



SUSTAINABLE AND VIBRANT TERRITORIES FOR A LEADING EUROPE

We, local and regional elected representatives gathered in national associations of local and regional governments across 41 European countries, members of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), strive for “*Empowering local and regional Europe, while promoting a more inclusive and sustainable future for all citizens and generations to come*”. We share values of local democracy, rule of law, solidarity, equality, diversity and sustainability, embedded in the 2030 Agenda, the European Green Deal, and the European Treaties and Charters.

6 concrete proposals to bring Europe closer to its citizens

1. **A permanent mechanism for citizen consultation** in the form of citizen panels, with people drawn by lot and brought together to reflect on major European societal issues, must be formalised.
2. **Every year, 9 May should be dedicated to a debate on the European project**, its benefits and challenges such how to build a decarbonised society, in every school and in every municipality and region in Europe.
3. **Relaunch twinning** to offer all young people the opportunity to visit their twin city in Europe before the age of 18. This will contribute to the construction of a European citizenship, also in the framework of a work on memory to share where the idea of European construction comes from.
4. **An Erasmus for territorial civil servants** - The mobility of public agents is written into the texts but in reality, it does not really exist. We propose an Erasmus dedicated to civil servants on the basis of an exchange between local authorities (twinned if possible) over a period of 3 months, 6 months or one year. This period would be integrated into the career of the civil servant as a training period and would give rise to aid from the European Union or the State to the participants and/or the authorities concerned.
5. **Other European universities** - beyond the two Colleges of Europe - can be created to train people in a European spirit.
6. **A Europe proud of its cultural and linguistic diversity**: Invest in language learning so that by 2040 every European can at least speak English and two other European languages, in addition to their own.

Fostering citizens' engagement

Given their proximity to people, communities and places they serve, local governments play a central role in fostering participation of citizens in the public debate across Europe: they are key to enable people to have their say and co-design public policies that will impact their lives. Beyond traditional forms of participation such as voting or referendum, it takes the form of promoting community-led projects, participative budgeting, consultations through citizens panels, mobilisation of young people through youth councils and new experimentations of participation of all groups (migrants, senior citizens...).

- ✓ This is the entire **ecosystem of action** that Europe must take into account when launching legislative proposals and strategies, because they will have an impact on local capacity to act.

Leaving no one and no place behind

The sustainable, inclusive and resilient future of Europe can only exist if no one and no place is left behind. All territories matter in Europe, from the small villages in rural areas to very dense urban centres of Europe's metropolitan areas. Therefore, the principles of subsidiarity and local self-government must be guaranteed.

- ✓ National governments and the EU need to **address territorial disparities**, and strive to give local and regional governments the means to achieve the best possible quality of life, access to public services, health care and education wherever people live.
- ✓ Specific attention must be brought to territories under threat of **depopulation** and desertification, within but also beyond cohesion policy
- ✓ **A Europe that recognises the value of territorial diversity is needed** – supporting all territories whatever their size and tailoring its approach and funding conditions

A Europe that respects its entire population

If Europe is to be a leader and live up to its commitments to the fundamental rights and principles enshrined in treaties, the institutions and governments at all levels will require transformational approaches, honesty and bravery to tackle root causes of social injustice and discrimination which are complex and varied.

- ✓ Women who make up half or more of the population—must have equal representation and influence at all levels in policy-making and implementation, especially in European institutions, with quotas if necessary. Currently, women account for around 30% of municipal councillors, but only 15% of mayors. And at European level, women represent 40% of members of the European Parliament but only around 25% of the members of the Committee of the Regions.
- ✓ Traditionally marginalised groups including, among others: young people, ethnic minorities, disabled persons, LGBTQI+, migrants must have a voice in shaping the policies that impact their daily lives and must find their way in our society with no discrimination and with the same chances of integration.
- ✓ This could be achieved by removing barriers to voting and standing for elected office, including: lowering minimum age requirements to 16 years for European elections, ensuring high quality affordable childcare, and pursuing participative approaches to governance at all levels.

Migration: from emergencies to long-term strategies

In the next 30 years, there will be many waves of migration in the world and towards Europe in particular, due to wars, poor economic conditions, survival, or climate change. In order to prevent the potential failure of the European Union and to avoid the erection of border fences in Europe, we strongly support the proposal of the Commission for an efficient strengthening, management and safeguarding of the external European border. A common *European asylum system* has to be based on the principle of fair burden sharing between Member States. People with migrant background bring many positive effects to our European society. Respect and dignified inclusion in our municipalities and regions are needed to ensure the best possible integration. Coordination between all players concerned including all spheres of governance is essential.

