

CEMR Declaration on the 60th anniversary of the signature of the Treaty of Rome

Rome, 24 March 2017

We, the members of the Executive Bureau of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, representing 130,000 of Europe's local and regional governments federated in the national associations, members of CEMR, assembled in Rome, Italy, on 24 March 2017, to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the signature of the Treaty of Rome.

1. In our current time of major challenges and changes this is an important moment to recall our European history, in particular of the 20th century, and to commemorate the founding of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957 by six European countries aiming at establishing a common market for goods, labour, services and capital.
2. Further treaties and the accession of 22 countries marked the development of the Union, in the spirit to create 'an ever closer union', to further develop the economic Union into a political Union, attached to the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.
3. The enlargement to Southern, then Central and Eastern enabled the unification of a European family centred on a political project for the continent. This development marked a significant step to unite more states in response to their aspiration for peace, economic and social progress, solidarity and security.
4. We welcome the major progress made in the last 60 years and we are proud of the achievements.
5. Today, the European Union is in a difficult situation. The geopolitical environment has changed considerably, the risk of another financial crisis still exists and terrorist acts committed in some countries make it clear to our societies how fragile peace and safety can be. The effects of globalisation, climate change, migration and diversity on our societies are evident and call for bold responses.
6. These changes and their impact on peoples' lives can create worries and lead to adverse or hostile reactions. The political leaders should not be afraid of that, but listen to the people and their expectations and aspirations, and look for ways how they can be addressed. We need to make clear that there are no simple solutions to today's complex problems, but that we are committed to putting the people at the centre of our reflections.
7. In this context, leaving the European Union and retreating behind national borders might seem attractive to some but it is a false solution. We respect the view expressed by UK citizens and the result of the referendum in the different regions of the United Kingdom last year. In this respect CEMR commits to support our UK members in retaining and developing as many links as possible with the EU, its member states and indeed the CEMR members as possible. However, while deciding to leave the European Union and taking a unilateral path may appear to offer a panacea to the challenges we face, there are no easy solutions.
8. Given the scale of the issues at stake, we believe in multilateralism and cooperation in Europe and at global level. We think that Europe has to play a leading role in the world. Our experience clearly shows that Europeans are stronger when united and that they can achieve better results when standing together on the global scene.
9. These challenges imply a more effective Union which will be able to act more efficiently in order to face the essential issues on growth, security, migration and climate. This needs to go through a pooling of the most important elements of sovereignty of the willing member states. The mechanisms of the Union must not hinder the will of the states who would like a stronger political, budgetary and economic integration. This would mean allowing, on an institutional level, a multi-speed Europe where each state

would be free to participate or not in new steps of integration. The perspective of a budget for the Eurozone plays a full role in this new institutional landscape.

10. The mayors have been at the forefront of the European unification: in 1951, six years before the signing of the Rome Treaty, about 50 mayors from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Switzerland founded the Council of European Municipalities, aiming at contributing to the creation of a peaceful, prosperous and united Europe. Since 1984 we also gather regional associations and today we are composed over 60 national associations from over 40 countries.
11. CEMR and its members are committed to the building of a free, united Europe respectful of its diversity, based on strong local and regional governments that strive to provide high quality of life to their inhabitants.
12. For over 60 years, CEMR has advocated the autonomy of local and regional governments and their participation in the unification of Europe, and our engagement has contributed to the adoption of the European Charter of Local Self-Government by the Council of Europe in 1985 and the creation of the Committee of the Regions in 1992. With our world organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), we promote decentralisation processes, advocate for involvement of local and regional governments in the global agendas and support cooperation activities between sub-national governments in Europe and the world.
13. Our key message remains unchanged: local and regional governments have a specific contribution to provide a peaceful, prosperous, social and sustainable environment to the citizens on our continent and in the world, as enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals.
14. Political leaders at local and regional level experience mounting Euro-scepticism among citizens. Many of us are convinced pro-Europeans, but we also see the increased impact of EU regulations on the local and regional level. Sometimes European policies seem out of touch with reality, and we need to take actions to change that.
15. Local and regional governments are the tiers of government that are closest to the citizens and ensure the implementation and application of many rules and decisions taken by the EU. However, we are concerned that our expertise and views are insufficiently taken into account. This must change.
16. Local and regional governments play an important role in regaining the trust of the European Union's citizens, and we commit ourselves to organising and participating in initiatives that support European democracy and the continuation of our European project. We will also contribute to the debate about the future of Europe, express our views and present concrete proposals to address the issues that we face.
17. Besides EU legislation and regulations, we should remember that people need to identify with the idea of a stronger integration. Therefore, exchange opportunities need to be further encouraged and supported.
18. The twinning movement, thanks to CEMR, developed considerably in order to foster reconciliation and mutual understanding between Europeans. CEMR and its members were and are still the key drivers of this concept, they have added further a global perspective of cooperation from the local level.
19. Other activities to stimulate exchanges and cooperation between elected local representatives and citizens are equally important: exchange programmes such as Erasmus and Europe for Citizens' truly contribute to making people feel that they are Europeans.
20. 66 years after the founding of our organisation, we still believe in the words of one of our founding fathers, Edouard Herriot (1905-1957), former mayor of Lyon: "tout divise les états mais tout unit les communes" – "everything divides states but everything unites municipalities". CEMR is convinced of this now more so than ever.