



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SPEECH BY COR PRESIDENT-ELECT, KARL-HEINZ LAMBERTZ

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS' PLENARY

12 JULY, EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, BRUSSELS

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentleman,

Let me first thank you for the confidence you have placed in me. It is a great honour for me to carry out this responsibility and I will do so with passion and determination.

I would like to thank the members of my group who nominated me as their candidate, and all the political families which expressed their support. Without renouncing my convictions, I will be the President of everyone and for everyone. I will take up my mandate in line with our agreed common priorities and in the spirit of cooperation established at the start of the five year term, a first for our Committee.

I would particularly like to thank Markku Markkula and his team for the work they have carried out since 2015. I will continue in the same tandem spirit, with the same commitment and cooperation throughout my Presidency.

Dear colleagues,

I would firstly like to address our young trainees who have just expressed their views here in our plenary and, through them I would like to address all young Europeans.

I am a father and grandfather. Like most parents, I have one wish for my children: that they have a good quality of life which is even better than that we ourselves have enjoyed. This is also my wish for all young Europeans, as they represent the future of Europe.

Our parents passed to our generation an invaluable legacy: Europe. A community of peace built from the ashes of war. They had the wisdom and the strength to overcome hatred and resentment. Thanks to them, we live in peace. A price cannot be placed on this legacy.

The ambition of Europe's founders was much more than economic. The Treaty reminds us that the essential objective of the Union is economic and social progress. This is where European ambition lies.

As Jacques Delors said, you can't fall in love with a large market. Europe needs to realise the promise of better social rights that it made more than 60 years ago. The social dimension of the EU is not a luxury that Europeans can do without. It is vital to the improvement of the lives of Europeans and to the EU's survival.



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Economic and social conditions are such that sometimes they prevent our young people from imagining a better future for themselves.

In the past, we were taught that European integration was irreversible. With Brexit, disunity and disintegration are no longer imaginary risks. At a time when European ambition is vital to protect citizens, those who have used fears and lies to commit their countries and the Union to this path shall bear heavy responsibility on behalf of all Europeans.

I want to express all our solidarity to the British members of our assembly with whom we work every day for a better Europe. With whom, whatever the circumstances and whatever our future framework may be, we will always continue to have a close and special relationship.

To all young people, let me say that we will be at your side and do our utmost to pass on a legacy of peace, prosperity and better social rights. Make sure that you always have the courage to say the truth without compromise. Be demanding. Fulfil your desire for a better Europe. And let us join forces. My greatest wish is for Europe to move beyond crisis and become for you, as it was for us at your age, a beacon of hope.

Dear colleagues,

I come from a family of farmers in Schoppen, a small village close to Eupen. My family passed to me an attachment to the land, a commitment to hard work and a spirit of solidarity. And no doubt a sense of pragmatism. The history of the border region where I grew up has been bleak. Our ancestors fought in different armies, and our families were torn apart by two wars which forced our grandparents to involuntarily change their nationality three times during their lives.

For the past thirty-six years, I have held political roles within the Belgian German-speaking community, a region which in many respects is a laboratory of Europe. I always fought for openness and against turning inwards. The strengthening of the identity of my region always went hand-in-hand with openness towards Europe and the world.

Successful regions are deeply rooted and broadly connected. This insight has been proven by scientists and corresponds to my experience in political life.

Since the beginning of my political activities, I have been able to measure the added value of the European Union for its citizens on the ground. This Union is not just an idea: it has delivered concrete, tangible and often fascinating achievements.



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Dear Colleagues,

No institution alone, whether it be European Council, the Commission or the Parliament, can respond to the multiple crises to which the EU must respond. This also applies to our Committee. We need to work together. This is my intention and the EU institutions are giving us encouraging signs. They have asked us to contribute on the reflection of the future of Europe, towards which all of our work, in all areas, must converge. This will allow all of us to demonstrate your ability to mobilise locally and our ability to put forward proposals in all areas.

Starting this autumn and then in every October each year, we will hold a debate that will allow cities and regions to express their views on the state of our Union. This will allow us, I hope, to increase the impact of our political messages. It will allow us to reflect the progress of our work. I know that I can count on the commitment of the presidents and members of our commissions, assisted by the whole of our administration, to feed into this debate on the future of Europe. And I call on all political groups and national delegations to play an active role.

Dear Colleagues,

There is no magic recipe. There is not a radical idea which will all of a sudden remove the storm clouds and reveal the sun. But I have a belief: Europe will not be able to radically reform itself alone from the top down. It is from the grass-roots level that Europe has the opportunity to rethink its policies with a view to restoring a genuine relationship of trust with Europeans.

