

Forum of the World Regional and Sub-national Legislative Assemblies (Milan, 23 October 2015)

Regional and local representation for true global democracy

Presentation by Clemens Lammerskitten, Vice-President of the Congress

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Clemens Lammerskitten, I have been Member of the Niedersachsen Parliament in my home country, Germany, since 2008 and I am here to represent the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, in my capacity of Vice-President of the Congress.

The Congress is a political assembly, composed of 648 elected politicians, representing the 200 000 local and regional authorities of the 47 Council of Europe member states. As an institutional body of the Council of Europe, the Congress focuses on the local and regional dimension of democracy, rule of law and human rights. Its main objective is to promote decentralisation through the transfer of political powers and financial resources to the municipalities and regions, and to ensure that policy decisions are made at the closest possible level to the citizens.

The institutional core mission of the Congress is the monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy in member states, which is carried out via the assessment of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, opened for signature 30 years ago, on 15 October 1985. This Charter, which is now ratified by all 47 Council of Europe member States, is the only legally binding international instrument of its kind.

The Congress has actually two very important reports under preparation: Mrs. Mialot Muller from France will present "Trends in regionalisation in Europe". This report will analyse challenges and common developments in the field of regional self government. And M. Lambertz from Belgium will tackle the topic: "Autonomy and borders in an evolving Europe". Having in mind the Ukrainian crisis, this topic deals among other questions with procedures, how to organise rational, fair and transparent interaction between the levels of

government, if there might be need to change borders. I am convinced, that these reports will be of particular interest for the CALRE members too and we will report back to you in your next meeting about the outcome of these drafts.

Building on the success of the Local Charter, the Congress had striven to create a similar Charter for regional autonomy. Unfortunately, the political environment has proved to be unfavourable to push through such an ambitious project at the ministerial level. This common will and work, however, has led to the adoption in 2009 of the “Reference Framework for Regional Democracy” by the European ministers responsible for local and regional affairs, and subsequently endorsed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. This collection of rights and duties of regional entities is designed to give recommendations on what regional structures should be like in Europe, and to inspire countries seeking to introduce or reform their regional cleavage.

Within the Congress, it is the Chamber of Regions, which has the particular role of following political developments as regards regional autonomy in Europe. In line with its political priorities for the period of 2015-2016, the Chamber of Regions has paid special attention to major recent trends in this area, such as the growing support of extremist populist parties, the rise of nationalist tensions in regions, and the pursuit of regions towards more decentralisation – sometimes going against centralising attempts of national governments. In this connection, the Chamber shall pursue its work in related fields, such as: regionalisation and devolution in Europe, regional and minority languages in Europe; movements for reinforced regional autonomy or independence; promoting public ethics and preventing corruption, and also very importantly, co-operation with European associations of regions.

Most of the European regions with legislative powers are represented in the Congress’ Chamber of Regions, which offers a unique framework for dialogue and co-operation between them. The Congress is also open to co-operate with non-European regions, especially in the neighboring countries of the Council of Europe.

Apart from the political scope laid down in its priorities, the work of the Chamber of Regions relies on the adoption of different reports with a strong regional dimension. As a final point, let me just mention two of them: the report on “Trends in regionalisation in Council of Europe member states”, which has been debated earlier this week, during the 29th Session of the Chamber of Regions; and the report under preparation on “Autonomy and Borders in an Evolving Europe – Principles, frameworks and procedures for protecting and modifying status, competences and borders of sub-national entities within domestic law”, to which the Rapporteur is my colleague Karl Heinz Lambertz, who is also here with us today, as President of the Association of European Border Regions.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Organisers for the opportunity to address you today, and wish you a very fruitful conference!