

LADDER Conference
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The role of local authorities in the promotion of development education and awareness raising of citizens

Intervention by Gaye Doganoglu, Vice-President of the Congress

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to be here with you today and to address you on behalf of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

ALDA and the Congress have had a close relationship for many years now and more recently we have been working together on projects in a growing number of Council of Europe member states, with a view to strengthening local democracy and developing a truly democratic culture.

Building on our experience and the results that we have achieved, our co-operation is now moving into a new phase, as the Congress joins the LADDER project as an associate member.

Today's launching conference of the project discusses ways of empowering and engaging citizens in global issues, and I am here to highlight the role that local authorities can play in this field, in particular in the promotion of citizenship education, and also, to explain what the Council of Europe and the Congress are doing in these areas.

The Council of Europe sees development education as an intrinsic part of the education for democratic citizenship and human rights. Council of Europe activities in this field aim to give people the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that will help them to play an effective role in their community - be it on the local, national or international level.

Naturally, this implies informing citizens about the interdependency of our societies, generations and countries, as well as making them more engaged in global issues in a

sustainable way. This mission is promoted on the first place by the European Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted in 2010.

To reinforce a local dimension of citizenship education, the Congress has been working closely with the Council of Europe's Directorate General of Democracy which is responsible for education for democratic citizenship and human rights. One of the main linking points of this co-operation has been the European Local Democracy Week or ELDW, a pan-European initiative created for boosting citizen participation at grassroots level. This project is co-ordinated by the Congress and is part of my responsibilities.

As spokesperson of the ELDW, in October 2014 I participated in a Council of Europe Conference on a very similar topic to the one we have today: 'Think global - act local: Education for democracy'. This meeting highlighted current challenges in citizenship education, such as the reluctance of governments to invest in education for democratic culture in times of a financial crisis, and the need to keep pace with the rapid appearance of innovative tools in education.

The role and contribution of local and regional authorities to education for democracy was discussed through various practices by municipalities. ***I would like to share with you the example of my own municipality, Antalya [...].***

Of course we can always do more for promoting citizenship education. In the Congress we believe that local authorities have a strategic advantage in this field on account of their proximity to citizens, which gives them enormous potential – but also a great responsibility for – educating and engaging their citizens in global and democratic issues. And I think the key to sustainable achievements in this respect is to make citizens believe that they can make a difference through their actions.

The Congress, as a political assembly of local and regional authorities in Europe, plays a crucial role in delivering this message to local authorities, and through them, reach out to the citizens. Based on the human rights approach of development, notably the promotion, at local level, of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, the Congress has undertaken several activities to raise awareness of democracy and global challenges through education. Let me give you just a few examples.

During its 2011 October Session, the Congress adopted a resolution entitled 'Education for democratic citizenship: tools for cities'. In this resolution, it recognises the crucial importance of civil and political awareness of citizens, in order to ensure the health and development of a pluralist democracy. In March 2014, we held a Congress debate on best practices in implementing human rights at local and regional level. The resolution adopted on this occasion stresses the importance of raising awareness in the human rights field, and the role of local and regional authorities in the effective implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which constitutes a duty directly related to their competences.

Citizenship education is also important in the sense of counteracting radicalisation and discrimination in society. These pose a threat to fundamental democratic values, and affect in particular young people. In this regard, the Congress adopted a resolution and

a recommendation in March 2015 focusing on the role of local and regional authorities in combating and preventing radicalisation. The Congress strategy also includes the creation of a pedagogical tool-kit for use by local elected representatives when organising intercultural and inter-faith activities.

As regards combating discrimination, this year the European Local Democracy Week that I mentioned earlier is dedicated to the theme 'Living together in multicultural societies: respect, dialogue, interaction'. We are inviting local and regional authorities and their associations across Europe and beyond to take part in this initiative and organise activities - in October- on the topic of multiculturalism.

The Council of Europe and its Congress are doing a lot in the promotion of citizenship education, but evidently there is still much to do. Working together with all of you in the framework of the LADDER project will certainly offer a great opportunity for this. The Congress has the potential to give visibility for the actions of the LADDER project, for example through strengthening the human-rights based approach of development in the Congress agenda. We also hope to develop synergies between the Congress' priorities, its co-operation activities and the thematic focuses of LADDER, such as youth, migration and citizen participation.

We should also bear in mind that we have common partners in our respective projects, such as the national associations of local authorities and civil society organisations. This makes it easier, and also necessary, for us to join forces and co-operate together even better on implementing concrete actions, while avoiding duplications.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your attention and I look forward to the exchanges we will have today on these issues.