

**Launching of the project "Innovating democratic participation at local level in Bosnia and Herzegovina"
Online meeting, 23 February 2022, 11.00h-13.30h**

Speech by Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General of the Congress

Dear mayors and presidents of local councils,
Dear members of the Congress,
Dear Ms Travljanin,
Dear Mr Pantić,
Dear Ms Urumova,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you today, on behalf of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, to the launch of the project "Innovating democratic participation at local level in Bosnia and Herzegovina".

The Congress is the pan-European forum of elected local and regional politicians from the 47 member states of the Council of Europe. Its role is to promote and assess local and regional democracy and strengthen local self-government across our continent.

This project is the first one we will be implementing with local authorities across the country, jointly with their associations, as part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2022-2025. I am glad to see you participate in such great numbers and I am also happy to welcome members of the Delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Congress.

This project overall aims to enhance the quality of local democracy and create opportunities for citizens to engage in innovative participatory processes, in Mostar and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We will promote new democratic approaches, open government, public ethics, transparent and inclusive local policy making in the country.

At the Congress, we are convinced that - today, more than ever - our societies need a genuine democracy of proximity. The current context of the public health crisis has brought to the fore the need for advancing accountability and transparency, for tackling systemic inequalities and for enhancing citizen participation in local life.

Towns and cities are indeed the place where citizens can interact best with public authorities and where responses to their needs can be better addressed.

Local elected representatives - mayors and local councillors - have a vital role to play in leading the change and innovation dynamics that citizens expect from them. They must act as role models and foster good governance.

This project builds on our joint work with the City of Mostar, where the first deliberative process in a form of a Citizens' Assembly was organised in July 2021. It was the first Citizens Assembly in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the first one in the region.

We aimed to create new opportunities for citizens of Mostar. We are convinced that the follow-up being given to their recommendations by the City authorities paves the way for new alliances for the sustainable development of Mostar. I would like to thank the Mayor and the City Council for our very successful co-operation, and for resolutely engaging in fostering new ways of engaging their constituencies.

At the Congress, we believe in the great value of deliberative democracy as a tool to complement representative democracy and traditional ways of citizen participation.

In March 2022, our assembly will adopt a report and recommendation on deliberative democracy at local and regional level. This report includes the example of the Mostar Citizens' Assembly, and we look forward to hosting the Mayor of Mostar on this occasion.

In this regard, we are pleased to continue sustaining the effort of the city of Mostar and hope to work with another local authority in Bosnia and Herzegovina interested in bolstering democratic processes through innovative citizens' deliberations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our project includes another component which reflects the needs voiced by relevant stakeholders, including the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republika Srpska.

Associations of local authorities are fully-fledged partners of a multi-level governance system, playing a crucial role in implementing the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. They are indispensable in consultation mechanisms as they represent the voice of local and regional authorities and defend the collective interests of their member communities.

They also serve as a platform of exchange which brings together elected representatives from all political backgrounds and foster their co-operation to address local challenges.

We are very happy to team up with the two associations. We will work together to nurture open government, transparent and accountable local decision-making, and jointly promote a new culture of governance closer to citizens.

Open government emerges as an opportunity to streamline dialogue between all levels of governance and with citizens. It embodies the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability, and participation in support of democracy and human rights.

It is about co-creation of policies, establishing new alliances between local authorities and citizens, and renewal of democratic institutions.

We have placed open government at the heart of the Congress priorities as it also allows for a more integrated agenda and strengthens the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

We very much look forward to our co-operation with local authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their associations within this project, for a stronger voice and contribution by the Delegation to the work of the Congress. We trust that our joint effort will lead towards a conducive environment to change, towards strengthened local self-government, and to renewed trust in public authorities in the country.

Thank you for your attention. I wish all of us a successful project that will boost innovations and I look forward to our discussions today.