



# News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

We stand with **UKRAINE**

#SlavaUkraini

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES – COUNCIL OF EUROPE

DECEMBER 2023

## FOREWORD BY STEWART DICKSON

### IN THIS ISSUE:

FOREWORD BY  
STEWART DICKSON

2023 CONGRESS  
ELECTIONS

MARC COOLS  
ELECTED NEW  
PRESIDENT OF  
CONGRESS

MY MANDATE AS  
THE VICE-  
PRESIDENT OF  
CONGRESS

PERSONAL REPORT  
FROM THE MISSION  
TO CHISINAU

LOCAL PRESS AT  
THE HEART OF  
DEMOCRACY

COMBATTING  
CLIMATE CHANGE

ILDG REPORTS

*Stewart Dickson, President of the ILDG*

I have the honour to have been elected to take over the role of group leader of ILDG following the election of Marc Cools to the position of Congress President.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Marc Cools who has led our ILDG for the last nine years on his election as President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

Marc will do an outstanding job as our new President, he has set out clear goals and objectives for his Presidency, he will lead us with certainty and determination upholding not only the values of Congress but the those of his Liberal Democratic colleagues.

I wish to build on the excellent work done by Marc and to grow and expand our group and influence in Congress.

As ILDG Group Leader I hold a seat on the Bureau of Congress where I will be supporting Marc also working with the other political leaders and members of the Bureau to develop the work of Congress working our way through the challenges that face Congress in an uncertain world, standing united for the values of what unites us - Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law.

I will also be working to ensure that the Congress voice is heard in the wider Council of Europe family of organisations so that we are adequately resourced to do our work.

I look forward to working with all of you over the next few months.

Please feel free to call or share your thoughts with me, get engaged in the work of Congress volunteer for its missions and work, encourage others who have not joined our group and share our values to join us.

At its meeting on 23 October, the ILDG group elected Stewart Dickson as the new President of the group. Stewart represents the Northern Ireland Assembly and is a member of the Alliance Party. Stewart has been a member of the Congress for over ten years. He has served as the Congress's thematic spokesperson on local elections, as the first vice-president of the Monitoring Committee, and he currently chairs the Council for Democratic Elections of the Venice Commission.

Graphic containing contact information for Stewart Dickson MLA, including email, website, phone number, and address, alongside a portrait of him. The graphic also features the Alliance Party logo.

Email: [stewart.dickson@mla.niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:stewart.dickson@mla.niassembly.gov.uk)

Visit: [www.stewartdicksonmla.net](http://www.stewartdicksonmla.net)

Phone: 028 9335 0286

Call into: 8 West Street, Carrickfergus, BT38 7AR

Alliance

Stewart Dickson MLA

***On behalf of the ILDG group, we wish you a restful holiday season and successful New Year!***

*2023 was an eventful year for our group. ILDG welcomed the conclusions of the Reykjavik Summit, which proposed a vision for the organisation during very challenging times, and the subsequent decision of the Committee of Ministers to increase the Congress's budget. ILDG successfully conducted a campaign for the election of the new president of the Congress, and we look forward to working with Marc Cools. Stewart Dickson was elected the new leader of the ILDG group. ILDG members actively engaged in the Congress's work, with four reports adopted in the congress and four in the chambers.*

*In 2024, ILDG will meet on **25 March** (ahead of the 46<sup>th</sup> session) and **14 October** (ahead of the 47<sup>th</sup> session).*



# 2023 CONGRESS ELECTIONS

## MARC COOLS ELECTED NEW PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS



At its 45th plenary session on 24 October 2023, the Congress elected **Marc Cools** as the new President for a mandate of two and a half years. Marc Cools represents the Communal Council of Uccle (Belgium) and is also the Honorary Vice-President of the Brussels Parliament. A member of the Congress since

December 2005, Marc Cools served as the leader of the ILDG group from 2014 to 2023.

“The Congress is a unique forum that brings together local and regional elected officials from 46 European countries. Within our assembly, there is neither a

majority nor an opposition. We all work together, in consensus, to promote local and regional democracy throughout Europe,” declared Marc Cools in his inaugural speech.

Prior to his election, Marc Cools outlined his [priorities](#) as the President of the Congress, aiming to revive the Congress and position it at the centre of Council of Europe decisions concerning local democracy.

On behalf of the ILDG group, Stewart Dickson congratulated Marc Cools on his election, expressing confidence that, having set very clear and ambitious objectives, Marc Cools will be an outstanding president of the Congress.

Marc Cools succeeded Leendert Verbeek (Pays-Bas, SOC/V/DP) in this role. The previous ILDG representative in this position, Keith Whitmore (United Kingdom), presided over the Congress from 2010 to 2012.

