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**Contribution of the Union of Socialist Local and Regional Representatives in Europe (USLRRE)  
to the consultation on the PES manifesto for the 2009 European elections**

The Union of Socialist and Regional Representatives in Europe (USLRRE) calls on the PES to recognise and support the increasing role of local authorities in conforming the daily lives of our fellow citizens. The local representatives and administrations are essential public actors for democracy in our states. They exercise their power through truly efficient public actions and under a good management of their financial costs. The members of the USLRRE are committed to supporting our shared values of social justice and freedom in their local policies.

The Union of Socialist Local and Regional Representatives in Europe (USLRRE) welcomes the fact that the Lisbon Treaty increases the power of the European Parliament in the European decision-making process. As stipulated by the Treaty, the co-decision procedure becomes the rule in the legislative process of the European Union (EU). In the framework of this procedure, the European Parliament is on equal footing with the Council of the EU in the decision-making process. Along with the governments of the Member States, the European Parliament plays a decisive role in setting the agenda for the future of Europe.

Because an increasing number of areas fall under the scope of EU policy and as the EU influences local and regional policy in various ways, the elections to the European Parliament are particularly important also for the local and regional authorities of Europe.

The socialist and social democratic Members of the European Parliament are ever more important and reliable partners for their colleagues in the national, regional and local parliaments in their common efforts to create a social and just Europe for the people and with the people. The socialist and social democratic representatives believe that policy-making should be carried out at the closest level possible to the citizens according to the principle of subsidiarity.

In addition to those governments where socialists and social democrats are represented, a strong PES Group in the European Parliament is a dependable counterweight to the often too liberal positions of the EU Commission. The Socialist Local and Regional Representatives in Europe commit themselves to doing their utmost to support all PES candidates to the European Parliament.

## **1. Democracy and Diversity**

People live in towns and communities. This is why local authorities are the pillars of European democracy and society. They conform and organise the immediate living environment of people and at a time of rampant globalization, they preserve the local and regional identity as well as the cultural diversity of Europe. In this sense, they are a fundamental contribution to the development of societies in Europe, to the daily lives of people and to the unification of Europe.

Like in European elections, EU citizens can also vote in the local elections of the country in which they live. The right to vote and to stand for as a candidate for the municipal elections allows EU citizens to participate in the decision-making process of their communities. Therefore, European integration and unification are promoted at the root.

### **Taking advantage of local potentialities and reinforcing the action of local authorities**

The strength of local authorities is that they 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.

In view of the different tasks that local and regional authorities carry out, they should have the necessary legal capacity and means for action in order for them to do their job. According to the subsidiarity principle, these tasks should be carried out if possible by the smaller unit and in a decentralised manner. This corresponds to the principle of local government in public affairs, which is not only laid down in the Lisbon Treaty but also in the European Charter of Local Self-Government of the Council of Europe, which all EU Member States endorsed.

This also guarantees that the most fitting solution is found at local level in order to respond to the needs of the people. What is good for a city in the north of Finland does not necessarily work for a community in Andalusia. Europe needs decentralised structures in order to make the most of its innovation potential and cultural diversity to the benefit of people. The big strength of Europe lies in its diversity of towns and communities. We should therefore call for as much Europe as necessary, and as much local, regional and national self-governance as possible.

The discretionary power of local and regional authorities is very often limited not only by EU legislation directly but also in particular by the financial constraints that European regulation entails. The budgets of local authorities are heavily burdened by EU rules and as a result their political margin of manoeuvre decreases. This should be much more taken into account when drafting new legislation at European level. Member States, which play an important role in the drafting of European legislation in the EU Council, should therefore make sure that local authorities receive adequate funding in order for them to fulfil the tasks attributed to them by European law. As far as European regulation is concerned, the rationale should be: they, who order, should pay.

A stronger local participation in the European decision-making process is a fundamental prerequisite to the so often proclaimed 'Citizens' Europe'. Because of their knowledge of local conditions and problems, local authorities can bring an important contribution to the drafting and implementation of European legislation and provisions. Their expertise makes them the most reliable partners in order to define policies that are close to the citizens but also, for example, to draft and implement structural policies. They are in better position to assess if draft legislation and projects actually fit the needs of people in their immediate living environment.

