



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT TZITZIKOSTAS

LOCAL DIALOGUE ON EUROPE DAY

SUNDAY, 9 MAY 2021 11AM

Chers collègues, chers amis,

C'est un vrai plaisir d'être ici avec vous aujourd'hui.

En premier lieu je voudrais remercier les co-organisateurs de ce dialogue local: M. Renaud Muselier, Président de Régions de France, M. Dominique Bussereau, Président de l'Assemblée des Départements de France et M. François Baroin, Président de l'Association des Maires de France.

Un grand remerciement aussi à M. André Viola, Président de la délégation française au Comité européen des régions, à Mme. Jeanne Barseghian, Maire de la ville de Strasbourg qui nous accueille en cet magnifique salon, à Jean Rottner, Président de la Région Grand Est, au Président de la Collectivité européenne d'Alsace Frédéric Bierry, et à Joël Giraud, Secrétaire d'Etat en charge de la ruralité qui représente le gouvernement français.

Merci aussi à Andreea et à Yussef pour avoir partagés leurs visions de l'Europe du future dans les vidéos qu'ils nous ont envoyés. Autant que politiciens Européens, nationales, régionaux et locales, c'est notre devoir d'être à l'écoute et de donner des réponses aux besoins concrets de nos citoyens.

C'est ça le but ultime de la Conférence sur le future de l'Europe: donner voix à nos citoyens et à nos communautés locales dans l'Europe entière, bien au delà des capitales et de Bruxelles.

Dear friends,

We come together the day the Conference on the Future of Europe is launched, during one of the most turbulent moments of recent times.

Throughout these difficult times, Europe's one million regional and local elected politicians never stopped serving people living in our regions, cities and villages.

As local leaders, we have kept our health services, schools and transport running. We continue to provide social services and protect our environment. We have found new ways to support businesses, adapt the local economy, and work with civil society. We are fighting side by side with doctors and nurses.

The pandemic has shown that Europe and its foundations lie in our local communities.

The months ahead will continue to be difficult for all of us. By working together in solidarity, we can make the vaccination campaign a success, save lives, and ensure every region, city and village recovers.



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Europe must emerge from this crisis more sustainable and resilient by formally recognising the importance of local and regional governments.

Trust will pull us through this crisis, and we, locally and regionally elected leaders, are the most trusted level of government. We know best the needs of our citizens and how to address them.

We have heard that democracy is one of the key words highlighted by Andreea and Yussef, and I fully share their views.

We need to relaunch the European project by enhancing its democratic functioning. I see our "House of European Democracy" as having solid foundation - the regional and local authorities - strong walls - the member states - and a protective roof - the European Union.

Permettez-moi de dire que la Ville et l'Eurométropole de Strasbourg, ainsi que l'Alsace entière, en sont un parfait exemple. La coopération pacifique entre communautés locales, qui s'est affirmée à la place des guerres et des controverses, a posé les fondations pour une meilleure entente entre France et Allemagne, et l'Union européenne est venue s'installer – tant métaphoriquement que physiquement – comme trait d'union et élément de protection de cet élan de construction, de partage et d'enrichissement réciproque. C'est l'histoire d'un succès qui doit inspirer nos efforts.

The Conference on the future of Europe is an opportunity to reflect on European democracy, strengthen its functioning and increase its legitimacy. We must be united in our resolve and united in our ambition. We must use it to improve the way the EU works and reconnect with the citizens Europe serves.

In my region in Greece, the EU is visible and tangible first and foremost via the achievements of the cohesion funds. We have been able to upgrade, expand and equip 49 hospitals, build 18 new schools, construct new highways, transform 40 public buildings to energy efficient, along with hundreds of other projects that are being implemented all across Central Macedonia.

This is the Europe our people want and appreciate: an EU close to their needs and able to help them solving their problems. To convince and be loved again by its citizens, Europe has to rediscover his local vocation, and stop thinking that all that matters can be discussed between Brussels and capital cities.

So make no mistake: the Conference will achieve this only if it genuinely and concretely involves local communities – whatever their views or political persuasion.

It must give people a voice.

A top-down exercise will only feed the anti-European, populist and Euro-sceptic narrative. Listen, engage and respond to people in their language in their communities, or fail.



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This is why we organised this local dialogue here in Strasbourg today: to mark the territorial dimension of the Conference.

Our 1 million local and regional leaders are the heartbeat of our communities and our Union. We want to live up to our democratic accountability. As local and regional authorities, we must be fully involved in the Conference for several reasons:

Firstly, to ensure greater engagement with our citizens, as we are the closest level of governance;

Secondly, to give legitimacy to the whole process, as we are democratically elected and accountable to their voters;

And thirdly, to make the EU fit for the future, because we can identify good and bad EU policy and point the EU's efforts in the right direction.

Our Committee is contributing to the Conference by setting set up a High Level Group on European Democracy led by Herman Van Rompuy to analyse the role of local and regional authorities in EU democracy;

Secondly, organising Local Dialogues with our Members and other partners such as the European Movement International and the European Youth Forum: let me thank Eva Meydell and Silja Markkula for being with us today. We will also involve the main European and National territorial associations, and I would like to thank M. Stefano Bonaccini, CCRE President, for his presence today.

Thirdly, we are organising a series of plenary debates on the functioning of European Democracy throughout the duration of the Conference.

Fourthly, we are holding two big events, which I invite you mark in your calendars. One is the European Week of Regions and Cities together with the European Commission taking place this October. The other is the European Summit of Regions and Cities in early 2022 during the French EU Presidency. Let me thank all the French associations for their support, and my wholehearted gratitude to the PACA region and the city of Marseille that have agreed to host our Summit.

Finally, the CoR will continue its work within the Executive Board of the Conference to make sure the voice of our local communities and of their elected leaders is clearly heard.

Dear friends,

By listening to our people, the Conference must enable an honest reflection through a profound democratisation process. We want less institutional complexity and more democratic representation of people's trust via their vote in the European, national, regional and local elections.



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The Conference can only be a success if it goes beyond Brussels and the capitals, and I am sure that Vice-president Šuica and State Secretary Zacarias will agree with me on this crucial point.

It must be transparent and open up to as many citizens as possible, as well as those actors that directly or indirectly shape, implement and transpose Europe on the ground.

Together, we should create a new way of working so that the EU and its policies really improve the lives of people. Opening up Treaties maybe burdensome, but not taboo if that's what takes to give a future of Europe people want.

Local and Regional authorities are the best allies the Union could have because of their democratic nature and by their proximity to citizens.

Now more than ever, together we must seize this opportunity to restart and bring Europe closer to its people.

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