

**BRINGING EUROPE CLOSER TO PEOPLE
THE POLITICAL PRIORITIES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS
PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD IN THE POLITICAL PRIORITIES 2020-2025**

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The economic, migration and COVID-19 crises have illustrated that only by pooling resources and working together can Europe best serve the interests of its citizens. Each time Europe has been confronted with new challenges, it has relied on its local and regional governments to respond and find solutions for our communities.

Today is no different. The unprecedented nature of the crisis requires Europe to show unity and solidarity by supporting the efforts of its 1 million local and regional authorities. The contribution by local and regional leaders is and will be key to stop the pandemic, continue to deliver public services, protect jobs, support SMEs and prepare the ground for the recovery. Saving lives and our economies is synonymous with supporting all local communities.

Building a cohesive, resilient and sustainable Europe that is closer to people will be our main priority over the next five years.

To achieve this, we will focus upon strengthening and protecting democracy. European democracy needs to be modernised making it more responsive to citizens' needs. The Conference on the Future of Europe is an opportunity to bring about change by giving local and regional governments a stronger role in the EU. We will continue to champion Europe and its fundamental values

locally – including freedom of speech, equality, human rights and freedom of movement – which are vital for the future of democracy.

Secondly, we need to refocus the EU's efforts to support all cities and regions respond to the major transformations they face today. These include ensuring the EU assists their response and recovery to the pandemic. Europe must also not take sight off the climate emergency, demographic change, migration, and digitalisation. All these challenges need a coherent, integrated and local European approach that supports every citizen. How Europe responds to these transformations and emerges from the pandemic will determine the future of the European Union.

Thirdly, cohesion as a fundamental value must be strengthened and be the compass of Europe's future. In such uncertain times, social, economic and territorial cohesion between regions, cities and people is necessary not only to secure the long-term future of the European economy, but as a demonstration of the European Union's strength. The EU must provide sufficient regional and agricultural funding, but it must go further. Cohesion must be at the heart of its priorities, policies and programmes to bind Europe's communities.

The urgency for Europe to come together, react and invest in all regions and cities is paramount to secure our citizens' future. Now, more than ever, the European Union must use all its resources, modernise its democratic and institutional architecture and show that it is at the service of every local community and every citizen.
