

The Congress of local and regional authorities



Conference on cooperation for Local Government development in the South Caucasus

Kutaisi, 30 November 2010

Speech by Günther Krug, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be with you today in order to explore together with you ways and means to strengthen local democracy in the South Caucasus.

As many of you know, the Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) were born out of the destruction and the violent confrontations in the Balkans, with the clear necessity to restore trust and to rebuild confidence between former enemies.

When it launched this initiative back in 1993, the Congress of Local and regional Authorities of the Council of Europe was driven by the strong belief that consolidating and fostering local self-government and carrying out concrete projects on the ground, namely at community level, and by promoting projects involving the communities themselves, was the most fruitful way to achieve this goal.

To this very day, we remain firmly convinced that local democracy remains the cornerstone of democratic stability within the region. The Congress attaches utmost importance to a stable democratic environment enabling people to become informed and active citizens building democracy from grassroots level onwards.

I also want to state very clearly that although the Congress has noted the country's commitment to improve local and regional democracy, and found its legislation to be on the whole compatible with the European Charter of Local Self-Government, improvements still remained to be made – notably, in the simplification of the public administrative procedures in order to ensure the most effective use of political rights by citizens.

Needless to say, it is a great pleasure for me to address you today and to reaffirm our commitment; the commitment of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, to advancing local and regional democracy in South Caucasus.

I am grateful to the organisers for giving the Congress the opportunity to look at how the situation has evolved since our last seminar here in Kutaisi in October 2009 and to learn from you and to share with you what action has been undertaken and should further be undertaken by the Congress in order to contribute to the democratic development of the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Certain things never change, and we in the Congress remain firmly convinced that local democracy in the South Caucasus, in particular here in Georgia plays a key role in holding



together multiethnic communities and in fostering intercultural dialogue within and between them. Local self-government was crucial in restoring trust and building confidence in communities torn by the Balkan wars, which is why Local Democracy Agencies, LDAs, launched by the Congress, have become such a success all over the Balkans. There are now up to 11 LDAs in this area which have become local focal points for democratic change and development in the Balkans.

Local and regional self-government structures are also more apt in establishing practical ties of cooperation with their counterparts across the region – cooperation which is sometimes difficult to establish at national level but of which successful, dynamic examples exist at local and regional level, namely under the aegis of the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe, NALAS.

This capacity of local and regional authorities for networking and active partnership at their level is the reason why the Congress is so insistent on greater practical cooperation between regional entities and municipalities. However, this cooperation must be based on, and carried out within, a clear legal framework. Undoubtedly, ALDA can play an important role in the advancement of democracy and contributing to stability in the South Caucasus.

I wish also to say a few words of recognition to the current President Mr. Per Vinther on his ongoing commitment to the work of the Association and, most importantly, the improvement of local democracy and self-governance through the targeted input by the ALDA network in spreading expertise and good practices, encouraging exchange between the so-called 'old' and 'new' democracies and building new and lasting partnerships for the benefit of the citizens.

I wish also to highlight the contribution of each individual LDA. Since their creation they have been a permanent reference framework for the Congress on local democracy, starting on very difficult grounds in the South East of Europe and aiming to contribute to the consolidation of the democratic development in the South Caucasus.

Last but not least, I wish to encourage all those involved on a daily basis in the running of the LDAs: Delegates on the ground; the local authorities in the host towns; the local and regional elected representatives throughout Europe represented within the Congress, who strongly believe that this kind of active partnership is beneficial for all communities involved; the men and the women in the local and regional partner towns who are doing such outstanding work, and also the numerous non-governmental organisations with whom the LDAs have established a fruitful partnership.

All of these players are helping in giving a concrete meaning to the Council of Europe's values, whilst disseminating the principles advocated by the Congress, firstly through concrete action on the ground in South-East Europe and now here in Georgia since the opening of an LDA in Kutaisi in 2006.

As you all know the Congress monitors closely the evolution of local democracy and self-government in the Balkans and in the South Caucasus through regular country reports, recommendations and resolutions, as well as through the observation of elections and targeted fact-finding missions.

I would like to express my hope that our exchanges on past and ongoing programmes and joint ventures in the region will help us to get a better understanding of the needs and the possible offers that ALDA together with Congress can make in order to become more and more operational in the region, we stand ready to help you to improve the democratic record of your country for the benefit of your citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, I would like to stress that we are looking forward to a higher pace of progress in effective local democracy in this country.

We in the Congress do believe that you are already on the right track when establishing new effective partnerships at local level which are more citizen-oriented, more participatory and therefore more effective. This is what we are seeking to build, and what we are building together. And together, we shall succeed.

Thank you for your attention!