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CALL FOR ACTION

■ The High-level Political Conference was held in Reykjavik on 15 May 2023 on the margins of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe. The Conference was organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (the Congress) in partnership with the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities and the City of Reykjavik.

■ We, the representatives of the **Assembly of European Regions, Association of European Border Regions, Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies, Council of European Municipalities and Regions, European Committee of the Regions and the Congress**, state the following:

1. Local and regional democracy is at the foundation of strong democratic, inclusive, sustainable, and cohesive societies.
2. Local and regional authorities are key in upholding and defending democracy, human rights and the rule of law in their communities, embedding democratic values at grassroots level and thus preventing democratic backsliding.
3. The role of local and regional authorities, in protecting citizens' rights, responding to their needs and managing multiple crises has greatly increased since 1993, when the First Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe decided to create the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities; the member States have also recognised the fundamental role of the institutions of local democracy in preserving stability in Europe and the role of the Congress, as one of the two political assemblies of the Council of Europe, in transmitting the European values to the level closest to the citizen.
4. Democratic societies are facing internal threats highlighted by growing polarisation, socio-economic inequalities, the rise of populism, extremism, disinformation and hate speech. They are confronted also with external challenges related to the impact of the war against Ukraine, migratory movements, health threats, climate change, energy transition, and their consequences, which have all had a detrimental effect on citizens' trust in democratic institutions and led to democratic erosion.
5. While some of these challenges to democratic societies and their institutions are not new, their recurrence and gravity make it ever more important to reassert unity and solidarity in Europe and to reflect on how to reinforce democracy, rule of law and human rights protection on the continent, at every level.
6. Even though challenges and crises affect all levels of governance, events of recent years have highlighted the critical role of local and regional authorities on the frontline in reacting to emergency situations. In these cases, effective multilevel governance is particularly important, requiring central and local governments to act together to respond in an

efficient and sustainable way. Moreover, as current challenges usually exceed national boundaries, systematic cooperation between neighbours should be actively encouraged to facilitate resilience.

7. Adopting a bottom-up approach to defining strategies and policies and engaging local governments, communities, and their leaders as partners can cement the political commitments of States, secure democratic stability, develop resilient, inclusive, and peaceful societies and thus help to respond to citizens' needs and aspirations and prevent the atrocity of war.
8. We reaffirm our ongoing and future commitment to supporting Ukrainian local and regional authorities and their associations as well as their engagement with counterparts in other European countries, including in support of Ukrainian refugees.
9. Local and regional authorities must be equipped and empowered to fulfil their role in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The unique challenges faced by territories with geographical limitations, vulnerability to climate change and limited resources should be duly recognised.
10. The role of the local and regional authorities, in putting human rights at the core of their work and in setting up human rights institutions at local level, must be acknowledged. Local and regional authorities have a crucial role to play in fostering citizens' engagement in democratic processes, as a key element of ensuring trust in democratic institutions.
11. Local and regional authorities must be supported in their efforts to increase education, employment and housing opportunities for young people as well as their involvement in all stages of the policy cycle, with special regard to vulnerable, marginalised and excluded groups, thereby improving their youth policy and practice and supporting the overall democratic participation of youth.
12. Local and regional authorities must be proactively involved in the designing of public policies to address climate and environmental crises and priority must be given to concerted action at all levels of government in order to respond to environmental challenges and tackle the climate crisis. This includes working towards resilience-building measures to address the impacts of climate change, such as extreme weather events and rising sea levels, and climate induced migratory movements.
13. Local and regional authorities must be recognised as key partners of national governments in addressing the challenges and opportunities of migratory flows and, accordingly, should be supported and involved in the development and implementation of migration, reception and integration policies, with a focus on their action to protect the human rights of migrants and refugees and to promote diversity, while upholding principles of social cohesion and equality.
14. The capacity at local level to address the accelerating technological changes in digitalization, including the artificial intelligence, varies significantly across territories. Local and regional authorities must be recognised as key stakeholders in the development and implementation of policies related to digitalization and artificial intelligence, and must be equipped and empowered to adequately respond to these challenges and opportunities, in accordance with European standards on protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

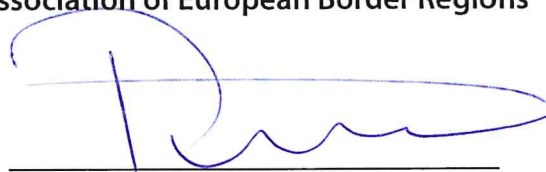
15. Greater unity both between States and within the States themselves starts at the level of cities, municipalities and regions. Local and regional authorities play an important role in making European democracy more stable and more resilient and have proven their capacity to implement national policies while duly fulfilling their responsibilities.

Signed in Reykjavik, Iceland on 15 May 2023

Assembly of European Regions



Association of European Border Regions



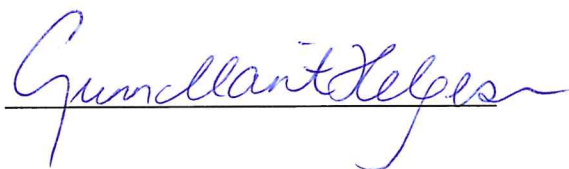
**Conference of Peripheral
and Maritime Regions**




**Conference of European Regional
Legislative Assemblies**



**Council of European Municipalities
and Regions**



**European Committee
of the Regions**



Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

