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Presentation of the report on Congress priorities for 2017-2020

Presentation by Anders Knape (Suède, PPE-CCE), Rapporteur

Dear colleagues,

The core mission of the Congress is to protect and promote local and regional democracy.

There are different ways to fulfill this mission, but whatever we decide to do we must always focus on what we know and what we can do.

And when we do, we must take into account the following elements:

- The mandate which was given to us
- the needs of local and regional authorities in the member States
- the situation on the ground
- the priorities of the Council of Europe
- the international context.

This is what we have done, Gudrun and myself, when we have started the reflection and the consultation on the priorities for our work in the coming years.

Many policies on the political agenda of the European member states have a direct impact on our local and regional authorities.

We saw it very concretely with the economic and financial crisis a few years ago and we see it now with urgent issues such as the massive influx of refugees and migrants and the fight against terrorism.

These issues require quick responses at national level but also long term strategies and measures to be mostly implemented at local and regional level.

Over the years decentralisation has become necessary and even obvious. The role of local and regional authorities has grown and they have become important players in the search of solutions to current challenges. They are also unavoidable when it comes to maintaining cohesion, security, social stability and equality in societies.

Their efficiency depends mainly on the national governments' readiness to consult and associate local and regional authorities to the drafting of national and European policies in areas of interest to them. The example of the integration of migrants and refugees is relevant in this respect. Policies in this field can only be successful if local and regional authorities are associated to the definition of criteria for the distribution of refugees and migrants among communities within a State instead of being imposed by the central government.

In the course of the coming years, the international context may well change and we may have to adapt our priorities and activities.

As Gudrun just said, the priorities are a framework and within this framework, the Congress will give itself a margin to decide on when and how to implement the activities.

But even in doing this, we will always make sure to fulfill our statutory mission. We must ensure that our work concretely improves the daily lives of our citizens and our communities.

Obviously, the full implementation of the priorities will also depend on the means and resources the Congress will have at its disposal.

The priorities will be integrated and translated by the three Committees – Monitoring, Governance and Current Affairs - into their future work programmes and be implemented on the basis of what can be done. Naturally all activities will be subject to the approval of our Bureau.

Identifying the means and necessary resources to implement our priorities will be the next step in this process. And the new Bureau will hold its first discussion on the concrete implementation of the priorities by the end of this year.

Dear colleagues,

In drafting these priorities together with our colleagues, Gudrun and I have tried to cover the whole range of responsibilities and missions that elected local and regional representatives fulfil. But we also made sure to be focused and to concentrate on what we felt as essential.

Once these priorities are adopted, we invite you to take up the ownership of this work programme for our Congress and to share with us the responsibility and the commitment to concretely implement them.

Thank you