

**6th European Conference
on Sustainable Cities and Towns
(Dunkerque, France, 19-21 May 2010)**

**Speech by Gaye Doganoglu,
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Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
Council of Europe**

Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is great honour to speak to you today as we are just concluding, here in Dunkerque, the sixth European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns. I would like to thank Mr Delebarre for the warmest welcome and the excellent organisation.

The success of this event, the largest in Europe dedicated to local sustainable development, shows that local and regional authorities are resolutely at the forefront of building a sustainable society.

We all share the conviction that building a Europe of sustainable communities is an imperative of our time. It is indeed the only way forward, a way which will provide the optimal response to the challenges faced by our societies today. Our cities need a lot of care and we need to imagine tomorrow's world in a far more human way.

The Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities sees sustainable development as an integral part of local democracy and citizens' rights and an essential part of governance. It sees it as the process of building a territory capable of maintaining itself in time, preserving its own identity and that of its community, and keeping the momentum of its development dynamics.

It is an undisputable fact that over decades of democratic development on our continent, local authorities have become indispensable partners of national governments in addressing the concerns of our citizens, and today even global problems require local and regional action.

The process of decentralisation, which has been boosted by European integration, has created a tremendous shift of economic and social power towards territorial authorities, and with it an increase in our capacity. The scope of our competences is enlarging, as is our resource management capacity.

In today's urbanised world, local authorities bear the primary responsibility for action to ensure a high quality of life in cities, and a sustainable future. However, achieving sustainability calls for a fundamental change in the way we organise our daily lives and our consumption patterns, and in the way we plan and manage our affairs. We have to lead by example and mobilise our citizens towards the transformation of our cities. Here, too, we, local representatives, play a crucial role in bringing about this change.

European governments have recognised this role of local authorities in building democracy from the bottom up, first, by adopting 25 years ago the Council of Europe European Charter of Local Self-Government, and now, in the EU Lisbon Treaty which reaffirms the importance of local autonomy and introduces the concept of territorial cohesion, a state that can only be achieved and maintained through efforts at the level closest to citizens.

Having made this first step with the recognition of local self-government, member states must follow up with further action: involving local and regional authorities in their decision-making, seeking their contribution in national policy-making, taking on board their practical experience on the ground – in a word, creating a system of multi-level governance based on dialogue, consensus-seeking and shared responsibilities, in which each level of government will represent its added value.

This is why we urge European governments to consider territorial authorities as their partners and not just as executors of national or European policies. This is why we insist that the role of local and regional governments be included, defined and supported within the EU Strategy 2020, in particular their role in building a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy across our continent. Ladies and Gentlemen,

The local authorities gathered here today show that they are seeking a vision for tomorrow, that they are inventing new ways to make cities more liveable, more desirable, more sustainable and prepared for the future.

This is the spirit reflected in the European Urban Charter: Manifesto for a new urbanity, which was adopted by the Council of Europe Congress two years ago and which offers a philosophy for a new urban environment and modern urban governance.

This manifesto conveys an ambitious and demanding message to all those involved in urban development. It is an invitation to local authorities, in all their diversities and on the basis of shared European values, to implement the principles of ethical governance, sustainable development and greater solidarity in their public policies.

It is our vision for a modern urban community that is citizen-centred, cohesive, sustainable and knowledge-driven.

Our action for sustainability is also based on the conviction that a comprehensive and multi-level approach is needed to succeed and for this vision to be turned into a reality. Indeed, local and regional authorities are showing remarkable ingenuity experimenting with what fits best in their communities. Often they develop far more ambitious goals and voluntary commitments than their governments.

We are convinced that national governments must take advantage of the competences, capacity, experience and commitment of territorial authorities, in a word, that they must trust us.

How many international agreements or strategic documents are still ignoring the role of local governments? How many gatherings like today's are needed? How many declarations from local and regional authorities are necessary? The Congress will continue advocating for the role of cities and regions and calling for its formal recognition, not only at European level but also globally, because the challenges of this century are global.

The Council of Europe's Congress has been actively committed to this objective. As President of the Committee on Sustainable Development, I can also tell you that our thematic work and action regarding for example climate change, urban biodiversity and a new energy culture, are aimed at supporting local and regional authorities in their efforts and in raising their profile at the international level.

Local and regional authorities are indispensable stakeholders in any climate agreement. Cities and regions represent the most appropriate level of governance for public awareness-raising and citizens' mobilisation, and they can assume an even stronger role in combating climate change

and adapting to its consequences. But to this end, the necessary political and financial support is needed from both international organisations and national governments.

During the Conference in Copenhagen, the Congress delegation, together with that of the EU Committee of the Regions and other partners and networks, united to voice this position. It is also our position that action on climate is also a matter of good governance and of human rights. We argue for the human rights dimension – the right to a healthy environment – to be introduced into any climate deal, if we are to ensure a lasting and sustainable response to the challenge.

Finally, I would like to mention an annual event which we are promoting: the European Local Democracy Week. It is organised in the week of 15 October, on the occasion of the anniversary of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The idea is to bring together local authorities and populations, boost the democratic process and involve citizens in public affairs at local level. For the year 2010, we have chosen a common theme on sustainability and climate change.

Indeed, we strongly believe in the creativity of the citizens living in our cities, we believe that collectively we can imagine a better future for our cities and for our children. Because, when we speak about sustainability, we speak about our children, about prosperity, about their prosperity; we speak about justice in a wider sense, between generations and more widely, and we speak about politics and about human rights.

To conclude, I would like to say that the Congress has been an active supporter of cities networks and today, I strongly reaffirm that we will continue working in the same direction. We support the Dunkerque Declaration for sustainability and the Climate change Call.

Global challenges ignore borders, and we can only achieve sustainability and territorial cohesion together. So let's continue joining our forces for action and coming together to share our experience.

Thank you.