

First meeting of the Platform of Exchange– Mount Igman, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 24 May 2022

Speech by Jelena DRENJANIN (Sweden, EPP/PPE), Chair of the Governance Committee

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Mount Igman, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 24 May 2022

Dear Ms Travljanin,
Dear Ms Urumova,
Dear mayors and presidents of local councils,
Dear panellists, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address you today in my capacity as the Chair of the Governance Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and as a member of the municipal assembly of Huddinge in Sweden.

The Congress, as the pan-European forum of elected local and regional politicians from the 46 member states of the Council of Europe, aims to promote and assess local and regional democracy and strengthen local self-government across our continent.

We are very pleased to work with local authorities jointly with their associations, within our first project in Bosnia and Herzegovina that is being implemented across the country, as part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022-2025.

This project promotes new democratic approaches, open government, public ethics, transparent and inclusive local policy making in the country.

It builds on our previous action and joint work with the City of Mostar, where the first deliberative process in a form of a Citizens' Assembly was organised in July 2021, the first of its kind in the country and in the region.

We aimed to create new opportunities for citizens of Mostar. We are convinced that the follow-up that is being given to their recommendations by the City authorities paves the way for new alliances for the sustainable development of the city. I would like to thank the Mayor Kordić and the City Council President Marić, who are here with us today, as well as the Advisor to the City Ms Komadina and all the city councillors for our very successful co-operation, and for their determination in fostering new ways of engaging their constituencies.

At the Congress, we believe in the great value of deliberative democracy as a tool to complement representative democracy and traditional ways of citizen participation. At our session in March 2022, the Congress adopted a *report and a recommendation on use of deliberative methods at local and regional level*. They include the Mostar Citizens' Assembly as a positive example of organising deliberative processes at local level.

We are pleased to continue sustaining the effort of the City of Mostar and hope to work with another local authority in Bosnia and Herzegovina interested in bolstering democratic processes through innovative citizens' deliberations.

Our project includes another very important component which reflects the needs voiced by relevant stakeholders, including the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republika Srpska.

The importance of building democracy from the bottom up is visible now more than ever. The war in Ukraine has brought to the fore the crucial role of local authorities in sustaining their communities and responding to citizens' needs in times of crisis. We all witness this in the firm and admirable response of Ukrainian people to this difficult situation, and we share our solidarity and support with the people and authorities of Ukraine.

The role of local authorities was also made evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, which is still ongoing. Mayors and local councillors are those at the frontline, the first to respond to citizens' needs and provide them with essential services.

They are the ones closest to their citizens in dealing with many other current challenges such as the effects of the continuous climate changes and the ongoing crisis in the energy sector. On the social plan we are witness to the polarisation in our societies fuelled by erosion of democratic values and crisis of citizens' confidence in their governments, which adds to the list of challenges faced by local authorities

Ladies and gentlemen,

The current context in which we live, characterised by these multiple crises, has more than ever brought to the fore the need for advancing accountability and transparency, for tackling systemic inequalities and for enhancing citizen participation in local life.

The Platform of Exchange that is meeting for the first time today, will provide all of you with opportunities to exchange on ongoing challenges and common topics of interest among yourselves and with your peers across Europe. Furthermore, it will allow you to explore the ways in which you can target policies better to citizens' needs and concerns, and to discuss the methods to foster open government for inclusive, transparent and accountable policymaking.

I note with pleasure that representatives of 23 local authorities are present here today, including a member of the Delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Congress.

And within this framework, we are very pleased to co-operate with the associations of local authorities, who play the key role in ensuring the respect of the European Charter of

Local Self-Government and its principles, and in maintaining dialogue with other levels of government to defend the interests of local authorities.

We trust that activities that we are jointly starting today will contribute to further strengthening capacities of local authorities, leading to an environment that is more conducive to change, and to municipalities and cities that are more resilient.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that the citizens remain at the heart of our action. We look forward to working with all of you in enhancing the quality of local democracy and thinking of new ways to engage our citizens in decision-making.

In that regard, I would also like to take the opportunity to recall that this June will mark 10 years since the entry into force of the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right of citizens to participate in the affairs of a local authority. We hope that Bosnia and Herzegovina will soon ratify this very important instrument for citizen participation at local level.

I thank you for your attention and I look forward to our discussion today.