



## Retreat of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

### Opening Statement

First, I would like to thank you for the invitation to your retreat and for giving me the opportunity to discuss with you in order to give you inspiration to your work program. I have looked forward to this.

I also want to thank you for our good cooperation in the European sectoral social dialogue and I think this invitation underlines the general good relations between our organisations.

Your work program means a lot to us as social partner on the opposite side of the table. In fact, I think it would have been relevant to invite trade union representatives to all the 10 different sessions. I do not expect that comes as a big surprise for you.

Municipalities and regions are employers, service providers and procurers of goods and services.

I will focus my statement on your role as employers.

Local and regional government employ 17 million workers across Europe.

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There is an increasing pressure on the financial resources. Austerity policies have affected local and regional government more heavily than the public sector as a whole in many countries. Budget reductions have led to staff redundancies and an increased workload.

This leaves us with at least two obstacles: The lack of funding and investment in education and training of workers. And difficulties for workers with being away from their job while getting education and new skills for their new roles and job content.

However, life-long learning and adequate education and training for all workers is crucial.

At the same time as we are seeing an increased pressure on financial resources, we are facing demographic challenges. The workforce is ageing and more will be in need of quality public services. Urbanisation is a challenge for the bigger municipalities that grows as well as the smaller rural municipalities with a lower population density.

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One of the answers to the challenges is digitalisation and automatization of the administration and the use of welfare technology. We must take this path. However, we must walk this path carefully.

Changes in public services including digitalisation and automatization often changes the relation between public authorities, citizen and businesses. When the relation changes, the workers' role and job content changes.

It is essential that we continuously develop new skills to new roles and new jobs. Otherwise, we will not succeed with the adaptations we need to make. Otherwise, we will not preserve and develop the quality of the services municipalities and regions provide.

Before, I mentioned three challenges. The financial pressure, demographic changes and urbanisation. Let me mention a fourth. Migration.

Migrants can offer Europe great possibilities if we succeed to integrate them into the labour market and societies and this is important to address labour shortages and the challenges of the demographic changes we face.

The local level is where inclusion really takes place and local and regional governments play a key role when it comes to successful inclusion. Inclusion in the labour market is a key factor to inclusion in society. As I stated before, local and regional government are not only service providers but also relevant employers.

Workers that deal with migrants need adequate training to fulfil their jobs.

As for the migrants we must ensure that the recognition of professional and educational qualifications is properly monitored and that they are provided with the adequate education and training to be able to take a job.

Training, education and life-long learning is an investment that pays off and benefits employers, workers and the society in general.

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Finally, a few points on how to address the challenges.

It is important that we do this together. Not only at the European level but first and foremost at the national level and at local level.

Social dialogue including tripartite social dialogue and collective bargaining is the most appropriate leverage to address the changes and challenges, we face.

You will always get the best results when you involve the workers in the development of new services. They do have the right to be informed and consulted – and it will have a motivating effect and increase the quality of services. This is also the best way to take a strategic approach on not only the development of services but also on the implementation of new services as well as ensuring that the workers are provided with the adequate education and training.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to the debate.