### MEMBERS ELECTED TO OTHER LEADING POSITIONS

#### CHAMBER OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

#### CHAMBER OF REGIONS



Vice-President

**Martine  
DIESCHBURG-  
NICKELS**  
(L, Luxembourg)



Vice-President

**Randi MONDORF**  
(R, Denmark)

Martine Dieschburg-Nickels and Randi Mondorf join the Bureau of the Congress where they will work alongside Stewart Dickson and Marc Cools.

#### MONITORING COMMITTEE

#### CURRENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

#### GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



**Viorel FURDUI**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-  
President (Straseni,  
Republic of Moldova)



**Benoît PILET**, 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice-  
President (Angers, France)



**Jimmy MOLONEY**, 4<sup>th</sup> vice-  
president (Kerry County,  
Ireland)

# MY MANDATE AS THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF REGIONS: COMMITMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

*Randi Mondorf, Regional Council, Capital Region Denmark*



During the latest Congress session in October, I was elected as one of the Vice-Presidents of the Chamber of Regions. I am deeply honoured and grateful for this new position, yet I approach it with humility and curiosity, eager to tackle the challenges facing the Congress.

As articulated in my letter of candidacy, the vision and purpose of the Council of Europe resonate

profoundly with my heart and personal values. Advocating for local democracy and influencing matters of significance to citizens has been a lifelong commitment of mine, throughout my youth and adult years.

In my role as Vice-President of the Chamber of Regions, there are two specific issues I aim to address and hopefully develop further during my tenure in the Bureau.

During the many missions I have undertaken, I have made many European acquaintances and friends across the member states, fostering cross-border political relationships. I am aware that many other politicians associated with the Council of Europe have shared similar experiences. I strongly believe that these bonds, relationships, and insights into various European political frameworks and challenges should be further developed and built upon. These relationships are invaluable, and the dynamics of discussions, such as those addressing the questions 'How do you run schools or elderly care?'

can significantly contribute to the development of local or regional democracy in our respective countries. I genuinely believe that there is much more to gain from mutual collaboration, particularly in offering support to newer, less experienced democracies and politicians. Therefore, establishing a framework for more professional interaction in a political context is one of my ambitions.

The second issue pertains to the crucial task of promoting and branding the Council of Europe in our respective member states. It is imperative that we succeed in securing increased financial support from our member states. Enhanced financial support is intricately linked to the Council's brand and general awareness. Somehow, I have the impression that the Council has somewhat lost recognition and reputation compared to the European Parliament. I aspire to be part of changing that.

## A YOUNG DEMOCRACY TO CARE FOR. WE HAVE A JOB TO DO!

### RANDI MONDORF: MY PERSONAL REPORT ON THE MISSION TO CHISINAU

Upon landing at Chisinau Airport, you quickly realise that this country is among the poorest in Europe. There are no gates, only an apron, and a single new modern building welcomes you.

In the first weekend of November, I participated in the local election observation in the Republic of Moldova. During the briefings, it became clear very quickly that this small, brave, but poor country is under heavy pressure from Russia, not to mention the struggles with social and health issues related to its economic situation.

However, the briefings also left me impressed with the young and ambitious professionals who have the determination to develop their country in terms of both welfare and democracy.

We have a job to do if we want to ensure democracy in the Republic of Moldova and prevent the influence and infiltration of Russia and oligarchs into Moldovan political institutions. The Council of Europe has been very active and present in Moldova for some years now, and I can only emphasize how important it is to protect this small, brave country bordering Ukraine.

I encourage everybody to carefully read the report on the Moldovan elections once it is ready because it truly illustrates democratic development and the threats and challenges democracy faces on Europe's eastern borders.

## JOURNALISTS MATTER: LOCAL PRESS AT THE HEART OF DEMOCRACY

*Mélanie Lepoultier Mayor of Sommervieu, Vice-President of the Departmental Council of Calvados*



"Journalists matter": such was the title of the conference organised by the Latvian Presidency of the Council of Europe in Riga on 2 October 2023. Bringing together numerous journalist federations, European media centres, experts, researchers, and rapporteurs on the subject of media at the Council of Europe, this conference also marked the launch of the Council of Europe's campaign on the safety of journalists. This new five-year campaign is a strong commitment from the Council of Europe to press freedom, a fundamental element of the rule of law.

Beyond the publications of the Council of Europe, the campaign relies mainly on the platform for the safety of journalists, whose operation is notably ensured by the European Federation of Journalists.

As a co-rapporteur on the report on local and regional media and local democracy, I had the honour of representing the Congress during this conference. It was an opportunity to voice the concerns of local governments and highlight the indispensable presence of local media for local democracies. During the

discussions addressing fake news, artificial intelligence, or media deserts, it was crucial to emphasize how the local level is also essential in the media landscape and how the absence of press or press freedom leads to an inevitable polarisation of opinions.

