

## **INSTITUTIONAL STATEMENT FOR EUROPE DAY: A COMMITMENT TO A JOINT FUTURE**

The COVID-19 crisis is putting everyone to the test all over the world and the European Union is no exception. It is currently immersed in coordinating efforts to find a response to this unprecedented global crisis, the consequences of which will be felt in the areas of health, society, the economy, equality, the environment and, in the final instance, in democratic institutions and the current system of governance.

If we were capable, 70 years ago, of establishing the foundations for the process of European integration and the continent's reconstruction following the Second World War, today, more than ever, we need to demonstrate the ability to imbue our global agendas with real substance and steer the world towards the path of sustainability and resilience, of inclusive, engaged and egalitarian communities, and towards a social model in which people are the protagonists.

For this reason it is essential to reassert the role of municipalism in the new world order that will flourish in the wake of this onslaught. The fact is that our local councils have positioned themselves on the front line and ensured access to basic services; they have looked after the most vulnerable among us, they have protected essential service workers, they have strengthened our health infrastructures, and provided support for charitable networks. Local governments are providing an example of mutual cooperation: building alliances, broadening their outlook, coming up with solutions, and filling their local populations with confidence.

Local authorities continue to be one of the main cornerstones of democracy due to their position of proximity to the general public. Future cohesion policy must remain a priority in the European Union's next multiannual financial framework, especially when proposing the post-pandemic recovery strategy, taking into account the needs and context of each European region, territory and city.

It is for all these reasons that, on the occasion of Europe Day on 9 May, the Barcelona Provincial Council is calling upon the EU to reaffirm its commitment to its citizens and strengthen the investments planned for the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy to speed up recovery and contribute to social, regional and economic cohesion.

It is important to review the allocation of European funds within the new context in which COVID-19 has placed us, introducing new socio-demographic criteria such as the European Social Progress Index and the unemployment rate, particularly youth unemployment. The Cohesion Policy should take into

account key criteria such as climate change, resource efficiency, energy poverty, quality of life, the impact of the crisis, social inclusion, and the need for a sustainable economy that puts people first. It must also adopt an overarching territorial vision that includes rural, urban and peri-rural areas in order to consolidate the regional balance, strengthen small towns to prevent population loss, promote digitisation, urban regeneration and green infrastructure, and preserve natural and cultural heritage and biodiversity, all while remaining connected and cohesive.

We ask that the European budget for 2021-2027 be based on the experience, knowledge and needs assessment developed by local authorities, which are tasked with tackling global challenges and their consequences every single day. This investment must be both flexible and simplified: any centralisation will undermine its effectiveness. At the same time, it is essential that the definition of funding programmes and priorities with a local impact become a truly multi-level cooperative negotiation, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and local financial autonomy.

In order to consolidate the bond between the European Union and its citizens, we need to articulate this trust through the authority that is closest to them – namely, local authorities – and jointly discuss the major priorities and challenges of the so-called ‘new normal’ in order to co-design common solutions. And these solutions must not leave anyone behind, either inside or outside the EU, because we are facing a global phenomenon that calls for a global response. It is essential that we take this opportunity to put into practice the lessons learned from the past and that we do not underestimate the policies of community and foreign action.

Not only do we need to strengthen European discourse, but we also need to turn our attention to other countries and societies around the world. COVID-19 also accentuates the correlation between its impact and poverty levels. We must recognise that although the virus is having a devastating effect on Europe, it is to be expected that in other countries, such as those of Latin America and Africa, or our neighbours on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, the situation could become truly harrowing.

Barcelona Provincial Council not only stands firmly behind the municipalities in the province of Barcelona but is also in constant contact with our partners in Latin America (most notably in Ecuador, El Salvador, Brazil, Bolivia and Uruguay), our Mediterranean neighbours (especially Morocco and Lebanon), and African nations such as Mozambique and Senegal. These are countries with which the Barcelona Provincial Council has a long-standing relationship, and they are already feeling the impact of the pandemic. Their local governments are overwhelmed by the situation.

Cities and local governments are at the forefront of managing the crisis generated by COVID-19 and it is very likely that they will be at the forefront of driving recovery. As stated in the manifesto of the Confederation of Cooperation and Solidarity Funds, of which Barcelona Provincial Council is a member, entitled **Cooperation Against Coronavirus: To respond to this challenge we must showcase the capacity of local governments in the**

*management of basic services, especially in times of crisis, through public policies that guarantee public access to water and sanitation, the collection and treatment of solid waste, the management and prevention of risks and disasters, and local economic development, among others. In addition, strengthening the global action of local governments by promoting cooperation policies with the municipalities of other countries is vital to enable them to respond to the same global challenges.*

For this reason, we want to reassert the key role of international cooperation, and of decentralised development in particular, for its ability to generate debate, share experiences and jointly define common projects based on local strategies, all of which are of tremendous importance in the current scenario of uncertainty in which we find ourselves.

In this respect, Barcelona Provincial Council wants to express its determination to continue fostering a citizenship that is mindful, critical and committed to human rights, peace, sustainability and democracy worldwide. We aim to put human life at the centre of political decisions, especially the lives of the most vulnerable, here and everywhere. For this reason, we reiterate our commitment to maintaining the contribution of 0.7% of our budget towards development cooperation, with the determination to progress from Europe towards a post-COVID-19 world that, despite all its effects, will also give us the opportunity to explore new models of sustainable development and a fairer and more people-centred society.

Now, more than ever, we need to commit to the pledge of the 2030 Agenda to *leave no one behind* and understand that without global responses there will be no local solutions, and that the pandemic cannot be contained if it is not stopped in every region in the world. We need to emerge from this crisis with greater strength, solidarity and willingness to cooperate. This is the Europe and the world that we want and aspire to.