



News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

Newsletter - December 2009



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Welcome to the electronic Newsletter of the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe is the largest pan-European institution promoting democracy at local and regional levels in 47 states. The ILDG is the third largest political group of the Congress bringing together elected representatives of the local and regional communities from all over Europe. The Group was created in 1997 in order to provide members of the Congress with an efficient tool for making the voices of local democracy heard at the international level. The group contributes to local democracy building by defending human rights and individual freedoms and actively participates in the core activities of the Congress.

December is quite a special moment of the year: on the one hand, we appraise the work done in the past year; on the other hand, we build prospects for the future.

During the past year the ILDG has improved inter-institutional cooperation with democratic and liberal partners in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the EU Committee of the Regions. President Whitmore addressed the ALDE of the Parliamentary Assembly. And now on the pages of the Newsletter we welcome Mrs Flo Clucas, President of the ALDE Group of the EU Committee of the Regions.

In the past year the Group met twice on the occasions of the plenary sessions of the Congress. For the first time, the Congress held two biannual sessions. ILDG members were quite active in debates both in the Group and the Plenary, they presented several reports in the Chambers.

This year the ILDG was actively involved in the activities of the Congress: a record number of local communities took part in the celebration of the European Local Democracy Week; and at this very moment a delegation of the Congress (including representatives of the ILDG) is carrying out a monitoring mission in Russia and another one is participating in the UN Conference on Climate Change that we all follow with utmost attention.

The next ILDG meeting is scheduled for 17 March 2010. The Group projects to interview the shortlisted candidates for the post of Secretary General of the Congress. We will also discuss how make the ideals defended by the Group more attractive to the people.

We warmly thank the members of the ILDG for their active participation in the work of the Congress and the group. We are also grateful to all those who during this year contributed to this newsletter, with a very special thank you going to Mrs Flo Clucas, Chairwoman of the ALDE in the Committee of the Regions, and Mr David Lloyd-Williams, the outgoing member of the ILDG.

Merry Christmas and a happy and active 2010!

Learning the Lessons of 'Love' - how the Cirque du Soleil's latest show offers a lesson in modern politics



Flo Clucas, President of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe in the EU's Committee of the Regions, Deputy Leader of Liverpool City Council

I had the great good fortune recently to visit the United States for a holiday. We journeyed from east to west, across the great greenness that is Virginia, to the tree covered slopes of the Texas hill country and to the desert oasis of Las Vegas. Not that I am a gambler, though as a politician I might be forgiven if I were. No, we went to see Cirque du Soleil's 'Love', based on the Beatles words and music.

The show is a magnificent blend of music, words, circus, ballet and dance, with humour, courage, risk-taking and immense imagination thrown in for good measure. Performers work together, yet each individual in his or her own interpretation of the words and music creates a perfect visual interpretation of the music and lyrics. It is a night not to be forgotten!

As we travelled across the US from west to east, what became clear was the prevalence of the music we had travelled 5000 miles to see interpreted. From Bracketville to Bandera, New Jersey and New York, it seemed wherever we went, the Beatles music was being played.

Why, 40 something years after they broke up should their music carry such resonance? Why should youngsters not born when the Beatles were at their peak, children as young as six or seven, who could never have known them, why should they be singing their songs?

Are there lessons in the Beatles and Cirque du Soleil experience that we can all learn, as those who practice the art of politics, as well as those who govern?

Well, yes, I think there are.

The essence of the Beatles success is that they were able to relate to those who listened and still listen; able to communicate simple feelings and emotions in a way that could be clearly understood; able to make the complex not only accessible and interesting, but memorable. Cirque du Soleil have taken Beatles' songs and woven them into a production that sees the value of imagination, design and innovation. They take words and music and marry them to movement.

So, what lessons are there and how can we learn from them?

Unlike the Beatles, as politicians we often make the simple complex. We create artificial barriers between us and the citizen. We do not always relate well to the man or woman in the street. How often do citizens accuse us of promising much and doing nothing? How many have been turned away from political activity as a result?

This is a lesson that Barak Obama has learned well. He has learned the value of words, of oratory. His message 'Yes we can', both empowers and gives hope anew to those who listen. Obama was able to reach out, to activate citizens who heard, bringing tens of thousands into the political process for the first time.

