



HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA
Governance Platform

Relaunching Europe Bottom-Up

Integration of Refugees in Europe as a joint municipal development

Conference Report



Legal disclosure

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1. Executive Summary

Background

The European Union is currently facing several crises brought on by the financial and economic crisis of 2008 and further intensified through the high influx of refugees from 2015 onwards. The level of cooperation between the European member states has decreased since 2008 and this trend has continued in the process of finding solutions to solve the current migrant and refugee crisis. There is growing skepticism from the citizens of the European Union towards the decision-making process on the EU level and its ability to find appropriate solutions to current challenges. This trend may be worsened by the incapacity of politicians at the European level to come up with sustainable, forward-thinking and consensual policies and solutions.

The issue of integration of migrants and refugees is the most pressing at the European, national and local level. The influx of migrants and refugees represents the highest level of displacement on record according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Time for action is now. However, the urgent need for a sustainable value-oriented migration policy – which in the long run needs to be combined with a European immigration policy – is aggravated by the incapacity of decision-makers to find a solidary solution for a refugee integration in the whole of Europe. For many reasons a top-down distribution is condemned to fail. There is a stalemate in the European Council to find sustainable value-oriented solidary solutions. Therefore, there is the need for a bottom-up alternative by municipalities and cities that have an interest to voluntarily integrate refugees for humanitarian purposes and for their own prospects.

It is the cities that must take on the main responsibility of tackling social, humanitarian and financial

challenges already present in their local communities and the additional challenges caused by the influx in migrants and refugees on their respective level, especially possible competition between refugees and local poverty. All these challenges must be overcome in a time in which funding from national government has decreased and available funds are limited.

Even though this is the case, several cities all over Europe have declared their readiness to welcome refugees and are already actively developing and implementing measures for a successful integration of migrants and refugees. The cities and municipalities need financing options that allow them to invest in their local infrastructures, advance their local communities and citizens as well as cover the costs and solve the challenges caused by the influx of migrants and refugees.

Initiative “Relaunching Europe Bottom-Up”

The “Relaunching Europe-Bottom Up” initiative therefore suggests a new and holistic approach that supports municipalities with integration and urban development and gives them direct access to EU funds. It calls on the European Union to create new publicly financed funding opportunities in the next European Union Financial Framework in 2021 that support cities and municipalities with the integration of refugees and give them additional monetary funds to invest in their local infrastructure.

The benefits of this approach are 1.) a revival of the European idea and a reinforcement of citizens’ identification with the EU through bottom-up citizen participation, 2.) a decentralized sustainable growth initiative at the local level and 3.) closer cooperation between European cities and municipalities.

Conference “Relaunching Europe Bottom-Up”

The conference aimed at sending a strong message to the EU that there is an urgent need for multi-stakeholder and municipality-led approaches for the integration of migrants and refugees that require adequate funding from the EU level. With the help of such funding opportunities, cities and municipalities would be able to invest in their communities based on inclusion, solidarity and innovation.

The main talking points of the conference were:

- **The importance of cities and networks:** Cities take on national responsibilities and civil society plays a key role. In matters of integration, local levels take on a decisive role in providing targeted measures for local community and refugees that facilitate successful integration and economic growth. In this context exchange between cities is vital for knowledge transfer and good practice exchange.
- **The need for multistakeholder dialogue and action:** There is a strong need for social multi-stakeholder dialogue on the local level that includes all stakeholders at the political, business and civil society organizations level. To address the growing challenges and the complexity of issues, there is the need for flexible governance on EU level as well as the national levels.
- **The importance of investments for social cohesion:** Investments into the local infrastructure are crucial. Although costly in the short term, investments prove effective in the long term. Currently, administrative barriers complicate integration of refugees on the local level. There needs to be a clear framework for language training, advocacy on the rights and obligations etc.
- **The importance of reform on the EU level:** There is a strong need for direct and holistic funding for cities as well as for simplifying the implementation for all actors.

Outlook

The initiative “Relaunching Europe Bottom-Up” wants to make use of the positive energy at the local level within the EU that was demonstrated at the conference. It is presently collecting support for a manifesto based on the conference and is working on a subsequent campaign to extend the support and raise awareness for this approach. This plan was met with large approval by participants of the conference. The time to turn the integration of migrants and refugees into a European growth initiative with a positive outcome for local communities and for migrants is now. The initiative will remain committed to this cause. **We have a new chance – all we need is the political will of the EU to seize this opportunity and relaunch Europe bottom-up.**

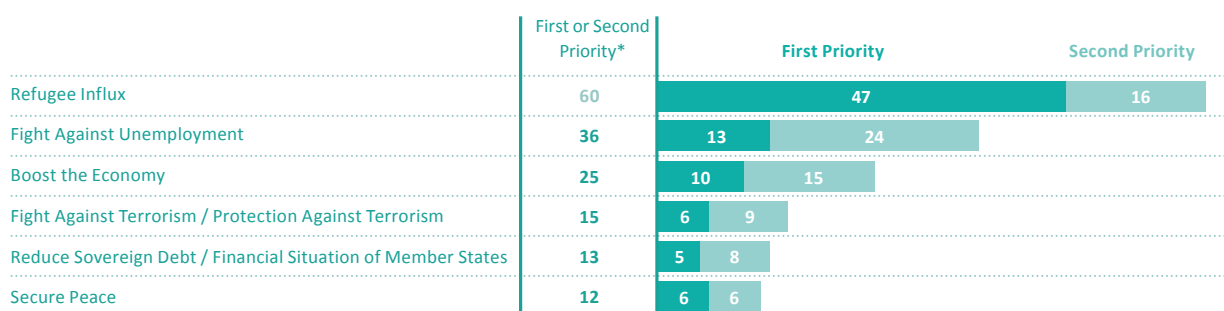
2. Current state of affairs

The financial and economic crisis of 2008 brought the economic integration of the European Union to a stop. Since then, **the European Union has been facing enormous challenges and is still working on finding solutions.** The ongoing economic crisis has led to a loss of reputation for the EU. People have lost trust in the policy makers' capability to deal with the major challenges Europe is facing and the European Union is often perceived as a distant and bureaucratic institution.

