

## **Speech by the President of the Congress Gudrun Mosler-Törnström** **127<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee of Ministers**

Nicosia, 19 May 2017

Dear President,

Dear Ministers

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, I have a regular exchange with your Deputies in Strasbourg. Today I am delighted to address you, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, and to speak about the role of the Congress, the second Council of Europe Assembly. And let me say that the role and achievements have grown substantially over the past few years.

The Council of Europe had the foresight to open the way to representatives of local and regional authorities as early as 1957, exactly 60 years ago, when it created a committee within the Parliamentary Assembly, with the Congress that we know today being established at the first Summit of Heads of States and Governments in Vienna (in 1993)

The representatives of the territorial collectivities in the 47 member States you represent, work together in the Congress.

Strengthening democracy, human rights and the rule of law at local and regional level are the core objectives of the Congress; the tools to achieve this are monitoring of local and regional democracy and observation of local elections... Both serve to strengthen the political dialogue with governments and, beyond that, to strengthen local and regional democracy.

Today Europe is facing great difficulties: the economic crisis, mistrust in politics and politicians, the lack of solidarity towards refugees and migrants, the rise of

extremism, nationalism and terrorism are threatening our societies. In this context, more than ever, the contribution of local and regional elected representatives to the work of central governments is indispensable. Solutions to many of today's problems lie in municipalities, cities and regions.

Local and regional authorities are the level closest to citizens and to the most vulnerable individuals in the community. We are convinced that extremist and radical leanings can be countered by education and prevention on the ground. Local and regional authorities are also in the front line in dealing with the reception and integration of migrants and refugees, which should be done with full respect for their human rights.

In order to fulfil their tasks, local and regional authorities must have the necessary means and they must be involved in the drawing up and implementation of national and European policies and legislation.

We are convinced that the mobilisation of all forces at all levels of governance will enable us to overcome the major threats to our values and to our societies. The Congress will contribute its part to the activities of the Council of Europe as a whole.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Cypriot Government on their excellent Chairmanship and highlight the fruitful co-operation that the Congress has had with them. We are looking forward to continuing in this spirit of co-operation and dynamic work with the new Czech Chairmanship.

I would like, Mr. President, to express to your Government all the best wishes for this Chairmanship.

Thank you.