



Local & Regional
Europe



What future for Europe?



A vision from a local
and regional perspective



About CEMR

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the broadest organisation of local and regional governments in Europe. Its members are over 60 national associations of municipalities and regions from 41 European countries. Together these associations represent some 130,000 local and regional governments.

CEMR's objectives are twofold: to influence European legislation on behalf of towns, cities and regions, and to provide a platform for exchange between its member associations and their elected officials and experts.

Moreover, CEMR is the European section of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the worldwide organisation of local government.

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

A LOCAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

PREAMBLE

1. Given that the European construction is derived as the product of a history marked by conflict and fragmentation, it is built on a common European vision of its destiny. It is defined by **shared values**; democracy, human rights, equality and respect for rule of law. The European construction is expressed within the legitimate context, resulting both from the European Union and of the Council of Europe.
2. In a continent marked by diversity, **political cooperation** and dialogue are more essential than ever, based on shared values. Respect for these shared values is more important than ever.
3. The respect for **diversity** should be recognised as a common European value. Subsidiarity is a major solution to the challenges of the diverse continent, putting at the centre the role of local and regional authorities in the governance landscape.
4. **Decentralisation** and division of powers are essential elements for democracy. Sub national government (communes, counties, intermediary authorities and regions) forms the backbones of the political and administrative structure of our states; here, citizens can influence how their communities are governed and play an active role in the society.
5. Since its creation, CEMR has advocated the **autonomy** of local and regional governments and the recognition of their contribution to the European project. Our engagement has contributed to the adoption of the European Charter of Local Self-Government by the Council of Europe in 1985. However, we currently observe in several European countries threats to local democracy and disturbing phenomena striving towards a movement of recentralisation. Therefore we request that the principles of the Charter be upheld and enforced in all European countries.
6. In the face of the current geo-political situation and challenges, Europe's local and regional governments confirm their belief in a **strong and united** Europe, founded on our common values. Many global problems are apparent and need to be addressed at the local and regional level. CEMR brings together local and regional leaders united in diversity and solidarity, committed to a peaceful and prosperous life for the people living in our cities, municipalities and regions.
7. The **European Union** has profoundly marked the history and mind-set of its citizens. It remains an unprecedented example of political integration, even if we are witnessing one of the most difficult times for the European project.
8. The future of the European Union concerns all Europeans, whether they live within or outside the EU; therefore, **reflections** on the future of Europe need to go beyond the EU and its current composition. The situation of non-members and potential EU candidates needs to be addressed and a perspective has to be provided to them in the future concept of the EU.
9. The future of Europe is not an issue to be discussed solely by Heads of State, governments and Parliaments. We call for a **broad debate** that encourages people to share their aspirations and what kind of Europe they desire.
10. Political leaders need to listen to the **citizens** and understand their concerns regarding the European Union project. On the basis of this dialogue, leaders have to draw the necessary conclusions and take brave decisions to drive forward the European Union, in a direction that is supported by its people.

11. The European Commission's **White Paper** draws up five scenarios for Europe by 2025 and launches a broad debate; local and regional authorities are key stakeholders and have an active role to play. CEMR and its members will provide valuable input to the upcoming debates, highlighting the specific local and regional aspects of every relevant issue. Noting the forthcoming publication of several reflection papers, we call on the European Commission to include a specific chapter addressing the local and regional dimension of the issues to be considered.



A EUROPE THAT IS CLOSER TO ITS CITIZENS

12. **Efforts are needed to establish better links between the challenges that people experience in their daily lives and the solutions that Europe and the European Union should provide; therefore, an active role must be ensured for local and regional governments in the development and implementation of these solutions.**

12.1 Worldwide, people are experiencing a crisis of **confidence** in political leaders' ability to adequately respond to their concerns and needs. This is a worrying trend and in Europe, the economic and financial crisis, migration, globalisation and geopolitical developments have raised questions as to whether our leaders are able to provide the right solutions.

12.2 Forms of **citizens' participation** have evolved over the years due to new communication tools. Citizens now want to intervene in specific policies and no longer on general matters, communication and interaction must then be adapted to these new trends.

12.3 In the European Union consistently high levels of youth unemployment in some Member States, limited public investment in infrastructure and basic public services and the focus on the **Single Market** have led many Europeans to believe that the Union's sole purpose is economic integration.

12.4 As the level of government closest to the citizens, cities, municipalities and regions and their representative organisations, seek to find ways to involve citizens beyond electoral processes. Up to 75 per cent of municipal statutory functions are impacted by EU legislation; thus, local and regional governments play an important role in the implementation of **European rules** and in explaining the rationale and the benefits of European cooperation to citizens. This is a challenging task as they have to demonstrate that there are no simple solutions to complex problems.

