



**REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**



ADDRESS BY THE ACTING PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
MS. CONSTANTINA AKELIDOU, M.P.,
AT THE 49TH UCEU CONFERENCE - GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Famagusta Gate, Thursday, 29 October 2009

Distinguished Mayors of the Capitals of the EU member states, candidate countries for accession to the EU and neighbouring Middle East countries,
Representatives of EU Capitals' local authorities,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to address the 49th Conference and General Assembly of the Union of EU Capitals, on behalf of the President of the House of Representatives, Mr. Marios Garoyian, who is currently paying an official visit abroad.

A word of praise is due for the commendable work the UCEU has accomplished since its creation, by bringing together European Capitals and fostering mutual understanding, solidarity and regular communication between them and their citizens.

Nicosia, a Capital with a history dating centuries back, is all the more honoured to hold the Presidency of the UCEU for 2009. This highlights Cyprus' significant role, as a bridge of dialogue and cooperation between Europe and the Middle East, while adding to the dynamics of the city of Nicosia towards further development.

The theme chosen, "Inclusive and Sustainable Capital Cities", which eminent guests will further enrich with their knowledge and expertise, points, above anything else, to the essential role local government is vested with, in upholding and further strengthening democracy, good governance and the rule of law. Democracy, in both its representative and participatory forms, cannot possibly exist, if local government is not empowered to play its full role in the overall administrative system, in such a way as to improve citizens' quality of life, enabling their effective participation in public affairs.

Capital cities, being a vibrant and continuously evolving nucleus within states, with a significant social capital, infrastructure and resources, are presented both with significant opportunities and challenges, in their efforts towards sustainable development. Efforts by Capital cities towards best coupling economic growth with due respect to the environment and social welfare, should be a part of a comprehensive and inclusive policy. A policy, which would seek to remedy existing social imbalances and address effectively all forms of divisions and exclusions. All the more so, in the face of today's global challenges, which point to the urgent need for greater synergy and solidarity, as well as for sounder and more resistant institutions, starting from the local level.

Local authorities are in need of greater support by the State. Courageous steps are essential on behalf of EU member states, in terms of decentralization and redistribution of powers. These must be reflected in such reforms of legal frameworks, which will empower local administration with increased competencies and resources, thereby ensuring its autonomy and credibility. The Cyprus Government, acknowledging in local administration a valuable partner towards promoting its development planning, has been gradually increasing the powers and competencies of local authorities, along with increased financial support. For its part, the House of Representatives stands firmly by local authorities, fully exercising its legislative and oversight role, in order to ensure protection of and best promote citizens' rights and interests.

Distinguished Participants,

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, of which the UCEU celebrates the 20th anniversary with a symbolic award, Nicosia remains the only divided European capital. I should like to reaffirm, also at this level, the adherence of the Greek Cypriot side to the on-going negotiations between President Christofias and the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mr. Talat, towards a just and viable settlement of the Cyprus problem. A settlement, in accordance with international law, pertinent UN resolutions and the European principles. A settlement, which will ensure respect of the fundamental human rights and interests of the whole people of Cyprus: Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Maronites, Armenians and Latins. A solution, which will reunite Cyprus and its people, including its capital city of Nicosia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our common vision of a better world could not be materialized in the absence of local democracy, or greater sensitivity towards the less privileged regions and people. It could not be materialized either in the absence of respect for diversity, or of solidarity in upholding human rights and social justice. EU Capital cities have a substantial role to play in this respect. It is our duty, as politicians, to support, in every way we can, their efforts towards achieving sustainable growth and social cohesion to the benefit of our citizens.

In congratulating, once again, the UCEU for its excellent work, I wish you a successful outcome of your deliberations and a memorable stay in Cyprus.