



CITIZENS OF EUROPE!

European Congress on Citizenship and Twinning

Rybnik, 29 Sept. - 1 Oct. 2011

Final Declaration

In 1951, local elected representatives, mayors and councillors from six European countries launched the Council of European Municipalities with the aim of creating a Union of European peoples founded on autonomous local authorities dedicated to furthering peace, harmony and prosperity in Europe by bringing citizens from all countries closer together. This movement has resulted in a spectacular development of city and town twinnings – 40,000 links as of today – in Europe that has accompanied every step of the unification process of Europe. This has contributed in a fundamental way to the reconciliation between former enemies, particularly France and Germany after the Second World War, and to the reunification of Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall. This twinning movement continues to be the best way of bringing Europeans together, enhancing the feeling of European citizenship.

In 2011, we are facing challenges brought on by the financial, economic, political and social crisis. Rising nationalism in Europe will give no answers, and bring no solutions. Europe once again seems to be the only possible response, through the necessary evolution of the European Union towards greater political and economic integration and solidarity. Will we be able, like the founders of the European Union, to seize the opportunity of the current crisis as a chance to advance Europe's development toward greater solidarity, or will we let the European project wither away? Citizens have a decisive role to play in this debate. What responses can the European Union bring to address their doubts and expectations? How do we bring the citizens back to the heart of the European project?

We, women and men holding local office, dedicated actors of the twinning movement and European citizens, assembled together in Rybnik from 29 September to 1st October 2011 during the Polish Presidency of the European Union:

- Reaffirm our commitment to the European project and highlight the progress made in European construction and note with satisfaction that, since its creation, the European Union has had a fundamental impact on the lives of European citizens. We recall, however, that while the EU has been successful in many areas, there still remains much work to be done, particularly in political, social and economic terms;
- Call for a unified Europe, politically united and capable of responding to the challenges facing society today, such as social cohesion, youth employment, demographic change, climate change, energy supply... To respond to these challenges, we call for a new model of governance in Europe – Governing in Partnership, which will bring together all spheres of governance – local, regional, national and European – as well as the civil society, economic actors and the academic world;

- Emphasise that to overcome the crisis of confidence overtaking our societies, including with respect to political representatives, Europe must empower itself with the means to strengthen an active and participatory citizenship;
- Believe that the European Union of tomorrow will be stronger if it returns to the values which formed the basis for its construction and recall that an education in European citizenship and the transmission of memory must be at the heart of the European project;
- Call for a Europe that is tolerant, multicultural and respectful of diversity and call on the European Union to continue to strengthen policies and actions which fight all forms of discrimination, and to support all actions of integration and participation of non member-State citizens in Europe;
- Call for a Europe of dialogue and exchange with its neighbours and ask the European Union to extend its support for twinning to the neighbouring countries to the East and South of Europe in order to promote mutual awareness and understanding between peoples;
- Seek a Europe that is unified and open, conveying a strong message to the rest of the world, and recall that local and regional authorities play an important role in the struggle against poverty, for peace and justice and the construction of better democratic governance in the world;
- Underline the role that twinning and partnerships have played in strengthening dialogue and friendship between peoples as well as in raising awareness of other cultures, and invite the European Union to further promote this achievement;
- As we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of its creation, CEMR, and its National Associations wish to recall that twinning, launched by its founders, played a fundamental role in restoring peace and dialogue between the peoples of Europe. We emphasise the impact of the community support for twinning launched by the European Union in 1989, particularly on the construction of an enlarged Europe after the fall of the totalitarian regimes in Central Europe, and ask that this programme be strengthened and given the financial means necessary to promote the emergence of a citizen's Europe. In view of this, we suggest that the next programme be based on a symbolic budget of 1€ per European, or 495 million €;
- We commit to making our exchanges spaces for European learning, for dialogue and open conviviality for all our citizens in order that each one, in particular those of the younger generations, can exercise or develop their knowledge and competencies, be it in an educational or professional framework, or in their free time;

- Welcome with interest the proposal to create a European Academy for local and regional governance, to share knowledge and help capacity-building for our elected representatives and civil servants to improve local and regional services and democratic development and better citizen participation;
- Observe that despite the significant progress that the European Union helped to bring about, substantial inequalities persist between women and men in European society today. Following the success of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life launched by CEMR, we call for the setting up of an Observatory, at European level, on the implementation of this Charter so as to support and to follow its application on the ground;
- Remain convinced that the intergenerational dialogue forms an essential tool in building an inclusive society mindful of the importance of transmitting values and knowledge, and hope that the European Year for Active Ageing and intergenerational solidarity proclaimed for 2012 will help to give more resonance to this message;
- Highlight the effectiveness of multi-lateral cooperation, involving multiple European local and regional authorities and request the European Union to encourage the mutualisation of cooperation conducted at local level;
- Call for better recognition by national authorities and the European Union of the role that twinning and partnerships play due to their proximity to the citizens, and suggest, in view of this, that the new European External Action Service include if not a full Unit, then at least a specific expert for local and regional authorities.