

157th European Committee of the Regions Plenary Session
Item 19 – Debate on local and regional authorities' support to Ukraine

5 Speech for Leendert Verbeek, President of the Congress of Local
and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Brussels, Belgium; 11 October 2023 (11:15 – 12:05)

Dear colleagues,

10 Thank you for the invitation and for the opportunity to be here with you
today.

I feel strongly committed to Ukraine.

I visited Ukraine 3 times since the outbreak of the war.

I spoke with the Mayor of Bucha shortly after the massacre.

15 I spoke at several conferences on the reconstruction after the war and I
spoke on several occasions in the European Comity of the Regions.

Congress supported the launch of Cities4Cities platform to match needs
of Ukrainian cities with supply of other European cities.

Later in my speech I would like to share some current developments in
Ukraine concerning local governments.

20 We are glad to see that the political work of our two institutions continues to bear fruit.

The Congress welcomes the establishment of the Ukraine Facility and we gladly contributed to the draft CIVEX opinion on the related EU Regulation of Parliament and the Council.

25 We find that the Regulation recognises the important role that local and regional authorities play in the reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine.

At the same time, the Congress supports the rapporteur-general Mr Nardella in advocating for more concrete involvement of local and regional authorities and for doubling the funds for their capacity building.

30 The Congress, as an institutional partner of the European Alliance of cities and regions for the reconstruction of Ukraine, believes that the Alliance can play a co-ordinating role.

Ensuring complementarity with other donors, international organisations and European associations.

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Cities and regions will indeed play a crucial role in the reconstruction of Ukraine.

Therefore, to do so, local and regional authorities need to be provided with means for action, namely with their own powers rather than only delegated ones.

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This will increase transparency and efficiency, strengthen the democratic basis in the country and improve the quality of services to residents.

45 This has to be pursued by national authorities through decentralisation
and local government reforms, in line with the European Charter of Local
Self-Government of the Congress.

On this regard, I am glad to note that the Ukraine Facility Regulation is
well aligned with the provisions of the European Charter in view of
50 recognising the principles for subsidiarity and proportionality.

For its part, the Congress will pursue its support for Ukraine under the
Council of Europe Action Plan and as part of its statutory activities.

During my last visit to Ukraine, participating in a summit on local
authorities, I experienced a worrisome trend of the military taking over
55 powers from Mayors and councillors.

And national government competing with the AUC, the national
association of Municipalities.

We understand that the current situation requires a regime of martial law
in Ukraine and that the existing emergency measures allow for certain
60 derogations from the provisions of the Charter and democratic
standards.

However, these derogations must be proportional to the requirements of
the situation and must be temporary.

We urge for the return to decentralised governance as soon as the
65 situation allows for transition from martial law to civilian rule.

We encourage Ukrainian authorities to pursue decentralisation and
modernise the country with a clear separation of functions and powers
between local and state authorities.

70 An adaptive multi-level governance system should be introduced to facilitate the constructive and sustainable dialogue between different levels of governance.

This would ensure balanced and co-ordinated contribution of local and regional authorities, and their national associations to the recovery of the country.

75 All these provisions are important for the successful implementation of key reforms, fast recovery and modernisation of the country on its EU accession track.

80 At this moment we contribute to a roadmap that has to be followed in order to restore a healthy democracy in respect to the position of the local and regional authorities.

Technical assistance to be provided under the Pillar 3 of the Facility is therefore vital.

85 We are convinced that Ukrainian local and regional authorities will have a major role to play in the effective operation of the recently established International Register of Damage for Ukraine.

It is a first step towards an international compensation mechanism for victims of the war set by the Council of Europe and we should all join forces to build capacities of local and regional authorities and support them in this endeavour.

90 I would like to invite the committee of the regions to express their unwavering solidarity with the local and regional authorities in this complex situation.

We look forward to our even stronger co-operation and co-ordination in these matters.

95 Thank you for your attention.