

## **Speaking notes of Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities**

### **Opening of the PLATFORMA Political Council Meeting**

**9 March 2022 – 14.00**

Greet participants, in Strasbourg, seat of CoE and online.

Happy that we are able to meet after long planning and uncertainty. The quality of in-person exchanges and the informal aspects of coffee breaks and receptions cannot be met online.

This meeting is taking place as Europe is confronted with war, on a scale unprecedented since WWII.

Our thoughts and solidarity are with Ukrainian people and authorities.

The war reminds us all of the need for all people, who share democratic values and hold dear freedom and democracy, to stand together in solidarity and support, and work together to defend, promote and uphold these values. The Congress Bureau has done this last week and our strong declaration is also in your files.

This meeting today, organised jointly by the CEMR and the Congress, is proof of the strong co-operation between our two bodies – the Congress of local and regional authorities as an organ in the Council of Europe - and a network of national associations of local and regional authorities of European countries which is the CEMR and PLATFORMA.

The CEMR is an institutional partner of the Congress, and its Charter of Municipal Liberties is rightly seen as a precursor of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. In 2023 we will celebrate the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry into force of the ECLSG, which has been ratified by all 47 member states of the CoE. And local democracy is under stress and partly under threat.

After decades of promoting decentralisation and advancing local and regional democracy in Europe, today we need to join our forces even more in the face of multiple challenges to which our towns and regions are compelled to respond.

### **Priorities**

This is reflected in the priorities of the Congress for the current mandate until spring 2026. The Congress has decided to enshrine as its core mission the monitoring of local and regional democracy, the observation of local and regional elections, substantial thematic contributions to address current, future but also persisting challenges and the implementation of co-operation programmes on the ground. The overarching principles and guidelines for our work in the Congress and the Council of Europe as a whole, are the Sustainable Development Goals. A global project where the Congress and the CEMR / PLATFORMA work together also in the framework of the HLPF of the UN.

Regarding its thematic priorities for the next years, the Congress will focus on « preventive action », to avoid that things go wrong in our member states and that the elected local and regional politicians can perform and deliver, for the benefit of the women, men and children they represent and they are accountable to:

1. Effective local and regional responses to public health crises → and we will have to add other crises
2. The quality of representative democracy and citizen participation
3. Reducing inequalities in the field
4. Environmental issues and climate action in cities and regions
5. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence in the local context.

We plan to review and update these priorities at mid-mandate in October 2023 and we might have to adjust them and the work programme even before.

These priorities were established after wide consultation with Congress members, national associations and European associations to address the commonly identified challenges and to use the different legal, institutional and operational capacities available to us in our different roles. Coherence and synergies were the guiding principles of this inclusive process, to which many of you have contributed. And so it is not astonishing that we have among the participants today members of the Congress, secretaries of the national delegations and advisers to Congress members.

I am confident that this joint event will give a new momentum to our co-operation to improve democratic local and regional self-government and achieve the SDGs.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the new Secretary General of CEMR Fabrizio Rossi whom I wish much success in this function and I would like to thank Frédéric Vallier for the good cooperation over many years!