



*An Atlantic and urban vision of Europe's
future*

*General Assembly of the Conference of Atlantic Arc
Cities*

Final Declaration - April 29, 2017

Viana do Castelo

After a month of March 2017 of lights and shadows for the European project, the cities of the Atlantic Arc, meeting in General Assembly in the city of Viana do Castelo, want to convey their opinion and expectations to European institutions and local and regional entities on both sides of the Atlantic.

To this end, they recall that the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities was created in 2000 with the aim of developing a space of solidarity and projects among the local entities of the Atlantic Arc. Today, thanks to its 20 members, this network represents almost 400 local entities from the European Atlantic regions.

Cooperation between Atlantic cities

At a time when individual interests seem to take precedence over collective, Atlantic cities want to remember that solidarity is the basis of the European project and the engine of international politics. Likewise, this Atlantic Urban Forum recalls that the local level is the most pertinent to affirm the ties between peoples. Thus, the Atlantic cities propose:

1. Reinforcement of bilateral and network cooperation with British Atlantic cities, both through twinning and joint projects, without forgetting the multiplier effect of local networks such as *LGA, WLGA or Scottish Local Authorities*.
2. To improve the visibility and effectiveness of cooperation with cities on the other shores of the Atlantic, through multilateral action, consistent with the principles of its founding charters.
3. Increase territorial cohesion by fostering exchanges and synergies between the local authorities that constitute the network, with a special emphasis on urban-rural relations, coastal-inland dynamics and maritime cooperation.

Culture and citizenship

Atlantic cities want to express their concern about the growing gap between the Council's and the European Commission's messages and the expectations of citizens. Likewise, in the framework of the preparations for 2018 as European Year of Cultural Heritage, the Atlantic cities are endorsing the principles of this event. Thus, they want to emphasize:

4. The essential importance of redirecting the European project towards new applications of the principle of subsidiarity, where the territorial dimension and citizen participation have realistic, achievable and realized echoes in European politics.

5. The need to promote and strengthen the European Citizens' Initiative, so as to make it one of the pillars of EU decision-making.

6. The transcendence of European common values and their reflection on cultural heritage, tangible and intangible. This transcendence must inspire the new European project and facilitate the identification of citizens with it.

7. The excellence of the Atlantic heritage as an example of solidarity among peoples, of creativity that generates wealth and of "common ground" for territorial development.

Urban and port regeneration

Atlantic cities welcome the report of the Committee of the Regions and express their intention to participate in its practical implementation. In this sense, they want to emphasize:

8. The absence of real territorial continuity in the current and ongoing transport networks in the Atlantic Arc. New Atlantic transport networks should consider ports and maritime and inland cities as macro-regional nodes.

9. The importance of understanding the city as an economic and social whole that determines the life of the inhabitants. This principle applies equally to the port-city relationship, and therefore both views should not work separately

10. The need to work on a basis of political and strategic continuity, where the three dimensions of cohesion (economic, social and territorial) are combined and where cities also exercise real power emanating from their political legitimacy.

Brexit and subsidiarity principle

Atlantic cities would like to remind the European institutions that Article 5 of the TEU requires that the policies that affect the territories should actively involve the bodies concerned. In the case of Brexit, the European Council should not forget the role of local and regional authorities; nor the influence on cooperation areas such as the Atlantic Arc.

Likewise, Atlantic cities want to emphasize the need for a negotiation that measures the actual impact of the changes to come, carried out in the most transparent way possible and that defending the real interests of the citizens.

Conclusions: An Atlantic vision of the future of the European Union:

Thus, in conclusion of the debates and exchanges in this General Assembly, the Atlantic cities want to present their opinion on the fundamental principles that should be taken into account in the current debate:

1. The European Union **is a solidarity project**. Thus, Atlantic cities reject any fickleness with regard to the disappearance of cohesion policy or a reform that would render it meaningless.

2. This principle gains strength in terms of **territorial cooperation**, because Europe is a territory of territories, a dynamic space that gives meaning to the community project. In this framework, the Atlantic Arc connects Europe with the world.
3. Europe is an **urban** continent. The first glimpses of recognition in the Urban Agenda are not enough. This should become a much more inclusive instrument, where all European cities are actually represented and where there is a **European urban body** that functions as a resonance chamber, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.
4. Europe is a **citizen project** and as such must give the necessary weight to the instruments of expression of its inhabitants, such as the European Citizens' Initiative, or the European Parliament.
5. The basis of the European project is its **common and diverse culture**. The year of the European heritage should not be limited to festivities and recognitions, but rather represent a real step forward in the development of European cultural values and assets as bases of political strategy, citizens' dialogue and image in the world.
6. Europe is **blue**. The sea is one of the bases of sustainable development of the old continent and this status must be recognized not only in the results of the White Paper but also in a **European Maritime Agenda** that gives maritime policy the rank it deserves between EU policies.
7. Europe is **green**. European and, at the top, Atlantic cities are the best positioned to fight against climate change and to apply the principles of international and European conventions. This dimension is a sine qua non condition for the future.