



Manifesto of the USLRRE for the European Elections 2014

**Europe's strength lies in its cities and municipalities
For a social Europe of freedom, equal opportunities and solidarity**

The European integration process is Europe's foundation for security, stability and prosperity and provides people with the framework conditions for a life in peace and prosperity. It also contributed considerably to the reconciliation of the peoples of Europe after the Second World War along with the integration of the Eastern and central European countries in 2004, 2007 and 2013 which ended the over 40-year long division of the continent. Today the European Union comprises 28 countries in which 505 million people live in more than 96.000 cities and municipalities.

This strong community is, however, facing huge challenges: the continuing financial and sovereign debt crisis and its economic and social consequences have led to an increase in social disparities in the European Union. This is compounded by the demographic development and the consequences of climate change. Consequently, many people have lost their enthusiasm for the European idea because the current problems superimpose themselves on the achievements of European integration which are taken for granted. The European policy of regulations and directives is in contrast often perceived as being cold and bureaucratic.

The Socialist Local and Regional Representatives of Europe have always been committed to the European unification process. They are going to continue to work to promote the European idea and contribute to the improvement and continued social development of our common Europe. Because our future lies in a strong and social Europe. We, Socialists, are fighting for a constructive and continued development and improvement of the European Union: this European Union has to become more democratic, more social, more transparent and less bureaucratic and always bear in mind the impact of policies on local authorities and regions.

We emphatically reject any turning away from the European unification process and any renationalisation policies, such as the ultra-nationalists in many countries demand. A fall-back to nationalism is not a good alternative for Europe. It has only ever brought destruction, war, suffering and misery on our continent and is at the root of dictatorship and racism. We thus have to purposively face the ultra-nationalists together and point out to people the added value of European integration and of our policies for a social Europe.

The Socialist Local and Regional Representatives are committed to a social Europe based on the principles of freedom and democracy, social justice and solidarity, as well as closeness to citizens and subsidiarity. The citizens of Europe have to be at the heart of the European political project. The main objective of our policy is to bring about decent and equal living conditions in all parts of Europe. No woman, man or child should be left behind. That is what we socialists are fighting for in all EU member states.

The Socialist Local and Regional Representatives stand for the values of progress, peace, the European unification project, democracy, tolerance and dialogue. Any form of discrimination of minorities or social exclusion is, and remains, unacceptable. The EU members states are under an obligation to bring about decent living conditions and to ensure that all citizens can participate in society. This is why the diversity of cultures, traditions and structures in the European member states has to be maintained. This diversity is reflected at the local level and is one of Europe's main strengths.

All policies must be efficient, serve citizens in an open and transparent way and fight corruption and organised crime.

**I. We need a political change of course in Europe:
For a social Europe of freedom, equal opportunities and solidarity**

The European elections of 2014 are also extremely important for the local authorities and regions in Europe. This is because the European Union has competences in numerous areas that impact policies and actions at local and regional level in many different ways.

The European Parliament significantly shapes European policies. The Treaty of Lisbon enshrined the co-decision procedure as the ordinary legislative procedure. According to this procedure, the European Parliament is a partner on equal footing with the European Council in the legislative process.

The conservatives and neo-liberals, which hold a majority in the European Parliament, European Council and European Commission, with their liberal economic policies are responsible for the dire economic and social situation in large parts of Europe, as well as for the loss of faith in the European idea. They are out of answers to the current challenges.

Therefore we need a quick and deep-reaching policy change in Europe. Europe has to become socially fairer, closer to citizens, more democratic and less bureaucratic. The European elections of 2014 are thus about deciding on a change of course.

We, the Socialist Local and Regional Representatives of Europe, welcome the PES' programme for the European elections of 2014. We will support its leading candidate Martin Schulz so that a socialist at the head of the European Commission will in future shape the necessary change of course towards European policies more focussed on people's needs.

II. Europe's strength lies in its cities and municipalities

Europe's great strength lies in the diversity of its cities and municipalities. Elected in universal and direct suffrage, local and regional assemblies make a concrete and innovative local democracy live each day. They allow citizens a direct and regular contact with the representatives of public power. They are the foundation of European democracy and society and organise many aspects of people's immediate living surroundings. Thereby the cities and municipalities contribute significantly to ensuring economic prosperity, cultural diversity and social cohesion in Europe.

Local authorities can react in a flexible way to the local and regional specificities. They are able to come up with a range of possible solutions to respond to a range of challenges. Decentralised self-regulation however requires of the cities, municipalities and regions involved that they also take up their responsibilities and show their commitment. Local self-governance serves the already existing strengths and creativity of people at local level. Europe needs these decentralised structures in order to make the most of its innovation potential and cultural diversity to the benefit of people.