### **The Lisbon Treaty reinforces the local and regional authorities**

Like the Convention for the European Constitution, the heads of state and government have taken into account the fundamental role of local authorities in Europe. Much like the former Constitution, the Lisbon Treaty reinforces the position of local and regional authorities in the EU as follows:

- The treaty explicitly recognises the right to local and regional self-government as part of the national identity of Member States;
- The treaty reinforces the principle of subsidiarity and extends it to the regional and local levels;
- The treaty introduces a right of appeal for the Committee of Regions (CoR) before the European Court of Justice in case of infringement of the principle of subsidiarity;
- The treaty extends the rights of consultation of local authorities in Europe;
- The treaty foresees a procedure in order to assess the administrative and financial impacts of draft legislation at local and regional levels.

For the sake of a democratic and transparent Europe, the Socialist Local and Regional Representatives in Europe ask the PES to underline once more in its manifesto that the Socialists and Social Democrats in the European Parliament, as partners and friends of local and regional authorities, should see to it that these **rights** in the treaty are taken into account and implemented in practice.

### **Local cooperation to the service of people and of European integration**

Through meetings and exchange programmes, cities and municipalities in Europe are able to gather citizens from different countries, in particular young people, and in this sense they contribute to the unification of Europe. This is why EU funding for town-twinning and cross-border and trans-national cooperation should be maintained and extended.

### **2. A New Social Europe**

Cities and municipalities play a fundamental role in the creation of a social Europe on the basis of solidarity, proximity to the citizens and subsidiarity. In order to achieve “a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress” as stipulated by the Lisbon Treaty, the social dimension of the European Union should be reinforced and the social and territorial cohesion further improved. As the PES quite rightly puts it in its report on “A New Social Europe”, the acceptance of the EU by its citizens will greatly depend on its improving their living and working conditions. The social impact of European draft legislation should therefore be evaluated. After all, for us socialists and social democrats, the main focus should be on the individual. Competition is not an end! Furthermore the diversity of structures in the European Member States should be better taken into account.

### **Services of general interest**

The safeguard and improvement of services of general interest are a fundamental prerequisite for the creation of a social Europe. These services, of which local authorities are most often in charge and which pertain to the public welfare, range from water and energy distribution and public transport to such areas as welfare, schools, health, housing, culture as well as the care of people in difficult situations and other social services of general interest.

One of the tasks of local and regional authorities is to provide citizens with equal and non-discriminatory access to a comprehensive range of high-quality and affordable services and goods that are necessary to them. These services guarantee the good functioning of public life and the competitiveness of the economy and they contribute to preserving the natural living conditions for future generations. Services of general interest are an important basis for the development of the social and territorial cohesion of the EU and for job creation. They are a decisive factor to guarantee the social participation of people. It is essential to secure basic service provision to the population particularly in structurally weaker rural areas, i.e. equip them with the minimum infrastructure and offer basic goods and services. 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 USLRRE reiterates its demand for more legal certainty for local authorities with regard to the services of general (economic) interest. According to the principle of subsidiarity the historical structures of Member States in the EU should be taken into account. In this sense, decisions regarding which services of general interest are to be provided should be left to the EU Member States and their local authorities. This is moreover explicitly stated by the protocol (nr. 9) of the Lisbon Treaty on the services of general interest, when it talks about the common values of the EU in relation to services of general economic interest and underlines “*the essential role and the wide discretion of national, regional and local authorities in providing, commissioning and organising services of general economic interest as closely as possible to the needs of the user*”. The PES should recognise that in the framework of local self-government, cities and municipalities are the ones to decide whether or not to provide a public service and how, or entrust a municipal company or any third party they deem appropriate with this task. In principle, the question of who should provide what and under which form remains open. But what is important is that these services pertaining to the general welfare should be provided to the population in a transparent way and under public supervision.

