



Durban2019
11-15 November

**UCLG CONGRESS
WORLD SUMMIT OF LOCAL
AND REGIONAL LEADERS**



Europe Position paper #UCLGCongress

Local Action For the People
Assembly Track

Position papers 03

UCLG World Congress 2019 ASSEMBLY TRACK EUROPEAN POSITION PAPER

1. Key messages

- **Understand the activities of the CEMR and PLATFORMA in the light of the Sustainable Development Goals**
- Strengthen the **role, acknowledgement and involvement** of local and regional governments in **European and global policies**. In particular, we are continuing our work on subsidiarity and proportionality. In the European Union context, we would like to gain better recognition for the quality of local and regional public services. This entails freedom of choice over the way in which these services are managed based on priorities and the local or regional context. As regards European cooperation policy beyond 2020, the CEMR and PLATFORMA support reintroducing a specific budget line for Local and Regional Governments. Our study on the associations which represent local and regional authorities will help us to demonstrate the role that they play nationally, as well as how representative they are; this provides good reason for greater recognition in the European context and particularly from the European institutions.
- Increase **recognition of the role that local and regional governments** play in achieving the **SDGs**, and advocate for their **participation in the future European Decentralised Cooperation Programme** (influence of Member States on the different conclusions on the 2030 Agenda and of the European Parliament for its opinion report; organization of a delegation of European local and regional governments active in decentralized cooperation for the HLPF, annual report on the role of associations in implementing the SDGs, etc.).
- Continue to **advocate for efforts to promote equality between women and men at local and regional levels** by rallying the support of signatories of the *European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life*, supporting UCLGA in **developing an African Charter for equality**, and discussing obstacles to the participation of women in political life with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. The study on women in politics, which is currently being edited, will be very useful for this work; it will demonstrate how far we are from achieving gender equality in Europe despite the work that has been underway for many years.
- Defend the concept of **European cohesion policy as an instrument for territorial, economic and social development**; play an active role in discussions on and **developing strategies for territorial development and sustainable cities**. Several factors have an impact on territories: the movement of people and migration, and investment in infrastructure (including digital infrastructure), education and housing, etc. From a European perspective, structural funds are instruments aimed at reducing inequalities between territories.
- Local and regional authorities play an important role as **employers** as regards the **lifelong learning** of local and regional officials, decent work and well-being at work. SDGs 4 and 8 set out the path that local and regional governments should take as employers; however, changing stakeholders' mindsets and public administration structures remains a challenge.
- **Environmental policy is gaining prominence on the political agenda**; for example, in issues related to biodiversity; air, ground and water pollution; increased waste; the mobility challenge, etc. All these issues have an impact at local and regional levels. It is essential for

the voice of local and regional governments to be heard in order to ensure that their interests are taken into account when reviewing any existing legislation or new draft laws.

- We are pledging our commitment to the transition to a **fossil-fuel free society by 2050**. To that end, we promote measures aimed at improving energy efficiency, reducing the greenhouse effect and increasing the use of renewable energy. Local and regional governments will be on the front line in meeting this major challenge.
- Create innovative **international partnerships**, for the purpose of implementing and improving local and regional policies throughout the world based around the **SDGs**.
- **Share practices and experiences among members and partners**, in order to continually review and improve our public policies for citizens' well-being: strengthen the capacities of local and regional governments and their associations, workshops, peer reviews, discussions, training, etc.
- **Contribute to the work of the Global Taskforce** with the aim of bringing the perspective of European local and regional authorities to global discussions, and boost collective learning on global challenges that have an impact at local level.

2. The current context and remaining challenges

The CEMR's work is closely **in line with EU legislation**, even though some of its member countries are not part of the European Union. Similarly, PLATFORMA and its 30 partners, which represent local and regional governments active in international cooperation, signed a strategic partnership with the EU in 2015 and receives **European funds** to implement its programmes. Their actions should therefore be considered in the light of European legislation and action, the importance of multilevel governance for improved effectiveness and a greater impact of public action on local and regional territories.

The major challenges at local and regional level are similar: affordable housing; mobility; the provision of services; an ageing population; social segregation; pollution and air and water quality; climate change; energy supply; and waste and wastewater management. Although rural cities and regions face the same major challenges, these issues manifest themselves in different ways (e.g. climate change causes warming in urban areas but flooding in rural areas). These issues are often linked and need to be tackled jointly.

