

INFORMATION ON THE “EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK”

The “European Local Democracy Week” (ELDW) is a new annual European event where national and local events are organised concurrently 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.

The two Council of Europe bodies in charge of local and regional democracy issues i.e. the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Congress) of the Council of Europe and the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) have initiated this project and jointly support its implementation.

The week beginning 15 October has been chosen for holding this event as a tribute to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, opened for signature on that date in 1985. Local authorities unable, for a variety of reasons, to organize the ELDW in this week are free to choose a more suitable week. A first launch in 2007 would also mark the 50th anniversary of the creation in 1957 of the Conference of the local authorities of the Council of Europe, the first authority in Europe to bring together elected officials of local and regional communities.

The European dimension of local democracy

Proximity, a vibrant local democratic life and good governance at local level are aspirations largely shared by most Europeans.

Several organisations work towards promoting local democracy in Europe. The Council of Europe is committed to promoting a style of local self-government that meets the needs of the citizens wherever they may be. The Council of Europe also initiated the European Charter of Local Self-Government that came into force on 9 September 1988. Through this instrument the signatory States undertake to recognise the principle of local self-government in domestic legislation.

Organising local events across the continent under the common “label” of the “European Local Democracy Week” would contribute to reinforcing citizens’ perception of local democracy as a common European value and a basis for building a democratic society.

Target groups

The ELDW is intended for first level local authorities (local communities, cities, municipalities) responsible for its organisation, as well as for citizens - the principal beneficiaries of the ELDW’s activities.

Objectives

The ELDW has several aims. Its purpose is to raise European citizens’ awareness of how local authorities operate, to inform them of the opportunities available for taking part in decision-making at local level and, as a result, draw their attention to how crucial their participation in local affairs is for maintaining the vitality of local democracy. The initiative will also serve as an occasion for raising local councillors’ and local civil servants’ awareness of democratic participation at local level and will enable them to meet citizens in an informal and entertaining setting. Furthermore, the “Week” will also create the opportunity to stress that local democracy is one of the common components for constructing a democratic Europe and to inform the public and elected representatives about Council of Europe’s role in this field.

The “Week”

The first European “Local Democracy Week” will be launched on the occasion of the 15th session of the Ministerial Conference of European Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government in Valencia, 15 to 16 October 2007, with representatives from the Committee of Ministers, the Congress and

the Parliamentary Assembly. Representatives of national associations of local authorities and of major European cities will also take part in the launching event.

At national level, it is important that a maximum number of partners adopt the week of 15 October as ELDW because of the symbolic nature of this date. Nevertheless, local authorities unable to organise the “Week” around this date are free to schedule the ELDW for another, more suitable, time of year. In order to inform citizens, compile their opinions and expectations, and encourage them to participate actively in local affairs, participating local institutions would organise for one or several days a variety of activities aimed at a variety of audiences. The activities could be directed at several levels, from the more serious to the more entertaining, such as disseminating information, arranging open door days or debates with local leaders and officials on issues of local interest, as well as organising games and competitions etc.. Particular attention should be given to the involvement of young people with the aim of raising as early as possible their awareness as regards democratic participation at local level.

After the “kick-off” in Valencia and other European cities or towns, the “ELDW” shall continue to be promoted as a “pan-European” event, with the aim of encouraging more and more local authorities to join in – individually and through their associations. Part of this strategy is also to welcome on board already-existing initiatives and projects in member States, including those scheduled at different times of the year, under the common label of “European Local Democracy Week” in order to give them greater visibility and maybe enhance their impact.

Project partners and participants

As the initiator of the project, the **Council of Europe** defines the general project outline, suggests activities, proposes a shared visual identity and generally coordinates the European dimension of the “week” in close collaboration with local government associations all over Europe. The Council of Europe also ensures that the European dimension of the initiative is reflected in the activities carried out at local level.

At **national level**, national associations of local authorities and national governments are invited to become partners and promoters of the project, establish a national framework supporting participating local authorities, and organise national events.

At **local level**, local authorities are invited to take part in the ELDW individually and will have a wide degree of discretion for deciding the best ways for organising and implementing the week.

Partner’s involvement

First consultations with European and national associations of local authorities have generated positive feedback, with member states demonstrating a general willingness in to support the project. 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.