

Forum for Local Democracy in Ukraine
4 – 7 July 2017 – ShishkiNN Resort, Snovjanka, Chernihiv region

*Address by Gudrun Mosler-Törnström
President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe*

Official opening - 4 July 2017

Dear Mr Melnychuk,
Dear Mr Ehnberg,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you, Mr Melnychuk, for your warm welcome in the Chernihiv region. I am pleased to be here today, in Ukraine, and to have the opportunity to exchange views with so many mayors, local councillors and young local leaders.

I already met some of you last November in Strasbourg, at the occasion of the World Forum for Democracy. And now here we are, this time in Ukraine, for our own "Forum for Local Democracy". It is the first time that the Congress is organising such an event, and we are glad that it is happening in Ukraine.

Using the example of Ukraine, we can show how the Congress operates in practice, and how the different activities are interlinked and synchronised. Through our two statutory activities, the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the observation of local and regional elections, the situation of local and regional democracy in member States is regularly put to the test. On the basis of the findings and recommendations further to monitoring and election observation missions, co-operation programmes can be designed which are tailor-made for the requirements of a specific country.

The co-ordinated interplay between monitoring and co-operation is also a means for the strengthening of the political dialogue of the Congress with strategic partners, in particular the national authorities, the local and regional elected representatives and national associations of territorial self-government. In Ukraine, so far, positive results have been achieved in respect of the different fields of action.

It is important for the Congress to stand next to Ukraine on its path to genuine decentralisation. Last Friday, at the ceremony for the 25th anniversary of the Association of Ukrainian Cities, I had the opportunity to meet with President Poroshenko who reaffirmed the importance of our common work and co-operation. We from the Congress also appreciated very much his message to the members of our Monitoring Committee which met – only a couple of days ago - in Kharkiv.

Since 2014, several reforms to strengthen local democracy have been successfully implemented by the Ukrainian authorities. Those reforms introduced new responsibilities and opportunities for local elected representatives to better answer the needs and demands from citizens.

However, we should remember that genuine decentralisation does not only entail changes in the legislation. It also requires local and regional authorities to receive specific capacity-building, and it requires the dissemination of accurate information on reforms to all stakeholders of local governance and to citizens.

With this in mind, the Congress developed specific activities for mayors and councillors in their roles as leaders for change and everyday actors of local democracy, activities that you have all been part of. Decentralisation is a

common trend among European countries. We may come from different places, but as local and regional authorities we face the same challenges:

How to strengthen democracy in our communities?

How to provide better services to citizens?

How to enhance trust at the local level and engage citizens?

This is why the Congress is keen on implementing the methodology involving peer exchange. By gathering mayors and local councillors from different countries, we enable them to debate on an equal footing, to share their experiences and to exchange good practices. We share a common understanding and we can help each other out.

I do not forget the young local leaders that are also here with us today. It is important for the Congress to focus on young people engaged in social and political activities at the local level, as we strongly believe that all community residents, and in particular the younger generation, should have a say in matters that affect them. It is inspiring to meet so many young people that are willing to strengthen their engagement and are committed to induce change in their communities.

We all are committed to change in our cities. We, in our respective countries, but also we, in the Congress, when we gather in Strasbourg to debate on topical issues linked to local and regional democracy. We share the same objective – which is to improve the lives of citizens by implementing good local governance.

There is one important actor providing a link between the discussions held in the Congress and the situation on the ground here in Ukraine. This actor is the Delegation of Ukraine, which is represented by several members here today: Mr Prokopiv, Mr Atroshenko, Mrs Tsymbaluyk. As the President of the Congress, I am particularly pleased to have such an active Delegation among our ranks. Your members have always been involved in the activities organised in Ukraine, and have been eager to present the results of these activities to the Congress. I look forward discussing with you today and tomorrow. - This Forum for Local Democracy in Ukraine is yet another occasion to gather and to reflect on topical issues that concern all of us in Europe.

I look forward to sharing my views with all of you, and I have no doubt that our discussions will nurture many ideas and will make all of us feel inspired when we return to our communities!

Thank you for your attention.