

### **Kari Nordheim-Larsen: Opening speech 20th European Days Bergen 6.-8. June 2013**

It is a great pleasure for me as president of the association of governors in Europe to wish you a warm welcome to the 20<sup>th</sup> European Days here in Norway and Bergen. We are pleased to see that close to 100 colleagues from about 20 European countries and important organizations have arrived in Bergen to participate in information sharing on an important and difficult issue, the question of balancing economic development and respect for the environment. My hope is that we all during the meeting and the four roundtables will get good examples of how we can find the right balance and most important how we through new ways of thinking and technical inventions can reach both aspirations, a blooming economic future for Europa without harming valuable environmental treasures for coming generations.

It is impossible to address these questions without taking into account that Europe now is in a situation of economic recession. This can unfortunately lead to constraints on national budgets, increased level of unemployment, more social inequality and maybe a risk for social unrest. This urgent challenge can not be wiped under the carpet when governors meet, and we are invited to discuss the future of Europe and the European Union under the somewhat provocative question: Exemplary of suicidal Europe? I will certainly not conclude before we have even started the discussions, but I am very sure that the answer will not be suicidal but rather some good thinking on how a well organized Europa can continue to give our inhabitants a platform to create a good live for themselves and the society and be a factor for stabilization and peace in the world.

During the Bergen meeting we will have something to celebrate. It is the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary for the European Days. I have participated in only three of these meetings. I have always returned back to my daily work with new perspectives and ideas. I am sure that during these 20 years there has been important information sharing and mutual inspiration with impact on the quality of our interesting and demanding roles back home. Norway was lucky to be the host when this event will be celebrated.

It is my hope that the Bergen meeting will give food for thoughts useful in our daily challenges. We also look forward to give you a glimpse of our country and Bergen is a very good place to do so. We don't have a history with nobilities and beautiful castles and palaces we have admired in many of your countries. Norway is a cold, arid and mountainous country and historically we had to struggle hard to survive. We could always mention the brave Vikings, but we know well enough that their deeds were not only good.

Like most people we love our country and feel proud as well. We have beautiful landscape with fjords and steep mountains, people live scattered in small towns and villages covering the country from north to south. In modern times we have also benefitted from a solid economy and so far we are not affected by the economic crises. We are eager to show you some of what's characteristic about our country and the Norwegian way of living and I hope that will make us good hosts. I hope you will enjoy the social part of the program and can leave Bergen on Saturday with good memories of 20<sup>th</sup> European days.