Local authorities believe that more legal certainty is required when trying to define if services are of economic or non-economic nature or whether they fall under the rules of the internal market or not. To this aim, the principles of subsidiarity and of local and regional self-government should be taken into account as foreseen by the Lisbon Treaty (Art. 14 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the Union and Art. 4 of the EU Treaty). Because of the diversity of structures in the EU Member States as well as of services of general interest, one way to reach more legal certainty could be to define abstract differentiation criteria and regulate the other matters in every individual field through sectoral directives, as already is the case for the different network industries.

In order to preserve the capacity of local and regional authorities to act and guarantee the provision of services of general interest, the USLRRE calls on the PES Group in the European Parliament to ask the European Commission to amend the EU public procurement legislation. Not only should the EU legislation on public procurement clearly exempt cross-municipal cooperation on its whole but a regulation should be also adopted in order to allow the commissioning of mixed enterprises.

### **Encouraging social and territorial cohesion – promoting a policy for the development of urban and rural areas**

A wide range of issues such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness, debt, crime, vandalism, drug abuse, health risks, disability, and problems related to education and qualifications are huge challenges for our society. In several local and regional authorities social problems have arisen, which threaten to create a social divide in our society. Local authorities are directly exposed to this phenomenon. They have the important task to adopt the necessary social policies in order to find concrete solutions to emergency situations but on the other hand, they should act in a preventive manner and carry out the necessary social measures so as to allow cities and municipalities to create better living conditions in a proactive manner.

A social urban policy should aim at allowing people from different origins and social backgrounds to live together and let all citizens take part in the social, economic and cultural life of their communities, particularly in structurally weaker rural areas.

The regions of Europe have developed very differently from an economic and demographic point of view and consequently, social inequalities between regions and within regions and communities will increase. It is therefore essential that measures launched by local authorities for neighbourhoods and communities with more serious social, economic and infrastructural problems should succeed in order to preserve the future perspectives and opportunities of people living there. The EU ministers in charge of spatial development in the Member States clearly declare in the Leipzig Charter for sustainable European cities: *“Our cities need enough scope for action in order to perform local tasks in a responsible manner and a sound financial basis which provides long-term stability. Therefore it is important too that Member States have the opportunity to use the European structural funds for substantial integrated urban development programmes.”*

The Socialist Local and Regional Representatives in Europe welcome therefore the fact that the European Commission has better taken into account the urban dimension in its structural funds programme for the period 2007-2013 and that more funding should be made available. We also welcome the fact that all the instruments for the development of rural areas have been pooled. The promotion of regional development in poorer rural areas has become more important than in the past in comparison to measures in support of agriculture. We believe that this change of direction in the programming of structural funds should be further pursued for the next period. Lastly, the financial support to neighbourhoods and rural areas plagued with social and economic problems are an important contribution to the territorial and social cohesion of Europe. From the local point of view, we also call for a further simplification of application procedures as well as planning and implementation of these programmes.

For the sake of solidarity between regions and national states of the EU, financial compensation mechanisms should be maintained through the European structural funds. The Socialist Local and Regional Representatives in Europe support therefore the objectives that the EU ministers in charge of spatial development also adopted in the so-called “Territorial Agenda of the EU – Towards a More Competitive and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions”. This Agenda suggests that territorial diversity should be even more taken into account in the European cohesion policy. Under the three main objectives of the European spatial development policy, the Agenda insists on developing a balanced and polycentric urban system with a new urban-rural partnership, on securing an equal access to infrastructure and knowledge, on guaranteeing sustainable development and on protecting nature and the cultural heritage.

### **3. Save our planet**

As the European Commission states in its 2007 Green Paper on “Adapting to climate change in Europe”, local and regional authorities play an important role in the fight against climate change and the protection of the environment. In addition to the different tasks that local authorities carry out in the field of environmental policy, many local authorities and regions have been active in the fight against climate change for a long time. They have taken a variety of measures especially towards producing and using renewable energy, they have focused on making buildings more energy-efficient and have promoted the use of more environmentally-friendly means of transport. Local and regional authorities also have the possibility to support the development of sustainable housing and transport at regional level, which brings about a lot of opportunities in the fight against climate change and for environmental protection. Among these are mobility concepts in order to avoid traffic and to move to environmentally-friendly means of transport, such as local public transport. Local authorities know best how necessary it is to make sure that provisions for the protection of climate and for a sustainable environmental policy are consistent with local framework conditions. In view of this and of the different situations in the Member States, the ‘one-size-fit-all’ solutions proposed by the EU are not a meaningful option.

