



**Meeting of the Bureau of
PES Local | Socialist Local Representatives in Europe
on Friday, 1st of June 2018, in Paris**

Resolution

Strong municipalities for a Europe of Social Cohesion and Solidarity

Europe is facing huge challenges

Our European Union is facing huge challenges. Even though the economic situation has improved over the last few years, disparities have increased in many places in Europe over the last decade. The gap between rich and poor has further widened. The level of youth unemployment and the number of people, especially older ones, who live in poverty is totally unacceptable for one of the richest parts of the world. Many people in Europe feel that their prosperity and security is threatened by emerging trade disputes, the unstable situation in Eastern Ukraine and the political development in Turkey, as well as by terror attacks in European cities. The armed conflicts in the Near East and the poverty and lack of perspective in many African regions have given rise to a refugee movement that reached its peak so far in 2015. The impact of these problems are also felt by our local authorities and present great challenges to local governments.

Though decisive joint action in Europe would be the logical response to this development, trust in the European idea and EU institutions continues to dwindle. This has led to a strengthening of populist and anti-European parties and movements. In Poland, Hungary and Italy these powers have even assumed governmental responsibility. The Brexit is thus far the lowest point of loss of confidence in the European idea.

Despite the fact that socialism stands for policies of solidarity and social cohesion, many people are paradoxically also losing trust in European socialism. Soon socialist and progressive parties will lead a government in only six of the 28 EU member states: in Spain, Sweden, Romania, Portugal, Slovakia and Malta. Socialists also govern in coalitions in some countries and are thus able to provide significant impulses, but they must also enter into difficult compromises which are often not well received by voters. Only eight in 28 EU Commissioners are socialists.

In local authorities socialists are (still) a force!

Socialism continues to be a force at the local level in many cities, municipalities and regions. Every day numerous socialist mayors and elected officials decisively and responsibly shape local policies based on the needs of our citizens. Especially in large European cities socialism is, and remains, the strongest political movement. About half of the approximately 200 cities in the EU with over 175,000 inhabitants are led by socialist or progressive (PES) mayors.

There are no simple and general answers for the success of socialist mayors in many cities and local authorities, there is too much diversity in Europe for that and local conditions are very different. Socialism is strongly anchored in cities ever since industrialisation. Workers, employees and the socially weak and disadvantaged, in particular, have always been able to rely on the fact that socialism in cities would provide appropriate solutions to their needs.

People know that socialism always focuses on social and societal cohesion. A large proportion of city-dwellers believe that we are most competent to find solutions when it comes to fighting poverty and unemployment, creating affordable housing and ensuring social participation and integration. We stand for social and sustainable urban solutions with respect to the major issues of the future such as climate change, the energy turnaround and digitalisation.

Socialist local representatives can make a significant contribution to the renewal of socialism

Most of the political objectives of socialism can only become a reality if they are implemented at the local level. That is where infrastructure needs to be adapted, renewed and expanded, where public services must be ensured and the welfare state provided for and strengthened. Socialist local governments have a great potential for innovation and regularly develop solutions which can be implemented locally.

Socialism has to better use this potential for innovation at the national and also at the European level. We have to develop policies based on the needs of citizens. In our cities and municipalities we are closer to people's concerns and needs. If we are successful at the local level, we can also be successful at the regional, national and European levels. It won't work the other way around. **To bring about a necessary renewal of Socialism in Europe, we must take more account of local government when formulating our policies. We have to involve our local representatives even more closely in the governing bodies and programmatic work and we should strengthen the local political organisations in our parties.**

It is important that we exchange experiences and solutions, so as to make the most effective use of the potential for innovation at local level. **Hence, PES Local wants to bring together in a forum representatives of European capitals and big cities. Such a forum can provide important impulses for designing modern and progressive policies in the PES.** We want to start with this project, together with our partners in the PES family, at the beginning of 2019 in time for the European elections.

When designing socialist policies at national and European level, we should **on no account neglect smaller local authorities and rural areas**, only because conservative parties are traditionally strong in many places. That should rather be an incentive for us.

