

International Summit of Cities and Regions “Partnership for Victory”, 20 April 2023, Kyiv, Ukraine

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities under the President of Ukraine

## Speech by Leendert Verbeek, President of the Congress

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**Welcoming speech from the international community**

20 April 2023 (10:55 – 11:05 EET)

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964 words – 8 minutes

**Dear President Zelenskyy,  
Dear Speaker of the Parliament,  
Dear Prime Minister,  
Dear mayors,  
Excellencies,  
Dear friends,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

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**I have the privilege to be with you today on behalf of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.**

**Please allow me to thank President Zelenskyy for inviting me to address this body which, in February 2021, was established in order to “renew relations between all levels of government, in a constructive, transparent and effective manner, and with an aim of establishing a platform for dialogue and decisions”.**

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**Beside sharing the “name”, we - the Congress of the Council of Europe and the Congress of local and regional authorities under the President of Ukraine - share common values and principles that guide us in our work.**

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**The Congress of the Council of Europe is a forum of exchange for local and regional elected politicians and a place to share experiences among them.**

35 **In the last 35 years since its entry into force, the European Charter of Local Self-Government which has been ratified by all 46 member States, has proved to be the efficient instrument which we use to defend and strengthen local democracy and local self-government in Europe.**

40 **The Charter guides the development of local democracy in Europe, and it opened a new era in the decentralisation of power and in empowering citizens and their elected representatives in Europe.**

**It served the same purpose in Ukraine since it was ratified 26 years ago, in 1997!**

45 **This long-lasting work to incorporate fundamental democratic values in Ukrainian local communities, resulted in empowered local authorities which stand today as fully-fledged partners that play a strong role in the country's multi-level governance system.**

50 **Today, in the times of war and extraordinary crises caused by Russia's large-scale war against of Ukraine, I find it particularly important to reaffirm the resilience demonstrated by local and regional authorities.**

55 **Please allow me to express our solidarity, the solidarity of the Council of Europe Congress, and my solidarity with the people of Ukraine, with President Zelenskyy and with peer mayors, presidents of oblast councils, local and regional councillors, - who from the beginning of the war, 419 days ago - have found themselves at the frontline and who have taken an increasing share of responsibilities together with central authorities.**

**We can conclude that building more inclusive, more equitable and more resilient societies starts at the level of villages, towns and cities and builds up to regions and the whole country.**

**Let me also praise the work of the Ukrainian delegation to the Congress, headed by Ms Liliya Pashynna, the strong commitment of all members of the delegation to unite our efforts – efforts of all 46 countries of the Council of Europe – to support Ukraine in its fight for freedom and democracy.**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

**The consequences of the war have brought to the fore the need for more effective multi-level governance to improve the quality of decisions and solutions.**

**The reconstruction, recovery and transformation of your country will greatly benefit from the contribution of local and regional authorities. It is a must, and they need to have a say.**

**Yesterday during the meetings in municipalities in Kyiv Oblast, I was able to witness their impressive efforts towards reconstruction, continuity of services to residents and revival of social life. This was made possible by co-ordinated action and dialogue.**

**Yesterday also, we were privileged to contribute to constructive exchanges on a joint vision for decentralisation and a roadmap for good democratic governance. I would like to praise here the openness and spirit of dialogue shown by all stakeholders.**

**Such dialogue and co-operation in a multi-level governance system will allow for effective results, greater flexibility in coping with the needs,**

and for better suited solutions tailored to specific challenges and territories.

In this view, the relevance of the European Charter as a unique international legal instrument comes to the forefront of any planned and future reforms.

The Charter puts forward, amongst its key principles, the need for consultation between national, regional and local authorities, and clearly reflects the multi-level governance approach.

A system of regular, inclusive and timely consultations should make subnational authorities and their associations an integral part of national crisis management and development.

I would like to highlight in this regard that national associations of local and regional authorities play a vital role as the representative voice of the collective interests of local authorities.

It is especially important when we speak about the recovery and transformation of Ukraine.

The effectiveness of responses to the aftermaths of the war, as well as the success of post-war recovery, will, in our opinion, largely depend on the right balance and interaction between all levels of governance.

The European Charter in this view can be used as the compass for the ongoing local self-government reforms and further decentralisation, transition to civil administration after the war and in Ukraine's path towards EU accession.

Co-ordination efforts among all stakeholders for concrete support to Ukraine, both at European level and in the country, will contribute to

110 **democratic stability and resilience, which is vital for Ukraine's recovery  
and modernisation on its European path.**

**The Congress of the Council of Europe stands ready to support your  
country in this endeavour, to contribute to the implementation of the  
Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine, and to continue promoting  
peer exchanges of know-how, partnerships, networks and multi-lateral  
115 co-operation for innovation and sustainable development for Ukraine's  
territories.**

**Thank you!**