

129th Session of the Committee of Ministers - Helsinki, Finland, 17 May 2019

Speech by Anders Knappe, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

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Dear President,
Ministers,
Ambassadors,
Secretary General,

The core mission of the Congress is to monitor local and regional democracy in Europe. Our monitoring, as has been acknowledged in the decisions of this meeting, is based on an international treaty, ratified by all 47 member States, the European Charter of Local Self-Government. And we are pleased that Belarus is very interested in developing local democracy on these principles. This may open the door to further complete the family of the European countries in the Council of Europe.

We, in the Congress, are fulfilling this mission with determination, constantly improving our procedures and making our recommendations ever more useful for the member States. The regular political dialogue and co-operation that we have with national governments, be it in Strasbourg or in your respective countries, is an essential aspect of this work.

Within the Council of Europe, the Congress, as political assembly and monitoring body, represents the local and regional political level that complements the action of national governments and parliaments in their efforts to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

In its contribution to the reflection on the future of the Council of Europe adopted during the April 2019 session and distributed to you, Ministers, the Congress reaffirms its conviction that in order to preserve European democracy, today we need, more than ever, a stronger and widespread grassroots democracy.

We firmly believe that local democracy is a central pillar of European democracy. In the current challenging situation faced by member States and by European institutions, the Congress can contribute, through its experience and that of the municipalities and regions it represents, to the development of comprehensive strategies aimed at revitalising democracy and strengthening our democratic space.

I am very pleased that both the outgoing and the incoming chairmanships attach great importance to local self-government and regional democracy: Finland having implemented a substantial reform of the regions and France, whose President Macron just a few days ago announced an initiative for more decentralisation, after having held several meetings of the “Grand débat” with mayors.

Mayors, Councillors, regional governments and parliaments, local and regional elected representatives from 150 000 local and regional authorities, are working every day in the field, for and with citizens all over the continent. They are committed to deliver, in all the areas of life of our societies and of our fellow citizens. They are a cement holding our societies together.

These millions of people, that we work to represent in the Congress, at European level, within an intergovernmental Organisation, are the essence of democracy itself. They can help significantly to restore confidence in democracy, in its processes, its actors and its institutions.

We are at a crossroads and central governments must rethink the organisational model of our territories. The key to the future democratic health of Europe lies in our collective ability to imagine a new “socio-territorial pact”. This is what the Congress proposes that governments should incorporate into their reflection. Thank you!