



**European Committee
of the Regions**

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT TZITZIKOSTAS
LAUNCH OF THE ZERO POLLUTION PLATFORM
THURSDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2021 10AM**

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

The launch of Zero Pollution Platform brings us together because we understand the urgency to act to protect the health of our people and our planet.

The truth is we are at a tipping point and we need to radically change how we live, consume and behave.

As the President of the European Committee of the Regions, the EU's assembly of elected local and regional leaders, and as the Governor of the Region of Central Macedonia home to 2 million people, I understand the importance of cutting air, noise and water pollution to protect my people.

I have a large rural population in my region, so protecting soil is also a matter of protecting our food supplies and local economy.

Air pollution alone causes around 400,000 premature deaths a year in the EU.

This number is simply staggering.

Yet in Warsaw, cutting air pollution has been a priority for Mayor Trzaskowski where they are removing coal stoves, subsidising clean energy for homes and introducing an air quality monitoring system.

With an estimated 280 million tonnes of plastic in our seas, a figure expected to double by 2050, the region of Tuscany launched a Fishing for Litter measure.

Zero pollution by 2050 therefore cannot be just words of ambition but a shared priority that is deliverable locally.

Our success depends on working with open ears, in partnership.



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As a regional leader, it is my responsibility to create the right environment to support industry, civil society and scientists to be innovative and flourish.

This platform must be empowering which is why I hope it is open and inclusive to more people, organisations, associations and local and regional governments.

The Platform must help us co-create, implement and measure EU policy so it is fit for purpose, and makes an impact on our ground.

It must shape EU policy-making, so that there is coherence between environmental, climate, economic and social policies.

In this regard, I hope this Platform cooperates closely with the Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform.

And I hope the platform can have an honest discussion on the impact of climate policy: promoting biomass combustion for example, can have a negative impacts on air quality.

We need EU action that is realistic and ensures a level playing field and ensures no person or region is left behind.

We need direct technical and financial resources made available for our regions, cities and villages, as needs differ across Europe, and there is no one-solution fits all.

We need to be not only be stringent in making sure laws are respected, but also help those regions and cities that are lagging behind.

We need to follow the polluters pay model, whilst also offering support to SMEs and industry to change their behaviour, especially given the current investment challenges they face.

You have heard many times: "pollution does not stop at borders": EU, national borders, regional borders and municipal borders.

How we act and behave affects the lives and livelihoods of our neighbours not only next door, but those living across borders and oceans.



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If we think that 60% of river basins in the EU extend beyond the territory of a single Member State that cannot be managed by a single community alone.

To face these challenges, we need cooperation between governments at every level, communities, civil society, industries and research, so we share information.

Led by my good friend Markku Markkula, the Finnish city of Espoo takes this approach and has a cross-cutting strategy based on co-creation and innovation, so it becomes carbon neutral by 2030, 20 years ahead of the EU's goal, tackling climate change and improving the quality of life of people.

The Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform is therefore an opportunity to promote cooperation, so we act realistically, ambitiously and urgently.

As we have seen with the pandemic, we need to collaborate at an international level, such as with the OECD, UNEP and WHO.

It is also most welcome that the Commission aims to align the EU's air quality standards more closely with the latest WHO recommendations.

The EU needs to strengthen provisions on monitoring, modelling and air quality plans to help local and regional authorities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have no doubt that the Platform will propose actions that delivers results.

For example, the Zero Pollution Action Plan foresees that the European Commission, in cooperation with our Committee, will create a Scoreboard of EU regions' green performances by 2024 that will highlight those results.

Let me finish by saying that the success of the Green Deal and delivering zero pollution, depends on how far we empower, engage and support Europe's one million local and regional governments, who hold competency on environmental policy, as well as businesses, civil society and our scientists.



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I want to thank the European Commission for understanding this, and for the positive ongoing cooperation.

As President of the Committee of the Regions, I will encourage local and regional governments to participate in the Platform and deliver zero pollution.

Our Committee will work for the success of the Platform, with my dear colleagues Marieke Schouten as Co-chair and Markku Markkula as Vice Co-chair.

I would suggest that Zero Pollution becomes a pillar of our Committee's Green Deal: Going Local campaign that aims to empower local and regional governments.

By acting together and accelerating our effort in and with our regions, cities and villages, we can protect our precious planet, saving lives and creating jobs.

Thank you for listening.

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