



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT APOSTOLOS TZITZIKOSTAS

"Regions and cities: Vital for Europe's recovery" Session 1

9 MAY EUROPE DAY, 2020

Ladies and gentlemen,

This Europe Day finds us physically separated by a terrible and common threat. But that very threat has shown us that we are stronger together.

Today, we remember those communities who are suffering from loss and fear an uncertain future.

We pay tribute to those who are putting others' lives ahead of their own. The health and care workers, those stocking our shelves with food, and those keeping our public services and economies running.

They have been our lifeline. There are no words to thank them enough.

This pandemic has tested the limits of our European partnership.

It has equally made visible the incredible bravery, selflessness and courage of so many.

It has brought us together. It has showed that the only way to respond and recover to save lives, protect communities and our economies is through cooperation, not needless nationalism and self-interest.

The virus has reaffirmed our values of solidarity and cohesion, which have been, and must remain, the backbone of our response and our recovery.

Only last week, the EU brought the world together raising 7.4bn euros to invest in treatment and vaccines for all of us.

The EU has guaranteed medical equipment. It has deployed funds and created new instruments to tackle unemployment and made available financial support and loan guarantees for the SMEs to maintain jobs.

Today, we also pay tribute to Europe's 1 million local and regional authorities who are leading the fight on the frontline.

Saving lives and our economies is synonymous with supporting all local and regional authorities. Their contribution is, and will be, key to stopping the pandemic, deliver health and care services, protect jobs, support SMEs and prepare the ground for the recovery.

By investing in all of Europe's people and places, we will all recover faster. Supporting those communities most in need, tackling disparities and accelerating sustainable green growth is not only a matter of fairness and equity, but of economic pragmatism.

To achieve this, Europe needs a strong cohesion policy and the involvement of local actors as real partners in all its recovery plans.

This is why, with all Cohesion Alliance partners and our 12 000 signatories, we have decided to renew our commitment today and start working on a new declaration to reaffirm the value of cohesion in the post-pandemic scenario, and help build a new partnership among EU, national, regional and local actors.

The health of our regions and cities will always reflect the health of Europe. When our regions and cities recover, countries recover. When our countries recover, Europe will recover. If we leave any person or region behind, we will fail.

We need an exceptional EU budget and EU Recovery Plan that reflect these exceptional times and address the needs of Europe's local communities.

They must be used to set up an EU Health Emergency Mechanism. They must offer grants and loans directly to local and regional authorities to relaunch the economy and provide public services. The EU also needs to strengthen aid programmes for SMEs, and develop new plans to help rural areas. We can do this now, together.

Robert Schuman famously said, this day in 1950, "Europe will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity." Today, more than ever, these words echo loudly and must guide us.

Words of solidarity must be matched with acts of solidarity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

let me finish by expressing my deep gratitude to each of you for joining us today. To everyone, every business, every essential worker and every politician.

It is this show of solidarity, that makes me proud to be European.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY