

# Building Europe with **Local Councillors**

## THE BULLETIN

As we embark on the **second year** of the Building Europe with Local Councillors (BELC) network, it is with pleasure that we present the third issue of our bulletin.

What began as a promising initiative over a year ago is evolving into a thriving community.

In this edition, you will discover an array of initiatives and best practices from BELC members. Among the many activities, the viewings of the State of the Union

2023 address proved that local councillors can truly have an impact on bringing Europe closer to its citizens. The bulletin will also tell you more about the support the European Commission provides to empower local councillors in their communication endeavours.

As we reflect on our journey thus far, we extend our gratitude to all BELC members' contribution to growth and success. We look forward to another year of collaborative achievement and community building!

# 877

BELC members

# 429

registrations on Futurium

# 163

regions covered

## Members in action

### State of the Union 2023

On 13 September, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, addressed the European Parliament.

In her State of the Union (SOTEU) speech, she elaborated on the EU's achievements and forthcoming initiatives, particularly significant in the lead-up to the 2024 European elections. The speech offered citizens valuable insights into the EU's efforts and provided an opportunity for them to reflect on the significance of their choices for future representation.

At this occasion, the European Commission invited BELC councillors to organise public viewing events, liaising with their nearest EUROPE DIRECT centre. Hundreds of members accepted the challenge and partnered with local networks. Thanks to their coordinated efforts, more than **19,000 EU citizens**, in over **150 regions** across **26 countries**, attended public viewings of this year's SOTEU and engaged in discussions.

Among others, in **Zagreb, Croatia**, the Mayors of Dubrovnik, Pula, Vrgorac, and Karlovac, all members of the BELC network, joined the dedicated panel organised by the Croatian Representation following the live screening of the speech. The audience in attendance was as diverse as it was insightful, comprising journalists, BELC members, and representatives of the academic community.





The Italian **Municipality of Napoli** broadcast the SOTEU address not only on its official website but also across the social media platforms of the Municipality of Monte di Procida. Particularly significant was their key target audience – final-year high school students poised to become first-time voters in the upcoming EU elections. By exposing them to this exceptional European discourse, Napoli aims to instil a sense of responsibility and awareness regarding young people’s role in shaping the future of Europe.

BELC members, including **Giustina Mattera** (Comune di Ischia), **Marilinda Donatiello** (Comune di Lacedonia), **Fabio Capuano** (Comune di Monte di Procida), **Francesco Parisi** (Comune di Poggiomarino), and **Manuela D’Amico** (Comune di Pozzuoli), were also present, underlining

the collective commitment to empowering the next generation of European citizens.

The viewing organised by EUROPE DIRECT **Pyrénées, France**, in partnership with BELC councillors **Bernard Devic** (Le Grand Narbonne) and **Marie-Pierre Eychenne** (Castelnau-Durban) welcomed numerous attendees – many of whom had previously never heard about the SOTEU speech. This event not only piqued the interest of citizens and local representatives but also sparked lively discussions following the Presidential statement.

‘Thank you!’ to all BELC members who organised public viewings and actively engaged with their communities, encouraging them to think and discuss about Europe and the key role citizens play within it.

## EU events & initiatives

### BELC members’ best practices

**EUROPE DIRECT Oldenburg** in Germany teamed up with BELC member **Dr Alaa Alhamwi** and Tom Schröder, City of Oldenburg councillors, to kick off an inspiring short video series. Stay tuned for the next episodes, including ‘What does Europe mean to you?’ and ‘Why vote in European elections?’. Don’t forget to subscribe to their **Instagram** and TikTok and share the videos on your channels!

**The Parish of Lousã e Vilarinho**, Portugal, has once again achieved recognition as a leader in sustainability, securing the prestigious Eco Freguesias XXI award for the third time. Alongside their eco-friendly endeavours, the Parish held their annual ‘Noite Branca’ (White Night) initiative, which is designed to breathe new life into local commerce.

