

High-level political conference on the margins of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe Member States
“Embedding democratic values at grassroots level”
Reykjavik, Iceland – 15 May 2023

Speech by Leen Verbeek, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

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Concluding session

15 May 2023

Dear colleagues,

I would like to thank everyone for the inspiring and enriching discussions that clearly demonstrated the pivotal role of the local and regional authorities in securing democracy and in protecting human rights in Europe.

We will conclude today with the signing of the Call for Action, by prominent European Associations and institutions, representing local and regional authorities of this continent. With this Call for Action we would like to convey a strong joint message to everyone, and especially to the Heads of State and Government that will be meeting tomorrow, that democracy at local level matters.

It is through the multi-level governance and its integral system of checks and balances that we will build strong democratic, inclusive, sustainable and cohesive societies. Confronted by many challenges and crises, we must look for unity and solidarity at all levels of government, where local and regional authorities are proactively involved in the design and implementation of public policies. Moreover, we must work with our neighbors across borders, as evidence shows that systematic cross-border cooperation builds resilience.

As we have stressed in the joint statement, the local and regional authorities must be empowered and provided with the necessary competencies and resources to fulfil their role as key partners of national governments in protecting human rights and upholding the rule of law.

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 therefore help to respond to citizens' needs and aspirations and prevent the atrocity of war.

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

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank everyone for joining us today: our partners, the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities, the Icelandic authorities and the City of Reykjavik, the interpreters and all the colleagues who worked on this event to make it a success.

I wish you all a nice afternoon and I would like to invite now our partners to sign the Call for Action.

Thank you.