



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT TZITZIKOSTAS

143RD PLENARY SESSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

DEBATE ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

WITH STELLA KYRIAKIDES, EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

18 MARCH 11:45AM

Dear Commissioner,

One year ago the WHO declared a pandemic.

Let us take a moment to remember the 2.6 million people who tragically lost their lives.

Let us remember the key workers who put others' lives ahead of their own.

Let us remember the 1 million local and regional authorities who fight shoulder to shoulder with and for their communities.

Commissioner, the pandemic has demonstrated the solidarity is the glue that holds our Union and our communities together.

Solidarity saw the EU agree a budget and the recovery and resilience plans of unprecedented size.

Solidarity led the procurement of vaccines for every European.

Without solidarity, a European vaccine war would have raged within our Union leaving many countries, regions, cities and villages behind.

Commissioner, people want to once again hold their loved ones, travel freely and return to work. They want a return to normality.

We need to open Europe safely together by summer before frustration spills over and to avoid irreparable harm to our regional economies.

We need to accelerate the vaccine campaign.

Let us be honest: serious mistakes have been made. The EU and national governments need to do better faster.

Governments across Europe need to be coordinated, coherent and consistent, as cracks in Europe's solidarity are starting to show.



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We have a common responsibility across all legally competent levels of governments to be consistent and stand firmly behind EU regulated vaccines.

Health is a shared legal responsibility across and within member states, and only together will we save lives and reinforce resilience.

As the level of government most trusted by citizens, we can accelerate the delivery of vaccines to every region, city and village.

We can tackle mistrust of drugs, science and governments.

Commissioner, by empowering local and regional governments we can turn around this flailing campaign.

We need to open up our borders and economies safely in a coordinated way.

A vaccine digital certificate is a step forward but alone is not the silver bullet.

It is a matter of ethics: people have the right to say no to vaccines.

It is a question of realism: millions of people still haven't been inoculated.

We need readily available tests that deliver results in minutes not hours.

Commissioner, the pandemic has shown we need more Europe in health to be better prepared in the future.

This dreadful disease has shown that every level of government – from the international to the local and regional level – all play a fundamental part.

Our Committee stands ready to debate the health union, based on our own local and regional competencies in line with the EU's guiding principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

It's time to rethink and restart Europe.

Together we need to open up, recover and become more resilient.

Alone we will fail.

The floor is yours.