Lots of these challenges rely on the structures, competences and finances of local and regional governments. However, the political choices made by central governments have impacts on many of these policies, and a change in a central government may affect the finances or assignment of competences. As a result, it is therefore useful and necessary to monitor and analyze change in national policy while facilitating discussions between European local and regional representatives as well as with their global peers. The CEMR regularly publishes a study on the structures and competences of local and regional governments and shares this information with its members so that they can draw on it in their national context. PLATFORMA also provides a space for peer exchange on practices and policies related to local and regional socio-economic development, as well as providing several publications and training to assist cities and regions that are looking for external expertise.

When exercising their competence for self-governance, local and regional governments are involved in initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors to advance the energy transition; this is reflected in a reduction in CO₂ emissions, increased energy efficiency and promoting the use of renewable energy. For information purposes, almost 12,000 municipalities from around the world have already signed the Covenant, 10,000 of which are in Europe.

In a CEMR study, it was shown that, in certain countries, European Union legislation has an impact on up to 75% of municipal activities and prerogatives. Therefore, a large proportion of the CEMR's

activities is focused on fields which are decided at the EU level, such as environmental policy, energy, climate change, transport, public services, etc.

3. Key policy priorities in the following areas

• Right to the city and inclusive territories

- Advocacy for
 - Cohesion policy and territorial, economic and social development policies (**future Multiannual Financial Framework**);
 - Asylum, **Migration** and Integration Fund (AMIF);
 - Rights and Values Programme (**Citizenship**);
- Gender equality with **Power2Her** and the study on “**Women in politics**”; Cooperation with UCLG Africa/REFELA and European support for the **African charter on gender equality** with the support of PLATFORMA;
- Promotion of the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC)
- Building sustainable territories through **cooperation between cities and regions throughout the world (development cooperation)**

• Territorial multilevel governance and sustainable finance

- Greater **inclusion of local governments in the European decision-making process**; the role of local and regional governments in the **European semester** procedure, the **partnership principle in the management of structural funds** and European investments, the multilevel approach in policies concerning local and regional governments, the establishment of **multilevel policy dialogue in European development policy programming**;
- **CEMR study on associations** which represent local and regional governments in Europe, demonstrating how **representative** they are (95% of the population on average) and their role in the national context as an interlocutor with governments and authorities;
- **Localizing the SDGs**: cities must be taken into account in the **implementation of the SDGs** (the goals must be “**tailored**” to them with indicators that reflect their diversity; they must be taken into account when drafting laws and plans for the purpose of implementing the SDGs and **measuring their progress**);
- The need to provide local and regional governments with **sufficient financial resources** in order for them to **exercise the competences** assigned to them. The recent report of the **World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment** (available in English: **Key findings** and **Country Profiles**) is a rich source for analyzing the current situation, drawing conclusions and making recommendations and calls for action.

• Opportunities for all, culture and city diplomacy: the keys to sustainable development and peace

- The purpose of PLATFORMA is to provide a space for discussion on development cooperation practices and to **strengthen local democracy through the action of its partners**. For example, PLATFORMA co-organizes the European Days of Local Solidarity, which are held each November to raise citizens’ awareness about cities’ and regions’ international action (working groups, **PLATFORMAwards**; European Days of Local Solidarity).
- Promoting the **localization of the SDGs**: a PLATFORMA-CEMR study on the European perspective and input to the **UCLG global study**. We also carry out advocacy work aimed at including cities in the implementation of the SDGs and in national reporting (New York model: voluntary local reviews), and to build the capacities of national associations so that they can improve their discussions and cooperation with their national government.

- **Safer, more resilient and sustainable cities that are able to cope with crises.**

- Support and promote **UN Women's concept of safe cities**, which is aimed at addressing violence against women in public spaces and sets out measures aimed at making **public spaces safer and more pleasant for everyone**.
- Promote the **Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC)** as a free and easy-to-use instrument to assist cities, their local elected representatives, staff and citizens in creating a sustainable development strategy for their city, monitoring its progress, sharing experiences, and succeeding in implementing the SDGs.
- Role that cooperations play in **fragile countries** – **what role** do partner organizations play in strengthening local democracy and the provision of quality public services that help to **increase citizen's confidence in their local public institutions**.

