

Building Europe with Local Councillors

THE BULLETIN

**BELC
has just
turned 1!**

One year after its launch, the Building Europe with Local Councillors network is delighted to share the second issue of its bulletin!

The community's reach is **fast expanding**, with new applications submitted on a regular basis. Even more impressive is the growing rate of membership within each EU country. Romania is breaking new ground: thanks to the invaluable collaboration of key local governments' stakeholders and the European

Commission Representation in Bucharest, about 100 municipalities and local councillors have applied to join the network in the past months.

This bulletin features for the first time **BELC members' initiatives and best practices**, along with their emphasis on local sensitivities, and highlights the continuing European Commission services, including visits and webinars, all aimed at **empowering local councillors to communicate the EU to their citizens**.

750

Members so far

400

registrations on Futurium platform

150

regions covered

Members in action

BELC members took the lead during **Europe Day 2023**. They actively engaged with their communities, organising collaborative events that celebrated the shared EU vision of peace and security.

By way of example: in **Vila Nova de Famalicão**, Portugal, the Mayor's symbolic unfurling of the EU Flag to the tune of 'Ode to Joy' captivated the local community of 250 individuals, who later participated in a march for the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN 2030 Agenda. In the **Rhein-Neckar-Kreis** region of Germany, festivities

featured a vibrant marching band in Mannheim and an information point where local councillors interacted with citizens, discussing EU initiatives and local participation. German member Ralf Frühwirth's **interview on a local TV station** shed light on the BELC network's aims and activities, underscoring the commitment of their local council. The **Italian municipality of Macerata** extended a special invitation to students, who shared their experiences and perspectives on studying, training, working, volunteering, and engaging in activism in the EU.

Portuguese Councillor Francisco Pombo Lopes started the first dedicated Facebook page; visit it at **BELC – Castelo Branco**





Promoting BELC to a EU-wide special audience

BELC was presented in one of the most well-attended sessions during the **14th EuroPCom Conference**, Europe's largest annual gathering of experts in the field of public communication, on 26–27 June in Brussels. Italian BELC member Lavinia Bianchi shared her experiences in communicating Europe in the local community and exchanged views with fellow panellists, including a high-level representative from the Committee of the Regions and a journalist specialised in local press. **Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen**, the Director General for Communication of the European Commission, closed the session by stressing the importance of communicating at the local level with the networks. Watch the recording of the panel discussion on BELC [here](#).

BELC members go transnational

A group of 6 BELC members from Italy, France, and Spain took part in a **Transnational Citizen Dialogue** on 25–26 May in Lyon. The event was organised by the Representation of the European Commission in France, the City and Metropolis of Lyon, and the EUROPE DIRECT Lyon Métropole. It gave BELC members an opportunity to discuss their local issues abroad with peers from various parts of Europe.

Italian BELC member Fabio Zucca was among the participants who actively engaged in thoughtful discussions on the synergy between the EU and local governments. The sessions contributed to the strengthening of cross-border bonds and the cultivation of future local collaborations, further enriching BELC members' arsenal of resources.

EU events & initiatives

On 24 April, the EC Representation in Malta held its **first event dedicated to raising awareness about the BELC network and its mission**. Local councillors gathered in Valletta to learn more about the network and how to join its growing community.

Alison Zerafa Civelli, Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government within the Ministry for National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government, voiced her support of the initiative. We are pleased to note the rising number of applications from Malta in the aftermath the event.

Check out the **video** from the event and stay tuned for more events organised in EU Member States with the support of the European Commission.



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BELC was present at the **2023 Annual Covenant of Mayors**, which took place on 30 March in Brussels, where local authorities shared challenges in responding to the ongoing energy crisis.

Local governments had the opportunity to interact with high-level representatives from European Institutions, including Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans and EU Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson, the European Parliament, and the Committee of the Regions.



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Strengthening the BELC community



Webinars

One year since the official launch of the network, all of its members, present in 23 countries, have now been introduced to the community through a series of welcome webinars.

Once onboarded, BELC partners have access to webinars on **specific EU topics, in their languages**, allowing them to learn more from EC experts and ultimately to share with their constituencies the information relevant to their regions and electorates.

Log in to Futurium to find out more about the webinar held for French members on 4 April on sports in the EU, the online session for Italian members on tourism and the EU, and a webinar for German members on energy efficiency in buildings. More webinars will follow!

Members' visits to Brussels

Local councillors from **Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany and Bulgaria** were welcomed to Brussels, the heart of the European Union, during visits organised by the European Commission to further cultivate knowledge sharing and cooperation between local governments and EU Institutions.

During these visits, BELC **members have privileged access to EU experts and high-level representatives** from the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Committee of the Regions, to delve into EU topics of direct interest to their constituency. For instance, Members from Spain had the opportunity to discuss the EU and its future with MEP Doménech Ruiz Devesa and foreign policy with Mr Camilo Villarino, Head of the Cabinet of Commissioner Borrel. The German delegation had extensive exchanges on economic and geopolitical challenges with Mr M. Hager, Head of the Cabinet of Vice President Dombrovskis.

In the words of Solange Baraldi, from the Italian municipality of Casalgrande, the BELC network aspires to offer to local councillors 'a preferential channel to communicate with the administrations, and with the European community and our citizens.'

Share in the members' experience: watch two visits' videos [here](#) and [here](#).



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Members' corner

Your main EU topics of interest

500 responses to the EU specific survey have thus far been submitted by members and municipalities. If you are a member, and have not responded to the specific survey yet, do it now! By indicating the most important issues in your constituency, you will get access to official information on **EU initiatives, solutions, and opportunities** of your immediate interest. Your replies also help the European Commission to provide EU materials in all EU official languages to support your communication activities on the ground, and to organise thematic webinars or bilateral sessions during the Brussels visits.

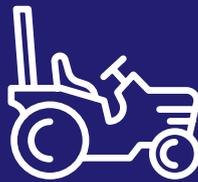
BELC members' 5 top-ranked EU topics of interest so far:



Valorisation of cultural heritage & traditions



Sustainable cities



Economic opportunities in rural areas, incl. for young farmers



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



Access to digital public services

A rich library of materials on EU topics

Benefit from exclusive access to a **wealth of official EU resources** based on your response to the specific survey! Accessible in the Futurium Library, you can use them to communicate with citizens on the EU topics that resonate most within your constituencies. Stay tuned for upcoming info on Public Health, Research, Innovation, and more.



Visual signature

The official visual signature of the BELC network is now available!

The visual signature can be used on all your communication material created within the BELC network framework, and it allows you to personalise your messages and reinforce the network's identity.

Discover it in the **Communication Material** section. See a sample below:



Building Europe with Local Councillors

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

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

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

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

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**