Proceedings

6th European Summit of Regions and Cities
European Recovery
Local Solutions

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Dear reader,

In cooperation with the Region of Attica, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) organised the 6th European Summit of Regions and Cities in Athens on 7 and 8 March 2014.

The aim of the Summit was to take stock of the efforts deployed at European, national, regional and local level to deliver a job-rich recovery. It also included a high-level debate with European political leaders about the future of the EU in view of the upcoming European elections.

The event welcomed a total of 1,400 participants, including members of the CoR and national, regional and local parliaments and councils, stakeholders from Greek civil society, representatives of associations, journalists as well as experts from the EU institutions.

The highlights of the Summit included the adoption of the Athens Declaration on the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy, numerous key note speeches as well as a series of lively high-level debates contrasting the insights and experiences of regional and local political leaders with the views of the EU institutions, industry and civil society.

The Summit provided a unique platform for encouraging the EU and its Member States to introduce a stronger territorial dimension as part of Europe’s future steps towards economic growth and job creation. We, the representatives of the EU’s regions and cities, are ready and willing to contribute to the shaping and implementation of a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe.

Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso
President of the Committee of the Regions

Ioannis Sgouros
Governor of the Attica Region
European Recovery, Local Solutions

Opening Session

Around 1,000 politicians and stakeholders attended the Summit’s opening plenary session. After a short performance by the New Hellenic Quartet, which included a number of traditional dances by the famous Greek composer Nikos Skalkotas, the summit’s participants were welcomed by moderator Karen Coleman, an EU affairs journalist from Ireland. She introduced the key note speakers for the opening session: Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso, President of the Committee of the Regions, Ioannis Sgouros, Governor of the Attica Region, Werner Hoyer, President of the European Investment Bank, Mercedes Bresso, First Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions and Yiannis Michelakis, the Greek Minister for the Interior.

In his opening speech, Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso noted that the latest economic forecasts showed that while there had been some signs of growth in Europe, unacceptable disparities still existed between the regions. If we wanted to ensure that the European growth strategy did not fail once again, there was a need for regional targets, partnerships between all levels of government and adequate funding to make recovery a real prospect for all EU citizens. Commenting on the EU targets set in 2010, President Valcárcel observed that little overall progress had been made towards achieving them. The economic crisis had undoubtedly taken a heavy toll on Europe’s economic growth prospects but this was not the only reason for the lack of progress. Europe needed to fix the weaknesses in the architecture and governance of the strategy. As local and regional authorities were responsible for one third of all public expenditure and two thirds of all public investments, they were best placed to deliver the EU’s priorities, he said.

In his introductory speech, Ioannis Sgouros discussed the situation from the perspective of the Greek regions. Noting the critical situation in his own country and in the rest of the EU, he called for a review of the role of the Committee of the Regions.
Regions and of regional and local government in economic development, innovation and social welfare. The prolonged recession experienced by Member States, the unprecedented levels of unemployment, poverty, and the social exclusion of increasingly larger social groups were facts that had created new challenges for both regional and local government as well as for the European institutions. For Mr Sgouros, it was obvious that the current crisis in Europe was not solely a financial crisis, but one that was primarily political and institutional. Never before had the indifference and scepticism among European citizens towards EU issues been so intense.

In his key note speech, EIB President Werner Hoyer warned that reality was often harder to handle than statistics, and that the disparities within the EU had never been so large, especially as regards employment rates and levels of private investment. Over the past seven years, Europe had been forced to manage the crisis while much of the rest of the world had continued moving forward. To tackle this situation, he emphasised that convergence and subsidiarity should be the key principles for shaping the EU’s growth efforts in the coming months and years. These key principles had been frequently overlooked during the crisis, and the tendency to replace them by centralised instruments needed to be reversed as soon as possible. Mr Hoyer underlined the role which the EIB could play in regional development, especially in view of the enhanced urban dimension of the new EU programming period, by lending and blending funds and through technical assistance.

On behalf of the Greek Presidency of the Council of the EU, Deputy Prime Minister Evangelos Venizelos reminded those present of the Presidency’s priorities: development, job creation and social cohesion, with a specific focus on youth employment and support for SMEs and new entrepreneurs. At present, the two major obstacles towards the realisation of these ambitions were financial burdens, particularly the high interest rates which hindered new investments, and energy issues. Mr Venizelos mentioned Greece’s efforts to tackle these obstacles in the face of the stereotypes that existed about his country, and the impact of the crisis on people’s everyday lives in Greece. These efforts had led to a primary surplus being achieved at the beginning of this year, which could be seen as the first sign of a return to financial stability and sustainable growth. The local and regional elections, which coincided with the European elections in May, offered the Greek citizens an opportunity to have their say on how Europe was taking shape and on the social, cultural and economic reality of their own city or region.

