



# Note of the CTME

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## Meeting of the Confederation of Towns and Municipalities of Europe

Online, April the 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### MEETING MINUTES

- Exchange of views and discussion around the situation of small towns of Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic

#### Italy

Italy was the first nation severely hit by the Coronavirus. In many regions, small towns represent the vast majority – if not the totality – of municipalities, which should stress the role they play in facing the crisis as well as the role they will need to have to tackle the recovery. The current situation is extremely complicated.

Most of the major Metropolises are now locked down and small towns witness important waves of migrations of urban citizens to the rural areas, which are posing complex challenges for the municipalities, considering their infrastructures, and human/financial means to intervene. The sanitary situation is also preoccupying as the death toll is extremely higher and in certain tensed areas, considering the number of people who are in a situation of total sanitary emergency, the number of deaths is probably 3 to 4 times higher.

Still, we hope the situation will improve the sooner the better. The total confinement policy decided by the Government for the past weeks and the total involvement of the police forces to make the confinement applicable both leave hope that the authorities may soon announce an increasing number of people cured from the virus. We support the current confinement process (it should last at least until the end of April) and are determined to pursue in that direction to obtain encouraging results.

Small towns are extremely grateful to the many volunteers who have come forward in the past weeks to ensure that the most fragile or isolated people, mostly the elderly, get some access to their primary needs. Without them, small towns in particular would have had been in an immensely more complex situation, considering their existing means for action.

On the financial front, the situation is critical. We have welcomed the Italian call to the EU institutions for more solidarity at EU level. But beyond the means and measures that must be taken, the importance of the message sent by the EU institutions is absolutely vital. The EU must now step up, concretely, rapidly, massively and without any ambiguity. The idea of our Union is at stake, nothing less. In the absence of such a reaction, there is absolutely no doubt that not only we will not be in a situation of recovery, but it might as well worsen.



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**WWW.SMALLTOWNS.EU**

CONTACT@SMALLTOWNS.EU

## France

There is a critical issue around the question of the means devoted to the equipments required during the crisis – masks, gels, etc. Even though it is not a communal competence per se, small towns are in the forefront regarding handling the crisis.

We try to answer the needs in sanitary equipments, and provide the necessary help to pension homes. Municipalities also participate in organizing and coordinating the reception of children of those who are mobilized. Most of the municipal services are closed or operate via teleworking, and only the very essential services that cannot be closed function.

We expect more difficulties in the coming days and weeks, notably around the loss of revenues for small enterprises and all businesses due to the downturned economic activity.

## Germany

The situation is very similar, compared to elsewhere around Europe: small enterprises are shut down, like schools and children's nurseries. Mayors have to face many questions from worried citizens and shopkeepers about the how and when will the recovery happen – there is a clear need of visibility, as many enterprises will be in danger of bankruptcy in the coming 4 weeks. They are hence asking details about the recovery agenda, which are obviously very hard to give.

There are also many questions around the hospitals capacities and HR means. Hospitals have reorganized their services in the light of the COVID-19 crisis and are locked, with no outside entries allowed. There are lots of discussions in the region regarding the trans-border relations, and Mayors regret the lack of European common thinking of the crisis: every country tries to get their own equipment on their own, but very few coordination at EU level which make existing difficulties even more complex.

Like in France and Italy, there also has been an issue with the migration of urban citizens to more rural places. For the first time since the end of WWII, we are facing a global crisis that hit every neighborhood and every living room across Europe. This is also why there must have no hesitation in the amount and nature of help we provide to each other, as we might as well face the return of old national reflexes.

Mayor Honnigfort presented his local situation, stressing that around 20 000 people are in urgent need of intense health care, and they are expecting the numbers to rise to 30 000 in the very near future. It is a new situation for Mayors, and they have to quickly adapt and be flexible.

Mayor Thomas Schmidt insisted on the need for EU solidarity. This crisis should be seen as a serious test for the EU and for Europeans, which is why solidarity should be the first answer, to save lives and show our commitment to the European idea.



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- *Expression for common concerns and a strategic planning of our way forward*

Small towns are to take a strong and very active part in the efforts at European level and in the Member States to the post-COVID19 recovery plans. This crisis, beyond having shown the limits of our health and sanitary systems, have also questioned our political organization in the ability of municipalities and towns to address the crises. Our position regarding these critical issues must be common, strong and coordinated:

- In the relations vis-à-vis our national governments and the EU
- Also regarding the nature of competences of municipalities and means to exert them

Our message should therefore turn around some key points:

- **Solidarity**: we must express and insist on our will to work together and pay for each other. Whether we mobilize bonds or other forms must come second. Moreover, we have seen too many trans-border problems of all kinds, where there should simply not have.

- **Investment**: the EU and national governments will have to invest in infrastructures of all kind: hospitals, pension homes, schools, public services. Resources and energy targeted in these directions can save small and medium-sized towns and municipalities in the crisis.

- **An industrial turn-around**: certain areas of our economies must be reconsidered and regional and local authorities have a role. Re-localization of the industries, above all the very essential ones critical to our sovereignties and common EU sovereignty must be considered necessary. It is leverage for small towns and remote/rural areas for useful revitalization.

- **Territorial justice**: Funds dedicated to the recovery must consider peripheral, rural and remote areas, and must also target small towns, as the crisis has witnessed they are in the frontline in times of crisis. Fighting the territorial divide is also tackling the digital divide: coverage should cover all territories including small towns, and territorial justice also implies social and economic support of the most fragile to give everyone the means to adapt to the digitalization process.

- **Questioning the current political and institutional models**: there must be a new role for local and public services across Europe. This crisis must be analyzed as a political opportunity to stabilize our societies. The local and regional levels have proven necessary to tackle the crisis, but fell short in having the required instruments to face it accordingly. The price of such a policy should also be calculated as leverage for fostering local development and attractiveness.

- *Agreed steps forward*

A Press release to be issued by Monday next week

A common position paper to be issued by next extraordinary meeting, in 3 weeks

Intensify our CTME board meetings on a regular basis for better coordination



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