State of the European Union: regions and cities answer the call and stand ready

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Statement by the President of the European Committee of the Regions, Vasco Alves Cordeiro

"President von der Leyen' speech on the State of the European Union is a good sum up of the challenges Europe is facing and a clear demonstration of political will and ambition to overcome them. On behalf of regions and cities from all the Union, represented by the European Committee of Regions I would like to make it clear that we answer her call to win over these challenges and we stand ready to do our part in the European common effort.

"The challenges highlighted by President von der Leyen are also the ones local and regional authorities across the European Union face every day. Mayors, governors, councillors are working tirelessly to find solutions and improve people's lives.

"As energy bills are becoming unbearable for citizens, public authorities and businesses, I welcome the announcements made today to cap revenues of energy companies and to reduce the overall energy consumption: extra revenues need to be used immediately to speed up the energy transition and support the most vulnerable. Energy savings will play a crucial role to manage the energy crisis: they will not be achieved without strong cooperation with local and regional authorities and we need to help our local and regional businesses to continue their activities and ensure jobs. Since May already, the Committee of the Regions has supported the Cities Energy Sprint to promote energy savings at local level. Further reforms of the electricity market are indeed needed to alleviate the weight it creates in people's wallets and achieve the energy transition. President von der Leyen clearly stated that the green and digital transition is the only way forward: we need to continue working hand in hand with cities and regions to keep the EU ambition high at all scales, from boosting green projects in small towns, to promoting

ambitious targets in global negotiations.

"With winter approaching, reconstructing Ukraine must be a priority. I welcome the announcement by President von der Leyen to provide 100 million euros to rebuild damaged schools. EU local and regional authorities are already working with cities and regions in Ukraine for this, like the city of Cascais in Portugal which will help rebuild a kindergarten in Irpin. This is why with the participation of the Association of Ukrainian Cities and other partners, the European Committee of the Regions launched the European Alliance of Regions and Cities for the Reconstruction of Ukraine. We call on the European Commission, Member States and all donors to give EU local authorities the financial means to support their Ukrainian counterparts in rebuilding their facilities. A peer-to-peer approach is the way forward in order to strengthen capacity-building and facilitate exchange of know-how on an equal footing.

"As President von der Leyen put forward plans to reform our economic governance, support our SMEs, boost our industries, and train our people, I urge all levels involved to bear in mind the importance and efficacy of local and regional authorities bringing those goals to where they're needed and where they impact more: our communities, from the smallest to the largest, across Europe. If the local and regional levels are properly associated, the full potential of this actions and plans will be harness and it will become a reality. If money is to be brought to the ground, it needs to be done in partnership with regions and cities following the successful approach of Cohesion Policy for decades.

"As the words of the late President David Sassoli were echoed, the aim of democracy is to improve people's lives. Local and regional authorities are the closest and most trusted levels for democratic engagement. The Committee of the Regions has been calling for years for a permanent dialogue with citizens, I therefore welcome the further use of citizens panels and the call for a European Convention. It is essential that, at the same time, we work to implement the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe that do not require Treaty changes. We do not forget that we are committed to implement them all. Also in this sense, President von der Leyen speech is timely and important. Like during the Conference on the Future of Europe, we will continue playing a constructive role, constantly bringing Europe closer to its people in times of need."

On October 11, President Vasco Alves Cordeiro will deliver its annual address on the State of Regions and Cities in the European Union. The Committee will also publish the EU Annual Report on the State of Regions and Cities, accompanied by a survey of local and regional representatives, the Regional and Local Barometer, which will bring more insights and vision on the role local and regional authorities play to shape the Future of Europe.

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