

Speech by Andreas Kiefer

Meeting of the Presidium of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities under the President of Ukraine

Odessa, 29 October 2021

(via Zoom)

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine

Andriy Yermak, Chairman of the Presidium of the Congress

Dear mayors and elected representatives of local and regional authorities,

Dear partners and colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to see you today and I thank you for the invitation.

It is my honour to convey the greetings of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. I would like to confirm that we remain a dedicated partner of Ukraine in supporting the implementation of reforms.

The agenda of today's meeting is very relevant, and it will be no surprise for you, that earlier this week, elected representatives from all our 47 member states exchanged good and less successful practices of handling the – still ongoing – COVID-19 pandemic and how to contribute to the recovery after. Our members discussed with leaders of the OECD and of the Council of Europe Development Bank and underlined that they found themselves at the frontline as the pandemic surged and that their responses to economic and social challenges remain crucial as the pandemic and its aftermath continue. Our speakers called on national governments to provide municipalities, cities and regions with sufficient fiscal space and promote new sources of financing, to clearly allocate responsibilities across public authorities, to capitalise on the role of subnational authorities to restore citizens' trust in government, and to strengthen institutional and fiscal coordination across all levels of government. One conclusion also was that a reflex to re-centralisation was not an appropriate solution to the complex challenges.

We are very pleased about the new and very active Ukrainian delegation in our Congress in Strasbourg with Liliia Pashynna as Head of the delegation and with Oksana Derkach as newly elected Vice-President of the Chamber of local authorities.

Ukraine is always on our agenda and our work programme. In November, our rapporteurs will come to Kyiv to finalize the preparation of the monitoring report on the application of the European Charter of local self-government. The new monitoring report will be presented to the Congress Session in March 2022. The last report dates back to October 2013 and was the basis for a fruitful political dialogue through a co-signed roadmap on 20 May 2015.

The roadmap aims to improve decentralisation and strengthening democratic local self-government along three strands:

- constitutional changes towards finalisation of the decentralisation reform;
- transfer of competences to the local level;
- financial autonomy;

A key condition of success of these reforms is a regular and inclusive consultation system with representatives of national associations of local and regional authorities to establish joint ownership of the reform process as well as of the implementation of the reform afterwards.

A successful reform also requires training for the elected representatives and for staff of the local administration. The Congress, with its different projects, and the Council of Europe as a whole, actively contribute to these training programmes.

In the Congress of the Council of Europe we have found that regular and structured consultation about draft laws and policies need to be improved in several member states. We stand ready to share good practice from different member states to make well intended reforms to strengthen democratic local self-government sustainable and serving the purpose in the interest of the women, men and children living in the cities and regions of Ukraine and all our member states.

As you know, the Congress implements projects in the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan and I would like to reconfirm our commitment to strengthening institutional consultation and dialogue on all matters of concern for local government (eg the Platform for National-Local dialogue on Open Government established with the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers) and support to building inclusive and accountable local and regional authorities that put citizens at the centre of local decision-making.

I also look forward to jointly identifying priorities related to the democracy pillar of the upcoming CoE-Action Plan for Ukraine (2023-2026). This new Action Plan constitutes an important and complementary tool for supporting Ukraine in its international commitments.

Dear Ukrainian friends and partners, you can continue to count on us, the Congress and the Council of Europe.

I wish you a successful meeting today in Odessa!