



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT TZITZIKOSTAS

PLENARY OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

STRASBOURG

29 APRIL 2022

Cher president,
Dear members,

I would like to thank all the citizens and the delegates for their committed and very hard work.

We have built a peaceful European Union after centuries of war and destruction. But today, war is again threatening Europe.

Right from the start of this attack on Ukraine, our cities and regions have been the first to send humanitarian aid and welcome refugees.

This week, President Zelensky has asked EU regions and cities to twin with their Ukrainian counterparts, supported by the European Committee of the Regions, in order to provide expertise and know-how for the reconstruction of the cities that are destroyed.

Dear colleagues,

we see this Conference as a message of hope and it is in our hands to make this hope a reality.

Our Union can only survive if our citizens care about it and believe in it.

And it is possible only if the EU represents a bottom-up construction, not a top-down one. EU citizenship is founded on our common European identity, not as a uniform one, but as a result of our vibrant diversity with local and regional traditions that fill people with pride about their European belonging.

And at the same time, EU citizenship also means rights and responsibilities. One of them is to elect and to be elected.

Therefore, I encourage all of us to reflect in the final report the Treaty Article 20 that states: "Citizens of the Union have the right to vote and to stand as candidates in elections to the European Parliament and in municipal elections in their Member State of residence, under the same conditions as nationals of that State."



**European Committee
of the Regions**

This treaty provision represents a yet untapped opportunity that citizens could expect the EU to better invest in, especially, in between EU elections. Through the hundreds of local and regional elections we can address the European matters given that 70% of EU legislation is implemented by regional and local authorities.

I further welcome the existing proposals by the citizens to simplify the EU decision making-process based on subsidiarity and multilevel governance and make EU institutions more understandable. We support the idea to adapt the names of EU institutions to national settings.

In this sense we also suggest adapting the name of the European Committee of the Regions into European Assembly of regions and municipalities – with a stronger role, just as Manfred Weber said earlier, and in line with the democratic mandate of the 1.2 million directly elected politicians from regions, cities and villages.

Dear friends,

in conclusion: this Conference cannot fail. It is essential to commit to its follow-up, so let's commit to a convention that will lead us to a much needed treaty change.

Let's make the next European elections a sign of European renewal based on this Conference's results in order to bring Europe closer to its citizens and the new generations.

Thank you.