

32nd Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
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COMMUNICATION BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER Gunn Marit HEGELSEN

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Statement of Gunn Marit HEGELSEN, The President of the Chamber

Dear colleagues, dear friends

Set up in 1957, the Congress celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. At that time it was called the "Standing Conference of local authorities".

In 1975, with the emergence of a significant regional dimension in the member States, the remit of the Standing Conference of local authorities was extended to include regions.

This was a major step in the journey which leads us in 1994, after the Vienna Summit of Heads of states and governments of the CoE, to the setting up of two Chambers within the Congress: the Chamber of Regions and the Chamber of Local Authorities.

Dear colleagues, as members of the Congress' Chamber of Regions, we have a responsibility: we must play our specific role in contributing to the general objectives of the Congress and to its global priorities. The Chamber of Regions must remain a strong pillar for the implementation of the Congress' priorities and in particular, to those defined for 2017-2020.

In the past, the Chamber of Regions has engaged tirelessly in the promotion of regionalisation as a way to contribute to democracy and stability within Europe. We must keep these efforts high on our agenda.

Regional self-government contributes to the principles of stability and democracy. Regionalisation should be regarded not as a problem or a danger, but as an effective, unifying means of giving regions a say in political decision-making at both national and European level. Regional self-government is a way to enhance democracy and to give it a firmer foothold in our countries. The Congress' Chamber of

Regions is in a position to support regionalisation efforts by fostering the principles of subsidiarity, proximity, good governance and active citizenship.

Within our member States, regions have an important role to play in enhancing complementarity and synergies with other tiers of government, as key actors at political, economic, social and cultural levels, and they must be recognised as such.

Dear colleagues, we have much to benefit from peer to peer exchanges of good practice and from constructive and open dialogue on topical issues that are currently faced by regions in Europe. We have much to learn from each other on how regions interact with other tiers of governments in addressing issues of concern, providing good services to citizens, defining policies which contribute to fair and sound economies, and in social and cultural development.

The current situation in Europe – the economic crises, unprecedented migrant flows, radicalisation, terrorism and other issues – threatens inclusive, safe and fair societies, raising citizens' expectations of the politicians they have elected, including at regional level. The Chamber of Regions will foster debates that help regions shape their policy and contribute to their effective co-operation.

The Bureau of the Chamber identified the subjects we have on our agenda today as topical issues that could enhance the Congress' priorities from a regional perspective. They reflect our Chamber's priorities, providing a platform for peer to peer exchange on such crucial issues as "Quality democracy at regional level" and "migratory flows at border regions".

As President of the Chamber of Regions, elected during the session last October, I pay tribute to my predecessors for paving the way forward. I myself am committed to continuing their actions.

The Chamber remains of course committed to continuing the strong co-operation which exists with a number of European Associations of regions with whom we share priorities and with whom we can develop synergies. This is why we will have the pleasure today of hearing contributions from associations and organisations representing regions in Europe.

Since my election in last October we started implementing the Congress Priorities 2017-2020, with a view to contributing to the objectives of "enhancing the quality of local and regional democracy and building safe and inclusive societies that respect diversity".

During the 31st session of the Chamber, we held a debate on the implementation of the "European Social Charter" of the Council of Europe.

I wish to thank Bureau members for their support in setting up this attractive agenda today and I look forward to hearing the contributions from our distinguished speakers as well as your contributions, dear colleagues, members of the Chamber of regions.