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Talking to Each Other – Identifying Problems - Finding Solutions

Start of International Dresden Dialogue at Dresden town hall

...Wroclaw, Strasbourg, Mechelen, Vantaa, Graz, Munich, Ghent, s'Hertogenbosch, San Sebastian... Mayor Dirk Hilbert invited mayors from all over Europe to the International Dresden Dialogue conference. Flight and migration, economic and social injustice, political and religious extremism: The European cities see themselves confronted by developments that pose new and serious challenges to living peacefully with each other in urban conglomerations. Mayors from all over Europe met at Dresden town hall to discuss democracy, culture and social cohesion in cities. The event is being held under the aegis of Karl-Heinz Lambertz, the president of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), and the Association of German Cities. The conference will be moderated by Professor Greg Clark from London. The International Dresden Dialogue consists of an international working conference on 1 and 2 October organised by Memorare Pacem, a mayors' dialogue on 2 and 3 October with a round table discussion and a panel discussion organised by the city of Dresden, the capital of the Free State of Saxony.

Dresden's mayor Dirk Hilbert: "When I meet executive mayors of other German cities, they no longer ask me 'What is happening in your city?' but rather 'How are you dealing with what's happening in your city?' It seems clear that division is rife in many parts of society, and that an increasing number of people are seeking a political refuge in radical positions; they have turned their backs on the political and social debate and are no longer willing to make a constructive contribution to shaping their own living environment. That is the reality in German cities and communities. Germany is therefore seamlessly following a European development, and when I say this, I am not just talking about Brexit or Catalonia. Whether in the Netherlands, France, Poland or Hungary: Europe is experiencing a horrifying renaissance of populists who have pledged themselves to walling off the continent and to the reinstitution of borders. Athletes have a saying that should also unreservedly apply to politics: No pain, no gain. As uncomfortable as this may sometimes be, politicians must also take anger on board. I will not change my political positions, especially when it comes to the question of social tolerance and open-mindedness, and I am firmly convinced that culture can be one of the decisive factors in developing our society. Particularly culture provides us with the unique opportunity of starting a process together with the citizens that may make us move closer together again beyond any imaginary borders. That is my main motivation for our bid for the European Capital of Culture title. Mutual understanding can only develop from meeting each other. Culture creates the right environment for this."

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, president, European Committee of the Regions (CoR):

"The citizens must become more aware of the added value Europe offers in order to regain their confidence in the European Union. We therefore have to listen to the concerns of the citizens, because Europe happens locally, not just in Brussels. We need a Europe that is one hundred per cent dedicated to the goals of justice and social progress. Cities and regions need the necessary funds to be able to invest in Europe's future in order to create the preconditions for social cohesion. This is the only way to fend off populism and nationalism, and to create a peaceful, united Europe that is firmly rooted in its cities and its regions."

Dr Albrecht Schröter, executive mayor of the city of Jena and member of the Executive Committee of the Local Authority Association:

"Cities want to strengthen the cohesion in their societies. This unquestionably includes mutual respect and being interested in each other. To be able to live together, the various social groupings must talk to each other and be given opportunities for engaged participation. Cities can also create an important basis for an active local democracy by involving a broad range of citizens in political decision-making processes."