In the context of the great social and economic challenges that we are facing in Europe and the rise of anti-European populist and extreme-right movements, the Socialist Local Representatives in Europe gathered in Paris affirm:

- Strengthening social cohesion within society is and remains a key objective of socialist policies.
- We, socialists, stand for solidarity between richer and poorer regions so as to create equal living conditions in Europe.
- The local authorities and regions of Europe have a prominent role to play in strengthening social and territorial cohesion.
- Sustainable and fair growth in a social Europe can only be achieved with strong municipalities, cities and regions.
- The right to local self-government in Europe must – as provided for by the Lisbon Treaty and by the European Charter of Local Self-Government of the Council of Europe – be respected and strengthened. Europe's strength lies in the diversity of its cities and municipalities.
- A social Europe requires strong local authorities able to act. The cities, municipalities and regions in Europe thus require funding that is appropriate for their tasks and stable over the long-term.

Expectations of Socialist Local Representatives:

Even more consideration has to be given to the direct and indirect financial impact of European legislation on local authorities. To do so, regulatory impact assessment procedures and the possibility of involving local stakeholders have to be further improved. PES Local welcomes the Urban Agenda, through which the EU Commission wants to ensure this and is going to follow closely the implementation of this initiative.

By increasing Cohesion Policy funding for structurally weak urban and rural regions and city districts with social problems, the European Union is making an essential contribution to addressing the very different economic and demographic developments of European regions and the resulting social inequalities. In doing so, it reinforces Europe's territorial and social cohesion. For this reason, it is critically important to

maintain an effective cohesion policy. PES Local has joined the initiative #CohesionAlliance of the Committee of the Regions and campaigns for a cohesion policy under which all EU regions would remain eligible, which is appropriately funded, less bureaucratic and more flexible, and which involves local and regional partners more closely.

To fight unemployment, it is important for flanking measures to be taken at local level, in addition to policies adopted at state or European level. To do so, the national level and the EU have to provide cities and municipalities with relevant legal framework conditions and financial resources.

Services of general interest have to continue to be an inherent part of the European social model. Such services are a crucial basis for the EU's social and territorial cohesion and for job creation and they are a decisive factor in guaranteeing social participation of people. Basic services must be provided to the population, especially in structurally weak rural areas, i.e. minimal infrastructure and a minimum offer of goods and services.

Affordable housing is essential for the social and economic stability of our cities and municipalities. Residential construction has to be intensified in regions with a housing shortage.

Integration has to be understood as a pan-European challenge organised locally. The successful integration of migrants provides an opportunity to enrich our society and to secure our economic development over the long term.

The principle of solidarity with refugees, who are in need of protection, is a key value of our common Europe and beyond any doubt. Local authorities play an important role when it comes to providing for and housing refugees locally, as well as in integrating those refugees who will stay in the EU permanently. Thus, the EU and the member states must provide local authorities with financing and the necessary framework conditions to enable them to carry out their important tasks of providing for and integrating refugees.

As socialists we commit ourselves to the sustainable development goals. The living conditions of people in developing countries and the environmental, economic and social resources should be preserved and improved for all people and generations. Local and regional partnerships can be a huge contribution in this sense. The EU should better take local authorities into account as actors of an effective cooperation to development policy, and define additional programmes.

Gender equality must be taken into account when defining local policies, for instance when it comes to the concrete aspects of daily life, like the labour market, housing, security or public transport. In addition, gender equality should be further promoted in local administrations and in the management of council-owned companies. We also commit ourselves to making sure that more women take part in politics in the local and regional parliaments across Europe.

It is very important for local authorities to deal in a timely manner with significant societal developments so as to be able to take crucial local policy decisions. In particular with respect to digitalisation and its impact on working conditions and ways of living, local governments and local administrations are expected to support and assist citizens and the economy.

City twinnings and local cross-border and transnational cooperations should be further promoted in the interest of growing together.