12.5 Good quality **public services** at the local and regional level and decent living conditions strengthen confidence in public authorities and institutions. Such confidence is based on the continued, reliable and affordable performance of local and regional authorities, and is jeopardised if local and regional authorities do not have the freedom to organise and finance their public services in a stable legal framework. This fact needs to be accommodated by European rules

12.6 It is important to recall that by promoting **exchanges** between citizens via twinning arrangements, it is cities that helped cultivate the feeling of belonging to a common European community. Reclaiming the value of that feeling and fostering that European identity is a responsibility of all levels of government but, particularly, that of the local level.

A EUROPE THAT TREASURES ITS DIVERSITY

13. Europe's strength lies in its diversity in culture, history, identity, traditions, political systems, etc. which should be valued and respected where possible.

13.1 Europe's differences are its **treasure** and we are proud of our cultural heritage and history. Open borders, free exchange of goods and services, free movement of people are great achievements that allow Europeans to travel, work and live in many European countries.

13.2 European continental **partnerships**, such as the Council of Europe and its Congress for local and regional authorities and the OSCE, and enlargements of the European Union foster the sharing of common values, contribute to a better understanding of our diversity and strengthens unity, solidarity and tolerance, and have opened new markets and given opportunities for labour forces.

13.3 Programmes like 'Europe for citizens' and 'Erasmus+' that support exchanges between people are extremely valuable as they contribute to the common understanding of our diversity. Consequently they should be expanded both in scope, and in terms of eligible countries that have signed Association Agreements with the EU.

AN EFFECTIVE EUROPE THAT CONCENTRATES ON MAJOR ISSUES

14. Major global challenges, such as security, migration, climate, energy and trade; and for the states sharing the Euro also economic and fiscal policies, are issues that are best addressed collectively.

14.1 Tackling major global challenges requires a more effective European Union; the political and legal framework should **focus** on what really needs to be regulated at EU level and the leadership should have the courage to refrain from overly prescriptive and bureaucratic approaches.

14.2 EU rules and regulations should not be too detailed and better take into account differences that exist, allowing **flexibility** and room for manoeuvre, in pursuit of commonly agreed objectives. Member States, in close cooperation with all relevant actors concerned, should define the appropriate way to achieve the desired outcomes.

14.3 Several **scenarios** are currently under discussion to define the potential future concept of the EU. CEMR acknowledges and welcomes the current discussions on the different options for the future of Europe – without already now pin-pointing a preferred option. Members of CEMR have yet to have a thorough discussion on the different scenarios proposed by the European Commission, in particular in relation to their meaning for local and regional governments. This may also concern the areas of competence and the Community institutions. This paper does not precede these discussions.

14.4 More **trust** should be placed in local and regional governments and the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and financial autonomy should be strictly applied. The concept of 'governance in partnership' should be implemented according to a fair distribution of competences and adequate and efficient mechanisms of coordination and collaboration between all levels of government. Where necessary, local and regional governments' capacities should be strengthened and in that way contribute to the successful design and implementation of common policies.

A EUROPE THAT IS INCLUSIVE, INNOVATIVE, AND SUSTAINABLE

15. A more politically and economically integrated European Union must progress beyond the Single Market and provide genuine instruments of solidarity.

15.1. We must strive for a social, **citizens-based** Europe on freedom, equality of opportunities and solidarity, in order to achieve a welfare state in the European Union. Governing in partnership will ensure success in the establishment of a social Europe.

15.2 Policies on territorial, social and economic **cohesion** must be strengthened to meet new challenges and the citizens' expectations. Youth issues, gender equality, anti-discrimination, social inclusion, integration policy, digitalisation, active ageing and quality healthcare, together with fight against climate change, environmental protection, employment, education, competitiveness, should be placed at the heart of efforts to close the economic, social and territorial divide in Europe, and implemented with a certain degree of flexibility to allow local governments to best respond according to the needs of their context.

15.3 We call for an intra-European territorial and social cohesion, based on principles of partnership, solidarity, freedom and dignity for all. Together with social and territorial cohesion, the **balance** between rural, urban and peri-urban regions, must be guaranteed. Particular attention shall be brought to areas at risk of depopulation.

15.4 Particular attention should be given to a solidary relocation of **refugees** in the EU countries based on regional, national and historical conditions, and local and regional authorities be allocated with the necessary support and resources to successfully manage integration in the mid and long-term.

15.5 The European Union social and economic model must foster **innovation** and be driven by environmental concerns, the digital revolution and global competitiveness, and should develop models for well-functioning social dialogue cooperation. Europe has the ambition and potential to become the world's most competitive knowledge-based economy.