Listening to him speak reminded me of JFK, another orator, another who could make the complex simple and, with a richness of language enable and activate citizens in a way not seen since the Churchillian days of WW2.

Those with that ability are few and far between.

But if great orators are scarce, how then are we, as Liberals and Democrats to motivate our

citizens? Where will the stimulus be found to encourage active citizenship?

We see all too clearly the problems and disenchantment with politics today. In the UK, the expenses scandal has undermined our democracy and will have repercussions far beyond the dismissal or resignation of a few MPs.

Across the continent, dissatisfaction in political processes and the economic crisis have found a voice in street-based protest and an undermining of national governments as citizens see how powerless governments can be in the face of mounting financial problems.

Many entrepreneurs, or budding businesses faced with the need for investment by banks and venture capital funds, find risk aversion is the order of the day. Where are they to find investors who will perform for them? If there is no risk capital, where will innovation and entrepreneurship find their supporters?

Here it is not simply words that will do the work, but deeds. Putting words and deeds together is not always easy, but if imagination and courage - another lesson to be learned from the Beatles and Cirque du Soleil - are what is needed to do so, then found they must be.

Local people, living in our towns, cities and regions understand and respond to local needs, but without the stage being set for them, without the ability to control the next move, even here action is difficult. Yet it is at the local level that the difference will be made. It is here that governments need to be imaginative rather than controlling, enabling local and regional authorities, who will make the vital difference for our communities and our businesses. It is here too, that local and regional authorities should understand the uniqueness of their position and the strength that comes from working together.

For the great opportunity that local and regional authorities can offer is that they are *not* national governments. They do not have the same constraints, nor the same obligations.

Local and regional authorities can create an environment that encourages by words and deeds those new and aspiring entrepreneurs to come forward, and, with small amounts of money, can enable innovation to take place. Once the risk has been taken, and the outcome is successful, commercial backers will step in to help grow young businesses.

Once such a welcoming environment is established, increasing entrepreneurial growth is easier.

A performance has a Director and Producer. One finds the money and the physical needs of the performers and writers, and the Director oversees the actors, dancers and acrobats on the stage. They have their own interpretation of their parts, but work together to create a unique performance. Working together, each in his or her own way gives words and music, imagination and innovation, life. The result can be spectacularly successful.

Freedom of movement, expression and communication, knowing the risks and taking them without being irresponsible, that is the essence of the Cirque du Soleil.

Governments could do a great deal if they learned that lesson. Learned too, that not every performance will be identical; not every interpretation the same. Though the song will be, the deeds that go alongside will differ to take account of local circumstances! Trusting those who are closest to the citizen is the first step – and it's a big one.

November 2009

Monitoring mission to the Russian Federation

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities will carry out a general monitoring mission to assess the state of local and regional democracy in the Russian Federation. The first monitoring visit, 16-17 December 2009, aims at assessing the situation of local and regional self-government, in particular in the light of the new law on the dismissal of mayors by municipal councils, enacted in May 2009. Mr Knud Andersen (Denmark, R), Vice-Chairman of the ILDG, is part of the delegation.

The second monitoring visit is scheduled for the first half of 2010. [Click here to find out more.](#)

Local and Regional authorities and the climate change

The Congress delegation headed by Vice-President Dubravka Suica (EPP, Croatia) and including Vice-Presidents Knud Andersen (ILDG, Denmark) and Günther Krug (Soc, Germany), as well as Gaye Doganoglu (EPP, Turkey), President of the Congress' Committee on Sustainable Development, is attending the UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen 14-18 December.

Earlier this year the Congress has called for recognition of the role of local and regional authorities in the process on climate change and asked for "inclusion of the human rights dimension in the new agreement, to ensure a healthy environment as a sustainable response to the challenge." [Consult the special files on the Congress's participation in the Conference.](#)

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Autumn Session Highlights

17th Plenary Session of the Congress 13-16 October 2009

At its 17th Plenary Session, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities adopted ten resolutions and ten recommendations focusing on different aspects of local and regional democracy, such as, transfrontier co-operation in Europe or local responses to the global challenge of climate change. [Click here to see the documents.](#) ILDG members presented the following reports in the Chamber of Regions and that of Local Authorities.



