

XVI Ukrainian Municipal Forum– Odesa, Ukraine, 27 - 29 July 2021

## Speaking points for Jelena DRENJANIN (Sweden, EPP/CCE), Chair of the Governance Committee of the Congress

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**Day 1 Local democracy and open government: dialogue for sustainable partnerships  
Panel discussion 1: Open Government to support democratic innovations in crisis and beyond,  
27 July 2021 (12:30 – 14:00 EEST)**

Dear Mayors,

Dear State Secretary Yarema

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be with you today and contribute to this panel discussion on open government both in my capacity as Chair of the Governance Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and as a local elected representative in Sweden. I have been participating in many of the activities of the Congress project in Ukraine in my capacity as a Congress Spokesperson on gender equality.

We meet in unprecedented times, the most devastating times in more than 100 years. We witness threats to democracy and historic low citizens trust in public authorities while the world continues to fight the health and economic crisis that results from the Covid 19 Pandemic.

Today, we will be discussing solutions to build a safer and better environment for our local communities, with citizens at the heart of the decision-making to renew their trust.

In the views of the Congress, open government is not a luxury, it is crucial to tackle these challenges. It is the simple but powerful idea that governments work better with the people and for people. They work better if they are transparent, participatory and accountable, and make their work better understood by the public.

We have just heard from the representatives of the national government what has been achieved through the commitments to the Open Government Partnership and how local government have been included in this work through the co-creation of the new Action Plan for Open Government and the National-Local Platform for dialogue, recently established with the Association of Ukrainian Cities.

At the Congress, we are glad to have been able to support you in this regard, always keeping in mind our ultimate goal of supporting local government reform and dialogue between central and local levels, as well as enhancing the practices through new initiatives at the local level.

Open government allows for a citizens-centered local governance, which, if done right, helps advance concrete policies and reforms that respond to their needs and are inclusive, and that empowers them to oversee the work of public authorities.

Allow me to reflect on the work and priorities of the Congress that consider accountability, together with transparency and participation as the three essential features of open government. These are core features for advancing democracy and for building prosperous societies.

Fostering these principles along with those enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-government is on the agenda of the Congress and fully embedded in our priorities for 2021-2025, which among others focus on the quality of representative democracy and citizen participation, effective local and regional responses to public health crisis, as well as on the digitalisation and artificial intelligence in the local context.

Since the adoption in 2016 of the Roadmap on the prevention of corruption and the promotion of public ethics at local and regional levels, we have issued a number of reports and recommendations that call on local and regional authorities to adopt and implement open government standards, to raise awareness on the importance of transparency, of the disclosure of information and open data, to allow for citizens to contribute to the work of local government and also scrutinise this work.

Today, we will hear about many initiatives in Ukraine that range from participatory budgeting, to online communication and platforms, and inclusive processes for the participation of youth, IDPs, vulnerable groups, of those who often don't have a say.

To answer to the question on the importance of inclusiveness of open government initiatives, allow me to refer to the existing evidence and data support the idea that citizen participation in public decision making can deliver better policies, strengthen democracy and build trust. It is also the role of local authorities to advance human rights at their level as a shared responsibility by introducing such a perspective in all their public policies.

From the citizens' perspective, we know that they are more likely to trust and understand a decision that has been influenced by "ordinary people" than one made solely by government or "behind closed doors". This is one of the major benefits for citizens to take part in any public decision-making.

And to build more on this, allow me to refer to evidence that also shows that values, such as high levels of integrity, fairness and openness of institutions and their representatives, be it elected or appointed, are a strong foundation for public trust. Similarly, local authority's competences –its responsiveness and reliability in delivering public services and anticipating citizens' needs– are crucial for boosting trust in public institutions.

But while we can indeed conclude that key drivers of trust are values and competences, I'd like to reflect on democratic innovations. Today while facing the challenges of the pandemic, it is all the more important that we, local leaders, engage with our constituencies to drive the change through co-creation and through building new alliances for the wellbeing of all in our communities.

The outbreak of Coronavirus has made this more evident. It is our responsibility to innovate, and this can be done through deliberative, collaborative and participatory local policymaking.

To be open, local authorities need to stand ready to reimagine and deepen the role of citizens in local governance processes by increasing opportunities for their participation, deliberation and influence. This will in turn ensure that roles and powers of local elected representatives are exercised in the public interest and contribute to enhanced local democratic governance.

Let me conclude by saying that in the Congress, we believe that working in this spirit, creates a virtuous circle and an environment conducive to change and to renewed trust in public authorities. All stakeholders must work together in this endeavour.

I am certain that we will be inspired by the discussion with Ukrainian mayors and the peer exchange that this forum provides for. We look forward to the scaling up of these initiatives for high-quality policymaking and the reforms to make local governance stronger and more resilient in Ukraine.