

## “Day of the Dialogue with the Government”

24-25 September 2018, Ternopil, Ukraine

*Speech by Andreas KIEFER, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe*

Dear Mr Zubko,

Dear Mr Vlasenko,

Dear Mr Klitschko,

Dear Mayors,

Dear members of the Ukrainian Delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased and honoured to take part in this event dedicated to the dialogue between national and local authorities on behalf of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe'. Such a high level participation and the number of stakeholders present is a clear proof of determination of all levels of government towards systematic policy dialogue in order to achieve the decentralisation and implement the local self-government reforms that Ukraine is pursuing.

I would like to express my special thanks to the Mayor of Kyiv and the President of the Association of Ukrainian Cities, Mr Klitschko, and to the association – its Executive Director of the Association, Mr Slobozhan and the members - for your warm welcome.

The right of local authorities to associate and to be properly consulted are two of the key principles enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government. As signatories of the Charter, governments are committed to consult local authorities on all issues and policies of their concern.

As fully fledged partners of a multi-level governance system, **national associations of local and regional authorities** such as the Association of Ukrainian Cities play a vital role in this consultation. They perform multiple functions as intermediaries between central, regional and local authorities, advocating for the common interests of their member cities and for the women, men and children who live in these cities. National associations also serve as a platform which brings together elected representatives from all political backgrounds and ensures co-operation, in order to bolster local political governance and innovative and democratic approaches to local challenges. Therefore analytical capacities of the association, which is the ability to assess the impact of legislation on local budgets and on economic actors and the population, is of key importance, in order to be a respected partner in the dialogue. An association is not meant to defend or reject government proposals on political grounds but on the basis of facts and internal

consultation. The board therefore is an important clearing mechanism in order to identify the common position of the cities *vis à vis* the government and the parliament.

National associations are expected to ensure and nurture a constructive dialogue between national and grass roots levels of governance. This can be done only with strong associations, open governments and elected politicians and territorial administrations which are keen on addressing the challenges faced by our cities and regions.

National policy-makers can turn local and regional authorities into their partners and allies in drafting better laws and policies by hearing their voices, learning from their 'know-how' and operational experience and discussing their proposals.

In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to underline the importance of ensuring a formalised, sustainable and effective **consultation mechanism** between national and local authorities, together with their associations. Also, we have to avoid situations where the right to be consulted is overridden on such pretexts as urgency and cost savings.

With this in mind, allow me to draw your attention to the Congress '[Guidelines on the consultation of Local Authorities by Higher Levels of Government](#)', which are presented for adoption at our next plenary session in early November. The objective of these guidelines is to enable local governments and their associations to strengthen and facilitate effective consultation processes, and to develop a system of genuine political dialogue between different levels of government.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To strengthen local democracy and to make progress in decentralisation the **European Charter of Local Self-Government** serves as a powerful and efficient instrument for local democracy in Europe.

30 years ago, on 1 September 1988, the Charter entered into force and opened a new era in the decentralisation of power and the empowerment of citizens and their elected representatives in Europe. So, today I find it particularly symbolic to reaffirm, here in Ternopil in front of 400 mayors, the relevance of the Charter as a unique international legal instrument which enshrines the principles of subsidiarity and proximity and protects local self-government. We are all beneficiaries of the Charter: all of us as citizens enjoy civic liberties and are able to contribute to public life. And you, as mayors serving the people in your communities, you are also beneficiaries of the Charter as you exercise your political mandates.

The **30th anniversary of the Charter** also reminds us that there can be no democracy in any country without local democracy. In essence, as member states endorsed in the preamble of the Charter: "*local authorities are one of the main foundations of any democratic regime*". The Charter also introduces the principle of subsidiarity in local public affairs, bringing decision-making powers closer to the people, and promoting good democratic governance.

We are proud that all 47 member states of the Council of Europe have now ratified the Charter. In addition, Ukraine is among the member states that have ratified the Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

Undoubtedly, this is also thanks to the parliaments of the Council of Europe member states, which introduced the Charter in their states' legislation. I would like to praise them for their co-operation. Moreover, I would like to pay tribute to local authorities and stress their role and duty in implementing the Charter.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's event will allow **local elected representatives** to take a more proactive role in the process of policy formulation and pave the way for shared synergies among all levels of government, following the principles of the Charter.

Local elected representatives have a shared responsibility and leadership role in developing strong, sustainable and innovative policies and practices towards improved resilience at local level.

Moreover, local authorities play an important role not only in promoting democratic values but also in accelerating the pace of development and providing a whole range of services that are essential to the communities' well-being. In the end, local authorities are the best placed to know the exact nature of local needs and how they can be addressed in a cost-effective way.

Similarly, in representative democracies, mayors and councillors need to ensure effective participation and involvement of citizens in their local decision-making. Development, whether economic, social or political, becomes meaningful and real only when it stems from the lowest, so-called grass roots level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last but not least, I would like to refer to our co-operation activities, which complement the statutory activities of the Congress. They provide a link between the recommendations and resolutions adopted at the plenary sessions and the situation on the ground, and are based on a regular political dialogue with the governments of our member states and the monitoring of the provisions of the Charter.

Such an example can be observed in Ukraine, where we are implementing projects since 2014, providing local and regional authorities, and their associations, with the opportunity and means to acquire new skills, and to strengthen their institutional capacities.

Today I have the pleasure to present you the project **‘Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine’**, which started its activities in July 2018.

The project, implemented as part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021, aims to improve the quality of local democracy in Ukraine.

The objective will be achieved by:

- Strengthening institutional frameworks, and
- Supporting local authorities and their national associations in their efforts to promote ethical decision-making and more citizen-oriented, inclusive, responsive and transparent local governance.

The project builds on the results achieved in previous projects, as well as on the needs voiced by the project’s main partners and beneficiaries, namely on the dialogue with all Ukrainian stakeholders ranging from:

- Local and regional authorities, mayors and councillors
- National associations of local and regional authorities, to
- Representatives of the Government and the Parliament of Ukraine.

Our main partner in this project is the Association of Ukrainian Cities, with which we enjoy a long standing and fruitful co-operation. Tomorrow, we will sign a Memorandum of Understanding to officially commit ourselves to achieving the project objectives and define the means of our joint work for the benefit of local authorities and the overall democracy in Ukraine.

In this framework, we will also directly support mayors, councillors and their teams in promoting ethical decision-making, and; in strengthening local governance, with the ultimate goal of building trust in local institutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am particularly proud of being able to launch the project in the presence of so many mayors and representatives of the national authorities. I look forward to our cooperation and many joint achievements. Today’s dialogue is another proof of Ukraine’s commitment towards local democracy and self-government, which we will continue to support. Together with other friends of Ukraine in the international community, the Congress is and will remain a reliable partner for further reforms.

I wish you constructive discussions in these two days.

Thank you.