

## 24th European Conference

### Local governments as agents of peace

Tuesday 10 May 2022, 9.30 am to 13.00 pm

Hybrid format in Barcelona at the Palau Robert (Sala Cotxeres)

### Conference agenda

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- 9.30 am**            **Opening session**
- **Pilar Díaz**, Deputy Councillor of the Department of the Presidency and Delegate for International Relations of Barcelona Provincial Council and Mayor of Esplugues de Llobregat
  - **Aleksandra Dulkiewicz**, Mayor of Gdansk, Chairwoman of the European Committee of the Regions Working Group on Ukraine
- 10.15 am**            **1st Roundtable: Future generations as builders of peace**
- Moderator: Lara Malvesí**, journalist of the EFE Agency, former correspondent in Brussels, and member of the Association of European Journalists of Catalonia (APEC)
- **Laia Cuscó Pellarés**, Councillor for Culture, Catalan Language Promotion, Youth and Cooperation and Solidarity, Caldes de Montbui City Council
  - **Piera D'Arrigo**, Programme Assistant for Youth Policy and Programmes in DG EAC
  - **Romy Karier**, member of Clervaux municipal council (Luxemburg) and member of the Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture of the European Committee of the Regions
  - **Julia Rosanna Sánchez-Valverde**, President of the Catalan National Youth Council (CNJC)
- 11.15am**            **Break**
- 11.45am**            **2nd Roundtable: European local governments and the military aggression against Ukraine: beyond the humanitarian emergency**
- Moderator: Tica Font**, member of the Delas Centre for Peace Studies
- **Iryna Yarmolenko**, Councillor of the City of Bucha (Ukraine), member of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) Policy Committee and a member of the CEMR Standing Committee for Gender Equality, as a representative of the Association of Ukrainian Cities
  - **Alba Barnusell**, Mayor of Granollers and Deputy Councillor for Gender Equality at Barcelona Provincial Government
  - **Joanna Midgley**, Councillor of Manchester City Council
  - **Marc Aguilà**, Local elected Councillor for Planning, Quality and Evaluation of Public Policies and European Projects of Sant Boi de Llobregat

12.45am      **Close**

- **Manuel Szapiro**, Head of the Regional Representation of the European Committee in Barcelona
- **Javier Silva Pérez**, Deputy Councillor for Youth at Barcelona Provincial Council and Mayor of Polinyà

This conference is organised by Barcelona Provincial Council, in collaboration with the Representation of the European Commission in Barcelona and the European Parliament Office in Barcelona.



## REPORT

The 24th European Union Conference, organised by the Europe and International Strategy Office of the Barcelona Provincial Council International Relations Directorate in collaboration with the European Commission Representation and the European Parliament Office in Barcelona, was entitled "**Local governments as agents of peace**". This theme was chosen so that the conference would be a space for exchange and debate on two phenomena of current relevance for the local world: firstly, the European Year of Youth and, secondly, the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

Pilar Díaz, Deputy Councillor of the Office of the Chair and delegate for International Relations of Barcelona Provincial Council, opened the conference, highlighting the commitment of both Barcelona Provincial Council and the municipalities of the province to the European project and to the construction of a long-term culture of peace. This is particularly relevant today, as the impact of the war is not only felt in Ukraine but also in the municipalities hosting the new arrivals. Ms Díaz also underlined Barcelona Provincial Council's willingness to strengthen the dissemination and implementation of actions aimed at young people and youth policies in the framework of the European Year of Youth.

The next speaker was Aleksandra Dulkiewicz, mayor of the Polish city of Gdansk. Via videoconference, she conveyed that, in the face of the consequences of the military conflict in Ukraine, many border municipalities such as hers are responding and are setting themselves up as peace builders. The challenges of supporting refugees are only increasing and that is why building partnerships and exchanging experiences with other European and border locations (such as Spain and Italy) is of great importance to improve the assistance they provide. She also mentioned the importance of protecting freedom of expression and freedom of the press and the role of local democracy in this struggle because of its proximity to citizens.

