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THE NETWORK
OF MAJOR
EUROPEAN
CITIES

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Dear European and national leaders,

We need to rethink the way we do things in Europe. Europe has many achievements of which we should be proud: enduring peace, greater wealth and solidarity. But it is being shaken at its foundations, by the Brexit vote, by growing Euroscepticism and the rise of movements that stoke fear and disillusionment across Europe. We, mayors, leaders and city politicians from over 135 major European cities, meet today at the EURO CITIES annual conference in Milan to consider how we can help build a stronger, more democratic Europe.

There is a growing disconnect between citizens and the EU institutions. What does the EU really do for us? Why does it matter? These are the questions being asked by our citizens. We, city leaders, can bridge this gap. We are the closest level of government to citizens. We have our finger on the pulse of the local population, we know people's interests, concerns and visions. And by working with us, so can you.

We envisage a Europe of which citizens feel proud to be part. Our experience tells us it is time to refocus the debate on Europe's future, which currently concentrates on relations between states. But it is cities that drive growth for their nations, not the other way around.

Churning out ten-point programmes and publicity about the benefits of the EU isn't going to convince citizens. They want to see what Europe and their national governments are doing to create jobs, innovate, learn, make them feel more secure, protect the most vulnerable people in our society and make the air they breathe cleaner. We don't just need to listen, we need to work with them. We are doing this in cities. We dare to think differently and try new approaches to engage citizens. Cities can be partners in turning our European governance model around, working from the bottom up to find solutions that actually deliver.

Cities are microcosms of a larger Europe. The challenges Europe is facing are concentrated in cities, where it is easiest to understand the impact of environmental, societal, economic, cultural and technological transitions. And it is largely in cities that pan-national programmes are delivered, like reducing carbon emissions. We may not have all the answers, but work in partnership with us and you will see that our expertise is invaluable for finding solutions to European challenges.



We believe Europe has a future, and a positive one. Look to cities to see that the values of the European project are still very much alive. Cities have shown solidarity and leadership in response to the refugee situation. We are working together to secure the economic, social and environmental future each European wants.

Despite the Brexit vote, we see a future for UK cities in this process too. Like other European cities, they are economic drivers, centres of knowledge, innovation and excellence, and examples of how diversity and integration can thrive. Many UK city leaders are determined to demonstrate that their cities are open for business and trade, and remain welcoming, tolerant and diverse places.

We must learn the lessons of the Brexit vote. Failure to do so could leave us sleepwalking into further problems in other cities, regions and member states. If Europe is truly committed to delivering inclusive growth, it must equip cities with the tools to connect people and places to growth and wealth. The Urban Agenda for the EU is a step in this direction, but we need real commitment from you, the EU institutions and member states, to work with us on building a stronger Europe.

Every crisis brings opportunities. This is our chance to create a more relevant and legitimate Europe. We invite you to join us on 7 March 2017 for a summit of mayors in Brussels to see how we can do this together.

Yours sincerely

Johanna Rolland

President of EUROCITIES

on behalf of the network's 187 member and partner cities

