Europe Day Declaration of Renew Europe Mayors and Regional Ministers

For a Sovereign, Decentralised, Federal Europe

9 points for 9 May

This 9th of May is a hard one for us all, as Europe and its citizens are mourning.

Citizens have mixed feelings about the handling of COVID-19 by public authorities, especially the EU institutions, and this unfortunate situation has undermined the trust of citizens in our Union, especially as many people are still struggling with the pandemic.

COVID-19 has proven to us that to protect the lives and health of citizens and preserve our economy, the European Union must take robust actions, proportionate to the dangers threatening us.

As mayors and regional ministers we are at the forefront of tackling this crisis, crucially assisting in containing the spread of the virus, in particular by maintaining public order and implementing an array of very practical measures of social distancing, reinforcing local capacities, preparedness and robustness of the health service infrastructure, as well as adopting the first measures aimed at alleviating the impact on the local and regional economy, while also guaranteeing the provision of all indispensable public services.

On this Europe Day, 70th Anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, it is our collective responsibility to revitalize the European dream and re-invigorate European integration. The Schuman Declaration called for "the foundation of a European federation indispensable to the preservation of peace". There has been much controversy over the decades regarding the word "federation". Let us address that briefly.

As mayors and regional ministers, we are not afraid of the word "federal", which by definition means the sharing of power between levels of government. For far too long it has been either misunderstood or deliberately distorted to imply absolute centralisation at the European level, when nothing could be further from the truth. A federal Europe means one where power is distributed between levels, with a clear distribution of competences for each level. As long-time defenders of multi-level governance, which results in a real and effective partnership between all levels of government, a federal Europe – in its true meaning - is the only way forward. When two thirds of public investment, one third of public expenditure, and one quarter of tax revenue, all take place at subnational level, it is clear that the EU cannot achieve its goals without a committed strategic partnership not just with national governments, but also local and regional authorities.

Thus, if a European federation was indispensable for peace in the past century, we believe that in this XXI Century it is indispensable of course for peace, and also for Europe's economic competitiveness, for climate change leadership, for the regulation of global finances, for the defence of consumer rights, for the protection and promotion of democracy and human rights, for the fight against international organised crime and terrorism, for the orderly management of migration flows, for the protection and promotion of multi-lateral organisations, and of course for the protection of our citizens from global public health dangers.

Therefore, the federalism that we propose is that of a rediscovered European sovereignty to face these challenges, and of a reaffirmed solidarity as the political basis of our Union.

Without a doubt, this COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that there are life-threatening dangers that arise when leadership is fragmented and unable to act swiftly and decisively. No nation state,

no region, no municipality could be effectively governed with the degree of fragmented leadership that we have for our Union: a system which deprives citizens of a clear answer to the most fundamental democratic questions: who governs? Who is responsible? Who do I vote for as leader at the next election? Although there are historic and valid reasons for the system we have at European level, it is not possible nor wise to continue governing in this way a united continent that faces so many grave challenges in the XXI Century.

Therefore, on the 9th of May, we make 9 calls for:

1. A Union that emerges from the Conference on the Future of Europe, with a less fragmented leadership structure: a President of the executive directly elected by European citizens, and accountable to the European Parliament which directly represents the citizens, enabling in this way the European executive to act swiftly and decisively in the areas of competence which should rightfully be managed at European level;

2. A Union where nation states continue to play their rightful role in areas of shared competence, with a more operational European Council, less reliant on summits; and where subnational governments are actively sought as real partners to achieve the agreed political, economic, environmental and social objectives;

3. A Union which, in the spirit of the Schuman Declaration, enjoys a de facto solidarity, as an automatic component of the EU crisis response mechanisms, which need to be quick, proportional to the crisis and effective; the EU needs to act as one, in particular in times of crisis;

4. A Union that measures its success in the health, security, wellbeing and freedoms of its citizens, allowing our citizens maximum individual freedoms, particularly the freedom of movement. Our citizens deserve to be treated fairly and equally across the EU if we want their trust;

5. A Union that lays down the conditions for a new type of market economy, based on carbon free energy, equal opportunities, fair competition that prevents and tackles monopolies of any kind (public or private, quasi or de facto), with appropriate regulation to protect the most vulnerable;

6. A strong and healthy Union that is committed to smart investments, not viewing smart investment as debt-generating spending, but as development of strength and resilience for present and future generations; a Union that – in partnership with national, regional and local governments - invests in hospitals, schools, sports and culture facilities, social housing, safe care homes, and widespread digital infrastructure. We need the next Multiannual Financial Framework to guarantee the capacity of our cities and regions to access much needed investment capital, also through a sufficiently leveraged EU budget when needed;

7. A Union that helps and protects small businesses as the foundation for a quick, sustainable and climate-neutral economic recovery, that leaves no city, region or citizen behind, and one that treats all forms of work and employment with equal dignity. We call on the EU to protect its SMEs and guarantee all precarious jobs through sufficient EU-financed mechanisms deployed quickly where needed, while continuing to enable every individual to freely choose the form of employment that best fits their profession as well as their personal needs and lifestyle;

8. A Union that puts in place an industrial strategy that takes into account our vulnerabilities and reduces any exposure to unreliable international supply chains in critical sectors (food,

energy, health), prioritising market incentives that facilitate European autonomy in these areas;

9. A Union that is open to immigration as a reality of human society, a reflection of European history and a guarantee for Europe's demographic future, an economic necessity, and a humanitarian duty; managing its external borders effectively, investing in international development to reduce the causes of unmanageable mass migration (extreme poverty, wars, climate crises, water scarcity), and confidently putting in place effective and coordinated integration policies.

We invite all Europeans on this 70th anniversary to join us in urging our national and European leaders to build this Union we call for. It is time for a Europe of partnership, a sovereign, decentralised, federal Europe. It is time for a Europe that works for its citizens!