

**Mostar Citizens' Assembly 10- 31 July 2021**

## Opening remarks by Bernd VÖHRINGER, President of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

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**Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 10 July 2021 (10.00-13.00)**

Dear colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to inaugurate today the very first Citizens' Assembly ever to be held in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am especially pleased to be here today both as President of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and as Mayor of the City of Sindelfingen in Germany where engaging citizens in local decision making is also at the heart of our action.

I would like to welcome all participants and first and foremost, to congratulate the 48 Citizens who have committed themselves to embark on a new venture of this deliberative process, as a deliberative “mini-public” that constitutes a Citizens’ Assembly representative of the people of Mostar.

I would like to extend my warmest welcome and gratitude to the President of the City Council, Mr Salem Maric for his commitment to this process since the outset. Allow me also to thank the Advisor to the City of Mostar, Ms Radmila Komadina for the excellent co-operation with the Mayor’s Office and the City Administration. My appreciation goes to the Head of Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo Ms Bojana Urumova, for her continuous support for the implementation of the Congress project in Mostar.

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 local and regional democracy and strengthen local self-government across our continent.

At the Congress we are convinced that today, more than ever, our societies need a genuine democracy of proximity. We believe that a strong social fabric, based on solidarity and a sense of community is necessary for our cities to develop into thriving, healthy, liveable places and for our democracies to flourish.

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. Our towns and cities are indeed the place where citizens can interact best with public authorities.

The right of citizens to participate in the affairs of a local authority is enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government and developed further in its Additional Protocol. It is also a horizontal feature of the work of the Congress and its priorities for 2021 – 2026. These priorities focus on building societies that are democratic, cohesive, sustainable, resilient and duly equipped with modern digital means.

We, in the Council of Europe, support those who want to enhance local governance, and lead in more inclusive and transparent manner for improved decisions and policies.

In this regard, the project “Building democratic participation in the City of Mostar” is implementing one of the recommendations proposed by the Reflection Group on Mostar, established by the Congress and the European Committee of the Regions in 2017.

We aim to create new opportunities for citizens of Mostar, who had been deprived their democratic right to vote for more than a decade, before the election last year. These new opportunities will enable citizens to engage in deliberations and dialogue with local authorities, thereby proposing a new way of participating in local decision making, a way that complements the traditional representative democracy and citizen participation, based on the principles of randomness, inclusiveness and informed deliberations.

This deliberative process, in the form of an Assembly was developed in an inclusive and transparent manner, and is tailored to the specific context of Mostar. The interest, the openness and support expressed by the city authorities, the citizens and all stakeholders in Mostar set the ground for success.

The topic chosen is the *cleanliness and maintenance of public spaces in Mostar*. This represents a big challenge in all our cities and towns. It is about quality of life, attractiveness and sustainable local communities – all important matters for our constituencies. Congratulations on this choice! I am convinced that your deliberations will help the municipality in improving the quality of the urban environment in the City of Mostar.

Over four weekends, during more than 30 hours of collective work, you will have the opportunity to learn about the topic; you will listen to experts and various local and European experiences; you will hear the views of local stakeholders, community groups and political representatives. You will come together to discuss each other’s perspectives, share your hopes, your fears, your concerns and propose new ideas. Then will come the time to deliberate upon in order to make recommendations and vote on them. These will be addressed to local authorities and further discussed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I trust that this experience will bring about change for your community, for yourselves and, at a larger scale, for the wellbeing in the city of Mostar. In my views, the change will come from the co-creation and the alliance that is being built between the authorities and citizens in addressing the issues at stake and in creating new forms of participatory democracy.

The Congress stands ready to support further this democratic process and accompany the local authorities to advance sustainable solutions that are conducive to the sustainable development of Mostar and better local governance in the city.

We are very pleased that the citizens in Mostar are engaging positively, and we look forward to the results of your deliberations.