Chamber of Regions:

Carmen Patrizia MURATORE, Italy (ILDG)
Consigliere, Regione Liguria

Over-indebtedness of households: the responsibility of regions
Presented on 14 October 2009



Chamber of Local Authorities:

Etienne VAN VAERENBERGH, Belgium (ILDG)
Echevin, Lennik

E-Democracy: opportunities and risks for local authorities
Presented on 14 October 2009



Constanty DOMBROWICZ, Poland (ILDG)

Mayor of Bydgoszcz
Creative cities – managing the cultural activity of cities
Presented on 15 October 2009



Nigel MERMAGEN, United Kingdom (ILDG)

Councillor, South Somerset District Council
First elections of the Mayor of Yerevan, Armenia (31 May 2009)
Presented on 15 October 2009

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ILDG

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So Far - but not quite far enough!!



In earlier editions of our Group magazine I have made reference to my frustrations at being a Substitute, and then my exhilaration at finally becoming a full member of the Congress.

Now I must record my sadness at having lost my mandate last June and finally lost my membership of the Congress in December. After seven years of close involvement, preceded by other European representative trips I must bow to the inevitable truth that I lost an election and with it a part of my life and a group of friends built up over the past years.

It has been my honour to be a member of the UK Delegation to the Congress and being a member and most recently a Vice-President, of the Congress's ILDG. My hopes for a greater future were building up but as in politics across the world there are always losers and winners. For the first time in 28 years I lost an election. With a 30% turn-out of voters and losing by 73 votes: it was a sadness which I felt quite strongly.

However there is always something good which comes from a change. I have found a real world of real people again!! No longer the closed world of local government and meetings! But living life as most other people do with fresh air rather than stuffy meetings, and talking about real problems rather than the guarded politico-speak of working parties, committees and councils.

Yes, of course, I will miss Strasbourg and the trips to different places, but new challenges arise and the good memories will never be forgotten. Already I have returned to a local Area Committee through another route of election and have been appointed Chairman of a local Management Partnership as well as chairing a Museum Foundation within my local community. I also lost my Police Authority membership when losing the election in June so I have also lost involvement in the management of the County Police Force. However I have been re-elected to chair the local Community Police liaison Committee despite no longer having a seat at the County table.

All in all not a good year for me, but on reflection it will no doubt become a year when change came about unexpectedly, but a change which started to make a difference in my life and my future. Often said, but true—when one door closes another opens!

Looking back on my Congress involvement, the most satisfying aspect was that during my very first trip as an Election Monitor to Armenia, I befriended the family of my interpreter and through the past seven years my wife and I have supported that woman's family following an unexpected death which left her daughter widowed without means. Following years of effort and help, her daughter graduated in November with a Masters Degree from the University of York St. John whilst her grandson has been working his way through English schooling, and has just started his GCSE coursework at a local school in my community. The daughter has now happily remarried after her bereavement and she, her new husband and her son live locally as part of my new family. For my wife and I, a wonderful reward.

Such has been my involvement with Europe generally and the Congress in particular. A very great satisfaction for my modest involvement in the life of the Congress.

So no regrets, some sadness, but many good memories and a strong desire to make a come back if health, time and the people allow! Thank you all for your fellowship. Au revoir! But not goodbye!

David Lloyd-Williams
December 2009



Agenda

➤ Meetings in January 2010:

15 January: Bureaux of the Congress and its Chambers, Lugano, SWITZERLAND, Contact : Linette Taesch

➤ Meetings in February 2010:

5 February: Bureaux of the Congress and its Chambers, Paris, FRANCE, Contact : Linette Taesch

15 February: Institutional Committee Utrecht, NETHERLANDS, Contact : Stéphanie Poirel

➤ Meetings in March 2010:

16 March : Social Cohesion Committee Strasbourg, FRANCE Contact : Dolores Rios
Culture and Education Committee Strasbourg, FRANCE Contact : Alexander Bartling
Sustainable Development Committee Strasbourg, FRANCE Contact : Marité Moras

16 March: Bureaux of the Congress and its Chambers Strasbourg, FRANCE Contact : Linette Taesch

➤ **Next Plenary Session:**

17 March 18th Plenary Session of the Congress, Strasbourg, FRANCE Contact : Dolores Rios

➤ **Next ILDG meeting:**

17 March: ILDG meeting, Strasbourg, FRANCE Contact: ILDG Secretariat

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