1. Securing the capacity of local authorities to act!

A social Europe needs strong local and regional authorities with the ability to act. The right to local self-government in Europe should be taken into account and reinforced, as foreseen by the Lisbon Treaty. We should therefore call for as much Europe as necessary, and as much local, regional and national self-governance as possible. The principle of subsidiarity should be strictly applied.

The local and regional authorities of Europe must be endowed with stable long-term funding on a par with their responsibilities. This is currently in doubt in several places in Europe. The impact of the financial crisis and of the public debt crisis, as well as the implementation of the measures agreed upon between the Member States of the Euro Zone, take up numerous resources. Dramatic consequences are especially felt at the local level. In order to avoid hardening of social gaps in the society, and an erosion of confidence in the State, a significant increase in the funding of local and regional authorities shall be guaranteed immediately. Otherwise, the threat of sizeable reductions in provision and of infrastructural decline will not solely bear on the local and regional authorities who are financially weakest. The consequence of this will be an even more worrisome weakening of the social cohesion and the economic foundation of the European Social State.

The true autonomy of local authorities lies in their capacity to define local policy priorities with and for the citizens. This requires a minimum necessary room to manoeuvre when it comes to resources of which they may dispose freely, beyond funding for the responsibilities delegated to them by the central state. The direct and indirect financial impacts of European legal acts on local authorities shall be more readily taken into consideration. To accomplish this, the procedure to study the impact of legislation, as well as the possibility of including representatives of local authorities, shall be improved. Finally, operators participating in the legislative process (the Commission, the Parliament and the Council, as well as Member States) shall make sure that sufficient resources are left at the disposal of local authorities, so that the latter are able to compensate for the costs resulting directly or indirectly from legal acts of the EU. In the application of the consultation principle, care must be taken that the financial resources of local authorities are commensurate with the responsibilities delegated to them by the central state and the regions. As far as European regulation is concerned, the rationale should be: they, who order, should pay.

By even further supporting structurally weak urban and rural regions, as well as areas in cities faced with significant social challenges, by means of resources allocated to cohesion policies, the European Union shall contribute significantly to overcoming the very divergent economic and demographic developments of the Regions of Europe, as well as the social inequalities that result from them, and thus to reinforcing Europe's social and territorial cohesion.

2. Using the potential of local authorities for Europe

The competences of local and regional authorities and their proximity to people should be better taken into account for the sake of Europe. The participation of local and regional authorities to the decision-making process should be reinforced. Their knowledge of local conditions and problems and their expertise can be an important contribution to defining policies that are closer to the citizen. They are in better position to assess if draft legislation and projects actually fit the needs of people in their immediate living environment. With the Committee of the Regions, local authorities and regions have a strong voice in Europe. This is something Socialist Local and Regional Representatives have intensely struggled for. The consultation and involvement of associations of local authorities and regions and other stakeholders representing local interests in the legislative process should also be improved.

The local level should be more closely involved than it has been as a partner of the EU especially in the preparation and implementation of structural policy measures. Thanks to their knowledge of local conditions, local authorities can make a significant contribution to rendering structural policy measures more efficient. Therefore, local authorities and regions should be more closely involved when national strategic framework planning and operative programmes are drawn up and implemented. In line with a territorial and decentralised approach, local actors should be granted more responsibility and margins for manoeuvre when applying funds (Multi-Level-Governance). Regional budgets can be a helpful tool to more efficiently promote local cooperation through an integrated approach.

III. The Socialist Local and Regional Representatives for a social Europe

For a social and progressive Europe, we, The Socialist Local and Regional Representatives of Europe, campaign specifically for the following priorities:

1. Guaranteed access for all to services of public interest

We campaign for services of public interest to continue to be part and parcel of the European social model. They are an essential prerequisite for social and territorial cohesion in Europe and for a functioning economy. Such services of public interest comprise water and energy supply, waste disposal, urban public transport, as well as health care and social services. Local authorities must ensure that all citizens have access to efficient, cheap and high-quality services. Our objective is to improve the living conditions of all citizens and to contribute to overcoming social fragmentation and exclusion by modernising and increasing the efficiency of services of general interest. Competition can be a means to an end; it is not an end in itself and has to be subordinated to policy objectives. Any limit on the capacity of action of local authorities in guaranteeing services oriented to the public welfare will be seen by citizens as a threat. The debate about the application of the concessions directive on the area of water supply has underscored this impressively. More legal certainty for local authorities has to be provided for at European level as regards services of general interest. According to the principle of subsidiarity the historical structures of Member States in the EU should be taken into account.

