

Second meeting of the Forum of Exchange, Tbilisi, Georgia

Opening remarks by Harald Bergmann, Human rights Spokesperson of the Congress of the Council of Europe

Check against delivery

3 October 2022

Dear Mayors,
Dear local councillors,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you today for the second meeting of the Forum of Exchange on Human Rights at local level in Georgia - in both my capacity as Human rights Spokesperson of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and as peer mayor of the city of Middelburg in the Netherlands. I am delighted to be able to finally meet you in person.

First of all, I wish to congratulate you for your continuous efforts to foster greater understanding and protection of human rights at the local level and to promote the dialogue, as local leaders and members of this Forum.

Your presence today is emblematic of your commitment to strengthening human rights protection and promotion in your municipalities. It also shows that you recognise that dialogue and exchange between local authorities is a winning strategy for our common strive for implementing human rights and inclusive governance.

Indeed, if we share information among us, we can exponentially increase our awareness of human rights and prevent human rights violations. Knowing about others' experiences, and challenges, is crucial to equip ourselves with the tools necessary to identify viable solutions to the problems we are facing.

We are meeting today in the Forum to discuss the results of the Capacities and Needs' Baseline Assessment that you as Forum members have carried out since the last time we gathered, online, in March 2022. My congratulations for the participatory approach you have engaged in and for your very active participation in such a self-reflection process. It is a quite an innovative and unique endeavour for municipalities in the region and I am looking forward to hearing some of the main findings today, learning about your good practices, and discussing solutions to the common challenges.

The efforts for human rights implementation that you are carrying out at the local level are at the core of human rights protection and promotion. Although it is state organs that ratify international human rights treaties, it is local authorities to a large extent which translate international obligations into practice.

This principle of subsidiarity which is recognised in the Georgian Constitution, stems from the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which states that “public responsibilities shall generally be exercised, in preference, by those authorities which are closest to the citizen”. This gives us shared responsibilities with national authorities, including on human rights.

Beyond legal texts, human rights are concrete, even if we often speak of them in abstract terms, and so is their implementation which takes place in the very concrete environment where people live, work and interact – in the environment of our communities, of our towns, and of our cities.

It is therefore our responsibility as local leaders to take the necessary efforts to ensure the enjoyment of human rights of our citizens.

Localising human rights is about having a positive approach to equality in our local policy making to thereby guarantee a good quality of life in our constituencies. To meet these commitments, we need to embed human rights objectives in our everyday practice and governance.

Based on the same premises, it is also necessary that our *informed* perspective is heard and taken into consideration in the development of national Human Rights strategies and Action Plans.

I call it our informed perspective because the local authorities closest to the citizens, we have the unique possibility to identify - and voice - the specific needs of our citizens as rights-holders, and to identify - and voice - the actual resources that we need to meet them as duty-bearers.

The baseline assessment that we are discussing today is yet another evidence of this possibility. Moreover, this baseline, and your inputs today, can strengthen the advocacy of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia, as your representative in the dialogue with central authorities.

Finally, let me reiterate the support of the Congress to your efforts. As Spokesperson on Human Rights, I can tell you that we are very interested in the practice in the Council of Europe member states where Congress recommendations and resolutions on the role local authorities play in protecting and mainstreaming human rights are being concretely applied.

We have published a set of Handbooks to further support and inspire local elected representatives in the concrete implementation of Human rights. This entails three volumes, on the right to non-discrimination, on social rights, and the latest one to be issued this month on environment and sustainable development.

I will be glad to share today some of the good practices they contain, as well as the examples and challenges from *my* municipality.

I am looking forward to learning from you different perspectives and solutions and to our fruitful exchanges on the tools and instruments that will help us better integrate a human rights-based approach in local decision-making.

Reference texts:

- Congress Compendium of texts on promoting human rights at local and regional level:
 - [Resolution 356 \(2014\)](#) on Best practices of implementation of human rights at local and regional level in member states of the Council of Europe and other countries;
 - [Resolution 334 \(2011\)](#) on Developing indicators to raise awareness of human rights at local and regional level;
 - [Recommendation 280 \(2010\)](#) and [Resolution 296 \(2010\)](#) on The role of local and regional authorities in the implementation of human rights.