In relation to concrete action that local governments can take to support Ukrainian local governments, Gdansk's mayor reaffirmed the need to build partnerships and direct relations between local administrations. For her part, Ms Díaz reported that Barcelona Provincial Council is working in two directions: with financial contributions for the work

on the ground, and by facilitating the reception of refugees by maintaining stable contact with the Ukrainian consul in Barcelona. Likewise, in the medium term, the aim is to forge links between municipalities in the province of Barcelona and Ukraine.

In the framework of the first panel "**Future generations as builders of Peace**", the speakers talked about how the European Year of Youth recognises the great capacity of young people to contribute to conflict prevention and to participate in shaping a culture based on peace, resilience, solidarity and cohesion to achieve transformation, integration and social peace in their communities. For years, many local governments, in collaboration with civil society organisations, have been promoting initiatives designed to foster a culture of peace and participation among young people in their regions, who are considered key actors in advancing towards sustainable development.

Along these lines, Piera D'Arrigo spoke about how EU youth programmes, such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, will play a central role in implementing and funding European Year of Youth activities. This is apart from the implementation of a number of flagship initiatives, including the Conference on the Future of Europe. She also reported on a number of European funding initiatives that could include young people affected by the Ukrainian conflict.

Also, in relation to how youth can contribute to peacebuilding and the creation of a more just, egalitarian, cohesive and resilient society, all the speakers reiterated the importance of listening to and addressing the needs of young people first so that they can become engaged and participatory actors. This is why the usefulness of training and employment programmes such as the Youth Guarantee was defended. It is important to remember that young people will be the main actors who will have to rebuild peace, and in the face of this great responsibility, institutions, including local governments, must support them in every possible way, also addressing the root of the problems and not just patching them up.

The second panel, entitled "**European local governments facing military aggression in Ukraine: Beyond the humanitarian emergency**", discussed how to support Ukrainian municipalities from the local level. It was emphasised that, once the war is over, different types of support will be needed, and in this respect, some local governments have started to reflect on the types of support they can offer Ukrainian local governments with which they already had a previous cooperative relationship. Several city platforms, such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, are also creating tools to facilitate international cooperation between European and Ukrainian local governments.

Iryna Yarmolenko, a member of Bucha Town Council (Ukraine), shared her first-hand experience and explained that some municipalities such as Yrpin have been more than 75% destroyed. The councillor appealed to all professionals who would like to volunteer their services for the reconstruction of Ukrainian cities and villages, from designers and architects to municipal technicians. She stressed that direct, bottom-up cooperation is needed to rebuild not only infrastructure but entire communities.

Furthermore, both the mayor of Granollers, Alba Barnusell, and the councillors of the city of Manchester, Joanna Midgley, and Sant Boi de Llobregat, Marc Aguilà, agreed on the importance of listening to Ukrainian councillors and mayors to identify their real needs and not to give answers, even if they are full of good will, which are not the most appropriate ones.

The round table closed by stressing the importance of local cooperation networks so that local governments can not only provide care and reconstruction responses, but also raise their voice to create true international diplomacy at the local level.

The day was brought to a close by Manuel Szapiro, Director of the European Commission Representation in Barcelona. He stressed that it had been shown that conceiving local governments as agents of peace was the right approach, as local authorities do a great deal of work in the current dramatic and decisive context for European integration. Europe is not what is done from Brussels or Strasbourg, but from the streets, together. He also recalled that the greatest challenge we face is to ensure that the links that are created are stable and long-lasting.

Regarding the European Year of Youth, Javier Silva, Youth Delegate of Barcelona Provincial Council, stressed the need to continue working with and for young people so that they can participate in the creation of a better, greener and more inclusive future. This is why it is necessary to improve investment in the future and to invest in youth as a prevention policy.