Without a local and regional foothold, without a territorial dimension, Europe will be like a tree without land, unable to take root. Condemned to disappear. In order to avoid this, the local and regional level needs to be constantly involved in implementing but also designing European policies.

We, the elected local representatives, are on the front line of Europe. Whether it be the capacity to invest, education, integration, improving the environment, security, innovation, and partnerships across borders, everything is important to us. I would even go further: our objectives are the same as the seventeen sustainable development goals set by the United Nations.

We are the ones implementing European projects on the ground. We are directly confronted with the expectations of citizens who, overall, have more faith in us than in other levels of government. It is both an opportunity and a extremely great responsibility.



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In our regions, we must provide practical answers that citizens expect. This leads us to adopt a pragmatic approach. And it is for this reason too that, very often, the positions of the Committee transcend ideological differences.

All of this means that the role of cities and regions must be fully recognised at European level. This is why President Markku Markkula and I spoke to Heads of State and Government and the Presidents of the other European institutions to ask that the contribution of the regional and local level to European integration be explicitly mentioned in the Rome Declaration adopted on the 60th anniversary of the Treaty.

Acknowledging our role, your role, is essential. But you must also have the means to exercise it. Europe's regions and cities must be able to invest and provide citizens and businesses with accessible, high-quality public services. That is why flexible budgets are vital: to give us the means to invest in the future.

The European Union is meaningful only if its members are moving in the same direction in the interests of Europeans, if it frees up the true scope for action and if it is inclusive.

Cohesion policy plays a full role in meeting this need for European solidarity. In all its dimensions, economic, social and territorial, it is part and parcel of the EU's DNA. That is why calling cohesion into question, by scaling it back, diluting it, making it conditional, makes really no sense. This would be unacceptable to our Committee. This policy must be preserved because it creates jobs and helps build infrastructure and many other things that Europeans need now more than ever. A Union without cohesion policy is not the Europe we want. This is the priority, our priority: in all areas, to highlight the reality on the ground and to make our proposals for the future of our Union heard.

Dear Colleagues,

The first half of our term was marked by a social, economic, political and identity crisis unprecedented since the creation of the EU. It is true that we have avoided the electoral results that would have made us fear the worst for the future of our Union. But we must not be mistaken: those who want to see the death of the European project have not succumbed. We must stop them from destroying Europe and preventing our children from having a better future. In order to do this, the best answer is take positive and specific steps for the benefit of Europeans.

We must not lose sight of the urgent need to rethink the European project and to act. The Union cannot simply explore ways forward for the period after 2019. It must, without delay, show its ability to change in order to restore public confidence.



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The task now facing us is commensurate with the challenges to which the European Union must respond. At the Committee, we must continue to open up to the outside world to enrich our thinking and the action we take.

We must continue to step up our contacts with local and regional authorities and their political leaders all over Europe. There is also a need to do more here in Brussels, with the associations, the some three hundred offices in the capital of Europe representing cities and regions.

We must become their focal point, the house of Europe's cities and regions and their partners. In this way, we can also increase our legitimacy as the voice of local and regional authorities within the EU institutions.

With our members, we have to ensure that our Committee provides more support for their activities, including within their local and regional authorities.

This discussion must be two-way:

1. How can my local or regional authority benefit from my role and activities here in Brussels?
2. But at the same time, what can I take from my region or city to bring to the CoR?

Of course, I know that your activities at local level occupy you more than those in Brussels. That is a good thing because you are taking practical steps for your citizens in your local authorities where Europeans live. This is what counts the most. And I am convinced that you can continue to count on the effective support and total commitment of our administration to make full use of the time you spend at the Committee.

Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends,

And so I come to my conclusion. In a globalised world, and in the interests of Europeans, there is no desirable alternative than to continue and deepen European integration. But it is not enough to say this among those who believe in it. Fear for Europe must give way to a desire for Europe.

We must have the courage to carry out the intentions of the EU's founders.

We need a Europe which fully recommits to the objective of justice and social progress.

A Europe that helps its citizens to build a better future for themselves.

A Europe capable of resolving the big issues of the early 21st century.

A Europe firmly rooted in its cities and regions.

Dear Colleagues,



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Over the next two and a half years, which are expected to be intense in light of Brexit, the difficult budgetary negotiations and the campaign for the European elections, you can count on me and the First Vice-President Markku Markkula to articulate your views, the views of the local and regional level, as strongly as possible. There will be no miracles. But I hope that that we will be successful and remembering that all our achievements will be shared. Crucially, I will need all your support to carry out the mandate you have just given me.

Thank you for listening. Thank you for your support.

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY