

Dear President of the Congress
Dear Members of the National Delegations
Your Excellences, Ladies & Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to attend the session on discussion about co-operation activities of the Congress and in this respect, it is my pleasure to address you on this.

But before I begin, let me to congratulate Mr. Mathieu Mori, on his election as the Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and wish him success in this very important role. The role, which is a key for the proper functioning of the Congress and its bodies.

At the same time, I would like to thank Mr. Andreas Kiefer for a very fruitful cooperation during his terms as the Secretary General of the Congress.

We highly value and appreciate the continuous support of the Congress for Georgia.

Development of the regions, eliminating inequalities and ensuring efficient and high level services to all is a key for the progress of the country.

In recent years, regional development programs, harmonized with EU values, have been planned and implemented to eliminate social, economic and infrastructural inequalities in the regions. To achieve these goals, we are implementing various activities and among others are:

- Promotion of economic activities in the regions;
- Ensuring access to public services and necessary conditions for the life and development of the population in the high mountainous regions;
- Increasing and strengthening the efficiency of local self-government.

We are focusing on formation of more accountable and financially strong local authorities, where decisions are made with an active engagement of local population.

In this respect, the Decentralisation Strategy for 2020-2025 with the intention of granting more functions and finances to the local authorities was adopted under the coordination of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure with active participation of all other stakeholders, including non-governmental and civil organizations, experts, academias, and of course, local self-governments themselves and their representatives – such as National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia and Association of Finance Officers of Local Self-governing Units of Georgia. The main directions of the Strategy are i) to increase the powers of local authorities, ii) fiscal decentralization, and iii) to enhance citizens' involvement and transparency. We are in the third year of the implementation of the Strategy and all actions contribute to expand public welfare, enhance the role of citizens and community groups and create more efficient delivery of public services.

Furthermore, we promote intermunicipal cooperation, capacity building activities for local civil servants and other local stakeholders.

During the past years, various bilateral and multilateral projects were implemented with support of the Congress in the field of civil engagement, human rights, gender equality and financial management of the local self-government. Mayors, councilors and young local leaders had a chance, through peer exchanges with the members of the Congress and representatives of municipalities of various countries, share experience in many field.

Of course, the areas of partnership are not limited to this and we hope and are ready for wider cooperation.

Recommendations, support and best practice sharing approach play an important role for further development of local self-government in Georgia. We are grateful to the Council of Europe for its invaluable contribution in this process.