

**The Cities of Remembrance International Network
and the European Committee of the Regions (co-organisers)**

The Dunkirk Appeal

European Cities Actively Defending Europe's Citizens and Its Founding Values

7 May 2026

Jacques Delors Building – Rue Belliard – Brussels, Room JDE 52

**Speaking Points for Ms Martine Dieschburg-Nickels, Deputy Standing Rapporteur for Human Rights
Luxembourg (GILD-ILDG),. (5 minutes)**

- Thank you for this important opportunity to contribute to today's discussion. The Brussels Pledge comes at a critical moment for Europe, marked by increasing geopolitical tensions, democratic challenges, and growing pressures on our societies. Cities and regions are on the frontline of defending European values, supporting citizens, and maintaining social cohesion.
- The Cities of Remembrance network, together with the Dunkirk Appeal, strongly resonate with the core mission of the Congress and the Council of Europe. They reflect our shared commitment to defending democracy, human rights, and peace, while strengthening democratic resilience by placing cities at the heart of this effort.
- Let me recall that the Council of Europe, bringing together 46 member States, is founded on the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Within this framework, the Congress plays a key role in ensuring that these principles are upheld at local and regional level, thereby contributing directly to democratic resilience across Europe.
- Today, we are facing serious and growing concerns. On the one hand, there are increasing risks to pluralist democracy across Europe, including polarisation, declining trust, and the rise of anti-democratic narratives. On the other hand, the ongoing war in Ukraine, an unprecedented challenge to peace and security on our continent, vividly illustrates the fragility of our democratic systems and the urgent need to strengthen democratic resilience, uphold our shared values, and stand in solidarity with those defending them.
- In response, the Congress is already taking concrete action. It monitors the state of local and regional democracy, promotes good governance, and supports human rights, while also fostering cooperation, dialogue, and initiatives that reinforce democratic resilience, particularly in cities affected by crisis and conflict.
- In this context, the Brussels Pledge can bring significant added value. It provides a strong political framework that complements the work of the Congress by mobilising mayors and local leaders around shared commitments, while further strengthening democratic resilience at local and European level.
- It is therefore essential that European mayors fully recognise and engage with the Congress, not only as an institutional body, but as a key partner supporting democratic resilience, amplifying their voice, and reinforcing local and European democracy.
- As underlined by Secretary General Alain Berset, Europe is facing a profound erosion of the international legal order, making democratic resilience more important than ever. He stressed that security cannot be sustained without strong democratic institutions, recalling that "there can be no human rights without democracy, and no democracy without the rule of law."
- This is precisely where the concept of democratic security becomes essential. It recognises that lasting security depends not only on defence, but also on the strength of democratic institutions, the rule of law, and public trust. By reinforcing these foundations, through

inclusive governance, civic engagement, and respect for rights, we can ensure that our societies remain resilient in the face of current and future challenges.

- Nowhere is this more evident than in Ukraine. The Congress continues to stand in unwavering solidarity with Ukraine, condemning the ongoing war of aggression and reaffirming our commitment to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Under extraordinary pressure, Ukrainian local and regional authorities have shown remarkable resilience. They operate on the frontline, delivering essential services, protecting citizens, and upholding fundamental democratic principles. The recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine must be firmly anchored in the principles of the Charter and strong multilevel governance. The Congress is supporting Ukrainian municipalities in their recovery and reconstruction efforts, ensuring that these are transparent, inclusive, and co-ordinated across all tiers of government.
- In this spirit and echoing the ambition of initiatives such as the Dunkirk Appeal, partnerships between Ukrainian and other European cities and regions are very important to sustain resilience and learn from it. We encourage cities and regions across Europe to co-operate closely with their Ukrainian counterparts through peer-to-peer exchanges and targeted support.
- Empowering local communities is essential for sustainable recovery and for advancing Ukraine's democratic reforms and its path towards European integration.