



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT TZITZIKOSTAS

CONFERENCE: "THE PLACE OF REGIONS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ARCHITECTURE"

TUESDAY 29 JUNE 2021

Dear colleagues, Dear friends, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all: Presidents of regional governments, regional parliaments, councils and assemblies, as well as counties and intermediate authorities.

Today's meeting is the first of three events. Each focuses on the specificities of the three types of sub-national authorities: regional, urban and rural. The aim is to discuss their expectations. The results will feed the European Committee of the Regions' contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe. We are meeting today just ten days after the Conference held its first plenary session.

Let me assure you that the European Committee of the Regions stands united in defining OUR contribution to the Conference. From the outset, our Committee's aim is to represent all of Europe's 1 million regionally and locally elected leaders, its 300 regions and 90,000 municipalities. And the composition of our delegation to the Conference reflect this, as it is not limited to our Committee's membership.

We will play an active role through three main activities:

Firstly, to advise our political work, we launched a High-level Group on European Democracy chaired by President Herman Van Rompuy.

Secondly, we are holding political debates in Brussels and across our Union, such as tomorrow's plenary debate that includes three Members of the European Parliament who are part of the Conference's Executive Board.

And most importantly, we continue to organise Local Dialogues in and with our regions, cities and villages.

We must listen and engage with citizens on the future of our Union. We must create a new vision that unites us on climate and mobility. We need to decide together how to make the EU even more fit for purpose, so it strengthens our local economies and creates local jobs, digitalises every aspect of our daily life and reinforces our common values.

We all know that our Union is diverse. Some Member States are more centralised, whilst in others regions hold legislative powers. But every region regardless of their power, has a crucial impact on the national and European level. We must not forget that regional and



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local authorities implement 70% of all EU legislation, represent one-third of public spending and half of public investments.

Therefore, we cannot accept forever that others will make decisions on our behalf. Our regional and local legal responsibilities and democratic mandate must be fully taken into account at European and national level. It is time to end this democratic and legal gap.

Ladies and gentlemen, my proposal to you is simple: while respecting our differences, let us use our strength and diversity, to identify regional common interests. Let us create a strong critical mass that can make a real impact on EU decision making. This is not a matter of increasing our power or visibility. The local and regional role must simply be better reflected in the EU's architecture, whether it be within the current Treaties, or if future Treaties changes are needed.

Europe today is perceived as too distant by citizens. It is time to strengthen the foundations of our common European House - its regions, cities and villages. This is the only way the EU will better address our citizens' needs and ensure EU legislation is a benefit not a burden. EU laws and investment must bring true added value to our regional and local communities. It must be positively felt on our streets.

Following the two panel debates today, we will adopt a Declaration which we have shared with you for your comments and endorsement and will remain open.

Today we do not intend to launch a new structure or bureaucratic tool. We intend to launch a political Alliance of Regions for European Democracy. Its purpose is to improve the way regions impact EU decision making, for the benefit of our Union and the citizens it serves.

I would like to thank my two co-hosts, Gustavo Matos Expósito and José Manuel Boliero, as well as the two moderators, Mark Speich and Antje Grotheer. I would also like to share apologies on behalf of Muhterem Aras, President of the Baden Wurttemberg Parliament, and Renaud Muselier, President of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region, who were unable to be with us today.

I look forward to today's interesting debates followed by the presentation of the Declaration by my colleague and friend, our First Vice President, Vasco Cordeiro.

Dear colleagues and friends, Europe is, first and foremost, about values and about democratic legitimacy. The more regional and local elected authorities are involved, the more our Union will be perceived by our citizens as democratic and being close to their needs and interests.

Let me thank each of you for being here and listening. It is my pleasure to now give the floor to President Matos Expósito.