4. Strategies and political tools

- In the European Union, certain **policies and EU legislation apply** in all Member States. The policies are backed up by instruments (for example, funds) to support the implementation or introduction of **new approaches**.
- Priorities are generally set for a **period of 7 years** and supported by a **financial framework**. The current period will finish at the end of 2020; negotiations for the next period are ongoing.
- The most important programmes for local and regional governments are rights and values, the asylum, migration and integration fund, and structural and investment funds. The CEMR is committed to **advocating** to ensure that our perspectives are included in the programmes.
- The CEMR has decided to develop a **multi-annual strategy, which will run until 2030, aimed at implementing the SDGs**; it will be adopted in May 2020.
- **Gender equality** has been one of the CEMR's policy priorities for over 30 years. In the context of the 2019 European elections, we launched the *Power2Her* campaign, and we are going to publish a study on women in politics (November 2019). The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life is continuing to be promoted: it currently has 1,800 signatories. Together with UCLG Africa and PLATFORMA, the CEMR is drafting a Local Authorities Charter for gender equality in Africa.
- The CEMR defends the interests of local and regional governments in dealings with the European institutions and, by voicing its positions, it helps to increase **local influence on the legislative environment**: *stances* and consultation on a wide range of subjects, for example legislation on water, waste, the future environmental action plan, etc. **Development of international partnerships** (PLATFORMA) that work to support democracy, sustainable local and regional development, and to disseminate the SDGs (Dogbo and Roeselare – PLATFORMAwards);

5. Links with global agendas and continental mechanisms

As explained above, the CEMR's political agenda is **influenced by the EU's political agenda**. **Lobbying** work is carried out to give prominence to local and regional government positions and to ensure that they are taken into account in policy and legislation implemented by the EU.

Since 2019, the CEMR has organized its work programme around the SDGs, and it is currently preparing a multi-annual strategy for 2020-2030 guided by the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda offers the benefit of being universal and helping to connect our activities more closely to the global dimension.

Similarly, as **the international agenda** has implications for European policy and the practices of local and regional governments and their associations (**COP 21, International trade agreements** [taking into consideration public services, the sovereignty of public authorities and EU standards], 2030 Agenda, etc.), the CEMR and PLATFORMA duly take it into account. Our organization also **takes part in the major global events** (UN Habitat Assembly in Nairobi, HLPF in July in New York, the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, COP 25 in Chile). The CEMR and PLATFORMA also actively contribute to the **work of UCLG** (GOLD reports), the **Global Taskforce** and the **OECD** (involvement in the Regional Development Policy Committee and in ministerial meetings, as well as in the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment, which is jointly organized with UCLG).

6. Main recommendations and actions of the local and regional government international movement

In the light of previous developments, the CEMR would like to make recommendations for future actions taken by the world organization. It recommends taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals and the diversity of territories, as well as their realities, in order to develop sustainable public policies that remain in step with the times. As a result, there seems to be a need for local governments to be involved in drafting legislation in order to facilitate the implementation of a policy as closely in line with local realities and citizens' demands as possible.

Recognize the need to include local governments in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals...

1. The **SDGs** must be taken into account by all political actors and actors in society, and particularly in the **European Union strategy** for sustainable development and inclusive growth.
2. A **multilevel political dialogue must be guaranteed** in order to promote the values of partnership, sustainability and subsidiarity. This dialogue should include the local, national, continental and international levels.
3. Promote **balanced territorial development** by recognizing the **major role that local governments play in implementing the SDGs, both in urban and rural contexts; their access to financial resources, methodological support and capacity development support must also be facilitated.**

... by allowing them to play a major role in the legislative process...

4. Actively include local governments in **the drafting, implementation and monitoring of global, continental and national policies**. A consultation system could be considered with a more or less mandatory element as regards drafting texts.
5. All policies implemented, at all levels, must **take into consideration their impact on the territory** (economic, social, environmental, urban, etc.).
6. **Coherence between internal and external policies** must be ensured, and policies should not be made to the detriment of others (production lines, agricultural policy, business promotion, trade agreements, etc.). Public procurement is a key element in promoting more sustainable development.

...in order to encourage the implementation and achievement of policy that is as close as possible to territories:

7. **Multi-stakeholder dialogue** should be encouraged in order to co-design public policies that are adapted as closely as possible to territories and citizens' needs (participatory approach to ensure ownership and that citizens have confidence in their local and regional public institution). **Peer learning** must also be promoted among different territories.

8. The **principles of local autonomy** must be introduced in all European countries (and *a fortiori* throughout the world) by, in particular, guaranteeing access to **sufficient resources** in order for them to exercise the competences assigned to them.

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