

140th Plenary Session of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Brussels and Videoconference – 12 – 14 October 2020

Speech by Anders Knape, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Debate on the annual Local and Regional Barometer, 12 October 2020, 11.00 – 12.30

Dear colleagues,

We have heard about the impact of the crisis on local and regional councils and we will hear more about it in the discussion today. In my capacity as President of the Congress of the Council of Europe let me present to you some of the key findings and responses needed to draw the appropriate conclusions and put in place the necessary legal and procedural measures to safeguard the capacity to act of municipalities, cities and regions and to maintain the democratic legitimacy of their action. Multi-level governance is an important key to positively responding to the crisis. When regions and local authorities – via their national associations – were involved in rapid response task forces at national level, the responses were more effective and reality-proof.

Those responses proved that recentralisation is not a “miracle cure” for the crisis. Our recommendations are to make sure that:

- any emergency measures are temporary, proportional and introduced under democratic control;
- better division of competences and means within the multi-level governance system is ensured and maintained even in times of crisis, and better coordination and consultations are established between different levels of governance;
- subnational authorities are involved in decision making within emergency mechanisms as an integral part of national crisis management – including on holding or postponing elections; and
- subnational authorities have access to direct funding during both the crisis management and post-crisis recovery.

Multi-level governance increases the quality of decisions and allows greater flexibility in providing solutions tailored to specific needs. Local democracy itself must be seen as a “service of general interest” to our societies, to be upheld even in crisis – for the core, common value which it represents. We must make sure that the crisis does not lead to the ‘lockdown’ of local democracy.