Notably, it was during the White Night event that the Parish also took to the streets to share information about the BELC project with the local community, raising awareness about active involvement in European issues and emphasising the importance of being informed citizens. Congratulations are in order for member **Helena Correia**, President of the Parish of Lousã e Vilarinho, for her successful efforts in advancing BELC’s mission.



**The Belgian Municipality of Fontaine-l’Evêque**, at the initiative of BELC member **Sophie Mengoni**, partnered with their area’s EUROPE DIRECT centre to celebrate the International Day of Democracy. On 13 September, local high school students attended a special viewing of the SOTEU 2023 speech, followed by a dynamic discussion with European Commission representatives about pressing contemporary issues, including immigration, peace, and the environment. This enriching experience encouraged young minds to actively participate in the democratic discourse, setting them on a path to becoming the engaged EU citizens of tomorrow.

More best practices from members on effectively communicating the EU locally will soon be available on **the BELC website**.



Municipality of Ventotene

## Events



### Ventotene, the small island symbol of European federalism, is now a BELC member

Every year, the Italian city of Ventotene commemorates the signing of the historic document "**For a Free and United Europe**" Manifesto, drafted by Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi in 1941 when they were both interned on the island prison during the Second World War.

This year, the event offered a unique opportunity for both local residents and international participants to come together and celebrate the city's membership in BELC. **MEP Domènec Ruiz Devesa**, and Alessandro Giordani, Head of the "Networks in Member States" unit at the European Commission were present and engaged in a debate on how to better communicate the EU at the local level.

### European Week of Regions and Cities

#EURRegionsWeek stands as the annual event in Brussels where cities and regions showcase their achievements in fostering economic growth, job creation, and the effective implementation of EU cohesion policies. It underscores the pivotal role that local and regional entities play in advancing sound European governance.

It marked a significant milestone for BELC: its first concrete collaboration with its counterpart and twin network, the EU Councillors Network managed by the Committee of the Regions. In a dedicated workshop, BELC members **Andrea**



Green Cities Forum

### Green Cities Forum

In September, BELC joined the **Green Cities Forum in Brasov**, Romania, dedicated to environmental sustainability and to transforming cities into healthier urban environments. Political leaders, experts, public administrators, and citizens gathered to collaborate and exchange experiences and best practices. BELC member **Alexandra-Ioana Crivineanu** had a significant presence at a roundtable organised by the European Commission. Romanian councillors learned more about BELC in a dedicated workshop, where they also discussed common local challenges, best practices, and EU solutions for the shared goal of greening cities.

**Capellini** (Italy) and **Dimitra Thoma** (Greece) shared their success stories, offering insights to empower fellow councillors in enhancing their outreach and collaborative efforts. They discussed their journey into the BELC network and how its pan-European scope has enriched their work as local representatives by connecting them with peers from other EU countries. The members also highlighted the exclusive access to both digital and physical events they've gained through BELC, and the availability of targeted materials provided by the European Commission on the Futurium platform. The workshop offered an opportunity to showcase and take stock of the twin networks' actions, while aligning their priorities for the future.



## Anci National Assembly celebrates 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary

The Anci Annual National Assembly of Italian Municipalities, held in Genoa from October 24 to 26, 2023, brought together mayors and municipal representatives from across Italy. This event aimed to address common challenges, exchange experiences, and make decisions on local, regional, and national policies. BELC member **Marco Chiriaco**, having received an official invitation to join the event, participated as a speaker.

Moreover, the European Commission had a notable presence at the event through a booth hosted by the Italian EC Representation. This on-site engagement in communicating European policies and practices at the national level serves as an exemplary initiative, providing a blueprint for effectively conveying the endeavours of the BELC network.

#Anci2023 served to extend the reach and influence of the BELC network and explored opportunities for synergy between BELC and ANCI, aiming to improve the effectiveness of municipal work and promote the adoption of European practices.

