

Drawn up by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

March 2009

THE ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT 2009

A MANIFESTO FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

The elections to the European Parliament mark the great democratic meeting-point between Europe and its citizens.

Given the current economic crisis and its effects, and the urgency to act together on climate change, the newly elected Parliament will face exceptional challenges and will share a grave responsibility for safeguarding the future of the Union's 500 million citizens.

At such a time we wish to convey a clear message about the kind of Europe we want:

A Europe which is strong and united, economically, socially and politically, and which fully recognizes the key role of its local and regional governments

To these ends, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions has supported the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon. But over and above the issue of the Treaty, we look to the European institutions – in particular the Commission and the Parliament – to play their full and active role in meeting the challenges we face, in a spirit of partnership with all levels of governance.

A Europe which refuses to turn in on itself and which rejects protectionism

Given the depth and expected duration of the crisis, these could be real temptations... but ones which it is essential to reject and overcome, since to yield to them would cause – in the medium and longer term – far greater economic and social damage. Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe must refuse to allow new barriers to be built on our continent, or against the EU's neighbours and those beyond.

A Europe of tolerance and respect, open and responsive to the world

We need to oppose, with even greater vigour, all forms of intolerance, xenophobia and aggressive nationalism. This is a fundamental duty of all of Europe's democratic bodies, from European Parliament to local commune.

The real risk of increased intolerance, at this time, makes it all the more important for Europe to develop programmes to promote citizen exchanges and understanding, in particular involving young people.

In addition, we need effective policies in relation to inward migration, which brings benefits but also poses challenges (e.g. to achieve successful integration) to cities, municipalities and regions everywhere, including effective policies to tackle illegal immigration.

Europe, moreover, must play its full part in tackling the global challenges and conflicts – to promote peace and resolve conflicts, to tackle poverty and implement the Millennium Development Goals.

A Europe with a strong social dimension

The current crisis has once again underlined the need to balance the working of market forces with a robust framework of social solidarity and protection. Whilst each country within the Union has its own means for providing social welfare and social services, we reaffirm our attachment to the European model of society which must continue to provide support for those who lose out or suffer exclusion or discrimination.

And Europe's local and regional authorities are, and must remain, at the heart of this continental web of social protection.

A Europe close to its local and regional roots, and to its local and regional elected representatives

In times of economic trouble, citizens turn in particular to their local and regional governments for shelter and support. We therefore count on the European Parliament – which has always been our ally – to take on board throughout its new mandate the concerns and priorities of Europe's local and regional authorities.

In this spirit of co-operation and multi-level partnership, we therefore invite the European political parties to take into account the following points:

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

1. Local and regional governments face increasing pressures at times of economic crisis – more demands for services and help, more pressure on finances. At the same time, they are usually best placed to act in implementing actions to revive or safeguard local economies. We ask that our role, and capacity for action, be fully taken into account in formulating and implementing policies to tackle the crisis. After all, local and regional governments are already responsible for a great majority of public procurement expenditure, and are best placed to respond rapidly to deliver economic stimulus programmes.
2. To play our full role, we need access to the necessary financial resources, at both national and European levels, together with a more flexible approach (in terms of subject-matter and administrative regulation) in relation to the Structural Funds and other European programmes.
 - ***We ask that the Parliament gives its support, at European level, to enable us to play our full role during the economic crisis, and also as conditions improve, both to protect our citizens and to help to stimulate our economies at regional and local levels.***

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND TRANSPORT

3. The world faces one of its greatest challenges in 2009 – can we reach a global agreement in Copenhagen in December of sufficient scale, with committed universal support, to protect the earth from the severest consequences of climate change, and to help those affected? The European Union must continue to play a leadership role, with the backing of all levels of government. Local and regional governments across Europe – and across the world – have been in the forefront on climate change, including strategies for adaptation.
 - ***We want the new post-Kyoto international agreement to recognize our role as key partners in tackling climate change, and ask that the Parliament supports us in this.***
4. Our decisions and policies on the use of energy and transport are fundamental also to the issue of climate protection and adaptation, as well as in terms of security for our citizens. Local and regional governments are active in helping to meet the EU's targets on reducing CO2 emissions, improving energy efficiency, and increasing the share of renewables, and are active in initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors. Similarly, in the field of transport planning and policy – both public and private – local and regional governments have a key role.
 - ***We ask that the Parliament supports our role as a partner in energy and transport issues, for example in dealing with relevant legislation on energy, urban mobility and the future of European transport policy.***

TERRITORIAL COHESION

5. One of the big challenges for the Union, and for the Parliament, will be the strategy for the EU's budget after 2013, which must be fit to meet the new challenges for our continent – responding to the needs of the EU's territories, and contributing more effectively to the achievement of its objectives for economic, social and territorial cohesion. We strongly believe that most of the challenges have a major impact at local and regional levels, and that local and regional governments are best placed to implement many essential measures.
 - ***We ask that the Parliament takes fully into account the territorial (regional and local) dimension in all of the budget discussions.***
6. In particular, we ask for support in ensuring that cohesion policy is not, in future, "renationalised" as *EU programmes have additional value over national programmes*. We support an ambitious future cohesion policy that is territorially-based, and which covers all regions of the Union, whilst still giving priority to the needs of regions facing greater difficulties in development.
7. We also ask for the support of the Parliament to ensure that the EU's urban and rural development policies become more integrated, in terms both of policy making and financing, at latest in the course of the approval of the next EU financial framework.
8. We believe that the concept of territorial cohesion is now better understood, in essence meaning that almost all policies need to be integrated and implemented at the most effective local or regional (territorial) level, with a view to tackling inequalities within as well as between regions, cities and towns.
 - ***We ask that the Parliament gives full support to ambitious, balanced, integrated and properly-resourced policies for territorial cohesion, in which our local and regional governments are key partners.***

LOCAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST (SGIs)

9. The issue of public services (SGIs) remains very high in the list of our priorities, and we have worked with, and offered ideas to, the Parliament's rapporteurs and committees, which have taken on board some of our points. CEMR has recently adopted a European Charter of Local and Regional Services of General Interest, which we ask the Parliament to take into account and to support. We believe that our Charter's provisions are fully compatible with "the essential role and the wide discretion" of local and regional governments in this field, affirmed in the Protocol on Services of General Interest annexed to the Treaty of Lisbon
10. In particular, we believe that in recent years, the balance between the internal market rules and the principle of local and regional self-government has not been correctly struck in this field. Local governments are, by their closeness to the citizens and thus to the service users, the best qualified to make judgments about the nature, mode of management and quality of the SGIs for which they are responsible, taking into account all of the local circumstances.
 - ***We ask the Parliament to work for amendments to existing law on relevant issues including:***
 - ***To ensure that local and regional governments can freely decide how each service is to be provided, including the definition and evaluation of standards for service quality***
 - ***To exclude non-commercial local public services, in particular of a social, educational, environmental or cultural purpose, from the internal market system***
 - ***To protect the right of local governments to set up and directly assign services to inter-communal companies, or to another local authority or non-profit public body***
 - ***To define the "in-house" concept for all public services in the same way as has been applied by the Parliament in the regulation on public passenger transport services.***

GENDER EQUALITY

11. CEMR has recently marked our 25 years of action for equality of women, and we are delighted that our European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life has generated a huge support; we acknowledge here the support from the Commission and the Parliament (through its Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee).
 - ***We ask the Parliament to maintain its strong backing for gender equality, and to include an important focus on the local and regional dimension.***

TWINNING AND EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

12. This year (2009) marks the 20th anniversary of the European Parliament's decision to create a European programme to support town twinning – a valued support currently provided through the Europe for Citizens programme. We consider that Europe needs, more than ever, the support and understanding of its citizens, and that twinning and similar actions are vital to create awareness of a common identity and a common citizenship. Moreover, we must not forget the important role of twinning in relation to peace-building and conflict resolution.
- ***We ask for the Parliament's support for a strengthened and better-funded Europe for Citizens programme, and in particular for twinning and active European citizenship, with a greater flexibility and synergy between different programmes, and involving a wider range of people and countries.***

DECENTRALISED CO-OPERATION

13. Local governments have for many years made an important – but often underestimated - contribution to international development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals through their north-south partnerships and twinings, in a wide range of domains (environment, governance, economic development, decentralisation ...).
14. The current Parliament has played a very positive role in recognizing this contribution, including the creation of the funding programme for non-state actors and local authorities. The associations of local and regional government have come together at European level in a new Platform, in order to co-ordinate our actions and work better with the EU's institutions, including the Parliament.
- ***We ask that the Parliament continue to focus on working with local and regional authorities to achieve the MDGs, and to recognize the important role of decentralized co-operation in pro-poor development,***
 - ***We also ask the Parliament to look for means of enhancing the local and regional contribution in these fields, and open a dialogue with our Platform of local and regional governments for development.***

SOUTH-EAST EUROPE AND THE EU'S OTHER NEIGHBOURS

15. One of our common European tasks is to consolidate peace and stability in the western Balkans, after the terrible wars of the 1990s in the region. This requires the development of effective governance and democratic institutions at all levels, which enable good and sustainable development of all countries and territories of the region.
16. We are convinced that eventual EU membership for all in the western Balkans is the best outcome, once the necessary conditions are fulfilled.
17. For other neighbouring countries of the EU, to the east and south, we likewise draw attention to the key role of local and regional government, and for the need for EU programmes to support such twinings and partnerships.
 - ***We ask the Parliament to support partnership initiatives and programmes aimed at strengthening local and regional government in the Western Balkans (especially geared towards a better understanding of the EU's operation and policies),***
 - ***and to promote effective programmes of similar character between local and regional authorities from the EU and other neighbouring countries.***

THE EUROPEAN TREATIES

18. For many years, we have pressed for the inclusion in the European Treaties of a proper place for, and recognition of, local and regional government in Europe's governance. We have therefore supported the draft Constitutional Treaty and the Treaty of Lisbon in providing
 - explicit recognition to local and regional self-government,
 - the extension of the subsidiarity principle to include local and regional government,
 - greater involvement, consultation and protection of local and regional authorities through the Protocol on subsidiarity and proportionality,
 - full recognition to the concept and objective of territorial cohesion, i.e. the role of local and regional authorities in integrating European and national policies in their areas.
 - ***We look to the Parliament to ensure, for its part, that these points are first realized (assuming the Treaty of Lisbon comes into effect, as we hope) and then implemented effectively by all EU institutions.***

The **Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)** is the broadest association of local and regional authorities in Europe.

Its members are national associations of local and regional governments from over thirty European countries.

The main aim of CEMR is to promote a strong, united Europe based on local and regional self-government and democracy; a Europe in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to its citizens, in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

CEMR's work covers a wide range of themes, including public services, transport, regional policy, the environment, equal opportunities...

CEMR is also active on the international stage. It is the European section of the world organisation of cities and municipalities, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).



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