- ✓ Improving the capacity of local and regional governments to better implement integration policies, while strengthening the role of national associations of local and regional governments, is crucial.
- ✓ The latter are also key actors in strengthening coordination between different spheres of government in developing adequate joint European responses for migration.
- ✓ Europe must also secure long-term structural funding to support local and regional governments in their endeavor, beyond short-term actions and promoting the exchange of knowledge which must remain at the heart of European action.
- ✓ One of the major issues both for Europe and its local and regional governments is also to overcome negative attitudes towards migration, including through building global citizenship (education and awareness raising through local and regional governments).
- ✓ Support for decentralised cooperation between local and regional governments of arrival and origin can help to give people better opportunities in their own country or better integration in their host territory.

No Green Deal without the involvement of empowered local and regional governments

Thousands of municipalities and regions across Europe have committed to the Covenant of Mayors, which recently renewed and aligned its ambition to the objective of the European Union to become carbon neutral by 2050. Local action plans serve as tools to engage citizens on climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity protection. Municipalities and regions also play a major role in carrying out energy-efficient renovation and allow their citizens to access secure, sustainable and affordable energy or water.

- ✓ Green transition requires a strong collaboration across all spheres of governance to accelerate decarbonisation; municipalities and regions are an integral part of the solution in partnership with citizens, the private sector, civil society and peers across the globe, as long as ambitious climate and energy action is accompanied by enabling frameworks, measures and financial resources for local and regional governments.
- ✓ With the appropriate European or national financial and capacity-building support, and in their own right, local decision makers will have the capacity to take ambitious and bold action to tackle and adapt their territories to climate change and drive the transition towards a greener and fairer society (including by upgrading existing infrastructure).

- ✓ A strong Europe that invests in active and sustainable mobility to connect people, through more investments for mobility solutions that connect Europe's territories, especially those left aside by the TEN-T core network corridors and further development of cycling paths within and between cities such as the Eurovelo.

Digital transformation in all types of territories

While maintaining a human face in the delivery of public services, supporting the most vulnerable and ensuring territorial cohesion, many local governments, as users and providers of digital services, feel the need to make the necessary adjustments to the organisation of their internal processes and their communication with citizens in order to prepare for new innovations, such as artificial intelligence, and put it to good use in the local environment.

- ✓ To achieve the goal of economic, social and territorial cohesion, the EU should strive to ensure that citizens, companies and public administrations in every region and municipality have access to very high-capacity networks (i.e. fixed line and/or 5G/6G).
- ✓ Ensure a transparent transfer of data between different systems in accordance with the once- only principle across Europe. An enabling legislative framework as well as financial & skills development support must be offered to local and regional governments.
- ✓ Accessibility, security, availability and usability must be guaranteed so that services can be used by all in a non-discriminatory manner, including for developing shared platforms to provide services or collaborate with existing ones - taxi transport, home exchange, home rental, shared mobility, meal delivery, etc.

New forms of partnerships - Internationalisation of municipalities as the way forward

Cooperation with partner municipalities and regions in the EU and beyond its borders allows for mutual exchange of know-how, public sector expertise and peer learning to reinforce local institutions, develop innovative public policies but also and above all, it allows for the Europeans to know each other and feel part of the European project and future.

- ✓ Town-to-town cooperation, twinning, and other exchange opportunities need to enter a new phase; one that builds on the tradition of friendship and cultural exchange while advancing common values and reflecting citizens' concerns and solutions.
- ✓ European institutions must recognise the internationalisation of municipalities and regions as paving the ways towards achieving global agendas at the service of citizens on the ground.
- ✓ All European Countries are entitled to join the European Union when they share the values of the European Union. To ensure that this is possible, the EU need to invest in all candidate and neighbouring countries to support the strengthening of local democracy, the promotion of the European values, human rights and rule of law, localise the Association Agreements, and increase and facilitate the access to EU programmes for municipalities and regions.
- ✓ EU institutions must also actively include representative associations in their work, inviting them to contribute to joint endeavours. This joint working should extend to multilateral fora, allowing Europe to speak with a collective voice that represents all levels of government.

A reaffirmed fundamental role of local and regional public services – giving capacity to local and regional governments

The continued provision of services of general interest to citizens has been crucial during the Covid-19 crisis. We acknowledge the Commission's efforts to relax the rules on state aid, thus allowing Member States and local and regional governments to introduce support measures during the pandemic. The European Union should also take the protection of local and regional public services into account when negotiating Free Trade Agreements with international partners.

- ✓ Social dialogue, properly funded health care systems, protection of workers, unemployed and vulnerable people must remain at the heart of the European project.
- ✓ The coordinated implementation of the European pillar of social rights involving Member States will also be essential in the coming years.
- ✓ Mobility between territorial officials and administrations should be encouraged by the EU to ensure innovation in territorial public policies.

Specific financial support to local governments for sustainable investments

In Europe, subnational governments' public spending represented 1.2% of GDP before the Covid-19 pandemic, which was already estimated to be quite low by the OECD. It is likely that their capacity to invest will be seriously impacted in the mid to long term by this crisis. In the EU, local governments are responsible for 45% of public investments.

- ✓ If we truly wish to achieve the green and digital transitions, national governments and the EU must make all possible support available to municipalities and regions to develop their capacities to invest for sustainable development.
- ✓ EU funding conditions should be adapted to the size of the projects and the capacity of local and regional governments. At the EU level, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the activation of the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact – meaning governments are temporarily exempted from rules constraining public debt and deficit – represent an opportunity for a reform of the EU economic governance framework. It must allow more room for local and regional governments to invest for long term sustainable development.
- ✓ At national level, Member States must take account of the needs and potential difficulties of local and regional governments to carry out long-term sustainable investments.
- ✓ European Municipalities and regions call for the creation of new financial means to finance long term sustainable investments such as public transport or active mobility infrastructures, energy retrofitting of buildings or other public infrastructure supporting the transition towards a circular economy (waste or water treatment). Such investments should open possibilities for very long-term loans by the European Investment Bank with very low interest rate and long-term depreciation.

Covid crisis as a trigger to change governance & dialogue with European institutions

Systematic structured dialogues with European institutions must be set up when it comes to legislation and strategies that concern citizens and local and regional governments, from the design to the implementation and monitoring of these initiatives. The necessity to understand consequences and be involved in processes are crucial for subnational budgetary and public investment decisions.

- ✓ EU fiscal rules and reform recommendations defined in the Semester have a direct impact on the responsibilities of municipalities and regions (from the definition of social policies to housing or support to SMEs). Local and regional governments need to be fully involved in order to make the Semester a genuinely democratic exercise. Same goes for the Green Deal and its multiple directives, the Digital Decade or the Recovery & Resilience Facility.
- ✓ EU cohesion policy and other EU projects come to life in almost all regions of Europe: Mayors and Presidents of Regions are the best possible EU ambassadors to show to the citizens the added value and concrete contribution of the EU in their daily life. The EU must build on this.

Enhanced dialogue on European affairs in Member States

At the national level, further co-creation with local and regional governments and joint reflections on the territorial impact of EU legislations and strategies are necessary, where Member States' decisions are decisive – includes taking account of views of national representative associations of local and regional governments. This must be systematised on all legislations and initiatives affecting local and regional governments.

- ✓ Positions in the Council must reflect position developed with different tier of governments in the country; the partnership principle must be applied in all policies, as in cohesion policy.
- ✓ At local and regional levels, it means to further involve local stakeholders and citizens in the many policies developed to improve living conditions in our municipalities and regions, especially on European initiatives.

Improving the representation and recognition of local and regional governments in Europe

The Committee of the Regions is the official representative institution of local and regional governments, while the Council of European Municipalities and Regions is the federation of representative national associations of local and regional governments. Their role in financing, implementing and developing the EU's political agenda has to be recognised and their level of recognition in the European Governance system must be improved. Local and regional governments need a formal possibility of participating in the European legislative process beyond the Committee of the Regions.

- ✓ National representative associations of local and regional governments should lead in nominating representatives to the Committee of the Regions instead of national authorities, to ensure independence and good political and geographical balance.

- ✓ Binding rules for gender balance in the composition of the national delegations of the Committee of the Regions should be introduced and serve as a condition for validation of the delegations.
- ✓ The Committee of the Regions should not simply have a consultative role but rather serve as a second chamber of the European Union; similar to the European Parliament, it should have its say on every legislation affecting European local and regional governance. Local governments should have a stronger voice in the Committee of the Regions. Therefore, a separate local chamber should be introduced. At least should the seats be equally distributed between local and regional governments.
- ✓ Systematic consultations must be organised upstream with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, likewise systematic consultation should be made mandatory at national level with national associations representing local and regional governments across Europe.
- ✓ The Council of European Municipalities and Regions should receive the same level of recognition by European Institutions as that received by its members - the national associations of local and regional governments – at the national level, with their respective governments.