

4th Parliamentary Forum of Regions – Opening Session

Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco, 19 October 2022

Opening address by Leendert VERBEEK, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

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1185 words = 10 minutes

Dear Speaker of the House of Councillors,
Dear Prime Minister,
Dear Minister of the Interior,
Dear President of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council,
Dear President of the Association of Regions of Morocco,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address this Parliamentary Forum of Regions as President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. I would like to thank the organisers for their invitation and for giving me this opportunity.

I am especially pleased to be here today because the Congress and the Kingdom of Morocco share a long-standing relationship of partnership and co-operation dating back to the work of the Commission led by Mr Omar Azziman which resulted in the ambitious project and legislative framework on advanced regionalisation in Morocco.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe itself is a forum – a political assembly of local and regional elected politicians representing 130 000 communities in 46 European countries, with the mission of advancing decentralisation, strengthening local and regional democracy and improving territorial governance across the European continent. We were happy to provide our expertise to the Azziman Commission, based on our experience with the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government - this key European treaty for decentralisation and decentralised governance of territorial communities. The principles embodied in the Charter found their reflection in the laws on advanced regionalisation adopted in 2015.

Ever since, the Congress has been co-operating with your country in accompanying this process of transition to decentralised territorial governance, in partnership with the Ministry of the Interior and its Directorate General of Territorial Authorities, as well as with the three Moroccan associations of territorial authorities.

An important milestone in this partnership was granting to the Kingdom of Morocco the status of Partner for Local Democracy with the Congress, in April 2019. Morocco was the first country to receive this status, which made it possible for the Moroccan delegation of regional, provincial and local authorities to participate in the work of the Congress, its sessions and the meetings of its statutory committees. And I am very pleased to acknowledge Mrs Mbarka BOUAIDA who is not only President of the Association of Regions of Morocco but also Head of the Moroccan Delegation to the Congress.

I am also pleased to see and salute the Presidents of two other national associations, Mr LAYMOURI and Mr DEROUICHE who will address this Forum later today, representing respectively local as well as provincial and prefectural councils. These three associations are our key partners in Congress activities in Morocco.

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Of course, relations between the Congress and Morocco have been part of the broader partnership between your country and the Council of Europe, which is reflected in the successive Neighbourhood Partnerships with Morocco. The current such Partnership -started this year and will span to 2025. It is in this framework that the Congress has been providing its support to strengthening local and regional self-government and promoting citizen participation at local and regional level in this country.

In doing so, we rely on the standards and principles established by the European Charter of Local Self-Government. We rely on our experience in implementing the Charter in European countries, and we will continue sharing this experience with our Moroccan partners, through expert support and peer exchanges with their European counterparts.

We began this work some ten years ago, and it is encouraging to see the progress achieved over this period.

In November 2017, I had the privilege to participate in a colloquy on regionalisation in Morocco, organised by the Congress and the Moroccan House of Representatives.

Back then, in my former capacity as Chair of the Congress Monitoring Committee, I presented the principles of the Charter and the key challenges we are facing in implementing the Charter in Europe. Our own experience, and discussions during the colloquy, revealed that these challenges are similar in all countries, on both shores of the Mediterranean, and that common approaches can be applied to find solutions to them – as long as we keep the principles of the Charter as the guiding principles in the search for solutions.

I am pleased to be back in Rabat, five years later, at the Forum aimed at strengthening and institutionalising relations between the State and the region, as well as between the region and other levels of territorial governance – provinces, prefectures and local communities.

In this area, our experience shows that the first key challenge arises when there is a lack of clarity about the competences attributed to each level of governance – as exclusive, shared or delegated by higher levels. A clear allocation of powers must be provided in the law. The second challenge comes from a lack of proper mechanisms for ensuring adequate financial resources for each level of governance; resources that match the competences and tasks allocated to each level. Finally, the third challenge is the lack of consultations and dialogue between national and subnational authorities, and a lack of mechanisms for interaction and coordination between different levels of governance.

The Congress considers the principle of consultation as a key principle of the Charter of Local Self-Government because it encompasses all matters of concern for territorial authorities including: competences, finances and territorial boundaries.

Regular dialogue between the different levels gives an opportunity to share experiences and leads to better policy decisions and for the ownership of those decisions by all participants in the dialogue. In the long run, it also leads to stronger accountability and trust by citizens.

I am very pleased to see all levels of government represented at this Forum to help establish responsible, shared and balanced governance and respond to citizens' expectations. The contractual approach, proposed for discussions, can certainly be one format to achieve this objective.

I welcome the emphasis on the shared governance. In Europe, the Congress has been promoting the concept of multi-level governance based on the shared responsibility towards citizens; a governance where each level is strong with its own competences, resources and decision-making autonomy, and where all levels work together to address common challenges.

The COVID pandemic has proved yet again that the multi-level governance approach ensures higher quality decisions and better use of resources tailored to specific needs in crisis situations. We are facing multiple crises

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today and the need for shared, multi-level governance to find adequate responses to these challenges is more critical than ever. I am confident that the results of this Forum will contribute to establishing such system of decentralised shared governance in Morocco.

For its part, the Congress will continue to pursue and strengthen its partnership with Morocco, both through peer dialogue with the Moroccan delegation and through our activities here on the ground, to ensure the success of advanced regionalisation in your country.

I wish this Forum every success, and look forward to your deliberations.

Thank you.