



**European Committee
of the Regions**

**FROM PARIS TO KATOWICE - CLOSING REMARKS BY KARL-HEINZ LAMBERTZ,
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS
2018 COVENANT OF MAYORS CEREMONY**
DATE 22/02/2018, 12:25-12:45
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, HEMICYCLE

Dear President, Dear Covenant of Mayors,

Let me start by wishing you a happy birthday. Since its launch 10 years ago today it has exceeded expectation with over 9200 supporters from 57 countries voluntarily. You have all made this a true European success story.

Today we now have irrefutable proof that climate change is real. The Paris Agreement was a historic response when the global community came together to say we cannot leave a world that is beyond repair for future generations.

The World after Paris: a change in global climate governance

When the US pulled out of the Paris Agreement it raised alarm bells, yet during the Bonn climate talks I met the Governor of California who explained that America wasn't Washington. Initiatives such as "America's Pledge" where more than 2,300 US cities, states and businesses declared support for the Paris Agreement showing that America's sub-national is determined to uphold its international commitments.

He said to me: "The sub-national level is driving the climate bus" to which I replied "Europe is ready to drive faster, together".

Whether it be US cities or local governments in Europe, we share a common belief: national governments can ill afford to ignore local and regional governments in our pursuit to limit climate change and we are ready to cooperate.



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Despite borders, despite national and political differences, cities and regions are the answer to the climate and energy challenge. They are not just implementing decisions but taking the lead.

At the international level, and through for example our Committee's partnership with ICLEI, we are finding a common voice that demands local and regional governments are formally involved in the UN climate negotiations.

We have been formally recognised but we now need to have a seat at the table to shape the global climate strategy.

We need a system that includes and measures our cities' and regions' CO2 emissions reductions. We need "Locally and Regionally Determined contributions" to be established to complement "Nationally Determined Contributions"¹.

Delivering a sustainable Europe

Locally and regionally, we know the implications that climate change has on our communities, we know that by greening our economies, cleaning our air and ensuring a healthy sustainable supply of food we are improving the lives of our citizens.

If we take the Dutch city of Schiedam – led by Mayor Lamers, the Chair of our Committee's Environment Commission – they signed an agreement with the maritime industry, the Port of Rotterdam, the province, the Dutch Ministry and residents to become a sustainable seaport world reference.

Cities are pioneers in smart technologies: investment in smart grids means that by 2020, almost 240 million smart meters will exist across Europe allowing consumers to reduce their energy consumption by as much as 10%.

These examples and the hundreds more led by you are making the difference and showing European climate ambition.

¹ Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) is the term used by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) where country set out their ambition for reducing carbon emissions



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Improving the Covenant of Mayors

However, there is no time for complacency and we need to do more.

For the Covenant of Mayors:

1. We need to set a firm, strategic course in the Covenant's globalisation processes in order not to lose our sense of direction;
2. We need to simplify the Covenant's methodology and reporting so it is accessible and understandable for all.
3. We need to strengthen the role of regions in the vertical coordination of climate and energy policies, and find ways to push national governments to be more involved in managing the Covenant inside member states.
4. We need to ensure everyone involved knows where the Covenant is heading, be clear about the differing roles for each level of government and work to mobilise more actors to take action.

The future of Europe that continues to show climate leadership

Ladies and gentlemen, we need to also reflect on the work of the Covenant in the context of the discussions on the future of Europe.

As the negotiations on the next EU budget begin, as our British friends decided to leave the Union and with the European elections in 2019, the next two years will define Europe's future.

Recent surveys² show that it's not only terrorism, the economic situation and unemployment that concern EU citizens, it's also climate change.

² [Standard Eurobarometer 88 Autumn 2017](#)



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Europe must continue to show global leadership on the protection of our climate.

Yet if we want to make Europe green again, we need member states to give us – local and regional leaders - the financial means.

EU structural funds are supporting local and regional governments to finance sustainable climate and energy action plans. Cohesion policy investments in energy efficiency, renewable energy and sustainable public transport are crucial to greening Europe's economy.

This is why our Committee – together with several other European associations of regions and cities – launched the #CohesionAlliance last year: a coalition of those who believe that cohesion policy must be strong, more effective, visible and available for every region and city in the European Union.

I therefore invite all of you in this room to join the 2000 other Alliance supporters.

Undermining cohesion policy³ would have grave repercussions in our ability to create green jobs, reduce our carbon emissions and move towards a low-carbon economy.

A sustainable Europe with citizens

We all have a responsibility to share the views, experiences, challenges and solutions here in Brussels. We also have a responsibility to let our communities know what Europe is and what Europe does. We need to say that waste or carbon emission targets are because of the EU.

To do this, Europe needs to improve the way it engages citizens. This is why since 2016 our members are organising citizen's debates in their constituencies offering a space for citizens to present their concerns, thoughts and ideas about the future of Europe. Sustainable development and EU funds must be part of this debate.

³ More than 25% of EU Structural Funds are dedicated to climate related projects. So far €29.6bn has have been invested in climate change action since 2014. Overall €262.2 billion is expected to be invested in climate-related projects between 2014-2020 (€73.2 billion has already been invested since 2014).



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We need to remember that the EU is not only Brussels. It is our cities, regions, towns and villages which is where the change we need will come from. We need Europe to set the right framework but let's be clear: the hard work is done by local governments, businesses and civil society.

I'd like to take this opportunity to say: the European Committee of the Regions is the home of every local and regional authority. Our doors are always open, our ears are listening and we are there to share your views and ideas on Europe's future within the EU.

Europe's future lies in all our hands.

Let me conclude by thanking the European Commission, European Parliament, and Covenant of Mayors Secretariat for organising this ceremony.

I'd now like to invite you all to join me at the European Committee of the Regions across the street from the European Parliament for the reception which starts at 13:30.

Thank you!

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY