becoming increasingly well-known and being confronted with issues going beyond its original functions. It receives various requests relating to economic activities as well as the restructuring of the town's amenities. This is evidence of expectations created by such a structure as well as the pluridisciplinary skills required of a Delegate who should be able to handle these requests, inform and advise those who approach him and, if appropriate, propose solutions for financing or implementing a project. Owing to the interest aroused, the LDE in Osijek initiated the extension of its activities in Slavonia (Okucani, Pakrac), in the territories where Croatian sovereignty was recently re-established by the Croatian army, a series of activities meant to

support local NGOs working in the field of human rights, refugees and displaced persons. This extension is presently run and coordinated by the Osijek staff.

The LDE in **Maribor**, whose inter-municipal agreement was officially signed on 11 September 1995, operates in Slovenia, especially in respect of refugees, and co-operates with NGOs active in this field. Its partner towns are **Brussels (B)** and **Blanc-Mesnil (F)**. The sister town of **Graz (A)** also responded favourably to the project. The LDE is establishing itself as the coordinator of different projects and as a regional pole in northeast Slovenia in collaboration with the municipality of Maribor, which is developing a special link with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe. Conducted by Patrick Quinet, the LDE in Maribor is the base of the TV Demo project, grouping together the local television stations of Maribor, Brussels, Tuzla, Sarajevo, Tournai, Subotica, Osijek, Belgrade, Liège, Skopje, Bologna, etc. This multilateral venture makes it possible to produce a one-hour monthly programme and broadcast it on the local channels of these towns. The programme shows aspects of everyday life, especially from the point of view of local residents and the municipalities.

In spite of substantial difficulties, **Subotica** started up the activities of its *Agency of Local Democracy* in 1993. **Tilburg (NL)**, **Namur (B)** and **Elche (E)** are the partner towns of this project. It has not, however, been possible to involve a Delegate in it. Nadia Cuk is therefore responsible for the project. The *Agency* operates in Voivodina. In spite of a modest budget and reduced activities owing to the difficulties in conducting international cooperation, a two-day seminar on human rights and democracy in local communities and a study on NGOs were implemented in 1994. The programme for this year includes the extension of the "School for Civil Society" project, the provision of support for young researchers in the field of social sciences, the holding of creative workshops, artistic events and a seminar on ethnic relations and participation in the international conference organised by the City of Tilburg. It is clear that the Agency will need substantial support in order to be able to implement these projects.

The LDE in **Tuzla** is the first created in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Solemnly inaugurated on 2 October 1995 with the partners of Tuzla, in particular the City of Bologna, coordinator of the project, and with a delegation from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe composed of the Congress Vice-Presidents Mrs ATIG and Mr CHEVROT, the creation of the LDE was the result of the efforts made by the municipality of Tuzla in favour of a multicultural and multireligious society, which is still preserved in spite of a difficult political and military situation. Numerous cities support this project : **Bologna (I)**, **Strasbourg (F)**, **Rennes (F)**, **Malmö Stad (S)**, **Tübingen (D)**, **Rubi (E)**, **Anvers (B)**, **Lisbon (P)**, **Nantes (F)**. Other cities also expressed interest in the project : **Hambourg (D)**, **Stockholm (S)**, **Göteborg (S)** and **Maribor (SLO)**. The project received the financial support of the Programme "Aid for democratisation and support for the peace process in the Republics of the Former Yugoslavia (budgetary line B7-5102, so-called "Serge Abou line"). The appointment of Mr Claudio GERIN as Delegate of the LDE in Tuzla was approved during the meeting of the Monitoring Committee on 30 June 1995. The Mayor of Tuzla remains in regular contact with the Council of Europe and the European Forum for the Active Prevention of Conflicts (FEPAC

- European Parliament) to inform about the situation in the area.

The continuation of LDE activities depends on three factors:

- **Enlargement of the partnerships** in order to maintain and develop the activities as well as to seek additional funds ;
- **Involvement of partner towns and regions** capable of providing ad hoc solutions to problems and projects at their level ;
- **Networking of the different LDEs** to allow advantage to be taken forthwith of the experience gained from the existing projects.

Local democracy embassies Projects and prospects

The *local democracy embassies* scheme seems to be proving highly successful. For towns in certain parts of former Yugoslavia, cooperation with partner towns elsewhere in Europe enables them to receive support that can be effective thanks to the pooling of projects and ideas coordinated by a Delegate on the spot. Small-scale projects can thus be implemented thanks to multilateral venture facilitated by concerted efforts of towns, NGOs and institutions such as the Council of Europe or the European Union. Six LDE projects are at present being studied.

Brtonigla - Verteneglio (located in Istria, a region of Croatia) is attempting to develop its project for a transfrontier television station, TV Nova, dealing with programmes aimed at promoting interethnic dialogue. The support of the "Confidence-building Measures" scheme is sought for the purpose. Its partners are **cities from the Canton of Ticino (CH) (Bellinzona, Locarno), the region of Emilia-Romagna (I) and Ravenna (I)**. On 29 June 1995 a meeting of the partners was held in Verteneglio with a view to opening the LDE.

In spite of the siege of **Sarajevo** (Bosnia-Herzegovina) which has for a long time blocked exchanges with the outside world, the municipality of Barcelona is willing to establish a local democracy embassy in Sarajevo. The City of Barcelona wishes at first to concentrate its action on the reconstruction needs of infrastructures and on the necessity to stimulate exchanges with the outside world. A first fact-finding mission established the urgency of the opening of this embassy. Due to the state of implementation of the work performed by the City of Barcelona, the Monitoring Committee decided on 20 October 1995 to approve the opening of the local democracy embassy in Sarajevo and the nomination of Mrs Teresa SANDOVAL, Councillor, from Barcelona, as Delegate.

The Association ANCI Veneto decided to launch a new initiative in relation to **Sisak** (Croatia), whose partners are **Region of Venezia (I), the Region of Lombardy (I), the Region of Puglia (I) and the region of Blaye (F)**. New developments should soon occur.

The "Association of the Towns and Municipalities of Macedonia" was invited by the Monitoring Committee to propose a host-city which would welcome the first local democracy embassy in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Mr Blagola SILJANOVSKI, President of the above-mentioned Association and Mayor of the town of **Ohrid**, presented a first feasibility study on the Ohrid Lake region which comprises other Macedonian cities such as Struga, but also Albanian cities such as Pogradec, with which Ohrid already leads discussions in the framework of the ecological future. This could then become a transfrontier project. Ohrid currently enjoys twinning relations with other European and non European cities such as **Katwijk (Netherlands), Wulongong (Australia), Windsor (Canada), Piran (Slovenia), Vinkovci (Croatia), Kragujevac and Budva (Serbia-Montenegro)**, and enjoys good relationship with **Eskishehir (Turkey), Pogradec et Korca (Albania), Blagoevgrad (Bulgaria)**. It is about to conclude a cooperation agreement with **York (United Kingdom)**.

One should notice that **Skopje** was also willing to set up an LDE with the cities of

Bradford (UK), Nuremberg (D) and Kosice (SL). Such a project arouses great interest on behalf of the Government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Lastly, Mostar could soon be provided with an LDE thanks to the projects developed by Friedensprojekt Potsdam, in collaboration with the cities of **Heidelberg (D), Cambridge (UK) and Montpellier (F), with a view to restoring the town's unity.**

The new requests from municipalities not belonging to countries of former Yugoslavia call for the following comments:

- The programme of *local democracy embassies* is in its infancy. The experience gained so far is therefore still limited. It is, for example, advisable to anticipate the evolution of an LDE's functions as and when its activities are implemented, and foresee the consequences. LDEs are rapidly confronted with all kinds of requests (such as the provision of new urban facilities) which, while not directly relevant to the tasks originally assigned to them, are nevertheless vital for the local populations.

- The LDE formula is simple and modest, and therefore seems attractive to towns in certain countries of former Yugoslavia -and indeed elsewhere- that wish to promote human rights, interethnic dialogue and democracy at local level. It should however be pointed out that such a venture requires of the partners (towns, NGOs and institutions) a genuine ability to get fully involved, coordinate their activities and ensure the implementation of and the follow-up to the projects. The success of an LDE depends, therefore, on the combining of all these energies and on a determination to carry a project of international cooperation through to a successful conclusion.

- The extension of the programme of *local democracy embassies* to other countries, which must be considered in that light and which has been contemplated or discussed in respect of Albania, the Baltic countries and Romania, would, however, make it necessary to take into consideration the additional workload and the financial implications that would imply for the Monitoring Committee, and to find further financial resources. These might concern in particular the programmes set up by the Council of Europe, the European Union or various foundations.

- Thanks to the know-how and experience acquired in the existing *embassies*, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia-Montenegro, a cooperation could be envisaged in the future with other States according to selected criteria such as the existence of conflictual relations between different ethnic communities or the conspicuous absence of a civil society.

During its meeting on 3 July 1995, the Bureau of the Congress accepted the change of title of the Monitoring Committee on action by Local and Regional Authorities in favour of the population of certain countries of former Yugoslavia which is now designed as

Monitoring Committee on local democracy embassies.

The change in the title was desirable. The change had to be made, first of all, in order to avoid referring to an ill-perceived and obsolete term "former Yugoslavia". This change will not, however, affect the mandate of the Monitoring Committee. It will not preclude from other measures being taken in favour of the populations of former Yugoslavia or ad hoc events being carried out in conjunction with the LDEs for the purpose of developing the topics examined within the LDEs. Such a title will give this working group a clearer identity .

The Bureau of the Congress took note, without making a decision at this stage, of the perspective for broadening the activities of the Monitoring Committee in other countries. **This possibility however would only be an eventuality. It must indeed be underlined that the urgency of the situation in some countries of former Yugoslavia and the limited resources presently available will require to set up priorities and to concentrate at first on that region of Europe.**

The Monitoring Committee supports the initiative launched by Mr Martini (Italy) to organise during the 3d Plenary Session of the CLRAE a special event in order to reflect on the political situation resulting from the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. This event would enable a reflexion on the new forms of geopolitical structures, the structures of work of local and regional authorities, and the impact of these evolutions as regards protection of the rights of minorities, respect of the differences, education, formation. It would also emphasise the work achieved by the local democracy embassies and underline the role that they can play in that process, in cooperation with local authorities.