



COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS

EUROPEAN SECTION OF UNITED CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

CONFERENCE OF TWINNED TOWNS

★ RHODES, 10 TO 12 MAY 2007 ★

"Twinning for Tomorrow's World"

- FINAL DECLARATION -

Fifty years ago, with the Treaty of Rome, the Heads of State and Government began laying the foundations for a Europe of peace, democracy and prosperity.

They had been preceded by Mayors who, refusing to accept the inevitability of war, had decided to take action at their own level, undertaking the reconciliation of the European family. Twinning thus aimed to help mutual understanding grow between peoples, and to contribute to the creation of a European spirit.

Twinning has played an essential role at every step in the development and growth of Europe. We, alongside the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, are proud to have actively participated in this process.

With over thirty thousand twinning links linking European local authorities and communities, this movement is today the largest citizen network of our continent.

The European Parliament and the European Commission have been pleased to recognise this movement, and have contributed to its development through the community aid to twinning, and now with the new programme, "Europe for Citizens." We wish to highlight this invaluable contribution.

Now, Europe and the World are undergoing a profound crisis; a crisis marked by difficulties in the relations between the States and the citizens, a crisis of identity which is in part caused by negative aspects of globalisation which can risk provoking the resurgence of nationalisms and fundamentalisms.

These must always be fought energetically. The European Union must contribute to facilitating progress towards peace and meetings between peoples and civilisations.

We therefore wish for the European Union to have an international role and identity, clearly visible and shared by the European citizens,

We, local and regional elected representatives, and activists of the twinning movement, gathered together in Rhodes from 10 to 12 May 2007 on the occasion of the conference "Twinning for Tomorrow's World":

- Reaffirm our conviction as to the strength and vitality of the twinning movement, in that it facilitates the involvement of the citizens in direct exchanges, thereby giving Europe a day-to-day, human dimension;
- Restate our commitment to ensure that twinning is an instrument for the inclusion of all of our citizens, reflecting their diversity and their cultures;

- Emphasise that twinnings can play a particular role in relations with countries that are potential candidates for accession to the Union, in particular in South-East Europe, but also with all of our Union's neighbouring countries;
- Remain convinced that twinnings can and must help to build bridges between towns and communities around the Mediterranean and serve as instruments for reconciliation and foundations for peace in the region, also encouraging the active participation of citizens whose origins lie in these countries who now live in our towns and regions;
- Underline, moreover, that twinnings can contribute to policies for development cooperation, and help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals; from a wider perspective, they can also serve, in this age of globalisation, to bring together citizens from all our different continents and all our diverse cultures;
- Reaffirm the importance of the political dimension of twinning as proclaimed by the Congresses of Twinned Towns of Bordeaux (1987), Ferrara (1999), Antwerp (2002), and our commitment for a stronger European Union – in accordance with CEMR's Statutes – which is transparent and close to its citizens.

Twinnings allow citizens to meet and learn about each other, to be enriched by their diversity. These links thus contribute to raising awareness of a common identity and sense of belonging, with an ability to be open and creative, and to the development of a European citizenship based on the values of democracy, freedom, tolerance, solidarity, justice and openness to dialogue.

For these reasons, we would like to reaffirm to the European Parliament, the European Commission and to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe our commitment to our partnership work, undertaken over many years, for the promotion and support of twinning, and underline the value of a strong financial and programmatic commitment from the Union, which should take into account the necessary involvement of all types of local authorities supporting through their twinnings the objectives of the Europe for Citizens programme.

To this end, we call on the Council of European Municipalities and Regions to play a proactive role as interface and co-ordinator between our local governments and the European institutions, and to develop practical tools in support of the twinning movement and to cooperate with all networks of municipalities and regions working to promote peace.

Above all, we therefore commit ourselves to working so that twinnings may continue to develop as spaces for dialogue and debate, between the citizens of Europe, across all geographical and cultural boundaries, on the issues and challenges of the Union which concern us all, and for which we need common and positive solutions.

In particular, twinnings can help with the deepening of dialogue and debate concerning the adoption, before the elections of the European Parliament in 2009, of a Treaty in relation to the fundamental principles on which the Union must be based, to its Institutions, and most importantly to the fundamental rights of the citizens and to European citizenship.

By emphasising once again our commitment to the concept of twinning, coupled with our will to see twinnings adapt to the realities of the XXIst century, we believe that we remain loyal to our founding values: to build for our citizens a stronger Europe and a better world, based on our common values.

