



**Meeting of the Bureau of the
Union of Socialist Local and Regional Representatives in Europe
on 12 June 2015 in Budapest**

Resolution of the USLRRE

Social cohesion of European territories, cement of a Europe confident in its future

Whereas Europe has difficulties bouncing back from the financial and economic crisis it entered in 2008, social tensions remain strong in many countries and lead to the very principle of European democracy and its local declinations being called into question.

In Europe, social tensions lead to democracy being called into question

The tensions running through Europe are diverse and sometimes take unexpected forms. The financial and economic crisis has highlighted even more the difference between the regions. There are those who resist thanks to a solid economy, aligned with the needs of global growth. In others the main economic sectors do not have the capacity to resist competitive pressure. Furthermore, social cohesion is also endangered within regions. Even within the flourishing regions of the capitals of London and Paris Ile-de-France, the wealth gap is increasing significantly. This problem is apparent in the poverty risk of young people and children in regions with high unemployment, older people with insufficient old-age provision, single women, people with precarious working conditions and people with a migration background are at an increased risk of poverty. In 2015, European social cohesion is strongly called into question.

Faced with this situation, populist and nationalist elected representatives propose simplistic solutions based on xenophobia and racism. They raise the question of national preference on issues such as employment, housing, education or even social benefits. After 2014, which saw the election of many populist and extreme right-wing representatives (52/751) to the European Parliament, 2015 has seen the number of populist parties such as UKIP (United-Kingdom) or FN (France) progress in a worrying manner at national level. In Hungary, a European country with the second highest ratio of asylum seekers to its population (Eurostat 2014), President Viktor Orban pursues an increasingly discriminatory policy by trying to deprive certain populations (Roma) of their rights.

Finally, the very many shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 have underscored that national self-interests obstruct finding responses to this global problem and they have hardened European public opinion on questions of immigration. A large part of the answers are to be found in African states. Europe bears part of the responsibility for the economic and social development of these countries. The root of our problems are to be found in these states and therefore we have to help them overcome their difficulties, if we want to tackle the root causes.

For the Socialist Local and Regional Representatives, the question of social cohesion, amongst populations within a country but also with respect to immigrant populations, is, in 2015, at the heart of the European question. The Socialist Local and Regional Representatives put the topic of social cohesion, amongst populations within a country and also with respect to immigrant populations, in 2015 at the forefront of the discussion in Europe.

European local authorities, as most important guarantors of social cohesion, have to be supported.

European local authorities have to contribute to reducing the wealth gap between member states, regions and within urban areas which is prejudicial to social and territorial cohesion today.

Local authorities help people fight against poverty and they provide the necessary support to solve other types of critical situations. In addition, they carry out an active social policy, for instance by offering a wide range of quality services in the field of care and education for children and youth, of integration of migrants, of employment and improved qualifications, culture, sports, leisure activities and health. It is therefore essential that citizens are encouraged to interact with one another, take charge of their own lives and take up their responsibilities.

For the Socialist Local and Regional Representatives, local public services have to be recognized as an important pillar for social cohesion. The European Commission, has to stop considering **local public services** as hurdles to the establishment of the single market. Instead of creating competition between public services, it has to **protect** them. Beyond social cohesion, these services are also useful in making the local economies in the territories more competitive. by ensuring that public life runs smoothly and that the necessary infrastructure is in place. Their policies thus have a considerable leverage effect in bringing about a return of growth and local employment in Europe. By providing public procurement contracts and by supporting education, together with national and European policies, they enable people in difficulties to find a job locally. In order to ensure that local public services run smoothly and that the necessary infrastructure is in place.

Given these many responsibilities, it is clear that European local authorities have to have **the capacity to act and to benefit from the necessary funding** to perform their duties and to seek new sources of financing using local and territorial innovation. As a matter of fact, the 95000 regional and local authorities of the European Union represent 1/3 of public expenditure and more than 2/3 of public investment expenditure. There can be no growth that is not inclusive and based on solidarity. Yet, local authorities are the first players when it comes to reducing wealth gaps. This support is based on the legal principle of subsidiarity. As stated in the European Charter of Local Self-Government of the Council of Europe, adopted by the Treaty of Lisbon, it is about enabling them to perform these duties at the most decentralised level possible. This support is also based on effectiveness. By supporting ever more urban and rural territories structurally in difficulties, as well as urban neighbourhoods facing significant social challenges, the European Union can contribute to overcoming diverging economic and demographic evolutions, as well as resulting social inequalities.

For The Socialist Local and Regional Representatives, the effectiveness of employment and inclusion policies and the confidence of citizens in politicians can only start in the field. On this basis, they ask for the means to take action to encourage local employment, to bring about social cohesion, and to demonstrate concretely the capacity to integrate immigrant populations. By developing local democracy much further, we will have the opportunity to better involve citizens so they interact with the social movement.

Urban and territorial cohesion is a prerequisite to the continuation of the European project

The questions that many European citizens ask themselves, their doubts as to whether democracy can resolve issues of cohesion and migration, also lead them to doubt their faith in the European project. Every time that growth stalls the European project is called into question. They easily relinquish their responsibilities and give these to others (elected officials, trade unions, associations etc.) by stigmatising scape goats when they, in fact, have the solution.

We, the Socialist Local and Regional Representatives, note that **the European project is not necessarily continuous** and that a disintegration process is threatening Europe be it due to frustration, a population's distrust . This process would have dire consequences, concretely for the economy and European society. For this reason, we maintain that social cohesion is a prerequisite to the continuation of the European project. There can be no cohesion without an economy, employment and the development of our territories.

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.

For the Socialist Local and Regional Representatives, the issues that weaken social cohesion – weak economic growth and unemployment, the wealth gaps between territories and concerns about migration – are of a nature to call into question the European peoples' confidence in democracy and in the European project if they are not resolved effectively. We are aware of the complexity of the problem and we know that it takes time, but above all we have to organise the ideological confrontation to at least come up with solutions.

Gathered in Budapest, the Socialist Local and Regional Representatives of Europe wish to affirm the following

Principles :

1. Whereas Europe is starting to emerge from the economic crisis, **democratic values** are under attack by populist politicians and the citizens' lack of trust in the **European project** has never been this high ;
2. The answer to the European peoples' crisis of confidence is to **maintain social cohesion** in the territories and to reduce the wealth gaps between territories ;
3. Local authorities are the first to guarantee such social cohesion through the implementation and management of a true high-quality local public service. On this basis, the **right to local autonomy in Europe**, as enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon, has to be concretely strengthened to allow local authorities to develop appropriate policies to fight against discrimination and to strengthen cohesion.

Expectations

4. The Socialist Local and Regional Representatives specifically ask for investments in social cohesion, in education and in the sustainable development of territories to be excluded from the requirements imposed by **budgetary convergence** on member states.
5. The European Commission has to maintain and protect services of general economic interest (**SGEI**) and social services of general interest (**SSGI**) which are a precondition to inclusive growth and which foster cohesion rather than social tension ;
6. As regards the free trade agreement **TTIP** which is currently being negotiated with the United States, we insistently urge the European Commission to ensure that local services of general interest be excluded from the agreement. The European Parliament and the member states have to ensure that this is done. The USLRRE rejects a so-called investment protection clause with extrajudicial and intransparent arbitration procedures in case of disputes.
7. Part of the "**Juncker Plan**" has to be explicitly earmarked for local governments. The Local and Regional Representatives of Europe would like to remind everyone that this plan is based on the PES proposal for the European elections of 2014.
8. For all of these reasons, the Socialist Local and Regional Representatives endorse the Resolution of the Congress 2015 of the **Party of European Socialists**.