

#EPPLocalDialogue

# Launch of the EPP Grassroots Engagement in view of the 2019 European Elections

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## EPP grassroots engagement

### - regional and local leaders' commitment towards 2019 EU elections

- concept note, 27 February 2018 -

#### 1. Why should the EPP build-up a grassroots engagement

The **EPP grassroots engagement** is an initiative launched by the EPP regional and local leaders in view of the 2019 European elections to:

- engage and reconnect with people
- restore trust in the EU and increase ownership of the European project
- make sure that the local and regional dimension of EU politics is part of the EPP Manifesto for the 2019 Elections, of the priorities of the EPP Spitzenkandidat and of the next political mandate of EU institutions.

A strong, efficient and united European Union is the best guarantee for our peace, freedom and prosperity and so it should remain in the future. European citizens want an EU, which meets their expectations and demonstrates added value through its problem-solving capacities. A Europe with a heart and a soul. A Europe which listens first and understands in order to better protect, empower and defend the interests of the people. They want to have a real say on Europe. A Europe based on local, regional and national realities.

We know that reforms were successful but they take time and now the implemented measures are beginning to bear fruit. However, the way some crises have been handled has disappointed more and more citizens, who in turn lost trust, confidence and enthusiasm in the European politics and the unique European project. A major challenge for Europe today is an increase of nationalism and extremism from both the left and right spectrum of politics. These extreme parties diminish pro-European forces. We have to avoid the EU falling into the hands of Eurosceptics and populists after 2019. Therefore, we need a strong, united EPP family, which acts with courage and determination, in order to reach a clear pro-European majority in the European Parliament.

Therefore, in order to reconnect with the people the EU needs to recognise and use the trustworthy know-how of locally and regionally elected politicians. They are ideally placed to ensure respect for subsidiarity and to connect the Union with its people in the places where people live, work, pursue opportunities, and experience good and bad times. They could also 'Europeanise' local problems and find solutions at the European level in fields such as transport, energy policy, industry and climate change, but also migration, security and fight against terrorism.

The European Union, in this context, needs to add its own identity and shared values to existing regional and national notions of belonging which reflect the concept of multilevel citizenship and multilevel governance. Across the EU there are more than 90,000 local and regional authorities, including 75 regional assemblies with legislative power. Local and regional authorities implement 70% of all EU legislation. They represent: 16% of GDP of the EU-27, 56% of public employment, 1/3 of the public spending and 2/3 of all public investment.

Therefore, EU governance must be closer to citizens in both directions: to make their voice heard in Brussels and to make Brussels' voice understood at home. The EPP is the biggest party in Europe, represented in 27 Member States at all levels, this means local, regional, national and European and **many EPP Heads of State or Government stand behind a strong Europe based on subsidiarity**, democratic values, and the rule of law, deepened at all levels of government.

- This is in line with the objectives of **EU Council President Tusk's** "Leaders Agenda" and his demand "*to hear the voice of regional and local authorities to rebuild trust in the EU*".
- **EC President Juncker's** views on the future of the EU published recently stated that: "*Politicians, at EU, national, regional and local level, share a responsibility to foster honest debate about Europe and its future. Citizens would be readier to vote in the elections to the EP if they were more aware of the impact of*

*EU policies in their day-to-day life... Starting from the Leaders' meeting of 23 February 2018, and taking into account their respective political structures and practices, Member States as well as local and regional authorities should be encouraged to hold outreach events to engage with citizens in public debates and consultations on EU issues, including in particular the future of Europe in the context of the process leading to the Leaders' meeting of 9 May 2019, shortly before the elections to the European Parliament."*

- This commitment is grounded in the **Rome Declaration** of 25 March 2017: we need to "work together at the level that makes a real difference, be it the European Union, national, regional, or local, in line with the principle of subsidiarity".

Based on these considerations, the aim should *not* be to build an alternative 'Europe of the regions', but rather to enable a '**Europe with the regions**'.

The opponents of the Union exploit the mantra that a vote against Europe is a vote for democracy. It is this type of strategy that managed to put the very existence and future of the EU at risk. It is therefore a question of high priority to reaffirm that the terms 'Europe' and 'democracy' are not opposed to each other; on the contrary, they reinforce each other. The European project needs to use the trusted democratic tools, by combining a gradual establishment of a new generation of partnerships with citizens and the use of new communication technologies.

The success of the EPP in the 2014 elections was a collective achievement. Given the current political situation, we must do even better for the 2019 European elections and work more intensively as one, united and responsible political family. As EPP, we will put this into practice. We are ready for an **EPP grassroots engagement**, which listens to the people, works towards restoring confidence and increasing ownership of the EU project.

## **2. What is the EPP grassroots engagement and how can it work successfully**

The grassroots engagement is an initiative launched by the EPP regional and local leaders in view of the 2019 European elections to reconnect with the people and restore their trust in the EU. It envisages a series of **EPP local dialogues** in all EU Member States following the model of town hall debates with citizens. They will be complemented by **three flagship events** taking place in Bulgaria, Austria and Romania.

**The EPP local dialogues** are following the model of town hall debates with citizens and will be launched under the motto "*Europe starts in your village/city/region*". We want to go in our cities and regions and pass a message of "unity in diversity" and of "think globally-act locally": "Europe starts in Sofia"; "Europe starts in Gabrovo"; "Europe starts in Innsbruck"; "Europe starts in Cluj-Napoca". Ideally, the EPP local dialogues should bring together:

- a local or regional politician
- a politician from the national party and
- a Member of the European Parliament or a candidate running for the elections, or a personality from an European institution, associations, etc.

The topics for the dialogues should be chosen according to the specificity of the city or region and the political landscape. During the dialogue, political leaders should engage in an open and honest debate addressing concerns, but also the opportunities which exist at the European level.

We are also encouraged by the success of the CoR's initiative "Reflecting on Europe". This bottom-up movement, triggered by a request from Donald Tusk, has led to the organisation of about 140 events in one year, bringing together thousands of citizens to share their thoughts and concerns about the past, present and future of Europe".

The EPP local dialogues will not only offer the opportunity to address local challenges at the local level but also to strengthen political subsidiarity and allow a better dialogue with people on areas which are decided upon in Brussels or Strasbourg, but implemented in Europe's cities and regions. This is also the objective of EC President Juncker's current Task Force on Subsidiarity which aims at: "*identification of ways to better involve regional and local authorities in the preparation and the follow up of Union policies*".

The organisation of the **three flagship events in 2018 and 2019** is prepared together with our Bulgarian, Austrian and Romanian Party friends in the Member states holding the Presidency of the EU over the next months. This initiative is building on the experience of the 2014 electoral campaign, when the EPP Group in the European Committee of the Regions organised a Summit of Regional and Local Leaders in Poznan (Poland), together with the EPP and Platforma Obywatelska. The then Prime Minister of Poland, Donald Tusk and about 800 regional and local politicians debated with the EPP Spitzenkandidat, Jean-Claude Juncker.

The **launch of the EPP grassroots engagement will take place on 9 March 2018 in Sofia** on the invitation of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, EPP President Joseph Daul and EPP/CoR President Michael Schneider, and in the presence of more than 400 local mayors and regional politicians, members of the EPP Groups in the European Parliament, and in the European Committee of the Regions, as well as eminent guests from all over Europe.

After the launch in Bulgaria, another *high-level event is planned in Austria in December 2018* with the EPP *Spitzenkandidat*, who will have just been elected at the EPP Party Congress in November in Helsinki.

A *Summit of Regional and Local Leaders*, with the participation of the EPP *Spitzenkandidat*, is envisaged to be the highpoint of the engagement and should be organised *in Romania in the first half of 2019*, just before the European elections in May 2019. On this occasion, the fruits of the EPP local dialogues can also be harvested to show our "Unity in diversity" as EPP family.

### **3. What is expected from an EPP grassroots engagement**

This bottom-up initiative could provide a credible and sustainable platform for interaction on key issues related to the European reform agenda and the future of Europe.

**This is why, the expected outcome of the EPP grassroots engagement** would be to:

- a) raise awareness of the importance of the EP elections while presenting the EU added-value via projects implemented at local and regional level;
- b) make sure that the local and regional dimension of EU politics is part of the EPP Manifesto for the 2019 Elections, of the priorities of the EPP Spitzenkandidat and of the next political mandate of EU institutions;
- c) share the outcomes of local dialogues with the EPP members of the two political assemblies of the EU: the Parliament and the Committee of the Regions;
- d) provide EPP candidates and the Spitzenkandidat with a list of success stories and EU funded projects, which they can use while campaigning;
- e) ultimately, the EPP local dialogues will not only offer the opportunity to address local challenges at the local level but also strengthen political subsidiarity and allow a better dialogue with people on areas which are often decided upon in Brussels or Strasbourg, but implemented in Europe's cities and regions.

In 2014, at the EPP Summit of Regional and Local Leaders in Poznan, Jean-Claude Juncker, at that time our *Spitzenkandidat* stated: "*As President of the European Commission, I will promote regional and local authorities' involvement in decision-making into the future. I will fight for a strong role for the Committee of the Regions throughout the legislative process and I will work closely with you*".

In 2019 elections, we can be strong only if we are united to reach out to the people in Europe's villages, towns, cities and regions. Going forward, we must work together to demonstrate that the EPP has its own vision and is capable of implementing the policies that will benefit the people of Europe collectively.

Our citizens must see that EPP leaders at European, national, regional and local levels work hand in hand for them on the ground.

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