

**‘Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the  
Association of Ukrainian Cities’**

25 September 2018, Kyiv, Ukraine

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

Dear Mr Klitschko,  
Dear Mr Prokopiv  
Dear Mr Slobozhan,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am particularly delighted to represent the Congress in this ceremony, which is a logical continuation of the long-standing co-operation with the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) and shows our determination to join forces for the improvement of local democracy in Ukraine, and towards a stronger partnership.

Our new project in Ukraine ‘Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine’ was initiated in July this year. It is a part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018 – 2021 and builds on the results and achievements of our previous activities in Ukraine. It takes into account the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the measures outlined and agreed in the post-monitoring Roadmap concluded between the Government of Ukraine and the Congress, and the priorities of the Government of Ukraine where the decentralisation of power is identified as one of the key areas of reform, as well as the regular rich exchanges with the Association.

In this regard, the Congress reiterates its full support to the irreversible process of reforms in Ukraine, a process over which the Ukrainian actors at national, regional and local level have taken full ownership.

Together – the Congress and the AUC - we will seek to strengthen the institutional frameworks for local self-government, and will provide direct support to local authorities in their efforts to promote ethical decision-making and more citizen-oriented, inclusive, responsive and transparent local governance.

The project is based on a demand-driven approach, on the needs and recommendations voiced by our partners and main beneficiaries, namely: local and regional authorities, especially mayors and councillors, the national associations of local and regional authorities and representatives of the Government and the Parliament of Ukraine.

We will support local elected representatives in developing policies and practices that will promote human rights. The engagement of under-represented groups in local affairs will be in the focus of our activities. Moreover, we will work with the AUC and local authorities to

help them introduce positive measures that will enhance resilience of Ukrainian communities and make citizens feel proud of their cities.

Equally important is the design, adoption and implementation of legal and policy frameworks that mainstream a gender perspective in local political action and that promote equal opportunities for women and men to participate in local political life. In addition, the participation of citizens in decision-making and influence democratic processes in local communities is a precious right that needs to be protected and nurtured by all levels of government.

I would like to recall that Ukraine has recognised this right by ratifying, in December 2014, the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority. Our joint activities will contribute to enabling Ukraine better to comply with this voluntary commitment.

Just like citizens, local authorities have the right to be consulted by other levels of government and this is one of the key principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government to which all member states have committed.

It is obvious that effective consultations cannot be carried out if local governments have no structures to represent their common interests in their dialogue with the central authorities. The existence of strong national associations of local authorities is therefore a precondition for successful consultations and initiatives.

The Congress has always underlined the vital contribution that national associations of local and regional authorities can make in negotiations and discussions with the government and the parliament, representing local interests in decentralisation processes.

Dear friends,

With this in mind, the Congress will provide an extensive support to your Association. We have defined the project priorities jointly and designed activities and a process to make cities role models and give the impetus to their daring capacity and willingness to introduce innovative practices.

We will work together to strengthen the capacities of the AUC to better advocate for the interest of its members – who serve the interests and needs of the women, men and children living in the municipalities. And it is the aim of the project to ensure a constructive dialogue and promote partnership culture and synergies between central and local authorities in the spirit of multilevel governance.

We all agree that national associations of local authorities have several responsibilities, one of them being able to provide a set of good quality services to its members. The Congress' support in this regard will include expertise and provide opportunities for exchanges. The baseline assessment will provide guidelines and recommendations that will feed the discussions in your decision-making bodies on the Association's strategic orientation, while further support will be provided in strengthening its advocacy.

Particular attention will be placed on a capacity building programme for local elected representatives and AUC staff members to entrust them with the responsibility as catalysts for change.

To conclude, allow me to mention the recent participation of the representatives of the AUC and Ukrainian mayors in the 5th Open Government Partnership Summit in Tbilisi, Georgia, where they had the opportunity to exchange with their peers from more than 70 countries from around the world. It was just the first of a series of project activities that will increase transparency and accountability of local authorities, which in turn will raise citizens' trust in local politicians.

I would like to quote the Mayor of Sumy, Mr Oleksandr Lysenko, who, following his participation in the Summit, said that "by putting local authorities in the spotlight, we are emphasising the need to 'go local' in the implementation of open government standards in Ukraine".

Dear friends,

I would like to invite you to join our forces and 'go local' in order to strengthen democracy and build trust at local level in Ukraine.

Thank you.