

We have now in front of us an excellent document drawn up by the Secretariat. A pragmatic document. An X-Ray of a dramatic situation that reminds us that we owe ourselves to commit to the home front, as this coming winter is shaping up to be a hard one. All predictions are sobering. High energy prices, triggered by supply disruptions could result in a long, cold, unjust and expensive winter for millions of people globally, as energy poverty reaches unprecedented levels.

Unfortunately, this is not a one winter problem. We will get through this crisis but we also must prepare for the next one. I am afraid there is no back to normal.

No doubt this is a time for solidarity.

We have a long and hard road ahead in tackling the energy crisis in Europe. It is not only a climate crisis; it is also a national security crisis – a challenge to our sovereignty. In response, we need to think global, act local or in our case, think European, act local. The role of cities and local authorities is crucial now.

Unfortunately, we have lost precious time and have counted on cheap energy to facilitate our green transition. We've known for years and we never made it a priority and seriously acted on it.

We need to act now. With one strategy – decentralisation. In two directions: on the one hand, put an end to energy dependence, and on the other we have to succeed in our green transition.

At the same time, we have to accelerate renewables deployment but this cannot be accomplished with us just issuing edicts. We need to give our hand. No matter what we do, the most important thing is to take people along with us and make sure we give them a safety net to minimise hardship and suffering.

This is a time for unity, putting aside parties, ideologies, and egos. We need synergies between all levels of government to foster implementation and I am thinking of the Declaration we adopted yesterday. Top down: coordination, financing tools, including and that's a paramount element, direct financing for cities, especially for those hosting the refugees. I was last week with the Mayor of Athens in Prague for the Conference of the Members of the Pact of Free Cities. We are a member from the very beginning of this initiative, an initiative struggling for the need of the direct financing for cities. Institutionally it's not easy but gradually we see some progress and at the end I am

confident, we will succeed because direct financing to cities is a necessity. We have to support the idea that power belongs to citizens and cities are the institutions closest to the citizens. And bottom up: self-reliance

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Many Mayors, are working towards fair and inclusive cities. Cities that support the most vulnerable amongst us and leave no one behind. It is an ambitious but worthwhile goal. Unsustainable energy and living costs are mines in the road ahead that can blow up all their efforts. We are at serious risk of exacerbating poverty, inequality and homelessness by limiting access of the most vulnerable to lighting, cooling and refrigeration, clean cooking and heating. Families should not need to choose between food and paying their energy. The costs of these efforts cannot fall on the most vulnerable, marginalised, and discriminated people of our societies. Refugees and those who received them and are need, merit our absolute attention and our assistance. But assistance doesn't mean only money. It can be realised in many other forms, as assistance in kind, direct investment, joint ventures, trade preferences, visa facilitation, scholarships and of course transfer of know how experience and solidarity .

The assistance to refugees is a global challenge that we need to manage collectively, especially at an EU level. We Greeks are aware of the enormous difficulties refugees and migrants face today, as Greece was for a long time an emigration country and suddenly, three decades ago, Greece started to become an immigration country . The Greeks don't forget the difficulties they had faced themselves .

Greece has provided safe haven for over a million people, that is over 10% of our population in the last seven years and Athens had to bear the biggest burden.

We must not forget that since 2009 Greece experienced the most dramatic financial crisis in Europe, worsened by an unimaginable wave of many thousands of refugees in 2015.

We had a hard work in front of us:

We reinvigorated the city by investing in affordable housing for those who need it, we have operated a guesthouse for victims of violence and discriminatory practices, provided free of charge legal help and psychosocial support to the victims, and instigated a program for supporting homeless drug users. For the first time in Greece, the City of

Athens has been able to provide a safe space for homeless drug users in their effort to fight addiction.

We had witnessed the transition of many refugees towards integration and we took action in this direction to promote social cohesion. We have been proactive by establishing points of reference to provide services to refugees and migrants, like the Migrants Integration Centre, and coordination mechanisms, such as the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrants and Refugees (ACCMR) and the Cities Network for Refugees (CNI).

Please note that the City of Athens follows the inclusive model: refugees and migrants have equal access in all public services with Greek citizens.

We understood that job market needs assessment per city/sector and the mapping of skills of the refugee population in a regular and systematic manner is very important. Today we are focusing on 1) adults' education urging for their enrolment in Greek language courses, 2) women and men, girls' and boys' participation in the city life and decision-making process and 3) most importantly on access to the job market.

And last but not least we understood that Arts and culture are a powerful medium for integration.

Now we are dismantling the Elaionas refugees camp in Athens and that's a victory.

We are ready to share our expertise with those friends who need it as we know that each and every one is part of our resilience.

Athens is ready to help the mayors in need and wishes to send a message of hope, unity and solidarity.

Thank you .