In order to efficiently counter the dangers of rampant climate change, it is necessary to have an integrated approach based on cooperation and the coordination between EU policies and measures and the national, regional and local levels.

If the light of the increasing number of natural disasters, which particularly affect the local and regional authorities, we call for an increase of the EU solidarity fund.

### **4. Europe in the World**

Europe’s Socialists and Social Democrats commit themselves to the objectives of global solidarity and sustainability for the purposes of the Millennium Development Goals and of the Agenda 21. 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.

A lot of local authorities in Europe work in the field of cooperation to development in very different ways. They support local authorities and projects outside of Europe, by providing them for instance with technical know-how, by supporting them in building and improving their administrations or by bringing natural disaster relief – as in the case of the Tsunami. In this way, European local authorities contribute to the Millennium Development Goals.

The European level should better take into account local authorities as actors for an effective cooperation to development policy and define other programmes and instruments in order to promote local and regional aid to development.

## Contribution of the USLRRE to the consultation on the PES manifesto for the 2009 European elections

### Summary of the main points

1. **The reinforcement of local and regional authorities as inscribed in the Treaty of Lisbon should be better taken into account in practice and applied.** The Lisbon Treaty underlines the significant contribution of local and regional authorities to European integration. It reinforces the position of local and regional authorities in the EU as follows:
  - The treaty explicitly recognises the right to local and regional self-government as part of the national identity of Member States;
  - The treaty reinforces the principle of subsidiarity and extends it to the regional and local levels;
  - The treaty introduces a right of appeal for the Committee of Regions (CoR) before the European Court of Justice in case of infringement of the principle of subsidiarity;
  - The treaty extends the rights of consultation of local authorities in Europe;
  - The treaty foresees a procedure in order to assess the administrative and financial impacts of draft legislation at local and regional levels.
2. **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.
3. **The big strength of Europe lies in its diversity of towns and communities.** 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 administrative and financial impacts of European regulation on the local level should be better assessed.
4. **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.
5. **In the interest of people and of a social Europe, local and regional authorities should be able to provide citizens with equal and non-discriminatory access to a comprehensive range of fundamental high-quality and affordable services of general interest.** These services are an important basis for the development of the social and territorial cohesion of the EU and for job creation. They play a decisive role in order to guarantee the social participation of people. The USLRRE reiterates its demand for more legal certainty for local authorities with regard to the services of general (economic) interest. According to the principle of subsidiarity the historical structures of Member States in the EU should be taken into account.
6. **For the sake of European integration, town-twinning and cross-border and trans-national cooperation should be further enhanced.**
7. **In order to preserve the social and territorial cohesion of the EU, local and regional authorities should benefit from better and adequate support.** Local and regional authorities play an important role in allowing citizens to participate in society and in the economic and cultural life of their communities on the basis of the principle of solidarity. They also contribute to fighting against poverty and helping solve concrete difficulties. Because of the very different economic and demographic development of regions in Europe and of the resulting social inequalities, it is fundamental to guarantee equal access to infrastructure and knowledge as well as a sustainable development while preserving the environment and cultural heritage. The urban dimension should be better taken into account when defining the structural funds programmes and the promotion of regional development in poorer rural areas should be more important than it has been in the past compared with measures of support to agriculture. From the local perspective, application procedures as well as the planning and implementation of these programmes should be further simplified.
8. **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. In a Europe based on solidarity, those local and regional authorities hit by natural disasters should benefit from greater support. It is therefore necessary to increase the EU solidarity fund.
9. **For the sake of global solidarity and sustainability, the EU should better take local authorities into account as actors of an effective cooperation to development policy, and define additional aid programmes.**