

**Joint Workshop of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG)
(Tbilisi, 29 June 2018)**

**Participation of Secretary General Andreas Kiefer
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
Council of Europe**

Speaking Notes

- It is a pleasure to be here and to address representatives of the Association again, six months after the opportunity to participate in the NALAG General Assembly in December 2017.
- We are glad that the new Georgian delegation to the Congress was nominated as expected and began its participation in the work of the Congress. National delegations to the European institutions and associations such as the Congress, CEMR or CORLEAP represent an important bridge between policy formulation and experience-sharing at European level and its implementation in the national setting.
- We welcome in this regard the nomination of the Georgian delegations to CORLEAP and CEMR, present here, and the opportunity to have an exchange of views with them today.
- Institutional partnerships for advancing local and regional democracy across the European continent take on a particular importance today, in the context of the current challenges to democratic governance at all levels – when the very values of democracy and legitimacy of democratic processes and institution are being put into question, against the background of rising populism fuelled by the feeling of disconnect and exclusion among citizens, and citizens' distrust in the mainstream politics.
- These challenges are testing our resolve and commitment, and we must act as a united front in defence of our shared values and of the European model of society. This European model of society is based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Local and regional authorities are an indispensable element of the checks and balances of our European model of society. The elected politicians in the municipalities and cities can promote a climate of inclusion, respect and of citizen participation and involvement. In this context and in view of Georgia's upcoming chairmanship of the Council of Europe from November 2019 to May 2020, I would like to refer to the recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on citizen participation in local public life,

adopted on 21 March 2018. This recommendation contributes to strengthening trust in and the credibility of the democratic institutions and helps to build inclusive societies. In this way local and regional and national politicians can and shall be empowered to better counteract populism. Populism offers apparently “simple solutions “, but populism and populist politicians seek to limit debate, they de-legitimise dissent and in consequence reduce political pluralism. And it is this pluralism that makes our societies vibrant, worth living in and worth taking responsibilities for the citizens.

- The Congress works in this direction within the Council of Europe and also with its partners outside the CoE.
- In the countries of the EU’s Eastern Partnership – which are all member states of the Council of Europe – the platform for such co-operation at local and regional level is CORLEAP. The Congress is actively contributing to the work of CORLEAP, in the framework of the now revised Cooperation Agreement with the Committee of the Regions – signed during the last session of the Congress in March – and I look forward to discussing the Action Plan for the participation of the Georgian delegation to CORLEAP.
- The Congress also has a long-standing relationship of partnership and co-operation with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR); in fact, the CEMR’s Charter of Municipal Liberties can be regarded as a forerunner of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. We are therefore very interested to hear the plans of the Georgian delegation to CEMR during this workshop.
- Most importantly, within the Congress itself, we look forward to working with the Georgian delegation and with your Association in general in both formulating and implementing Congress recommendations on the application of the Local Self-Government Charter, and supporting the decentralisation process in your country.
- Much has happened in this regard since the NALAG General Assembly. Georgia has a new Government, and we expect its continued commitment to the post-monitoring road map signed with the Congress in December 2015, for the implementation of the Congress recommendation of 2013. This road map will be certainly updated in the light of the new cycle of monitoring of Georgia, taking place this year, with the monitoring visit in April and the new recommendation to be adopted during the Congress session in November.
- In this regard, the decentralisation process in Georgia remains our top priority, and I look forward to hearing the update on the decentralisation strategy today. We in the Congress expect the continued commitment of the new Government to decentralisation, and I will be discussing these issues with the relevant Ministries during this visit.

- At the same time, I would like to reaffirm the Congress support to NALAG and commitment to our co-operation in support of the Association and its members. We have very fruitful relations of partnership with the Association's leadership and have been discussing proposals for new co-operation activities, in particular with your Executive Director, David Melua.
- As you know, the Congress completed last year a multilateral project in Eastern Partnership countries, including Georgia, on strengthening institutional frameworks for local governance. One tangible result was the publication, in Georgian, of the Handbook on Transparency and Citizen Participation, and of the Tool Guide on Management of Change for local authorities.
- Based on the experience gained, we are now putting forward a new project proposal which will focus on building capacities and skills of newly elected local councillors as drivers of change to apply European standards, promote transparent and open governance and foster citizen participation for greater accountability of local public administration.
- We plan to focus in particular on strengthening a consultation framework between national and local authorities, through NALAG, for the development and implementation of the national decentralisation and good governance strategy. In this regard, special attention will be paid to the development of the consultative platform between NALAG and the Parliamentary Committee on Regional Policy and Self-Government – a development that we can only welcome and support.
- Consultations with national parliaments are of paramount significance for the creation of the legal framework for decentralisation, but also for the incorporation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government into domestic law – a process that is highly recommended by the Congress as a guarantee for better application of the Charter and for overcoming many recurrent difficulties in the Charter's implementation. Earlier this week, I had the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this subject in the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, which is preparing a report on the role of national parliaments in the decentralisation of power in Europe.
- We in the Congress are ready to work closely with NALAG in support of your dialogue with the parliament.
- We also hope for your active participation in the Summit on Open Government here in Tbilisi in July because building open and transparent governance, based on inclusive citizen participation and control, will also remain our priority, as I have just mentioned.
- I look forward to discussions during the workshop.