2. Solidarity and equal opportunities: leaving no one aside

Strengthening social cohesion is a central objective of socialist policies. The local authorities and regions of Europe have a preponderant role to play in strengthening social and territorial cohesion. We want to give everyone the opportunity to take part in life in the community. We campaign for the creation of framework conditions that enable older people to live and age in dignity. The rights and opportunities for disabled people to participate have to be strengthened, as provided for in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We want all children to have the same opportunities in society, regardless of their social background. We want all children to have the same opportunities of participation and self-determination, education and a healthy development. Better access to education and knowledge is a key element to improving people's participation and promotion opportunities. Early child care and education should be improved for the sake of equal opportunities.

Integration has to be understood as a challenge for the whole of Europe that is shaped at local level. The integration of immigrants provides an opportunity for Europe growing together and for European development and takes place in the different local communities. At the same time, the relevant framework conditions fall entirely outside the powers of local authorities to shape these. This is why integration has to be understood and tackled as a pan-European task. The conditions have to be created for integration to take place immediately and locally and for the necessary funds to be made available.

Given a continuing migration of poor people within the EU and the increased numbers of asylum seekers and refugees, the member states and the EU must support the relevant local authorities so that the cities and municipalities are able to carry out this important integration and socio-political task.

A socialist urban and housing policy aims to promote social cohesion and social mixing. Affordable housing is essential for the social and economic stability of our cities and municipalities. Building needs to be strengthened in regions with housing shortages. Member states are responsible for creating appropriate legal framework conditions and funding programmes. Furthermore, questions of European competition law need to be clarified so as not to be a barrier to action at local and regional level.

3. Promoting local economies and local employment

Fighting unemployment is among the top priorities of socialist policies – particularly with regard to those who are at a disadvantage: women, handicapped persons, young and long term unemployed persons. The repercussions of unemployment are strongly felt by towns and communities. Thus in order to combat unemployment, it is essential that in addition to policies on the national and the European level accompanying measures are also taken on the local level. We regard the European programme “Youth Employment Initiative”, which was initiated by the European socialists, as being of the highest importance. Local authorities should play an important role in carrying out this programme. Employment policy remains the prime responsibility of national governments. To the extent of their possibilities and in different ways, local authorities and regions contribute significantly to the fight against unemployment: for example as public employer, by promoting the economy and making infrastructures available or through qualification measures. Local authorities support new strategies for achieving growth. They support co-operation between research and business as well as technological innovation. The extent to which they can contribute to this battle will depend on the legal framework and the necessary funds provided by the national government. They should be able to use structural funds under the cohesion policy for their priorities regarding economic development and employment.

4. Promoting gender equality

We campaign for promoting that gender equality be more closely considered when local authorities formulate policies - for example, as regards practical aspects of daily life: working life, housing, security or public transport. We want to give all women and men the opportunity to reconcile their professional and family lives by providing comprehensive child care services. Gender equality also needs to be improved in administrations and local businesses. We also commit ourselves to making sure that more women take part in politics in the local and regional parliaments across Europe.

5. Sustainable development: protecting the environment and safeguarding the living environment

We are committed to the objectives of sustainability set out in Agenda 21. The European Commission has recognised that local authorities play a central role in protecting the climate: 80 % of expenditure takes place at regional or local level (5. Cohesion Report of the EU Commission). Local authorities make an important contribution to sustainable development and climate protection, for instance through the production and use of renewable energies, energy-efficient building refurbishment and the promotion of environmentally-friendly vehicles, as well as sustainable local housing and traffic planning. The local innovation potential in the fight against climate change should be further developed and better supported in order to define a sustainable environmental policy. When defining policies and measures to fight climate change, the cooperation and coordination between the EU and national, regional and local levels are of paramount importance.

6. Cooperations and partnerships promote growing together and international solidarity

We want to use town twinning and local cross-border and transnational cooperations to encourage Europe to continuously grow together. Especially in times in which many citizens question the project of European integration, more funds should be made available to allow people within the EU to come together to make Europe more of a tangible experience and to promote understanding of living conditions in other parts of Europe.

We are committed to global solidarity as stated in the Millennium Development Goals. Numerous European local authorities engage in development cooperation and thus contribute to improving the livelihood of people in developing countries. Local partnerships have an important role to play in this. In order to better use the potential of local authorities for development cooperation, the EU should consider local authorities even more closely to be actors of effective development cooperation and make more programmes and funds available.

7. Contribution to European citizenship

We have always voiced our support for practising participative democracy. This contributes to informing citizens and making them responsible, enabling them to contribute their skills and influence local political decisions. Through such participation, citizens are also better informed of the influence that European policies have on local life and better able to live their European citizenship.