



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT TZITZIKOSTAS
EUROPEAN CAPITALS OF INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY CEREMONY
BRUSSELS
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Dear Commissioner Dalli, Dear Mayors, Dear colleagues and esteemed participants,

It is my great pleasure to participate at the first European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award Ceremony. This Award acknowledges the important work by our cities, regions and villages to promote equality and diversity, our founding values of the European Union.

Every day, we must act to promote these values and combat discrimination on any grounds in the provision of services, in decision-making at all levels of government and anywhere we encounter it. And in this task, the local and regional authorities, and the 1.2 million local and regional leaders are your partners.

They are at the frontline, fostering inclusive communities, where all citizens feel equally valued and included. Therefore, we highly appreciate the creation of this Award and assure you that the European Committee of the Regions fully supports this initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen,

the Union of Equality cannot be achieved without the active engagement of our local communities, without our local and regional leaders. They are the drivers of innovative diversity and inclusion policies and local initiatives. To this end, many local and regional authorities have also designated elected representatives with specific responsibility for equal opportunities and equal rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the recent EU Action Plan against racism, which acknowledges that regional authorities are at the centre of the solutions in the fight against racism - the European Commission acknowledges that structural racism exists in Europe and that swift and resolute action is needed.

To deliver this Action Plan and help people affected by racism, we need clear and measurable targets for its implementation and an effective monitoring mechanism to assess progress.

In this context, we appreciate that this Award has a specific prize to reward local initiatives for Roma inclusion, the largest ethnic minority group in Europe, and recognises the efforts to bring local Roma communities out of poverty and social exclusion.

At this occasion, we repeat our call on the EU to closely monitor progress on Roma inclusion



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in the Member States, and to involve the local and regional authorities in the design and implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks.

We must also consider the rights and the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and ensure better services and improved access to employment, education and transport.

Moreover, we must amplify the prevention of violence against sexual minorities and step up implementation of effective equality policies on the ground.

Today, I want to also emphasise the particular vulnerability of LGBTIQ+ youth, exposed to discrimination, stigmatisation and abuse from a young age. Too often they experience limited understanding by professional service providers and broader society, as well as mental, physical and sexual health challenges.

We must do more, we must do better.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While legal and societal change is a long-lasting process, it is even more important that cities and regions are the pioneers of inclusion, and protectors of equal rights.

Promoting local good practices helps speed up and foster the scaling up of effective measures and of innovative diversity and inclusion policies.

We must work together to help our cities, towns and regions be the safe, welcoming home and environment that allows everyone to flourish and fulfil their potential and feel part of the community.

I am confident that this Award is a major impulse for further positive transformations in our cities to make them fairer, safer, more inclusive and more open – and more united in diversity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

And now, we move on to the most exciting part. It is time to hand out the Awards in the Category of Local authorities with less than 50,000 inhabitants:

Bronze winner: Congratulations to Antequera, Spain

Silver winner: Congratulations to Ingelheim am Rhein, Germany

Gold winner: Congratulations to Koprivnica, Croatia



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I would like to congratulate all the Award candidates and all winners for their excellent work and efforts to make our communities more accessible, more welcoming and better places to live for all our citizens.

Thank you.

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