



EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES AND THEIR VIEW ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

EUROPEAN SPECIAL REPORT | FEB 2022

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The Conference on the Future of Europe is a chance to address the most prominent issues in Europe's regions and translate them into proposals for the future of the bloc, regional stakeholders say.

According to EU Cohesion Commissioner Elisa Ferreira, ignoring geography and territory in EU policymaking could lead to what one of the recent Commission studies [described](#) as 'geography of discontent'.

From the capital cities to regions and to rural communities – the rural-urban divide across Europe is a concern from an economic, social and democratic point of view, with EU citizens bearing the brunt of their region's medium and long-term challenges.

Almost 30% of the European population – 137 million people in total – live in rural or remote areas, which stretch over 80% of the EU's territory.

Experts and EU policymakers alike have identified the Conference on the Future of Europe as a potential tool to make the voice of European citizens from across different European communities and regions heard.

This Special Report looks into what they expect from the EU for their future development.

Languages: [Français](#) | [Deutsch](#)

Contents

.....

Local communities ask for bottom-up approach in bloc-wide democracy experiment	4
Bratislava mayor: Where national governments fail, cities step up for democracy	6
EU should not be ‘just a bank account’, French mayor says	8
Germany’s core industrial region aims for transformation	10
La Rioja representative: Future of Europe linked to future of regions	12
Changing the lives of Bulgaria’s mountainous communities	14

Local communities ask for bottom-up approach in bloc-wide democracy experiment

By Alexandra Brzozowski | EURACTIV.com



Regions and even cities have long demanded to have more direct access to bloc euros, so far with limited success. [Shutterstock/BalkansCat]

Languages: [Spanish](#)

Local citizens' panels indicate an appetite for ambitious EU reforms in the process of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE). Many policies could also benefit from a bottom-up and more regional approach, stakeholders argue.

In January, citizens from 12 municipalities and regions from eight different countries gathered for a [citizens dialogue](#), organised by the Renew Europe Group in the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), to discuss how issues in different policy areas could be solved at the local or regional level.

While the local citizens' panels

indicated an appetite for ambitious EU reforms in EU security, migration, climate, workers' rights, and the rule of law, local stakeholders' recommendations are pointing towards other areas that could be tackled through a bottom-up approach.

COMMON STANDARDS

Citizens from Autun (France), for example, called for harmonisation at the EU level of rules for accessibility, in particular in transport and establishments open to the public, as well as in public administrations.

Given the ageing of the majority of Europe's population, this increasingly important issue could be championed by lower levels of government.

"It's not a question of comparing one level of government against the other – both are needed, because one legislates (the national level) and the other implements (the local level), and in fact, there is also a European dimension to this," Autun's mayor, Vincent Chauvet, told EURACTIV.

According to him, many people with disabilities are not able to exercise their rights as EU citizens, in particular free movement throughout the bloc.

"Take, for example, someone in a wheelchair wanting to travel by train from France to Northern Europe. It's practically impossible," he said, pointing to the different rules in terms of accessibility for people of reduced mobility across different countries

This applies to transport but also to the hospitality industry, public facilities and spaces, Chauvet pointed out.

“For people in a wheelchair, the EU’s internal borders present still very many barriers to travel, be it for professional reasons or tourism,” he concluded.

Asked how the local level could help make mobility services more accessible to people with disabilities in a more efficient way than national governments, Chauvet said that “whatever changes are required will need EU legislation, transposed into national law, and then implemented at the local level”.

This would include the need to ensure rules regarding accessibility are defined by people with disabilities, as well as the establishment of European committees bringing together users with accessibility issues to give input to the process.

“Until we have a common understanding throughout the EU about the obstacles faced by people with disabilities, their ability to experience their European citizenship will be diminished,” Chauvet said.

DIRECT EU FUNDING

Another key issue raised by citizens is the way European funds find their way to local communities. With more than €330 billion in total budget, Cohesion Policy is the EU’s main regional investment policy.

In the recommendation process, citizens from Alimos (Greece) and others suggested that European funds should go directly from the EU agencies to the local authorities.

This could, they argued, make it possible for EU citizens to see first-hand the direct European support

for their municipality or region and strengthen the role of local authorities in European policies.

“We strongly believe that European funding should be as close to citizens as possible,” Michiel Rijsberman, Renew Europe Coordinator in the CoR’s Territorial Cohesion (COTER) Commission and Regional Minister of Flevoland (Netherlands), told EURACTIV.

Regions and even cities have long demanded to have more direct access to bloc euros, so far with limited success.

This would often mean bypassing national governments, who are currently most often in charge of distributing the funds once the European Commission greenlights their plans.

From 2014, including stakeholders such as trade unions, local governments and civil society in coming up with programs under cohesion policy, the so-called partnership principle, is no longer simply a long-standing practice but a [legal obligation](#).

However, players across the board have been saying European capitals are shirking on this responsibility.

“Involvement of subnational authorities by national governments results in better quality projects because they are able to quickly come up with executable projects together with regional partners,” Rijsberman said, adding this would help bridge social, economic and territorial differences between European regions.

“Ultimately, it is in the interest of citizens and the EU itself to make the delivery of funds as efficient and effective as possible. Too often, the involvement of national

administrations simply delays the process or produces inefficient outcomes,” concluded Rijsberman, who is also the rapporteur for the CoR on the financial rules applicable to the EU budget.

ENSURING FOLLOW-UP

The general challenge will be to ensure these proposals are correctly followed up, first, by the Conference’s plenary, and then by its various political bodies consisting of EU representatives.

Considering the high number of proposals – from citizens’ panels to local events across the bloc – French officials [suggested](#) drafting a political roadmap for the future before the end of the French EU Council presidency.

This would include five to ten major subjects, based on ideas “supported across the board in Europe”.

While the Conference’s website specifies that proposals will be discussed according to the Treaties, some citizens’ proposals have requested treaty reform. MEP Sandro Gozi (Renew, FR) told an event audience that treaty reform would be possible if citizens ask for it.

“We need to be ready to discuss and modify the treaty,” Gozi said, adding this could be most feasible in areas such as EU foreign policy and taxation.

However, despite the support of France and Germany, some EU member states such as Hungary or Poland will likely veto any attempts to change the EU treaties.

Bratislava mayor: Where national governments fail, cities step up for democracy

By Michal Hudec | EURACTIV Slovakia



Upholding the democratic principles and liberal values is one of the main goals of the Pact of the Free Cities, a platform Vallo co-founded with the mayors of Prague, Budapest, and Warsaw. [Matúš Vallo/Facebook]

Languages: [Deutsch](#) | [Slovak](#)

Democracy was born in towns and cities, and local leaders are closer to the people than national governments, Matúš Vallo, the mayor of Bratislava, told EURACTIV Slovakia.

Liberal democracy is going through a challenging time. Populism, declining media freedom, minority discrimination, and other threats to democracy are rising everywhere. Cities play a crucial role in upholding democratic values, Vallo explained.

“For democracy to function, it is very important that people trust their local representatives. They should see trustworthy politics and transparent institutions in places where they live. Where national governments fail, it is the cities and regions, who stand by people and democracy,” he said.

Upholding the democratic principles and liberal values is one of the main goals of the Pact of the Free Cities, a platform Vallo co-founded with the mayors of Prague, Budapest, and Warsaw in 2019.

“The Pact of Free Cities was founded in an extraordinary time when four mayors of four capital cities in Central and Eastern Europe were elected in a short time as a clear signal from voters for change and an alternative to their national governments,” Vallo explained.

The mayor continued that the Pact of Free Cities proved to be a resilient platform, which is underlined by last year’s expansion when 20 more cities worldwide joined.

This January, the expansion will continue with Brussels, Milan and Rome. In the second part of the year, a summit of the Pact is planned in Prague, as part of the Czech EU Council presidency.

Bratislava's mayor also said that cooperation among the cities is not just declarative, but they are coordinating various affairs on an everyday basis, and this cooperation extends to the lower level of city halls.

LIBERAL ISLAND IN THE ILLIBERAL OCEAN

Besides liberal values, climate change is another important topic on the Pact's agenda. Under Vallo's leadership, Bratislava has become a strong supporter of Green Deal commitments.

Currently, the fight against climate change is a cross-sectional topic felt in all other urban development areas, such as transport or urban planning, and is a vital part of strategic documents.

According to the mayor, cities are once again crucial players in the struggle against climate change as they are home to the majority of the population.

"The pandemic showed us that cities can be very effective and quick in providing pilot projects and innovative solutions to problems. Moreover, they stimulate the citizens towards responsibility and necessary change," Vallo said.

Vallo believes that radical changes in people's lives are necessary concerning climate change. Even more essential change in corporate behaviour, which should be further

stimulated by a framework set by the national governments.

TRANSPORT SYSTEM NEEDS CHANGE

In 2018, Matúš Vallo won the mayor's seat with a comprehensive "Plan Bratislava". This document will also serve as a basis for Bratislava 2030, the vision of the city for next ten years, which is currently in development. In 2030, Vallo wants Bratislava to be a "green and compassionate city".

Both documents deal with a wide range of issues with the ultimate goal of providing high-quality public spaces, sustainable forms of transport with an emphasis on public transport and cycling, and the provision of affordable rental housing.

Regarding public spaces and big projects, Vallo decided to create a Metropolitan Institute of Bratislava, responsible for the planning and implementation of various projects.

Transport has long been an issue in the city with traffic jams, unpopular public transport, and a lack of cycling infrastructure. Vallo noted that before the pandemic, approximately 40% of the population used individual transport on an everyday basis, while 60% used environmentally friendly forms of transport.

"Bratislava is preparing various activities with the aim of popularising environmentally friendly forms of transport, including new parking policy and extending the network of cycling lanes," Vallo said.

More and more European cities have recently opted for a total or

partial ban of cars in the city centres.

Vallo said that the goal of Bratislava is to curtail cars in the centre, but using other methods of doing so, such as parking policy, extending cycling lanes, bus lanes and tram lines, so there will be no need to use a car.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS ARE NOT AN ISSUE

Social housing is another of the big issues that Bratislava needs to deal with. "Bratislava lags behind Visegrád capitals and European average in terms of affordable housing. I would like to see Bratislava gradually approach the European average in the share of social housing," Vallo said.

The goal is to provide affordable housing for young families, the elderly, poor people, and essential workers, such as school teachers or medical personnel. In this regard, the city is preparing construction projects for city apartment buildings and reconstructing old apartment blocks that belong to the city.

Vallo also wants to cooperate with private investors.

When asked about the influence of digital platforms offering short-term rental services on housing, Vallo said Bratislava is not in the same position as Prague, Lisbon or other big European cities.

"We do not have data to confirm the relationship between short-term rental platforms and affordability of housing. From what we can see, Bratislava does not have the same problem, although we felt the decrease of tourists over the last two years," Vallo concluded.

EU should not be 'just a bank account', French mayor says

By Mathieu Pollet | EURACTIV.fr



The residents of Saint-Omer took part on Thursday 13 January in a citizens' workshop organised as part of the Conference on the Future of Europe [Mairie de Saint-Omer]

Languages: [Français](#)

Elected local officials are crucial in bringing the EU closer to citizens and showing them it is not just about receiving funds, the mayor of the small French town of Saint-Omer told EURACTIV France in an interview.

In 2021, France had nearly 35,000 municipalities. Within these, Saint-Omer in northern France, home to 15,000 people, is linked to the EU through history and geography, mayor François Decoster explained.

"The elected representatives of the territory are a relay that is now more obvious to the European institutions," Decoster noted.

He added he had seen "a lot of changes in the attention given to us by the Commission" in the last ten years, but cautioned that while work with the European Parliament "has improved a lot", there was still work to be done with the Council.

Decoster has been mayor since 2014 and is a member of the Hauts-de-France regional council. As a

committed European, he also sits on the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) in the Renew group.

The CoR is a consultative body of the EU that brings together local and regional representatives from across the bloc, allowing them to make their voices heard directly by the European institutions.

"We are 1.1 million local and regional elected representatives throughout the EU. This is an extremely important group of citizens who are involved in the life of their

territory,” Decoster told EURACTIV France.

Convinced that it is essential to talk about Europe at the local level, the mayor of Saint-Omer has set up ‘correspondents’ to bring European news to the public.



Each year, he also holds a “European walk” during which fellow citizens discover buildings and infrastructure built thanks to European funds or benefitting from them daily, such as the local organisations helping young people in their integration.

But “Europe should not be limited to a bank account”, warned Decoster.

CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The residents of Saint-Omer took part on Thursday (13 January) in a citizens’ workshop organised as part of the Conference on the Future of Europe, a series of consultations intended to bring new ideas for improving the EU.

Citizens from twelve territories in eight member states were able to exchange views and come up with proposals on EU matters.

“[The participants] are still talking about it! Not as something that will bring in EU co-financing, but as a real manifestation of a common European identity,” Decoster said.

They came up with three main recommendations: The EU must work to bring the European bodies and the citizens of the bloc closer together, take the lead in the fight against global warming and, finally, review its strategy for welcoming migrants by showing more “solidarity”.

On this last point, the mayor of Saint-Omer noted that there is a desire for “everyone to take their share of responsibility”.

At the same time, his town is located some 40 km from Calais, the site of a former major refugee camp, and he considers, not without pride, that he has “done [his] share, with great success in integration”.

These observations should feed into the debates of the Conference’s plenary assembly. France hopes to see the end of this democratic overhaul process, initiated in 2021, under its presidency of the EU Council.

“The Conference on the Future of Europe will not be a failure,” French President Emmanuel Macron assured journalists in early January.

INTERVIEW

Germany's core industrial region aims for transformation

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By Oliver Noyan | EURACTIV.de



"I would argue that North Rhine-Westphalia is actually the transformation region in Europe and that we are undergoing the greatest structural change here," Brockes, who also acts as the spokesperson of the liberal FDP for Industry and Energy in NRW, emphasised. [FDP/Dietmar Brockes]

The state of North-Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) has been at the epicentre of Germany's industry for centuries. However, amid ongoing digital and green transition, the region aims to master structural transformation to stay competitive, Dietmar Brockes, Chairman of the Committee for Europe and International Affairs in NRW, told EURACTIV in an interview.

While many regions in Europe face the challenge of adjusting to the

decarbonisation of their industries and leveraging the potential of new digital technologies, the industry-based state of NRW is particularly impacted.

"I would argue that North Rhine-Westphalia is actually the transformation region in Europe and that we are undergoing the greatest structural change here," Brockes, who also acts as the spokesperson of the liberal FDP for Industry and Energy in NRW, emphasised.

However, the ongoing change also bear great potential for Germany's most populous state.

"We must also set the path in such a way that it is achievable and that we can hold our own in global competition. And that's why it's important for me that we also rely on bridging technology," Brockes stated.

Brockes emphasised the "role model function" of NRW as it is "the

industrial state in Europe.”

“I don’t think there is any other place where more energy is produced and consumed at the same time,” Brockes argued.

FROM COAL TO RENEWABLES?

NRW has been Germany’s biggest producer of coal for decades. While the lion’s share of the state’s coal industry was rooted in hard coal in the nineties, NRW has already successfully switched to brown coal production.

“We have already successfully phased out hard coal mining, which is why we see the current structural change as a major opportunity and challenge,” Brockes emphasised.

The next big energy transition is already underway, as the German government plans to phase out brown coal by 2030 to reach its climate neutrality goal.

In mid-2021, the state government set the goal of 50% of its energy production from renewables. However, the path to the decarbonisation of electricity production is still rocky, as currently, only around 17% comes from renewable energy sources.

“Of course, this is a major challenge, but we also want to transform our industries accordingly through innovation,” Brockes said.

NRW aims to retain its “industry leadership in Europe” and develop into the “most innovative industry region in the world” by heavily investing in cutting-edge technologies that are carbon neutral

and digitalised.

One of the critical elements of this transition is hydrogen. “For example, we want to switch to hydrogen-based steel production,” Brockes said. While this would entail being more reliant on hydrogen imports, Brockes stated that NRW aims at retaining its technological leadership “as we are currently having it in the most advanced coal-fired power plants.”

To make the green transition a success, NRW wants to tap into the potential of its highly skilled working force, which is currently working in the coal sector. “That’s why we need skilled workers. For this, we need the qualification of people who are already working in the energy sector,” he stressed.

SHARING OF BEST PRACTICES

The region is also closely collaborating with other European regions to share best practices. NRW is especially building on its partnerships in the so-called Weimar Triangle, including the Polish region of Silesia and the French Hauts-de-France.

“Especially Silesia is facing similar challenges regarding the structural change of its industries,” Brockes said.

However, NRW is also in close exchange with other regions and European networks; for instance, the [Automotive Intergroup](#), which was launched by the Committee of Regions and provides a platform for discussing the future of the automotive industry between local and regional authorities.

Furthermore, NRW is also working

on a new partnership agreement with Piedmont in Italy, which shares “similar industrial structures” with North-Rhine-Westphalia.

“These are all platforms where we are happy to be involved in order to promote exchange, and I like to see these intensified even further in the future,” Brockes concluded.

However, Brockes insists that NRW remains the model region for the industrial transformation.

“At the moment, I think that quite a lot of people look to us and copy and adopt things from us,” he emphasised.

La Rioja representative: Future of Europe linked to future of regions

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By María Moya | [euroefe](#)



Rural areas of Spain such as La Rioja are facing demographic issues that need the attention of Europe to be solved. Photo: Shutterstock, Alexandru Chiriac

Languages: [Spanish](#)

Involving regions in decision-making processes at the European level is essential to ensure that policy measures are adapted to their unique particularities, **Ciudadano's spokesperson at La Rioja regional parliament**, Pablo Baena, told EURACTIV's partner EFE in an interview.

Local citizens' panels at the

Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) indicate an appetite for ambitious EU reforms and demonstrate many policies could also benefit from a bottom-up, regional approach. One example of regions that can benefit from such an approach is La Rioja (Spain).

"Talking about the development of Europe or its future" inevitably implies "talking about the future of the regions of Europe", Baena explains.

Baena commented that the demographic situation in many rural areas is one of the most pressing and significant problems in Europe's regions.

Rural areas account for almost 30% of the EU's population, equating to 137 million people. But this number is decreasing, leading to shrinking communities, ageing populations, and a lack of investment in these

areas. This is driven primarily by citizens looking for better economic opportunities and access to services, education, and professional facilities not adequately provided locally.

Preventing a “mass exodus” to cities, tackling the progressive ageing of farmers in rural areas and strengthening all economic sectors pose significant challenges, Baena added.

In his view, one primary goal for the future should be guaranteeing the availability of services to citizens living in rural areas. For example, fast internet connections are essential, enabling citizens to “choose the option they want”.

According to the Spanish National Geographic Institute, in La Rioja – the second smallest region in Spain after the Balearic Islands – almost half of its 319,796 population live in the capital, Logroño. The rest are distributed among 174 municipalities.

“Apart from its capital, La Rioja is a rural region,” Baena said.

While La Rioja does not have the lowest population density in Spain, it is well below the national average: 62.6 inhabitants per square kilometre, compared to Spain’s 84. In the EU, the number of inhabitants per square kilometre [is 109](#).

RURAL GAP

“(…) Despite being a very small region, we have a problem of depopulation”, says Baena, adding that “distances are small” within the territory, but “there are big differences between the capital and the municipalities.”

A large part of La Rioja’s GDP comes from producing and exporting high-quality wines, particularly the internationally renowned and well-consolidated trademark “Rioja”.

The “red miracle” of La Rioja is possible thanks to the “efforts of farmers and wine producers”, an element directly linked to La Rioja’s own “rural” tradition, which should be preserved, Baena stressed. But one of the problems facing the region is young people and families are not attracted to this kind of job and are keen to move to the city.

Future political strategies should “facilitate” and create adequate conditions so that people living there “are not forced to leave”.

Also, ensuring fast internet access for all and good transport infrastructures is essential, Baena said, adding it facilitates “the creation of new business models, Tele training, telemedicine” and new services provided by public and private sectors separately or together.

Correcting the deficit in transport infrastructures is also key as it “makes life easier for citizens” and contributes

“to the industrial development” of the region, where several factories have closed in recent years.

RAILWAY CORRIDORS

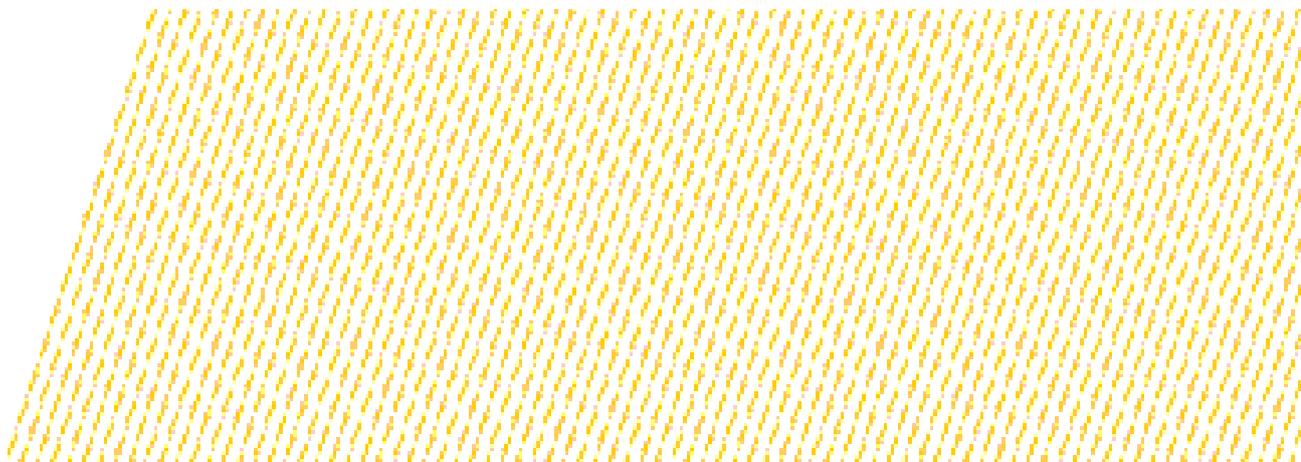
According to Baena, Europe “betting on the development of railway corridors” is very positive. Trains can be considered “green” and sustainable not only for passenger transport but to boost “logistics and industrial competitiveness” as well.

“It would be essential for La Rioja, to boost the modernisation of the Cantabrian-Mediterranean railway corridor (…),” Baena stressed.

The representative added that the EU’s [Next Generation recovery plan](#) is an opportunity to sustain the population in rural areas and contribute to developing La Rioja for the future.

However, Baena considers that the EU should continue its “gigantic effort” to ensure that citizens in the regions “are aware of and close to the institutions”, an issue for which both the Committee of the Regions and the Conference on the Future of Europe can be an essential tool.

“If the future of Europe depends on the future of its regions, we are talking about the future of the citizens of La Rioja, Spain and Europe,” he said.



Changing the lives of Bulgaria's mountainous communities

By Krassen Nikolov | EURACTIV.bg



The Rhodope mountains are home to endless potential including spa and cultural tourism. Photo: Shutterstock, Vasil Plugchiev

Bulgaria's mountain region of Dzhebel is bucking the general trend of depopulation, and its citizens are looking forward to a bright future fuelled with tourism and innovation. In an interview with EURACTIV Bulgaria, Mayor Nedzhmi Ali explained what he has in store for the gem of the Rhodopes in the short, medium, and long term.

Nedzhmi Ali is a Bulgarian politician of Bulgarian-Turkish descent, a former member of the European Parliament (MEP) and a former member of the Bulgarian parliament. He is a member of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, part of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). Ali was born in the Dzhebel municipality and is now its mayor.

Why did a politician with a long experience in European institutions and the Bulgarian Parliament run for mayor of a small mountain town like Dzhebel?

The reasons for accepting this next challenge are not one or two. One of the main motives is my sense of duty to the people who have supported me for years. I have felt that they have been proud of me throughout my life in politics. Another, no less critical motive is that one should not run away from challenges. And, of course, there was the expectation of my fellow citizens. I took the responsibility of responding to the expectation of change. They saw in me a person with extensive experience in politics, government and life who could wake

up Dzhebel from its slumber.

What can be done with the resources you have in the municipality? What is the Dzhebel Plan?

I was one of the few mayoral candidates with a management programme. I daresay it exceeded one five-year term. That is why the programme for the development of Dzhebel had short-term, medium-term and long-term goals.

The most urgent tasks were set in the short-term program. They have been neglected for years, and fellow citizens expected urgent solutions. I had set a goal in the short-term programmes for the citizens to feel the change in their lives. And this

happened at the beginning of the second year of my term.

Municipalities like Dzhebel indeed have minimal resources. Revenues from local taxes and fees of local people from Dzhebel contribute only 10-15% of the municipal budget. On the other hand, this turned out to motivate searching and finding alternative solutions. This provoked my professionalism – to find opportunities in crises.

We had to urgently solve the water supply issue, the asphaltting of the internal street network, improving the street lighting, street network and inter-block spaces... All these are quickly solved problems.

Many sports facilities were also built. For the first time in many years, the people of Dzhebel saw a change in every corner of the municipality.

The region of the Eastern Rhodopes Mountains in Bulgaria has been known for centuries for cultivating high-quality tobacco, but now an alternative is being sought. Is there an alternative?

Yes, tobacco production ended many years ago, but the decrease in tobacco consumption is a global trend. Municipalities like Dzhebel have also lost a traditional culture typical of the Rhodopes.

At the same time, the young generation is oriented towards new technologies and has found realisation in large IT companies. There are also alternatives put forward by the municipality – balneotherapy and cultural and historical tourism.

These are the available natural resources of Dzhebel, and they are development priorities. In the field of tourism, first, we took the necessary

steps to transfer the medieval fortress of Ustra from the ministry of culture to Dzhebel for the management and administration for 10 years.

The sites of national and local importance here and the mineral spring are a good prerequisite for the municipality's development. But the pandemic meant we did not achieve the expected level of investment, and the construction of hotels with spa complexes is expected to be realised after the pandemic. This will give a solid boost to the local economy.

How does Dzhebel use the opportunities of EU funds?

We have joint projects with Ardino [a neighbouring small municipality in the Rhodope Mountains] because we must use every opportunity to obtain funding, implement ideas and collaborate.

With European funds, we are improving the parks and developing the tourist attractions in the area. We have three natural and archaeological sites of national importance, but we want to establish spa tourism, and there is interest from investors.

So the focus will be on tourism?

Yes, because we are a border region with Turkey and Greece, which provides opportunities and the unique privilege of travelling freely and quickly to the Aegean Sea in Greece and Istanbul. On the other hand, tourists can easily visit us from both countries.

Dzhebel is a mountain town with a population of 4,000. How come it is not depopulated like many other similar Bulgarian towns?

Our development program has stimulated the construction sector. Investment in the construction of

residential buildings is an excellent example in this regard.

Depopulation, which is observed in some regions of northern Bulgaria, is not characteristic of us. I am happy that Dzhebel is not depopulating.

Are you supported by the central government – now and during previous governments?

We are at the start of a new EU programming period. Politicians must find a common language when it is in the public interest. So I count on and hope for good dialogue and cooperation with the new government. We, the local government representatives, will do what is necessary to develop the regions at all levels – national and European.

Does the experience in the European Parliament and the contacts you have in Brussels and Strasbourg help you?

Any experience counts – whether it is in local, central or European governance. My experience in Brussels and Strasbourg is reflected in the depth and perspective of the management programme.

In addition to these contacts, I am currently expanding and strengthening my connections with colleagues from these institutions as a member of the Committee of the Regions and the Renew Europe Bureau of the Committee of the Regions. The combination of being a mayor and a member of the Renew Europe Bureau provides an opportunity to implement policies that contribute to solving regional, national and European issues.



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