**5th European Congress of Local Governments on the challenges faced by local authorities and tasks for the future**

**For two days (8-9 April), Krakow has become the center of Polish local governments. In the spirit of the motto of the Congress: "Self-government - together for the future" a lot of attention of our participants was devoted to issues such as finding sources for regional development financing, smart-solutions, cross-border cooperation, creating favorable conditions for investment, integration of higher education with market needs as well as various issues related to culture and promotion of local homelands. Furthermore, a summary of the first year of newly elected local authorities has been conducted, prompted by the upcoming elections to the European Parliament and autumn parliamentary elections. For the fifth consecutive time already, Kraków hosted the most important politicians, local government officials, business representatives and local leaders from all over Europe.**

- *Good cooperation between central and local governments, as well as cooperation of local governments and businesses can help to improve the standard of living for Poles* - said the Chairman of the Programme Council of the Economic Forum in Krynica and the founder of the European Congress of Local Governments - **Zygmunt Berdychowski**.

**Meeting Space**

About 2,300 participants from nearly 40 countries, including over 100 journalists, took part in the 5th European Congress of Local Governments. The program consisted of 80 events: thematic blocks, panels, workshops, lectures, presentations and discussions in the "Stories of Success" cycle. Various discussions have traditionally been assigned into thematic paths: Finances, Society, Innovations, Economy, Environment, Good Practices and Health.

The congress was attended by, among others: **Olgierd Geblewicz**, Marshal of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and President of the Union of the Provinces of the Republic of Poland, **Marek Woźniak**, Marshal of the Greater Poland Voivodeship (Chairman of the Polish delegation in the European Committee of Regions, Vice-president of the European Committee of Regions), **Cezary Przybylski**, Marshal of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship, **Władysław Ortyl**, Marshal of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, **Elżbieta Anna Polak**, Marshal of the Lubusz Voivodeship, **Jacek Majchrowski**, Mayor of Kraków, **Paweł Rabiej**, Vice-Mayor of Warsaw, **Hanna Zdanowska**, Mayor of Łódź, **Bogdan Wenta**, Mayor of Kielce, **Piotr Grzymowicz**, Mayor of Olsztyn, **Wojciech Szczurek**, Mayor of Gdynia, **Krzysztof Żuk**, Mayor of Lublin, **Zygmunt Frankiewicz**, Mayor of Gliwice and President of the Association of Polish Cities, **Piotr Ćwik**, Voivode of Lesser Poland, **Witold Kozłowski**, Marshal of the Lesser Poland Voivodeship. The most important representatives of the central government were also present: **Beata Szydło**, Deputy Prime Minister and Chairwoman of the Social Committee of the Council of Ministers, **Andrzej Adamczyk**, Minister of Infrastructure, **Łukasz Szumowski**, Minister of Health and **Zdzisław Krasnodębski**, Vice-President of the European Parliament.

The number of our foreign guests has also grown this year. The 5th edition of the Congress was attended by guests such as **Risto Poutiainen**, Governor of North Karelia (Finland), **Guillermo Ramirez Martin**, Secretary General of the Association of European Border Regions (Spain), **Eva Hallström**, Regional Councillor of Värmland, Member and Chair of the Committee on Energy and Climate of the Assembly of European Regions (Sweden), **Tautvydas Tamulevičius**, Deputy Minister, Home Office (Lithuania), **Jose Ignacio Sanchez Amor**, Secretary of State for Territorial Policy (Spain), **Emil Boc**, Prime Minister (2008-2012), Mayor of Cluj-Napoca (Romania), **Irakli Kadagishvili**, Governor of Kakheti (Georgia), **Martin Zeil**, Partner of SLB Kloepper Rechtsanwälte, former Minister of Economy of Bavaria (Germany) and **Francesco Tufarelli**, Director General of the Office for Regional Affairs and Autonomy, Chancellery of the Prime Minister (Italy).

An important event of this year's **European Congress of Local Governments** was the presentation of the **2nd Financial Ranking of Territorial Self-Government in Poland**, prepared from the initiative of the Foundation Institute for Eastern Studies, the organizer of the Congress, by experts from the Cracow University of Economics, chaired by Professor **Krzysztof Surówka**, Vice-Rector for Education and EUK Students. The authors of the report examined the finances of all local government units, focusing on their own revenues, investment expenditures and EU funds raised for the implementation of tasks. By adopting uniform criteria for each surveyed entity, they selected the most economical communes and cities in Poland.

Last year, a lot of attention was paid to the need for modifying the legislation and the extend of powers that local governments should have, as well as the need to re-establish relations between the state and local governments. This year's Congress was a perfect opportunity to face the question of how successful the last year’s discussions were, especially in the view of the difficult situation related to the teachers' protests and the ongoing discussion related to the Polish education system.

**5th European Congress of Local Governments Awards**

The first day of **the European Congress of Local Governments** was concluded with a gala during which awards for local governmentshave been presented. There were as many as twelve awards given out that evening. The ceremony was graced by the **Zabrze Philharmonic Orchestra** conducted by **Sławomir Orzechowski.**

Two of the awards were granted on the basis of the **2nd Financial Ranking of Local Governments** in Poland. The award presented by the Deputy Prime Minister for Social Affairs, Beata Szydło, was received by the Mayor of Podkowa Leśna, **Artur Tusiński**. Podkowa Leśna turned out to be the best in the Municipality category of the ranking. The same award went to the Head of District of Poznań - **Jan Grabkowski**, whose district won the category of the ranking's Best District. The award was presented by the President of TUW Polski Zakład Ubezpieczeń Wzajemnych - Rafał Kilinski and the Rector of the University of Economics in Krakow - professor Andrzej Chochol. "Wprost" weekly presented a separate category of awards called the 'Wprost Golden Gey'. The 'Golden Key', which is a highly valued distinction has been awarded to two local government officials - the presidents of Cracow and Gliwice. **Jacek Majchrowski** (Cracow) and **Zygmunt Frankiewicz** (Gliwice) were honoured for their outstanding contribution to the development of the Polish local government. The representatives of medical companies have also received their awards. '**The Golden List of Polish Health'**, i.e. a list of the most important healthcare brands in Poland, was created in cooperation with the consultancy company Acropolis, Forbes Polska and the Institute for Market and Social Research IBRIS. The ranking was developed based on financial data and opinion polls in a partnership with the Polish Association of Employers of the Pharmaceutical Industry. LuxMed won the first place on the list and its award was picked up by **Bartosz Kapczyński** - a member of the board. Remaining awards went to **Krzysztof Kępiński** - board member GlaxoSmith Kline, producer of Rutinoscorbin and VoltarenMax; **Karol Piasecki** – vice-president of the Dr. Max company, **Adam Błażeczek** - financial director of Gemini Polska, **Anna Robak-Reczek** from Polfa Warsaw, producer of Acard and **Agnieszka Lubkowska** - director for production at TEVA, producer of Flegamina. Certificates confirming company’s place in the ranking were handed to all laureates by Katarzyna Dubno, vice-president of the Polish Association of Employers of the Pharmaceutical Industry. The higlight of the gala was the moment when a **special award of the City of Krakow** was given out on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the ABSL Business Service Leaders Association operations. President of the Association's board, **Piotr Dziwok**, received the award directly from the hands of Krakow’s Mayor, prof. Jacek Majchrowski.

**Focus on Big Cities**

In the world of globalization, cities want to have more and more influence on politics. They organize in networks, which later can become efficent tool of diplomacy-making. Cities are able to find themselves in the era of globalization, but what is required from them is a deliberate cooperation between one another as well as formation of smart alliances – these are some of the major conclusions from the plenary session, which took place on the first day of the 5th European Congress of Local Governments in Cracow. Panelists from France, Romania and Poland focused on the opportunities for cities which can be obtained through building of a network of their own, personal connections. Thanks to these even small municipalities can become significant partners for the central governments. – There is no need to overthink and overcomplicate this issue. What we need to start with are simple partnerships between cities allowing us to jointly solve similar problems, such as migration and security. These experiences will later help to improve the live of our citizens by sharing experiences and working together - said **Emil Boc**, president of the city of Cluj-Napoca and former Prime Minister of Romania. He has also noticed that during the rapid development and catching up of the civilizational differences between the East and the West, cities in the former communist countries have a chance to avoid mistakes made earlier by the Wester cities. - I believe that the less the government interferes in local affairs, the better - said **Grzegorz Napieralski**, senator of the Republic of Poland. **Jacek Majchrowski**, Mayor of Krakow and Vice-President of the Union of Polish Cities, agreed with him.

**Strong Local Government as a Cornerstone of Democracy**

Nowadays local governments are facing more and more difficult tasks, and the crisis of Western democracy is not helping them either. These days more and more people want a strong central government. The fight for the restoration of faith in the politics was reflected in the debate held during the plenary session that concluded the European Congress of Local Governments. The debate focused on the idea that strong local governments can and should serve as cornerstone of democracy. The guests of the plenary session have mainly discussed the problem of decentralisation and its importance in the political live of Poles in the recent years. **Mr. Antoine Godbert,** City Council Delegate for European Affairs at the French Tours referred to the "yellow vests" movement that have horrified France since last fall. *It is the local authority that is responsible for talking to dissatisfied people, we are the first line of contact with the citizens.* According to him, the current crisis of democracy should be met with a response at all levels of power – starting at local and finnishing on the European level. **Martin Zeil**, former Minister of Economy of Free State Bavaria had a very similar opinion. He pointed out that political forces using nationalistic rhetoric may not only distance Europe from the goal of further integration, but also lead to an ever greater concentration of power at the central level of each country. – *The solution to this situation should be the faith in the renewal of politics at the European level, as well as the idea of social justice* – he argued. The Polish perspective was presented by **prof. Zdzisław Krasnodębski,** - *After all, social divisions regarding views do not run according to the voivodships' borders* – he said. According to him when dealing with a democratic system a certain level of decentralization is always necessary. Otherwise, the power concentrated in the country's capital may weigh dangerously close towards authoritarianism.

Veolia Polska was the strategic partner of the 5th European Congress of Local Governments. The Towarzystwo Ubezpieczeń Wzajemnych Polski Zakład Ubezpieczeń Wzajemnych was the main partner of the Congress’s gala.