

Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe

Reykjavik, Iceland – 17 May 2023

United for Europe – General Debate

**Speech by Leendert VERBEEK (Netherlands, SOC/G/PD),
President of the Congress**

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Dear President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thirty years ago, the first Summit in Vienna decided to endow the Council of Europe with a second political assembly - the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

Today, all local and regional authorities of the continent are represented by the Congress in the Council of Europe.

They contribute to the anchoring of the fundamental values of the Organisation at the level closest to the citizens.

Through them, the intergovernmental work carried out by the Council of Europe is firmly rooted in the life of local and regional communities.

As shown daily or in crisis situations local and regional representatives are on the front line responding to the needs of citizens. In Ukraine, they have acted as a “second civil army” in the resistance against the full scale aggression by the Russian federation.

Today, while we welcome the establishment of a register, the Congress will be proud and committed to helping make the register work.

Local and regional authorities play a major role in building democratic stability in our communities.

They also play a crucial role in Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, as two thirds of the SDG targets can only be implemented at the local or regional level.

We call on you, the Heads of State and Government, to seize the opportunity of this Summit to express a strong and renewed commitment to grassroots democracy.

With your support we are ready to better respond to democratic challenges by strengthening the Congress' monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy, expanding the observation of local and regional elections and enhancing the protection of human rights in our communities.

Dear Excellencies,

The Congress will actively implement the decisions of this Summit within the realm of its competences and in complementarity with the other Council of Europe bodies.

We will contribute to the democratic security of this continent and its citizens.

Thank you for your attention