



## Contribution by the PES Group of the CoR on "*Europe in the world*"

Even though many Europeans feel uneasy about globalisation, it has emerged as something which the EU cannot ignore, especially given that internal European economic changes (the Lisbon strategy) are not enough to harness the full benefits of globalisation – a process on which nearly one in every four jobs in the EU depends. Besides, the greater the expectations of Europe in the world, the more Europeans see European foreign policy as an area in which joint decision-making needs to be strengthened<sup>1</sup>.

For European socialists and social-democrats, it is not enough for Europe to adapt to global markets and act as a Trojan horse for globalisation; it also needs to be given teeth so that globalisation can be controlled. Europe must serve as a base for protection, while eschewing protectionism. We must not give up our aim of reconciling internal solidarity with workers in the EU and external solidarity with workers elsewhere, albeit work is a factor at global level which we must try to control as effectively as possible by promoting the defence of economic and social rights at global level, in particular by giving the ILO and the WHO beefed-up powers.

Ratification of the Lisbon Treaty should mean the end of an excessively long introspective period for the European integration process; however, five years after Javier Solana presented an initial European **security strategy**, we now need to identify common European interests more clearly. What this means is that, in its capacity as a global power, the European Union should move from setting a good example to protecting its interests.

Far-reaching developments such as the liberalisation of trade, demands for more regulation and the need to re-launch the debate on European interests mean that public authorities will have to play a stronger role on the international stage. In this context, we would like EU external policy players to consider the potential benefits of involving local and regional government more closely.

### **How can EU local and regional authorities and their decentralised cooperation policies contribute to the attainment of the UN Millennium Development Goals?**

The current state of progress confirms that, if the targets set out for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are to be achieved in 2015, strong commitment by all tiers of government, the adoption of sound policies, public investment strategies in key sectors and increasing support from the international community are crucial.

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Eurobarometer 68, published in December 2007, showed that 67% (compared to 62% in spring 2007) of Europeans felt that decisions on defence and foreign policy should be taken jointly in the EU. This makes foreign policy the fifth most important common policy area (less important than the fight against terrorism, environmental protection, research and energy, but ahead of cohesion policy, immigration, consumer protection, agriculture or economic affairs).

Very weak human development indicators (especially child and maternal mortality, but also completion of primary education, nutrition, and sanitation) suggests that, on current trends, the 2015 objectives with regard to poverty are unlikely to be met.

In addition, the omnipresence of new global threats such as climate change and its adverse effects is already being felt by many developing countries. This situation is all the more worrying given that the European Union is heavily dependent on developing countries for supplies of raw materials.

In 2007, for the second year in a row, there has been a net drop in the volume of development aid from the international community. Despite the political rallying call around the MDGs, the international donor community clearly has difficulty in meeting its commitments. And, for the first time, the EU is part of this negative trend. Expressed in euro and as a percentage of gross national income, European aid stood at 0.38% in 2007 compared with 0.41% in 2006. Besides, what these figures do not show is the excessively large share of development aid which goes into the pockets of consultants (from developed countries) instead of reaching its intended recipients. Europe wants and has to play a leading role in rallying the international community's efforts.

However, the aid for development does not depend only on direct public aid coming from European governments, but also for the most part from the transfers made by the legal immigrants to their country of origin. Therefore, Europe should better consider this dimension and envisage new instruments to facilitate these transfers.

- To do this, Europe must reconfirm its intention of achieving its collective target of 0.56% in 2010, on the road to the 2015 target of 0.7%.

Against this background, we regret that European local and regional authorities' current and further potential contribution to the European Development Policy continues to go largely unrecognised.

This lack of recognition is also in contradiction with our conviction that improved democratic governance is the foundation for achieving the MDGs which must be based on a broad approach. The key element of good governance is a recognition that the best decisions are taken as near to the grassroots level as possible.

It is not nearly enough to talk about the "key role that local authorities can play in achieving the MDGs". Good Governance requires all tiers of authority in a country to govern according to the principles of transparency, public participation and respect for subsidiarity, and we as those bearing responsibility at local and regional level in the EU member states need to encourage mutual learning and the exchange of best practices in this respect amongst ourselves, and in our interaction with developing countries.

- This is why we propose that the maximum budget allocation which, under the next EDF regulation, would be earmarked for support for civil society, technical cooperation and governance, should be raised to at least 25%, in order to cover both the national and local dimensions.
- We also suggest stepping up the European Union's support to microcredit programmes in the developing countries in order to give to the unemployed, to poor entrepreneurs and to others living in poverty who are not considered bankable the chance to find ways in which to break out of poverty.

