

10th CORELAP Annual Meeting – Brussels, Belgium, 14 December 2021

Speech by Leendert VERBEEK

President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Council of Europe

5 *Check against delivery - Seul le prononcé fait foi*

Debate on “The renewed Eastern Partnership agenda: LRAs’ contribution to the EaP Summit”

Brussels, Belgium, 14 December 2021 (686 words)

10 **Dear President Tzitzikostas,**

Dear Mayor Cojocaru,

Dear members of CORLEAP,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15 **First and foremost, I would like to thank the organisers for the opportunity to address you today on behalf of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.**

**All CORLEAP national delegations are also represented in the
20 Congress, and it is natural that we enjoy a long-standing partnership
and close co-operation between us.**

**Through our monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-
Government in your countries, we in the Congress know first-hand the
25 challenges faced by local and regional authorities in the Eastern
Partnership region.**

**Through our co-operation activities in the field, in most of your
countries, we are looking to address these challenges.
30**

**This is why it is a pleasure for me to participate in this debate on the
contribution of local and regional authorities to the Eastern
Partnership Summit.**

**35 The main objective of the Summit is of course to discuss the renewed
agenda for the Eastern Partnership.**

This comprehensive agenda focuses on recovery, resilience and reform, with clear commitments in all the priority areas of co-operation.

In particular strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law, supporting the green and digital transitions, and promoting fair, gender-equal and inclusive societies.

The new agenda also proposes a revision of the Partnership's multilateral architecture to adjust the framework to the new priorities.

Local and regional authorities have a crucial role to play in this process.

Our priorities are not much different from the Partnership's overall priorities.

Decentralisation reforms, already underway in many CORLEAP countries, must be pursued and brought to completion in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

60

They must be carried out in constant dialogue between central and territorial authorities represented by their national associations.

The Congress will continue to support building platforms and frameworks for such dialogue, not least through our support to national associations.

70

The decentralisation reforms will strengthen the system of multi-level governance in the region.

The system that can provide the most adequate responses to the ongoing health crisis, and ensure the necessary resilience and recovery starting from the community level.

In November 2020, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers acknowledged the need for improved multi-level governance in Europe.

This increases the quality of decisions and shows greater flexibility in adapting to emergency situations.

This also means that local and regional authorities must be equipped with proper competences and financial resources, have access to funding and be part of regular consultations in both crisis management and recovery plans.

It is through the implementation of provisions set out in the European Charter of Local Self-Government that the decentralisation of competences can be ensured, to provide local authorities with the necessary resources to fulfil their obligations.

Moreover, the continuous dialogue with, and consultation of representatives of the local and regional levels, are strategic to creating an enabling environment for good governance, where citizens can be provided with the possibility of innovative solutions tailored to their needs.

Effective multi-level governance and dialogue between all stakeholders will strengthen institutional frameworks and foster grass-root resilience, in particular in light of the socio-economic aftermath of the health crisis.

While the national executive in a reflex, in many countries re-centralised considerable powers from the regional and local level during the pandemic, it is territorial authorities that assumed key responsibilities for implementing emergency measures in their communities and adapting them to local needs, which proved to be more effective.

Today, we need more decentralisation, not less, for better resilience and recovery.

Furthermore, in order to achieve fair, gender-equal and inclusive societies, territorial authorities must promote and practice open government based on transparency, accountability and citizen participation.

Engaging citizens in local decision making is key to both ensuring democratic innovation and regaining citizens' trust in democratic governance.

This is the foundation of the good functioning of democracy.

125 **I am convinced that these are the key issues that local and regional authorities must bring to the table at the Eastern Partnership Summit, in the discussion of the renewed agenda.**

I thank you for your attention, and look forward to our discussions today.