## Salon des Maires et des collectivités locales

Thanks to the expert coordination of the European Commission Representation and the EUROPE DIRECT network in France, BELC was present at the Salon des Maires in Paris, a significant event that brings together around 60,000 local government officials, stakeholders, and visitors from various regions across the country. Notably, BELC member **Thibault Guignard**, Mayor of Plœuc-L'Hermitage, together with Valérie Drezet-Humez, Head of the EC Representation in France, participated in a key roundtable discussion addressing the challenges and impacts of the 2024 European Elections on local communities.

# Strengthening the BELC community

## Webinars

The **first multilingual webinar** of the BELC network, organised by the European Commission, took place on 8 September. It presented the status of this pan-European network spanning 26 Member States, allowing members to exchange good practices in local communication about the EU and prepare for the 2023 State of the Union speech.

On 6 October, German-speaking members attended a webinar on the **State of the EU economy, economic governance and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)**. The session featured a distinguished speaker, Reinhard Felke, Director for Policy, Strategy, and Communication at DG ECFIN within the European Commission.

Further, a multilingual webinar held on 19 October offered participants valuable insights into ways of **Working together to bring the European elections 2024 close to people on the ground**. Members learned more about the upcoming elections, the communication tools at their disposal, engaged with EC experts, and discussed strategies to help familiarise their constituents with this EU-wide democratic process.

## Visits to Brussels

Members' presence in Brussels keeps going strong! **Italian** members delved into EU institutions from 23 to 24 November. In December, **Romanian** counterparts will participate in sessions on 7-8 December. Study visits provide valuable insights, deepening members' understanding of the EU's operations while nurturing meaningful connections within the network. The discussions and presentations organised during these visits are thoughtfully tailored to align with the members' primary interests in EU topics, as indicated by their responses to the survey.

Discover more welcome webinars, webinars featuring distinguished speakers on subjects chosen by BELC members, and past presentations on **Futurium**. Meanwhile, members from **France, Germany, Spain, Croatia**, and beyond are getting ready for their forthcoming visits to Brussels.



# Members' corner

## Meet the Communication Managers!

The BELC supporting team is growing. We're pleased to introduce to you the **Communication Managers**, who will help:



### Boost networking

among BELC members by fostering the exchange of best practices and facilitating knowledge-sharing. Keep a lookout for new activity on Futurium!



### Further your understanding

of EU policies, actions, and initiatives, and their relevance at the local level, enabling more informed engagement.



### Promote engagement

by encouraging discussions, debates, and interactions among you and within your respective constituencies.

## Your main EU topics of interest

Your response to the Specific Survey is invaluable. It helps the European Commission gain a better understanding of your needs, ensuring that EU materials are provided in your language and that thematic webinars or bilateral sessions are organised during your visits to Brussels. With **706** responses received so far, we're well on our way to tailoring our support to enhance your communication activities within your constituency. Thank you for your active participation!

If you have yet to do so, please take a moment to **complete the survey** and gain **privileged access to a range of services provided by the European Commission**.

## BELC members' 5 top-ranked EU topics of interest so far:



Valorisation of cultural heritage & traditions



Opportunities linked to tourism, incl. eco-tourism



Economic opportunities in rural areas, incl. for young farmers



Access to (quality) education, incl. education for environmental sustainability and digitalisation



Transition towards renewable energy

## New communication materials on the EU topics of your interest

Exclusive access to **official EU resources** is just one **click** away! Since the previous BELC bulletin, more materials have been made available in all EU official languages on Futurium, including EU Neighbourhood & External Policy and Borders & Migration. Stay tuned for upcoming information on Emergency Response, Health Policy, and more.

Expand the reach of the BELC network and communicate about the EU within your own community.

If you haven't already done so, **register to Futurium here**.

As members of the network, the Futurium platform is your space! It's where you can find **EU materials and events** and showcase **how you engage** on EU topics within your constituency. You can share pictures of your events, ideas, and strategies that have been successful.

Use your own language, the automatic translation will help you interact with other members.

If you have any questions, please visit the **Building Europe with Local Councillors** website, consult the **FAQs** or contact us at **info@eu-councillors.eu**



## Building Europe with Local Councillors