The strength of the European Union was further weakened by the European migrant and refugee crisis that became obvious in 2015, when a rising number of people arrived in the European Union and travelled across the Mediterranean Sea or overland through

Southeast Europe. Most of the refugees came and continue to come from Western Asia, South Asia and Africa.²⁶ **The influx in the number of unauthorized migrants to the EU has caused great tension among member states,** due to disproportionate burdens faced by some countries, especially those where most migrants arrive: Greece, Italy and Hungary. In September 2015, EU member states committed to relocating up to 160.000 refugees from Greece and Italy, however, until now fewer than 21.000 have been relocated. Europe is divided in the question of relocation, with countries like Poland and Hungary voting against resettlement quotas and refusing to accept refugees from the EU.

Figure 1 – Policy Priorities of the EU. Refugee Policy by Far Most Urgent EU Issue



Question:
Which tasks should the European Union tackle most urgently?

Figures in per cent. Basis: Eligible voters.

* Multiple responses

Source: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung - The European Union Facing Massive Challenges - What are Citizens' Expectations and Concerns?

26 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees states that the top three nationalities were Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi in the time between January 2015 and March 2016.

In the study conducted by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung “The European Union Facing Massive Challenges – What are Citizens’ Expectations and Concerns?²⁷”, one in two respondents named “refugees” as the EU’s biggest problem, when asked openly (without answering options). **Refugee policy thereby is a top priority for citizens.** They are concerned about the impact that the massive influx of migrants and refugees, who are fleeing war and instability, will have. The fears are strongest where immigration is lowest, i.e. Czech Republic and Slovakia. Citizens are also concerned about labor-market prospects, the economic development of their home countries, foreign policy, social cohesion and social security. The willingness to transfer national competencies to the EU level is low, especially where social policy is concerned. In Eastern European member states, there is a strong rejection by citizens that these issues be taken away from the state’s sovereignty.

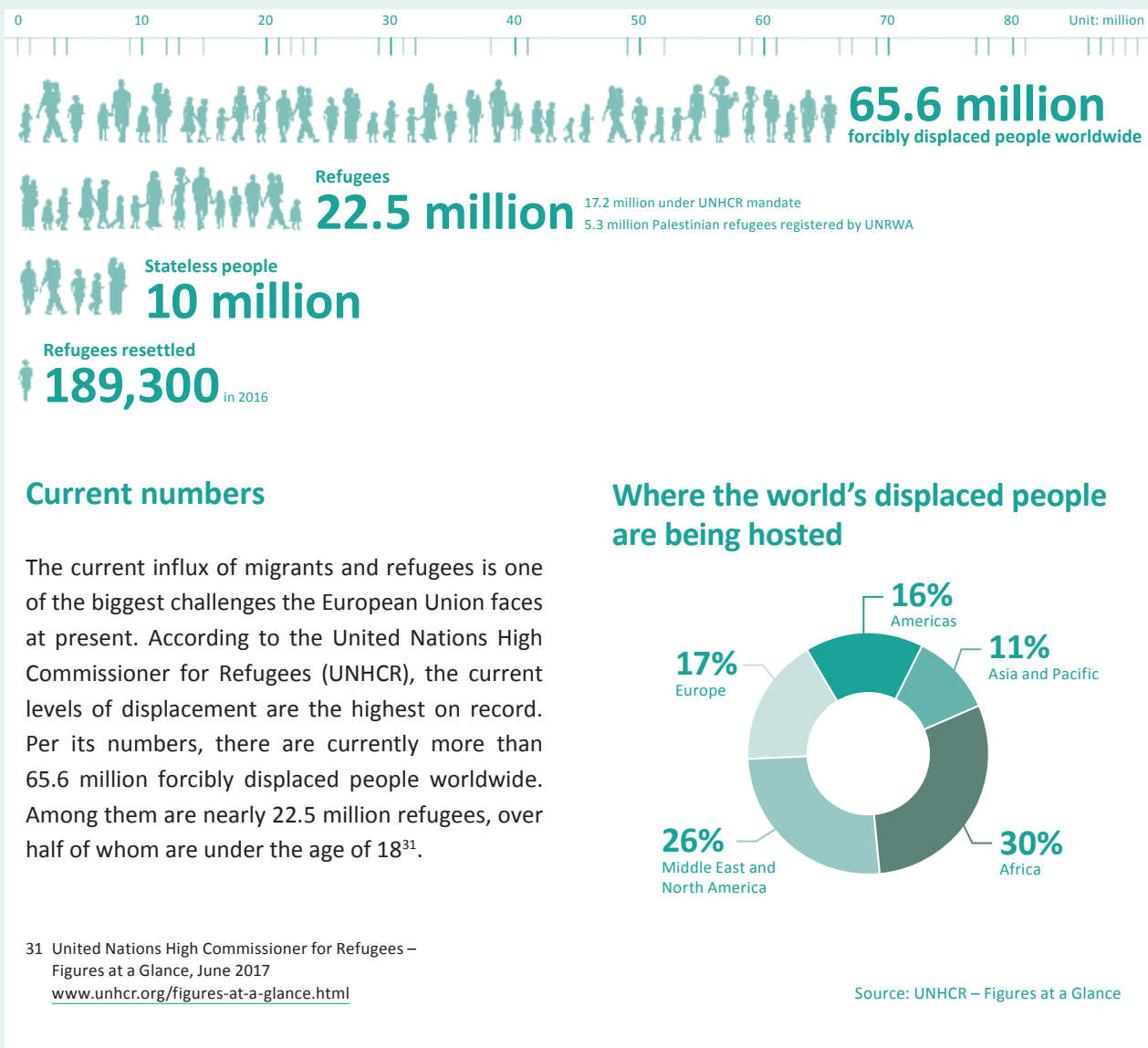
Overall, there is **growing skepticism in Europe’s decision-making systems and its ability to deal with the current problems.** The incapacity of politicians on the European stage to come up with sustainable and consensual solutions may worsen the trend. In that context, the acceptance and the distribution of refugees within Europe has high priority and needs to be solved.²⁸ Bridging the differences in the issue of migrants and refugee integration will be of great importance for the European Union’s social cohesion. There is **need for a better crisis management on the EU level as well as better cooperation, coordination and shared understanding** of the multiple crises currently present in the European Union²⁹. The EU must regenerate the trust of its citizens and send a strong signal that it can provide security and simultaneously that is able to adapt to change.³⁰

27 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung: The European Union Facing Massive Challenges – What are Citizens’ Expectations and Concerns? <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/12346.pdf>

28 Ibid.

29 Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung: What Are the Main Challenges Facing the European Union in 2017? https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/boll_event_report_challenges_eu_2017.pdf

30 Ibid.



Developments in Europe due to the migrant and refugee crisis

The numbers show that what we are witnessing momentarily is an **entirely new quality of worldwide migration and a subsequent migrant and refugee crisis**.

The EU continues to hope that the issue of unregulated displacement can be resolved by its deal with Turkey, by further similar agreements with North African countries (e.g. Libya) and by declaring them

safe third states. The aim here is to put a stop to the migration of refugees to Europe in general or to deter migrants and refugees from coming and – where appropriate – to create possibilities of legal access to Europe outside the EU.

The proposals to date are very dubious from the point of view of international law and human rights. They take away the EU's moral credibility, i.e., the human rights basis of its political system, are no answer to the evident lack of solidarity within Europe and the erosion of Europe's internal cohesion best

demonstrated by the erection of new internal European borders, and do nothing to combat the enduring social and economic crisis of unemployment, rampant poverty and growing social discrepancies in the EU. That means they are gambling with the future of the European Union and its nation states.

Conversely, they do not draw yet on the potential fund of willingness to help an innovative energy that can be observed throughout Europe at city and municipal level and in civil society and that could greatly benefit the EU.

Importance of cities in Europe and in the crisis

Europe is a union of cities. Currently, 72% of Europeans live in cities³². Estimates predict that by 2020, 80% of Europe's population will live there. In this respect, cities are vital for the economic growth, wealth and social cohesion within the Union. Cities are centers of power, knowledge, innovation and integration and can also be important motors for rapid advancements toward sustainability. However, cities are also the locations faced with big challenges, such as lack of affordable housing, concentrations of unemployment poverty³³ and the influx of migrants and refugees.

Currently, cities – as the most important actors for the reception and integration of migrants and refugees³⁴ – must tackle the social, humanitarian and financial challenges caused by the migration and refugee crisis with clearly insufficient financial and/or administrative support from their respective national governments or the European Union. Nevertheless, it is their responsibility to guarantee the basic protection to migrants and refugees. It falls

to cities to generate a better understanding within their local communities on the need as well as the obligation to grant refugees human rights and protection based on national, European treaties and international law.³⁵

The European Union has manifested the importance of cities for European development in the Urban Agenda for the EU³⁶:

“The core objective of the Urban Agenda for the EU is to involve cities in the design of EU policy, to mobilise cities for the implementation of EU policies, and to strengthen the urban dimension in these policies. Under the 2016 Dutch EU Presidency, the Urban Agenda for the EU aims to strengthen the urban dimension in EU policies by: (1) improving the development, implementation and evaluation of EU legislation (‘better regulation’); (2) ensuring better access to and utilisation of European funds; and (3) by improving the EU urban knowledge base and stimulating the sharing of best practices and cooperation between cities.”³⁷

However, there **is stagnation in the development and implementation of EU policies guided towards the urban dimension**. A report by the Directorate-General for Internal Policies that evaluated the role of cities in cohesion policy 2014-2020 found that the intention of the Commission to enhance the role of cities has not yet been fulfilled at the member state level. It concluded that more could have been done to give cities a stronger involvement, especially regarding program development.³⁸

32 PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency: “Cities in Europe – Facts and Figures on cities and urban areas”, 2016 www.pbl.nl/sites/default/files/cms/publicaties/PBL-2016-Cities-in-Europe-2469.pdf

33 Ibid.

34 EUROCITIES statement on asylum in cities, May 2015 http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES_stmt_asylum_May2015.pdf

35 Ibid.

36 The Urban Agenda is an integrated and coordinated approach initiated by the EU to deal with the urban dimension.

37 PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency: “Cities in Europe – Facts and Figures on cities and urban areas”, 2016 www.pbl.nl/sites/default/files/cms/publicaties/PBL-2016-Cities-in-Europe-2469.pdf

38 Directorate-General for Internal Policies: “The Role of Cities in Cohesion Policy 2014 – 2020”, 2014 www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2014/529075/IPOL_STU%282014%29529075_EN.pdf

Regarding the integration of migrants and refugees, EUROCITIES³⁹ has called for the following to make urban policy more effective:

- City authorities should be consulted directly by the European Commission, as they are the main operators and places in which refugees resettle and need to be integrated.
- The city authorities also need to be included in decisions of resettlement quotas, financial assistance, integration models and resources. Resettlement schemes will not be successful, if the necessary structures are not in place at the local level, the local civil society organizations are not involved and awareness-raising as well as consensus-building within the local population have not been properly managed.
- The European Commission should provide financial support for cities considering to take part in resettlement schemes, so that they can build the capacity of the city authorities.
- There is a need for a better balance of European and national funding between border protection and security and structural support for the reception and integration of migrants and refugees at the local level. This issue is especially important, as many European cities have had their budgets and resources cut due to austerity policies at the EU and national level. This type of funding should not be limited to the short term. On the contrary, there needs to be adequate financial resources available in the long term for structural integration policies.

³⁹ EUROCITIES is a network of 130 major European cities which represents the interests of 130 million citizens. For more information please visit www.eurocities.eu. The points referred to in the following are based on the EUROCITIES statement on asylum in cities (May 2015). http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES_stmt_asylum_May_2015.pdf

3. The initiative “Relaunching Europe Bottom-Up”

The context

The successful integration of migrants and refugees requires systemic and concerted efforts at the local level. This includes the set-up of multistakeholder approaches to provide migrants and refugees with the best possible professional social support and guidance possible.⁴⁰ The integration of migrants and refugees into societies is vital and requires all actors from local authorities, business and civil society groups, including migrant and refugee associations, to be part of the process and to cooperate and collaborate when addressing issues caused by migration⁴¹.

A failure to work on successful integration strategies violates the respect of fundamental rights and impedes the benefits that immigration can bring in the long term. If integration strategies are missing, migrants and refugees cannot access measures that will support them in regaining independence in the new environment and contributing to the host societies. This can prove costly for local as well as national authorities in the long term.⁴² Therefore, **finding effective and long term solutions that protect social cohesion and safeguard social and economic integration of migrants and refugees at the local and member state level is imperative.**⁴³

Cities have been forced to act independently from the nation state to find these solutions and innovations on the city level. In the past 30 to 40 years, the availability of public investment funding provided by the national governments for local authorities has been reduced severely throughout Europe. This has led to a deterioration of the standard and quality of living with respect to local infrastructure development such as housing, job opportunities and development and education, especially in rurally located municipalities and economically weaker regions. Local authorities have been struggling to provide services to their communities. The current influx of migrants and refugees, tasks them with finding a balance in investing in local infrastructures with the limited resources available and simultaneously generating conditions that allow for the successful integration of migrants and refugees.

The initiative

The initiative *Relaunching Europe Bottom-Up* by the HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA Governance Platform falls in line with this idea and suggests **a new European holistic approach that supports municipalities with integration and urban development** (schools, administration, promotion of trades and crafts) at once and that gives them direct access to EU-Funds. The initiative calls on the European Union to create a fund in the next European Union Financial Framework in 2021 for which municipalities can apply and receive direct and holistic financing for the refugee integra-

40 EUROCITIES statement on asylum in cities, May 2015
http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES_stmt_asylum_May 2015.pdf

41 United Nations University: Policy Report “Cities as Humanitarian Actors in Contexts of Displacement”, 2017
<https://i.unu.edu/media/gcm.unu.edu/publication/3521/REPORT-0402.pdf>

42 EUROCITIES statement on asylum in cities, May 2015
http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES_stmt_asylum_May 2015.pdf

43 Ibid.

tion and – additionally to be more inclusive – the communities’ general social cohesion and economic development.

This offers **the chance to transform the challenge of the incoming migrants and refugees into a European Growth Initiative** – benefiting the local communities, leading to successful integration and strengthening the identification with the European Union. It should also help simplifying European financing options and reduce double-spending effects that occur through overlapping areas of different funds.

To generate as much support as possible from the broad community for local integration and development strategies and projects, the application to the funds would be prepared by a multistakeholder group of representatives of the community, civil society organizations (including refugee representatives, social partners and religious groups), and business (thus benefiting in the long run from an enlarged and qualified work force). These multistakeholder groups should be built on equal footing of all partners, so that sustainable solutions based on participatory politics and common ownership can be found and implemented.

The application from municipalities for these direct and holistic EU funds should include:

- a plan for the **integration strategy** and for the general communal development strategy (sustainable infrastructure, education, employment, housing, cultural and sport activities, “ownership” opportunities, etc.)
- a **timetable for the strategy’s implementation**
- a **comprehensive input from business communities**. For the project to achieve its purpose, a detailed action plan including employment schedules, internship programs, procedures of mutual professional qualification recognition, training for newcomers (e.g. cultural, language) should be drafted.
- **expected results** (sustainable growth and employment benefits, general social and cultural integration and future development perspectives of the community, better cooperation between various actors for successful integration, added value for Europe by solidarity and participatory identification)
- **evaluation procedures**
- an **anti-corruption strategy** (for instance the “Integrity Pact” of Transparency International which has experience in that field).

At EU level, the decision about the municipalities’ applications should also be made by multistakeholder governance.

The benefits

1. **European commitment by bottom-up citizen participation:** It would empower citizens at the local level and would enhance participatory democracy in Europe. Their interests would be heard and included in the process of the integration of migrants and refugees. This would have positive outcomes in the long term, as the acceptance of the measures installed for the successful integration of migrants and refugees would be higher. The active participation would promote citizens’ identification with the EU, as they would feel that they can contribute to the design and implementation of solutions.
2. **Decentralized sustainable growth initiative at local level:** With this type of funding, cities and municipalities could strengthen their local economy and tackle challenges such as unemployment, scarcities in housing, infrastructure investments on the local level and support education. Being able to deal with these issues adequately has a two-fold positive outcome: citizens’ concerns about labor market perspectives and the growth of their local economies could be calmed through investments in the local infrastructures. Additional investment into measures for a successful

integration of migrants and refugees receive a higher level of acceptance due to the two-fold benefit for both newcomers and residents.

- 3. Closer cooperation between European cities and municipalities:** This approach would allow a horizontal associational integration of the European Union through closer cooperation between the European cities and municipalities. This could be done for example through existing city networks, such as EUROCITIES, and in other forms of cooperation. This could create a new coherence between proclaimed European values and individual action, which would boost the self-esteem, reputation and authority of EU citizens.

Numerous cities across Europe have declared their willingness and readiness to welcome refugees, and have already started taking in migrants and refugees and developing integration strategies at the local level. These cities need financial support. To stimulate as many European host cities for migrants and refugees as possible, the financing should include a palpable “overhead” for the cities’ own needs to encourage a broad social support within the cities to undertake the long-lasting process of integration.

Momentarily, however, there is a stalemate in the European Council in finding a sustainable value-oriented solidary solution for a refugee integration among European member states. This makes the need for this type of bottom-up alternative even greater, so that municipalities and cities that have an interest to voluntarily integrate refugees for humanitarian purposes and for their own prospects can do so successfully. The cooperation between the state and the municipality level needs to be deepened and improved. By providing the possibility of refugee integration, cities and municipalities can help their national governments to fulfill their duties. This will have a positive impact on their cooperation and communication.

4. Conference: “Relaunching Europe Bottom-Up”

Focus of the conference and its objectives

The conference in Gdańsk aimed at **sending a strong message that Europe needs a vital relaunch and, most urgently, a solidary solution of migration challenges.** Multistakeholder, municipality-led programs for integration of migrants and refugees are pivotal for responding to the challenges. As elaborated above, cities should receive direct European funding for a strategy of general community investment and development that is based on inclusion, solidarity and innovation. The conference also sent out a strong signal that there is the need to actively strengthen cities. It provided cities and municipalities with the opportunity to network and join forces in tackling challenges by learning from one another and working together.

To promote the policy, the city of Gdańsk, the Europejski Centrum Solidarnosci, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, SOLIDAR, the Consulate General of Germany in Gdańsk and the HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA Governance Platform invited stakeholders from municipalities, businesses, civil society from all over Europe and representatives from the European Parliament, social partners as well as cities and municipalities of Europe to the conference.

Its objectives were to give attendees the opportunity to:

- learn about a new holistic and direct financing strategy of European communities by the European Union.
- get acquainted with a multistakeholder based integration policy focused on a common development strategy at the municipal level.
- discuss the benefits of this holistic approach with participating European municipalities and answer open questions.
- promote a bottom-up relaunch of the EU through the participation of civil society and business and to call for investment support through more direct European financing options for communities and regions.
- promote further European integration by avoiding both centralization and renationalization.

Conference agenda

The conference was opened by Gdańsk mayor Paweł Adamowicz, Senior Policy Advisor on Migration at the Foundation for European Progressive Studies Dr. Hedwig Giusto and German Consul General in Gdańsk Cornelia Pieper.

The opening words were followed by a key note speech from Professor Gesine Schwan, President of the HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA Governance Platform on the topic of “Why ‘Relaunching Europe Bottom – Up?’ – The Refugee challenge as a chance for sustainable European (and global) development”.

Afterwards, the Deputy Mayor of Malmö and Vice-Chair of the EUROCITES Social Affairs Forum, Andreas Schönström gave a speech, which was followed by four inputs from stakeholders from politics, business and civil society organizations. These came namely from Maria João Rodrigues, (Member of the European Parliament, Vice-President and Parliamentary Secretary of the S&D Group), Moreno Diaz (European

Economic and Social Committee (EESC)), Catherine Woollard (Secretary General of the European Council of Refugees and Exile) and Henryka Bochniarz (President of the Polish Confederation “Lewiatan”).

Following the inputs, the speakers took part in a panel discussion dealing with the question of “Concrete proposals for European solidarity in the refugee question and how to contribute to strengthening the EU through the communities and regions?”

In the afternoon, there was an exchange of good practices. The cities of Gdańsk (Poland), Thessaloniki (Greece) and Merzenich (Germany) discussed the differences each city faces and presented solutions that were found on the local level in the plenary and in smaller workshops. These innovations demonstrated the potential of solidarity and innovative energy that lies in the approach of Europe bottom-up. The workshops facilitated in-depth discussion of the presentations and knowledge transfer.



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The conference ended with a wrap-up of the days' discussions and the presentation and discussion of a draft version of the manifesto to the conference. The conference came to a festive close with a multi-cultural concert by the The Sejny Theatre Klezmer Orchestra.

The conference was attended by circa 60 participants.

Talking points of the conference

The importance of cities and networks

- **Cities take on national responsibilities and the importance of civil society:** Cities had to step in and take on national responsibilities, such as to assist adults and families. This does not usually fall in their scope of responsibilities and could not have been tackled successfully without the help and support of NGOs and other civil society actors.
- **Local level plays a decisive role in integration:** Cities play an important role in the successful integration of migrants and refugees. It is where people live together and where lack of integration first becomes visible. Cities and communities

should receive guidance on well-functioning integration measures and adequate funding.

- **Successful integration needs targeted measures for local community and refugees:** Integration measures and investments should be provided to the local citizens and refugees alike to cover the specific needs of each target group. This is especially important in times of smaller projected economic growth and tight labor markets. For this strategy to be successful, the debate needs to be taken from the Brussels level to the capital and local level of member states.

- **Exchange between cities is vital:** Networks allow cities to exchange information and knowledge on the refugee situation in the cities. It also makes city-to-city technical and financial assistance and capacity building possible. This exchange between cities is important for the success of integration of migrants and refugees across Europe.

The need for multistakeholder dialogue and action

- **Need for a social dialogue:** Successful integration needs a social dialogue that includes all stakeholders at the political, business and civil society organizations level. This allows for cooperation between the actors and assures the migrants and refugees integration once their protected status is granted.
- **Union of cities:** The European Union needs to use the power at the local level and make use of the fact that there is also a union between cities. At present, networking and support between cities is difficult. Although many cities across Europe are willing to share the responsibilities, rules and legislation prevent this from being successful.
- **Need for flexible governance:** To address the growing challenges and the complexity of issues, there is the need for new and flexible ways of governance. This means that cities must work in closer partnership to restore trust in the European and national institutions and preserve the achievements of the European integration.



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The importance of investments for social cohesion

- **Investments into the local infrastructure are crucial:** Building schools, houses etc. and providing jobs is an important factor and needs socially sustainable investments. Local authorities are aware of the importance and impact that the right type of investment can have, however, funding opportunities are often complex and without direct access (i.e. European funds).
- **Investments are costly in the short term, but effective in the long term:** Among other things they are an investment into the potential workforce. If integration is successful, it will lead to economic growth, job creation and better welfare.
- **Administrative barriers complicate integration of refugees:** There is the need to draft a plan that provides inclusion-training to incoming refugees. This includes language training, advocacy on the rights and obligations and an incentive for local businesses to hire refugees.

- **Classification of certificates, skills and qualifications:** The integration into the job market of refugees needs a joint effort of governments and businesses to help assess the skills and qualifications of migrants and refugees. This process could be aided by businesses contributing Human Resources specialists to support the screening process.

The importance of reform on the EU level

- **Need for direct and holistic funding for cities:** EU resources should make partnership and multi-level governance a reality on the city level and promote citizen engagement. It should provide coherent, stable, flexible and strategic funding as well as simplify the implementation for all actors and allow for quicker accessibility of funds.



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Exchange of good practice

During the conference the cities of Gdańsk (Poland), Thessaloniki (Greece) and Merzenich (Germany) presented initiatives in the framework of migrant and refugee integration on the level of their respective cities.

1. Gdańsk (Poland): Immigrant Integration Model (MII)⁴⁴

Gdańsk is Poland's fourth-largest metropolitan area and has a population of 463.754 (city) and 1.080 (metropolitan area, 2016). Gdańsk has a total of 15.000 immigrants, most of whom are Ukrainian workers. The city's mayor Paweł Adamowicz was nominated for the World Mayor Prize for his and the

city's **Immigrant Integration Model (MII)**. The model is managed by the city hall and the Immigrant Support Centre (ISC). The founder of the ISC, Marta Siciarek, presented the model at the conference.

The integration model was developed in a multi-stakeholder approach and included stakeholders from non-governmental organizations, public institutions, private entities and the community of immigrants in Gdańsk. The model helps immigrants with legal counselling, job-seeking, language classes and brings together immigrants with volunteer mentors. The model strengthens the coordination and cooperation of various entities and improves the quality of services needed by immigrants.⁴⁵

The model focuses on the immigrants already living in Gdańsk and provides a framework to deal with the challenges of the predicted increase in immigration

⁴⁴ The description of the model in this report is based on the presentation of Marta Siciarek at the conference and the Immigrant Integration Model Gdańsk, June 2016
www.gdansk.pl/pobierz/82848/Immigrant-Integration-Model

⁴⁵ Paweł Adamowicz: Gdańsk – a city of solidarity with immigrants
www.huffingtonpost.com/pawel-adamowicz/gdansk---a-city-of-solidar_b_11178528.html

in Gdańsk. It highlights the main areas and lines for action for a successful and effective integration policy at the level of the local government and in the long term. The eight identified task areas are education, local communities, culture, violence and discrimination, health, employment, social assistance and housing. All areas have been underlined with accompanying measures and tasks.