15.6 In order to reach the Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives of the Paris Agreement on climate and Agenda 2030, seeking to build decarbonised and resilient communities, Europe should continue taking bold **actions** at all levels of governance. The favoured approach should be the promotion of integrated and sustainable urban policies, including mobility, renewable energy, a circular economy, etc.; we call for sufficient financial support from the European Union and national states.

A EUROPE THAT PLAYS ITS ROLE IN THE WORLD

16. Europe is a major contributor to peace, prosperity and sustainability in the world, as it is other European organisations such as the Council of Europe or the OSCE. It should keep a particular focus on local democracy and the development of the neighbouring countries. We support a Europe which voices local and regional governments' interests when negotiating international agreements and development programmes.

16.1 The local and regional level can boost the implementation of Agenda 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Agreement on climate and the New Urban Agenda. As members of the UN, all European states have agreed to take actions to reach the goals. The **localisation** process of the Agenda 2030 should therefore come with a real commitment to strengthening multi-level and multi-sectorial alliances.

16.2 As stable and respected partners, European states as member of the European Union but also of other European organisations such as the Council of Europe, the UN

Economic Commission for Europe, the OECD, etc. significantly influence relevant international **negotiations** and decisions at the global level. As globalisation and migration flows clearly affect the local and regional level, local and regional authorities should be consulted on these issues. They can provide vital support and complement the actions of central governments in response to global challenges. CEMR and its members in cooperation with their partners gathered in the world organisation 'United Cities and Local Governments' (UCLG) have demonstrated influence on global issues, most recently in the Climate Agreement, the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda discussion.

16.3 Our experience of subsidiarity and the strengthening of local self-government in Europe is relevant when engaging with the rest of the world: we call on Europe to highlight the advantages of strong **decentralised** democratic structures; international development programmes should place stronger emphasis on projects involving local governments and local actors, including civil society

16.4 International **cooperation** must remain a tool of solidarity and respect endogenous processes of development. Key development factors must be embraced—local governments and civil society - while also compensating for the inequalities caused by wars, industry-induced climate change or unfair economic practices



OUR SCENARIO: A LOCAL AND REGIONAL AGENDA FOR BOLSTERING EUROPE AND THE EU

17. Europe's leaders should seize the occasion to rethink the European project and reshape the policies and institutions according to the outcome of the current reflection on Europe's common future.

17.1 Any discussion about the future of Europe should be based on the recognition of the principles of **local self-government**, subsidiarity and proportionality and of the important role local and regional governments play as backbones of our states and societies.

17.2 The future European Union institutional set-up should have appropriate and efficient tools and **governance** structures, building on the existing system, where local and regional governments and their representative organisations are instrumental in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and legislation.

17.3 Only in this way will Europe and the European Union **succeed** in developing meaningful policies for citizens, and optimise chances for regaining their trust and support.

CEMR and its member associations consider themselves committed partners of the European institutions and central governments. Therefore we stand ready to contribute in a constructive way to the debates on the future of Europe and the European Union. Working together will provide the best foundations for an effective way forward.

ANNEX

RELEVANT CEMR POSITION PAPERS

ON EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Declaration on Brexit, July 2016
- Declaration on the 60th anniversary of the signature of the Treaty of Rome, March 2017

ON LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT IN RELATION TO RELEVANT ISSUES

- Better Regulation for Better Results, October 2015
- An EU Urban Agenda, December 2015
- Reviving local public investments, December 2015
- Refugee crisis: for a common European Asylum Policy, December 2015
- Call for a real common European Asylum Policy, April 2016
- Key Priorities on Gender Equality, December 2016
- Key messages on the future of the Europe for Citizens Programme, June 2017

ON ISSUES RELATED TO INCLUSION, INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

- Future of Cohesion Policy, June 2017
- Circular economy, December 2016
- European Pillar of Social Rights, June 2017
- Work-Life Balance, June 2017

ON THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS AT GLOBAL LEVEL

- COP21 Paris Summit on climate change, December 2015
- COP22 Marrakesh Summit on climate change, December 2016
- Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), April 2015
- Habitat III process and the new Urban Agenda, April 2016

RELEVANT POSITIONS OF THE PLATFORMA COALITION OF ACTORS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- Towards a New European Neighbourhood Policy, June 2015
- Habitat III process and the new Urban Agenda, April 2016
- PLATFORMA declaration on the EU Global Strategy and the 2030 Agenda, April 2016
- PLATFORMA position on the EU's New Partnership Framework with third countries, September 2016
- PLATFORMA position on the Revision of the European Consensus on Development, September 2016
- PLATFORMA's contributions: Fighting inequalities with the local and regional perspective, November 2016
- PLATFORMA's five recommendations to strengthen the local dimension in the re-revised EU Consensus on Development, December 2016.





More info



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