

43rd Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities - Strasbourg, France, 25 to 27 October 2022

Debate on Ukraine

Date 25 October 2022

Congress calls on all its networks of towns, cities and regions to co-operate with Ukraine

25 000 electric generators, 300 000 heating installations and 3 000 mobile water treatment units: as winter approaches, Ukraine needs very practical support to cope with the months ahead. Through their networks and associations, European local and regional authorities are responding to these immediate needs, while already helping their Ukrainian counterparts to prepare to rebuild, as shown in a debate held on 25 October 2022 during the 43rd Session of the Congress.

Introducing the discussions, Congress President Leendert Verbeek stressed that the Congress had stood firmly beside Ukraine since the outbreak of the war, while pointing out that mere statements were obviously inadequate compared to the horrors and war crimes being committed in total breach of democratic rights and values. That was why the Congress was calling on all its networks of towns, cities and regions to co-operate with Ukraine.

Speaking from his office, the mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, who also chairs the Association of Ukrainian Cities, highlighted the human and economic price being paid by his country “for choosing to belong to the European family”. Russia had had no qualms about starting the worst war seen in Europe since 1945, with the aim of re-incorporating Ukrainian territory into its “empire”, like during the Soviet era, he said, while stressing that, in the conflict, Ukraine was also defending the future of Europe: “even if sanctions are painful for you, that is the price to pay for peace”. He also pointed out that several of the Ukrainian mayors who had been kidnapped at the start of the conflict were currently still missing.

The Ukrainian Minister for Communities and Territories Development, Oleksiy Chernyshov, briefly listed the destruction caused by Russia throughout the country, and its short and medium-term needs. Once the war had ended, it would take one or two years to rebuild key infrastructure, but over 10 years to restore the country to full capacity. Over \$350 billion would be needed for the task, but, in the short term, \$3.5 million needed to be invested to get through winter.

As Anders Knape (Sweden, EPP/CCE) pointed out, European towns, cities and regions had already been co-operating effectively with Ukrainian local and regional authorities before the war and this co-operation was now facilitating the assistance which the former were providing to the latter. It also showed the importance of having strong and well-developed local authorities everywhere.

Cities4cities, a network for co-operation between European and Ukrainian cities

The Cities4cities network launched in March 2022 demonstrates this practical commitment. As stressed by its founder, the President of the Congress Chamber of Local Authorities, Bernd Vöhringer (Germany, EPP/CCE), it is not confined to political support but also helps refugees, while providing Ukrainian towns and cities with the technical facilities they need, which are often available from partner authorities in Europe. Karl-Heinz Lambertz (Belgium, SOC/G/PD) said that European local authorities could be proud of what they had already done but they needed to go still further. In addition to partnerships for emergency aid, they now had to prepare themselves in the longer term for the consolidation and rebuilding of the country. Soeren

Schumacher (Germany, SOC/G/PD) also pointed out that the partnership between his region of Hamburg and Kyiv was both based on immediate needs and also geared to the future, while Wilma Delissen van Tongerlo (Netherlands, ILDG) stressed the close ties between local authority associations in the Netherlands and Ukraine.

Never stop talking about Ukraine

Russia was seeking to destroy Ukraine's infrastructure to terrorise the population and bring about the collapse of the country, said Mykola Lukashuk (Ukraine, ILDG), who predicted that the winter would be all the more difficult because over 1 000 municipalities had no electricity supplies at present. "However, we must stop being afraid of Russia, which we will push back with Europe's support," he continued. For his part, Iurii Frintsko (Ukraine, ILDG) alerted his counterparts to the dangers which the destruction of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant would pose for the whole world. "We need anti-aircraft defence, and if you cannot protect our skies, help us to protect them ourselves," urged Vitalii Bey (Ukraine, EPP/CCE), speaking in his dual capacity as a local elected representative and a member of the armed forces.

Lastly, the Ukrainian youth delegate, Olexandra Petrakova, called on Europe not "to get used to the war in Ukraine" and asked the Congress to hold debates on the war at every session until peace was restored. "We are being bombed all the time and I hope that the new Secretary General of the Congress will visit Ukraine very shortly to get an idea of the situation on the ground," she said in conclusion.