

## Cities for Europe

Berlin, August 5<sup>th</sup> 2021

With the European Union, the states of Europe have drawn the right conclusions after the horrific wars of the last century, founding a common project based on fundamental democratic values. We, the Europeans and our cities and regions, are the beneficiaries of this great project.

It is our conviction that we, at the grassroots level of Europe, have every reason to make our own contributions to the success of this European project more than we have in the past. The time has come for us to think more strongly than before about our own responsibility. Europe needs our active co-responsibility.

That is why, together with our partners, we have launched the "Europe Bottom-Up" project. It aims to highlight the achievements of European actors at the grassroots level - the Europeans and their cities and regions - for Europe and to encourage them to make further contributions. At the centre of this project is the development of a common platform on which the activities for Europe "from below" are to be gathered and which is supported by the Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The "Europe Bottom-Up" platform is being developed as a digital action and cooperation platform. It is available to social and cultural initiatives, but also to activities of the bodies at the basis of Europe, the cities, municipalities and regions.

Cities are our most important partners in face of the "Europe Bottom-Up" challenge. After all, it is the lives and achievements of the many in our cities and regions that determine the success or failure of Europe's social and economic, its cultural and societal reality.

One of the tasks of the "Europe Bottom-Up" platform is therefore to describe and understand this potential more precisely in order to develop constructive solutions nationally, or rather transnationally "from below". This idea is summarised in the project group "Cities for Europe", where European mayors and city governments come together with the aim of orienting concrete examples of municipal practice to the benefit of European development as well as to exchange experiences.

This begins with the consideration of aligning every day, regular municipal tasks with the goals of a common Europe.

In view of the concrete contributions to the "Europe Bottom-Up" platform, we also want to take a closer look at four possible focal points of municipal work in which we see a particular potential to generate an impact for Europe:

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- Local democratic practice in municipalities and cities.  
The concrete democratic practice of European municipalities is an essential contribution to the democratic culture in Europe. It is about citizens' practised co-responsibility for their city and their region. As a contribution to "Europe Bottom-Up", European examples of successful and exemplary local democratic practice are to be collected and processed. Examples both good and bad are to be presented to learn with and from one another. Competitions and awards, such as the nomination of a European Capital of Democracy on the initiative of a Viennese project, will also be communicated and promoted.
- Culture-driven European urban development policy and particularly the lessons learned from the strategies of the European Capitals of Culture.  
The application procedures of the candidates for the respective European Capital of Culture have shown how culturally driven strategies can allow cities to develop a particular profile that is exemplary for Europe. Building on these experiences, European cities and regions should be encouraged to use their cultural competences in a targeted way for their future development. The experiences of the candidate cities for the European Capitals of Culture already offer important guidelines.
- Municipal integration policy  
For the EU's migration and integration policy, the cities and regions are the local centres of competence that ultimately decide on Europe's capability for integration. One example of this is the "Cities of Safe Harbours" alliance (with cities such as Potsdam), which has taken on the task of taking in refugees and thereby strengthening Europe's integration capacity "from below". Beyond such examples, it is the task of cities and regions in Europe to take up the challenge of integration not only with regard to refugees and thus to strengthen and recognise the importance of cohesion in Europe.
- Peripheral European experiences and challenges, especially in border towns  
What "periphery" implies for Europe in terms of both problems and potential for learning is apparent in certain cities and regions. In cooperation with the German border towns of Zittau and Heringsdorf we have specifically discussed:
  - using the concrete example of these two cities to look at the particular experiences of border towns and the simultaneous lack of attention "from above" for their specific challenges,
  - to consider this first (perhaps especially together with the two European Capitals of Culture 2025) for the German-Polish border region,
  - but beyond that, to establish the connection with comparable situations of border towns in other parts of Europe.

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