The key values and principles of the MII are:

- **Promoting immigrants' capital and energy:** active integration policy through civic participation should invest in human and social capital of immigrants and infrastructure. By doing so, it ensures economic development and high quality of life for residents.
- **Acknowledging the wealth of cultural diversity:** integration is considered a two-way process between immigrants and the host society to encourage learning and understanding of the other's culture. It does not mean unconditional acceptance of the migrants' norms and customs. The host societies have the right to set boundaries.
- **Necessity for partnership and collaboration:** the integration process needs partnership and collaboration between sectors such as public, private, non-governmental and a variety of disciplines and area. Immigrant groups must also be included in the development and implementation of integration strategies.
- **Immigrants must be ready to learn and respect the local cultural and legal norms:** integration is viewed as a two-way process that involves the host community and the immigrants. A willingness to learn the culture, customs and language is imperative for successful integration.
- **No ghettos or clusters:** collective and centralized accommodation units for foreigners should be avoided at the local community level. Immigrants should rather be accommodated in existing institutions and organizations.

→ **Immigrants should have similar opportunities available to local community members.**

→ **Integration policy should rely on data-driven information and empirical research:** this approach counteracts decisions based on opinions or stereotypes.

The Immigrant Integration Model is coordinated by the Immigrant Integration Model Implementation Team composed of four entities: 1.) steering committee, 2.) managing group, 3.) integration and migration forum and 4.) the immigrant council. It provides a framework to help guide the city's integration and migration policy.

2. Thessaloniki (Greece): Thessaloniki Empowerment Hub for Socioeconomic Integration of Refugees and Migrants (HUG)⁴⁶

The municipality of Thessaloniki is the second-largest municipality in Greece and has a population of about 324,766 inhabitants (2011). Thessaloniki has a number 1,171 refugees and migrants of which 642 are children (Unicef, February 2017⁴⁷). The municipality of Thessaloniki has always been multicultural with a long history of migration. Due to this characteristic, the citizens of the municipality are welcoming toward refugees and migrants, as they have migration experiences in their personal or family history.

The project **"Thessaloniki Empowerment Hub for Socioeconomic Integration of Refugees and Migrants (HUG)"** is an initiative of the City of Thessaloniki and part of the Urban Innovation Actions. It was presented at the conference by Lazaros Panagiotidis from the City of Thessaloniki.

⁴⁶ Based on the presentation "HUG: Thessaloniki Empowerment Hub for Socioeconomic Integration of Refugees and Migrants" at the "Relaunching Europe Bottom Up" Conference (Gdansk, June 7 2017)

⁴⁷ Refugee and Migrant Child Population outside Accommodation sites in Thessaloniki, February 2017
<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/57941>

HUG follows three aims: 1.) building and validating migrants' and refugees' skills, 2.) support migrants in networking with natives and 3.) foster the experimentation with business ideas that are co-created in key economic sectors for Thessaloniki.

The project tackles several challenges:

- Work with reliable data about migrants/refugees
- Recognize their skills and needs with the use of credible tools
- Provide support services related to employment and entrepreneurship
- Integrate several dispersed/unconnected support schemes into a single point to avoid overlaps / waste of resources
- Design and implement innovative solutions
- Develop and promote collaboration between migrants/refugees and natives

To successfully engage with the challenges, HUB offers these solutions:

1. Unifies all local structures promoting the migrants' and refugees' integration in the city of Thessaloniki and its surrounding area at one single access point
2. Facilitates the development and promotion of entrepreneurial initiatives between migrants/refugees and natives in key economic sectors and with emphasis on job creation for the specific target groups
3. Fosters the design/development of innovative solutions for migrants/refugees through co-creation among social enterprises, humanitarian organizations and migrants/refugees
4. Staffed with both migrants/refugees and natives and promotes role models

5. Governed by a multidisciplinary and multilevel structure – the HUG Network consists of several stakeholders representing government, business, civil society and academia
6. Makes use of innovative methodological tools and recommendations / findings of other initiatives currently implemented
7. Continuously monitors and assess its performance

3. Merzenich (Germany): Merzenich helps⁴⁸

Merzenich is a municipality in the district of Düren, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. The district of Düren is made up of 15 cities and municipalities, with a population of 262,828 inhabitants. Currently, the district of Düren has around 55.000 inhabitants with a migrant background. The municipality of Merzenich has around 9.904 inhabitants, whereof 575 have a second nationality and 578 are foreigners, 135 of them are refugees. Around 40 refugee children attend the kindergartens and schools. Inga Dohmes, a representative and volunteer from the municipality of Merzenich, presented the initiative “**Merzenich helps**”.

The municipality of Merzenich has provided housing, clothing and living assistance to a large amount of people. In a multistakeholder approach, levels of administration, several social organizations and volunteers developed approaches to help migrants and refugees to support and integrate them. Currently, the municipality is working on an integration concept that will provide guideline to integrate migrants and refugees in the municipality. The integration concept is expected to be finished by summer 2017.

The refugee aid program “Merzenich helps” offers a variety of support measures for refugees:

⁴⁸ Based on the presentation “Municipality of Merzenich” at the “Relaunching Europe Bottom Up” Conference (Gdansk, June 7 2017)

- large number of voluntary helpers support the administration
- Three young people in federal voluntary service in the municipality support the program
- Meeting place “Tobi-Haus” for refugees and voluntary helpers (includes a clothes market [“Kleiderbörse”])
- Support in the integration of refugee children at a primary school as well as a comprehensive school
- Round tables with voluntary helpers, interested and helpful citizens, administrative assistants and the mayor of Merzenich

Key takeaways from the exchange

- **Models for integration strategies:** The approaches established in the Immigrant Integration Model in Gdańsk and the Thessaloniki Empowerment Hub for Socioeconomic Integration of Refugees and Migrants can work as viable models for other cities. They empower citizens and include all actors on the local level in the development and implementation of strategies. However, solutions must specialize on the challenges in the respective city and context. There is no blue print that can be developed in one city and then be applied elsewhere. Yet the principles and methodology of the MII and HUG can be applied in other cities and help to develop a city-specific strategy for integration based on the challenges faced there.
- **Education and language training:** The experiences in Merzenich for example have shown there are still considerable shortcomings regarding education and language learning among refugees and migrants. However, there are not enough instruments and offers to address these issues. Promoting and supporting these fundamental strands are important to ensure successful integration. Possible measures to promote integration for children could be language support, expansion of international preparatory classes and kindergarten. Additionally, integration activities among youth should be increased through language training and vocational training to integrate migrants and refugees into the local job market.
- In general, **people’s willingness to volunteer tends to diminish over time**, as the type of work and challenges that migrants face change. Therefore, the appreciation and care for volunteers as well as maintaining their willingness to help is vital to sustain the support over time.

5. Conclusions and next steps

Conclusions

At present, **cities and municipalities do not have sufficient funds to provide the necessary measures at the local level for the successful integration of migrants and refugees.** Even before the migrant and refugee crisis there were tremendous cut backs in public investments available to local governments. This has had significant impact on the economic development and the social cohesion of cities and municipalities. Therefore, the core vision of the conference was to send a strong signal to the EU that additional direct and holistic funding for 1.) public investments is necessary so that cities and municipalities can invest in their local infrastructures and citizenry and 2.) install successful measures for the integration of migrants and refugees. This double strategy can function as a type of European Growth Initiative by creating jobs, improving roads and bridges and stabilizing social cohesion, just to name a few.

EU Reflection Paper on the Future of EU Finances⁴⁹

In its recent “Reflection paper on the Future of EU Finances”, the EU has acknowledged that the current migrant and refugee crisis has tested the flexibility of the budget to the limit. It also acknowledges that within EU cohesion policy, the different layers of controls and the complexity of the bureaucratic system make it difficult for beneficiaries to get access to the funds quickly and consequently to deliver on the projects quickly.

The Commission has suggested the following principles for reform:

49 European Commission, Reflection Paper on the Future of EU Finances, June 28, 2017
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-eu-finances_en.pdf

The design of the future EU budget should be driven by these key principles.

- **EU value added:** funding should be concentrated on the areas of highest value added, taking into account the different dimensions indicated in Section 2 such as focus on results.
- **Accountability:** the debate on the future EU budget will follow a democratic and transparent process. The use of additional instruments outside the EU budget should be kept to a minimum, as they blur the understanding of the budget and put at risk democratic control, transparency and good management
- **More flexibility within a stable framework:** The multiannual structure of the EU budget is an asset. Certainty and predictability are a prerequisite for long-term investment. However, experience has shown that more flexibility is essential to respond to crises and unforeseen events. This should be reflected in a more flexible structure and a larger share of the budget should be left unallocated.
- **Simplified rules:** citizens should not be discouraged from applying for EU funding as a result of excessive bureaucracy. Efforts to cut red tape and further simplify the rules of implementation should therefore continue. Moving towards a single set of rules would help achieve this.

Source: European Commission – Reflection Paper on the Future of EU Finances

Another learning is the **importance of collaboration and cooperation between cities** across the European Union. When this measure is applied frequently, cities and municipalities benefit from the knowledge exchange and exchange of good practice examples by developing similar models for their respective local level. However, funding for networking and knowledge exchange opportunities, such as the conference in Gdansk, are severely limited and lead to networking potentials being lost. This hampers cities and municipalities in connecting with one another on a larger scale, which would help create coherent and successful integration throughout Europe.

Participants of the conference stressed **the need to be involved more in the governance structure of EU financing and EU decision-making**. This in turn would help the implementation of the Urban Agenda and push forward its goals of better regulation, better access and utilization of EU funds and improve the knowledge exchange between European cities as well as the sharing of good practices and cooperation between cities.

Declaration of Polish mayors⁵⁰

On June 30, the mayors of 11 large cities in Poland signed a declaration in which they express their intention to work together to promote successful integration of migrants and refugees across Poland. The cooperation is based on the principles of solidarity and the exchange of knowledge and solutions between cities. The exchange will be supported by a working group on questions of migration and integration. Ultimately, the mayors who signed the declaration strongly believe that a culture of welcoming refugees will lead to economic development in cities and will raise their attractiveness.

⁵⁰ While this declaration is not linked to the conference, it shows the importance of collaborative approaches and cooperation.

Participants regarded the **Relaunching Europe Bottom-Up initiative as a very relevant approach in the current state of affairs.** It was generally acknowledged that the main impact of the migration and refugee crisis is felt at the local level and that it is cities that must tackle the challenges that come along with it. Therefore, different social powers on the local level, i.e. different political, business and social actors as well as citizens, must work together and establish a fruitful social dialogue in a multistakeholder setting. This enables them to find solutions that both serve the local community and the refugees and migrants and which will have a higher chance of implementation due to a strong sense of ownership by all actors.

The conference **showed that there is a strong need for direct and holistic financing that allows cities to establish these types of multi-stakeholder initiatives** to tackle all issues at the local level. In this way, cities and municipalities can fulfill their responsibilities towards local citizens and the migrants and refugees joining the local communities.

While there was general agreement on the need for further EU financing that provides more flexible and direct financial support to cities, there was still some **need for discussion regarding the time line for restructuring the EU funding scheme and options.** Another question still open for discussion is the **feasibility of consolidating the different funds managed by different Directorate-Generals.** The consolidation reaches into the sovereignty of the Directorate-Generals and must be carefully thought through. These two points need to be further discussed at further conferences and with decision-makers on the EU level.

Next steps in the initiative

Manifesto (in progress)

The results of the conference are enforced by a common manifesto, which many participants have expressed their support for and their willingness to actively engage with the promotion of its strategy. Currently, the initiative is collecting signatures of key stakeholders for the manifesto to establish an initial supporter base across the local, national and supranational level.

Campaigning (planned)

In a next step, the manifesto will be distributed through an online campaign to enlarge the support base among key stakeholders across Europe on the local, national and supranational level from politics, business and civil society organizations. The outreach will not stop there: in correspondence with the initiatives' multistakeholder and local approach, the campaign will also encourage citizens to show their support.

The publication of the manifesto and the initiation of the campaign make use of the positive energy within the EU on the local level – be it among citizens or local representatives and/or refugees and migrants. The time for action is now to make the integration of migrants and refugees have a positive outcome for all involved and to overcome issues of feeling of shortcomings by creating a direct and holistic funding scheme that benefits all – the local community as well as the migrants and refugees.

Manifesto

“Relaunching Europe Bottom-Up”

Resulting from the conference on June 7, 2017
European Solidarity Center, Gdańsk

Despite President Trump and Brexit bringing Europeans closer together – the ship EU is still in turbulent waters. Narrow-minded nationalist politicians, frustrated citizens, provocative social inequalities, loss of trust and vision for sustainable solutions are threatening the most important and promising political project of our time. We, the citizens in civil society organizations, business, and municipalities have the responsibility to join forces and relaunch Europe bottom-up.

We are aware of the problems, but we are even more aware of the extraordinary chances the European Union has for all of us. And **we have ideas, hope, energy and a vision on how to overcome the present stalemate for a better Union and to newly ignite citizens' identification with the European project.** As a promising first step and as **an answer to the most urgent challenge for European solidarity**, we want to introduce an open-minded, comprehensive, inclusive and realistic **European funding for Refugee Integration which would help with voluntary decentralized relocation.**

A new European holistic approach that supports municipalities with integration and local development and gives direct access to EU-Funds opens the chance to transform the challenge of the incoming refugees into a European Growth Initiative – benefiting the local communities, leading to successful integration and strengthening the European Union.

Our idea is in line with initiatives of the European Commission²⁶, the European Parliament²⁷, the European Economic and Social Committee²⁸, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions²⁹, the EUROCITIES, the Solidarity Principle³⁰ and the LEADER/CLLD³¹ method in European Regional Policy.

It helps the necessary simplifying of European financing and reduces double-spending effects that occur through overlapping areas of different funds.

What do we need practically for relaunching Europe bottom-up? Starting with the next European Union Financial Framework in 2021, which is now in preparation, **the European Union should create a publicly financed fund for which municipalities can apply and receive direct and holistic financing for the refugee integration and – additionally to be more inclusive – the communities' general social integration and economic development.** Creating such a fund would also be in line with the Commission's recent reflection paper on the “Future of the EU Finances” (June 2017) stating that “(...) it is necessary to shift towards new, sustainable growth models that combine economic, social and environmental considerations in a holistic and integrated way.”

To generate as **much support** as possible from **the broad community**, the application should be prepared by a **multi-stakeholder group of representatives of the community**, civil society organizations (including refugee representatives, social partners and religious groups), and business (thus benefiting in the long run from an enlarged and qualified work force). These multi-stakeholder groups should be built on equal footing of all partners, so that **sustainable solutions based on common ownership** can be found and implemented.

The application from municipalities for these holistic EU funds should include:

- a plan for the **integration strategy** and for the general communal development strategy (sustainable infrastructure, education, employment, housing, cultural and sport activities, “ownership” opportunities, etc.)
- a **timetable for the strategy’s implementation**
- a **comprehensive input from business communities**. For the project to achieve its purpose, a detailed action plan including employment schedule, internship programs, procedures of mutual professional qualification recognition, training for newcomers (e.g. cultural, language) should be drafted.
- **expected results** (sustainable growth and employment benefits, general social and cultural integration and future development perspectives of the community, share of best practices between bodies for a better integration, added value for Europe by solidarity and participatory identification)

- **evaluation procedures**

- an **anti-corruption strategy** (for instance the “Integrity Pact” of Transparency International which has experience in that field).

The decision about the municipalities’ applications should also be made by multi-stakeholder governance.

The European Commission should initiate a “demonstration project” soon that follows these promising parameters. The preparation of the new Multiannual Financial Framework (2021 – 2027) is an excellent opportunity for this. There are several options that can be combined to initiate this process. In their recent reflection paper on the future of EU finances, **commissioners Corina Crețu and Günther Oettinger** underlined: “The design of the future EU budget must be underpinned by a clear vision of Europe’s priorities and a determination to invest in the areas that will secure economic strength, sustainability, solidarity and security for the future.” **They also suggested radically new financing instruments for the new financial framework in order to be more effective, especially in overlapping programs.**

- Corresponding to the idea of president Juncker, who has suggested to create a Fund out of not used financing from the AMIF Fund in order to help Italy with the management of refugees, the European Commission could also build a fund by combining remaining funding of several Directorates-General. This would help to test the holistic approach for integration and development on the municipality level as well as its new evaluation following the multi-stakeholder governance principle.

- A new fund could also be financed by a new initiative for investment as proposed by the recently elected French president Emmanuel Macron, by the former Italian Prime Minister Renzi and other European politicians to overcome unemployment as soon as possible.

All ideas fit together very well and could lead to a successful combination of integration and municipalities' development. Municipalities all over Europe could apply under the above-mentioned conditions.

We invite the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council to follow our proposal and to realize it as soon as possible. **We have a new chance** – all we need is **the political will of the EU to seize this opportunity and relaunch Europe bottom-up.**

- 26 Reflection Paper "Future of EU Finances" (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-eu-finances_en.pdf): The European Commission suggests that the EU could create "a 'single rule book' governing all processes and instruments or application of the same rules and conditions for the same type of project. This can lead to a reduction of the administrative burden for beneficiaries (with the help of simplified rules) and promote better coherence across different EU investments. **Pact of Amsterdam (2016):** http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/urban-development/agenda/pact-of-amsterdam.pdf
- 27 The situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration: The European Parliament welcomes the additional funding provided by the EU in 2016 to deal with migration. However, it touches on the issue that this funding represents funding under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) (2014 – 2020). The EP stresses that medium- and longer-term funding need to be addressed and accompanied by a revision of global resources to guarantee funding in the long term. www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2016-0102+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN
- 28 Opinion of the EESC on "Integration of refugees in the EU" (exploratory opinion): The EESC stresses the importance of housing and employment for successful integration. It also calls for direct economic aid for every refugee and migrant for member states of initial reception (Malta, Spain and Greece) and an increase in financial resources of the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) as well as the Regional Development Fund. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2016.264.01.0019.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:264:TOC

- 29 **Nicosia Call April 2016:** www.ccre.org/en/actualites/view/3263
- 30 **Article 80 TFEU** "On the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, including its financial implications, between the Member states." www.lisbon-treaty.org/wcm/the-lisbon-treaty/treaty-on-the-functioning-of-the-european-union-and-comments/part-3-union-policies-and-internal-actions/title-v-area-of-freedom-security-and-justice/chapter-2-policies-on-border-checks-asylum-and-immigration/348-article-80.html
- 31 **LEADER/CLLD:** LEADER is a local development method that aims at developing integrated bottom-up approaches to engage local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, decision-making and resource allocation for the development of their rural areas. It has been in use for 20 years. In the 2014 – 2020 programming period, the LEADER method has been extended under the broader term Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) to three additional EU Funds (European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund). http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/community_en.pdf



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