

Workshop on consultation mechanisms – Yerevan, Armenia, 12 September 2018

Opening remarks by Secretary General Andreas KIEFER Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Council of Europe

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Deputy Minister,
Distinguished representatives of the Armenian national authorities,
Distinguished representatives of the associations of local authorities,
Distinguished representatives of international agencies and of Council of Europe member states,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, I welcome you to this workshop, dedicated to the question of consultations between national and local authorities.

The Congress is organising this workshop because of the importance we attach to establishing consultations between national and local authorities, which represents one of the key requirements of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by Armenia in 2001; and because the need for a consultation process in this country is reflected in the Congress Recommendation on local democracy in Armenia, adopted in 2014 as part of our monitoring, and in the Roadmap on the implementation of this Recommendation, signed with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development in 2016.

As Armenia advances on the path of decentralisation and strengthening local self-government, the question of setting up an effective framework for consultations is becoming one of the priority issues. We strongly hope that this workshop will lay the ground for the process of dialogue in this country aimed at structuring and possible formalising a framework of such consultations, to make them regular and effective.

Today, in the context of participatory democracy, dialogue and consultations between different levels of government is a major requirement of any democratic society. During this workshop, we will be discussing the legal requirements for consultations but also the consultations modalities existing in Armenia and in other European countries, and their experiences in organising such consultations.

I would like to thank representatives of the national associations of local authorities from Georgia, Iceland, Latvia and Poland who responded positively to our invitation to take part in this workshop, and would be happy to say a few words myself about the consultation modalities in my home country of Austria during our discussions.

I also would like to thank representatives of the Armenian national authorities, as well as associations of both local elected representatives and municipal civil servants who support elected representatives with their skills and expertise and who are here today.

I would like to stress in this regard that associations of local authorities play a special role in consultation mechanisms because they voice and defend representatively collective interests of local governments, acting as a kind of trade unions for local elected representatives – and we will be discussing their role today as well.

I should add that this workshop is organised in the framework of the Congress co-operation project in support of the Communities Association of Armenia, under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia. Strengthening local democracy and local self-government is one of the key dimensions of this Action Plan, which will be continued into the next cycle of four years, 2019-2022.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the Congress, we recognise and very much appreciate the political will and commitment of the Armenian Government to building a decentralised governance system in this country, by carrying out the necessary reforms, pursuing decentralisation and establishing dialogue with local authorities. We also appreciate the constructive and fruitful relations of dialogue and co-operation between the Congress and the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development. Deputy Minister, your participation in this workshop is another sign of this positive experience. We are confident that this co-operation will continue under the new Council of Europe Action Plan for and with Armenia.

The new Action Plan will begin to be implemented in 2019, and the next monitoring visit of the Congress in Armenia is also scheduled for 2019. As we assess the progress made since the previous recommendation in 2014, we would be happy to see a framework for regular and systematic consultations in place in this country, as one of the major accomplishments in implementing our recommendation and the Roadmap.

In concluding, I would like to stress that consultations with local authorities, beyond being a legal requirement, is also a very practical tool. After all, it is all about establishing a dialogue between different levels of government – a dialogue for building together democracy in the country and for developing together local communities. The participation of local authorities in making national decisions give these decisions greater legitimacy and shared ownership, thus ensuring their better implementation at local level. Through consultations, national authorities also learn from local experiences of what works and what fails in local communities. Equally important, joint decision making creates a sense of belonging, of being part of a common mission, of the same national community, of one country.

This is why I look forward with great enthusiasm to our discussions today.

Thank you.