***How can EU local and regional authorities effectively contribute to EU peace building policies?***

European integration is itself a peace project and it can act as a powerful example in the world – in particular because it brings together not just member states but also their regions and local communities.

We are convinced that the values of democracy and human rights as they are proclaimed in the Charter of fundamental rights attached to the Treaty of Lisbon constitute a corner stone of the European integration process, and these values and rights should also be the main vector of its external policy.

Our position on this matter has been clearly defined and reaffirmed several times: there cannot be genuine democratic governance without substantial devolution of power to the local and regional level. By cooperating to produce tangible solutions to concrete regional problems, local and regional authorities can build trust between peoples, confidence in local democracy and faith in intercultural dialogue. It is important to develop a local democracy that citizens can trust and in which they feel they have a say.

Also, we do not believe that multi-level government should be confined to the EU. Multi-level governance is a global standard, but not a model which other regions should be forced to copy. Particularly for countries of continental size such as India and China, it sets standards in terms of internal markets and economic freedoms, of legislation, and also of cooperation between and within States. For example, we would like to see a comparable instrument in Africa to the European Grouping of Territorial Co-operation (EGTC).

***What could be the accompanying role of local and regional authorities in the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policy?***

To meet the requirements established under the *acquis communautaire* and the Copenhagen criteria, candidate and potential candidate countries to the EU must develop sustainable and decentralised political and administrative structures. Local and regional authorities are frequently citizens' first point of contact with the system and it is thus vital that they should be able to provide the services the citizens require. Experience shows the importance of working towards the development of strong, decentralised political and administrative structures, as these are often weak in candidate and potential candidate countries. This is one area in which EU local and regional authorities have a great deal of experience, given that the challenges involved are faced by such authorities in all Member States.

Our conviction is that a stable and secure neighbourhood can only be achieved through an efficient co-operation at regional and local level. Local and regional authorities have many years' experience in cross-border cooperation, for instance through town-twinning schemes, which also bring aspects of culture and identity into the development of democracy and administrative structures. This in turn brings added value to the Community. It is also important to get involved in disseminating information about the EU and its functioning to potential new member states' regions – and to support schemes like region-to-region exchanges or administrative twinings.

➤ We also call for a re-launch for the negotiations with all Western Balkan countries in order to gradually advance towards visa-free travel for the citizens of these countries as a token of support for their efforts to further European integration.

With regard to the neighbourhood policy, we agree that it is useful to develop neighbourhood policy action plans with each country, given that these plans are negotiated with each country, taking into account their needs and capacities, together with their interests and those of the EU. This enables each country to follow its own path.

- Nevertheless, we suggest a more differentiated approach which would in particular take into account the territorial specificities of cross-border cooperation between EU Member States and neighbouring countries. We have already called for further efforts at national and regional level to link regions from neighbouring countries with European Groupings of Territorial Co-operation (EGTCs).

*What steps could be taken to increase the involvement of local and regional authorities in the Euro-Mediterranean Process, since they play a crucial role in the establishment of an area of peace, stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean region?*

Given the potential role of local and regional authorities in strengthening the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, it is imperative to no longer defer their closer and stronger involvement in the Barcelona Process, as already called for in the Barcelona Declaration in 1995. We want to contribute to the development of the role of decentralised governmental bodies of the Mediterranean area in the fields of democratic transition and good governance; administrative capacity building; peace building; intercultural dialogue; migration; energy, transport and infrastructure planning; urban planning and rural development etc. Local and regional authorities need to be closely involved in the operation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Many of the above-mentioned policies which are crucial to make the Euro-Mediterranean a reality, are executed at local or regional level. We therefore need a framework for a stable cooperation between sub-national authorities from the Mediterranean area. Often, pragmatic cooperation on concrete issues is much easier to achieve than global agreement between whole Member States.

- The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership certainly needs improved political dialogue through democratic representatives. We are convinced that the role of the Euro-Mediterranean parliamentary assembly should be further strengthened, notably by granting the Committee of the regions an observer status.
- We also call for the creation of a new structure in the Euro-Mediterranean institutional framework, composed of local and regional authorities from both sides of the Mediterranean and mandated with the task of promoting territorial and decentralised cooperation, encouraging the partnership, developing programmes that include schemes to be undertaken all over the Mediterranean region, and analysing the functioning of association agreements with Mediterranean partners at local and regional level.