

Version as of 10 May 2023

Embedding democratic values at grassroots level

High-level political conference on the margins of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe Member States

co-organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities and the City of Reykjavík

15 May 2023

Venue: City Hall, Reykjavík

[Live streamed](#)

CONCEPT NOTE

The Council of Europe will be holding its 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government in Reykjavík, Iceland, on 16-17 May this year.

The objective of the Summit is to renew the “Conscience of Europe” and enable the Council of Europe to respond effectively to the challenges presented by the war in Ukraine and democratic backsliding in Europe, by redoubling investment in the Organisation’s core competencies – the promotion of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The Summit will be an opportunity for all Council of Europe member states to recommit to the values that underpin democratic security in our fast-changing continent.

The Summit is also an opportunity for local and regional authorities to convey to the Heads of State and Government a compelling message in support of the crucial role of local and regional democracy in embedding democratic values and engaging citizens in democratic governance and decision making at the grassroots, thus contributing to the core mission of the Council of Europe and to preventing democratic backsliding.

It is the right moment to send a strong message that local and regional authorities and their Congress can help the Council of Europe to deliver better on its mission and values.

The high-level political conference, organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in partnership with the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities and the City of Reykjavík, brings together key European associations and institutions of local and regional authorities – institutional partners of the Congress – to reaffirm that local and regional democracy is at the foundation of strong democratic, inclusive, sustainable, and cohesive societies, as well as the need for better and stronger multi-level governance on our continent faced by multiple external threats and internal challenges.

The objective of the conference is to highlight the key role of territorial authorities in ensuring a human right-centred approach in local and regional governance, as well as in building strong and inclusive democratic communities, engaging young people as the driving force for change.

The participants will hold two panel discussions moderated by the Presidents of the Congress' Chamber of Local Authorities and Chamber of Regions. At the end of the conference, they will sign the Call for Action in support of empowering local and regional authorities to fulfil their role as key partners of national governments in protecting human rights and upholding the rule of law, addressing the challenges and opportunities faced by democratic societies, and responding to citizens' needs in the time of multiple crises.

DRAFT PROGRAMME

9:00 – 9:30

Registration

9:30 – 10:00

OPENING SESSION

Moderated by Mathieu MORI, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Remarks by:

- Sigurður Ingi JÓHANNSSON, Minister of Infrastructure of Iceland
 - Leen VERBEEK, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
 - Bjørn BERGE, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe
 - Dagur B. EGGERTSSON, Mayor of Reykjavik, Iceland
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10:00 – 10:40

SESSION ONE: Human rights-centred approach in local and regional governance

Moderated by Bernd VÖHRINGER, President of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Speakers:

- Alin-Adrian NICA, 1st Vice-Chair of the CIVEX Commission, European Committee of the Regions
 - Gunn Marit HELGESEN, President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions
 - Cees LOGGEN, President of Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions
 - Rachid MADRANE, President of Conference of Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe
 - Jón Jakob JÓNSSON, former Congress youth delegate
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10:40 – 11:00

Q&A

11:00 – 11:20

Break

11:25 – 12:00

SESSION TWO: Building strong and inclusive democracies with youth as the driving force for change

Moderated by Harald SONDEREGGER, President of the Chamber of Regions of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Speakers:

- Peter VAN'T HOOG, Vice-President of the Association of European Border Regions
- Jean-Luc VANRAES, Vice-President of the Assembly of European Regions
- Alice BERGHOLTZ, Vice Chairperson of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe
- Elias DRAY, Vice-President of the European Youth Forum
- Remigiusz SEPIAŁ, Congress youth delegate

12:00 – 12:25

Q&A

12:25 – 12:35

CONCLUDING SESSION

Moderated by Mathieu MORI, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Remarks by:

- Heida Bjorg HILMISDOTTIR, Chair of the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities
- Leen VERBEEK, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

12:35 – 12:45

Signing of the Call for Action

Family photo

13:00

Meeting with the press