Similarly, I could underscore the need to consider the local level in data collection or research on this subject. The growing number of reports from the local press on the platform for the safety of journalists clearly highlights the attention we all must give to it.

## COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT: A NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL RESPONSIBILITY

*Martine Dieschburg-Nickels, communal councillor, Strassen*

The meetings, exchanges, and discussions among local and regional politicians at the Council of Europe's Congress are crucial sources of information, recommendations, and best practices for addressing the numerous challenges facing our society. It is this dynamic work and the opportunity to collaborate with people who share my values that motivates my commitment to the Congress.

My article addresses one of today's major issues: the protection of the environment and natural resources,

which is fundamental to guaranteeing our future and the quality of life for future generations. It is imperative that we take sustainable initiatives to combat climate change.

I would like to provide the reader with a brief overview of some important and effective measures implemented in Luxembourg. Some of them are based on partnership between municipalities and the State.

My municipality, Strassen, has signed the Climate Pact, the Climate Alliance, and the Nature Pact.

### Climate Pact 2.0

The municipality must establish objectives for its climate policy actions to achieve, and perhaps even surpass, the targets outlined in Luxembourg's Integrated National Energy-Climate Plan for 2021-2030 (PNEC). In return, the state provides financial and technical support to the municipalities during the implementation process.

For the local climate strategy to succeed, concrete actions must be meticulously planned and executed. These actions should be grounded in

the European Energy Award (EEA) catalogue of measures, which encompasses 64 criteria across six different thematic areas.

The measures and provisions enacted by local authorities undergo examination and evaluation during an audit. Presently, four levels of certification, each linked to corresponding subsidies, are available: 40%, 50%, 65%, and 75%.

Thematic certifications, such as those for circular economy, adaptation to climate change, and air quality, enable municipalities to secure additional subsidies.

[www.pacteclimat.lu](http://www.pacteclimat.lu)

### **Climat alliance « Klimabündnis »**

Aware of the impact of Western lifestyles on the planet's most vulnerable peoples and territories, the Climate Alliance has been combining local action and global responsibility for over 30 years. It is the only network to have defined quantified targets: each member town or city undertakes to continuously reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to achieve a reduction of at least 95% by 2050 (compared with 1990), in accordance with the requirements of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The network, which counts nearly 2,000 member municipalities in 27 European countries, including around 40 in Luxembourg, collaborates with indigenous peoples, conducts awareness campaigns, and provides tools for climate action.

In Luxembourg, it was in 1995 that several municipalities joined forces with two NGOs, "ASTM - Action Solidarité Tiers Monde" and "Mouvement Ecologique," to establish the "Klima-Bündnis Lëtzebuerg/Alliance pour le climat Luxembourg" (Climate Alliance Luxembourg). The project is supported by the ministries responsible for cooperation and development, as well as for sustainable development.

[www.klimabuendnis.lu](http://www.klimabuendnis.lu)

### **Nature Pact**

The Nature Pact is a pivotal tool for actively advancing the protection of nature and biodiversity at the municipal level, offering the opportunity to seek state funding. It represents a mutual commitment between the Luxembourg state and municipalities.

The project is founded on a comprehensive catalogue of



measures. A holistic strategy must be formulated and executed for the municipal territory, encompassing the urban environment, open landscapes, forests, and aquatic environments. Simultaneously, effective communication and cooperation are essential.

Similar to the Climate Pact 2.0, the Nature Pact incorporates a certification system for member municipalities, featuring four levels of performance: "basic certification" (40%), "bronze" (50%), "silver" (60%), and "gold" (70%).

To determine a municipality's eligibility for "Pacte Nature" certification and to calculate the subsidy amount, the municipality's level of performance concerning the implemented measures is assessed according to the catalogue of measures.

## **REKPORTS ADOPTED DURING THE 45TH SESSION**

Harald BERGMANN, Netherlands, (L, ILDG): Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government in Estonia (co-rapporteur; Chamber of Local Authorities)

Anne COLGAN, Ireland (L, ILDG): European Urban Charter III (2023): Urban living in the era of transformations

Carla DEJONGHE, Belgium (R, ILDG): Report on the observation of the elections to the Council of Elders, City of Yerevan, Armenia (17 September 2023) (Chamber of Local Authorities)

Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom, (R, ILDG): Report on the observation of local elections in Albania (14 May 2023) (Chamber of Local Authorities)

Matthias GYSIN, Switzerland, (L, ILDG): Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government in the Slovak Republic (co-rapporteur)

Mélanie LEPOULTIER, France (L, ILDG): Local and regional media: watchdogs of democracy, guardians of community cohesion (co-rapporteur)

All reports presented at the session are available [here](#)

**CONTACT:** Tel: +33 3 8841 2682 email: maria.bigday[at]coe.int

**Webpage:** <http://www.congress-political-groups.eu/en/5-ildg/>