Mercedes Bresso presented the results of the intensive and complex analysis which the CoR had delivered over the past 15 months on the achievements of the Europe 2020 strategy so far. Based on stakeholder surveys and consultations, thematic conferences and other assessments, the CoR Bureau had adopted the Athens Declaration shortly before the Summit began, setting out the main observations and recommendations for Europe’s growth strategy from a local and regional perspective. The first conclusion was that the Europe 2020 strategy needed a territorially-differentiated, place-based approach to target-setting, based on a mixed top-down and bottom-up planning process. The Europe 2020 strategy, and in particular the design and implementation of the National Reform Programmes, should be carried out in partnership through the adoption of multi-level governance arrangements. Other recommendations included aligning the European Semester with a long-term investment focus, enhanced policy coordination and a strengthened administrative capacity. The Athens Declaration would be the basis for the CoR’s contribution.

Ioannis Sgouros
Governor of the Attica Region

"Europe should take a big decision right now: to change its policy, namely its way of thinking and acting, in order to regain the trust and confidence of its citizens."

Werner Hoyer
President of the European Investment Bank

"The most disastrous effect of the crisis is the backlash in convergence, one of the basic ideas of European integration."

Evangelos Venizelos
Deputy Prime Minister of Greece

Mercedes Bresso
President of the CoR
to the upcoming European Council and the Commission’s revision of the Europe 2020 strategy.

Greek Minister Yiannis Michelakis was the final speaker to take the floor. He confirmed the huge impact of the crisis on Europe’s regions, which had significantly increased inequalities, particularly in the area of employment. The only way out was to implement a growth strategy that focused on inclusiveness and solidarity. He confirmed the first positive signs in Greece that had been mentioned by his colleague Mr Venizelos: after seven years of horrific recession, the recovery would finally begin in 2014. This environment of recovery would make it easier to take the next steps in the structural reforms currently being implemented in Greece. Mr Michelakis welcomed in particular the focus of the Athens Declaration on cooperation: not only among the different levels of government, but also between the various regions and cities within the EU. He concluded by highlighting the specific capacities of local authorities to detect the real needs of the citizens and to assess the possibilities for development and growth.
Smart – Sustainable - Inclusive

**Summit exhibition**

The EU, its Member States, regions and cities have developed several strategies to break the negative spiral of the economic crisis and to get Europe back on track for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The Europe 2020 strategy set out a series of policy targets and gave a clear focus for the EU’s investment priorities. Regions and cities play a key role in the delivery of these European ambitions. They are responsible for two thirds of all public investment and one third of all public expenditure, primarily in areas which have a tangible impact on society’s welfare: education and training, innovation, social services or environment protection.

An exhibition was organised in connection with the 6th European Summit of Regions and Cities, showcasing how regions and cities of all sizes can develop locally tailored growth initiatives, often with the support of European Structural and Investment Funds. The exhibition highlights over 45 examples of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth investments at local level, from all EU Member States. It also includes comprehensive information and graphics about the delivery of the seven Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives.

Many of the projects showcased in this exhibition are co-financed by the European Union. The European Structural and Investment Funds will also play an important role in the years ahead. Between 2014 and 2020, the EU will make some EUR 366 billion available from cohesion policy funds including EUR 6 billion for targeted youth employment measures, in addition to the EU 80 billion available under the Horizon 2020 programme for research and innovation. In parallel to this, the EU closely monitors the Member States’ government policies through the European Semester process, searching for the right balance between austerity and investment.

An online catalogue of the exhibition is available on the Summit website (www.cor.europa.eu/athens2014). The exhibition will also be on show in the Committee of the Regions building during the first two weeks of April 2014.
Investing in economic recovery and sustainable job creation: Europe’s regions and cities make it happen

Workshop

This first summit workshop considered the prospects and challenges for Europe on exiting the crisis and how its regions and cities might contribute to delivering a job-rich recovery. Jean-Louis Destans, President of the Eure département, France, introduced the session. The main challenges were then presented by Yves Leterme, Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD. Six panel members shared their views: Marek Woźniak, Marshal of the Wielkopolska Region, Poland; Dimitrios Kalogeropoulos, Secretary-General of coordination and management of solid and liquid wastes and environment in Attica, Greece; Bas Verkerk, Mayor of Delft, the Netherlands; Annika Annerby Jansson, President of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions; Georges Dassis, President of the European Economic and Social Committee’s Workers’ Group; and Arnaldo Abruzzini, Secretary-General of Eurochambres. The session was moderated by Karen Coleman.

Jean-Louis Destans opened the debate by explaining the Europe 2020 Strategy assessment process carried out by the CoR’s Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform. The Europe 2020 Strategy was clearly worthwhile in itself. There were however considerable differences in implementation levels: regions such as Flanders, Catalonia or Scotland had developed horizontal strategies in line with Europe 2020, whereas other, smaller regions were working on sectorial strategies. Four years on from its launch, there had been little progress towards achieving the Europe 2020 targets. What was worse, regional disparities had grown. Continuous monitoring of the indicators at regional level was however particularly difficult owing to the lack complete and up-to-date regional data. The Europe 2020 Strategy, a method designed to optimise convergence without imposing one universal economic model, was based on the principle of partnership.

“Local and regional authorities in the EU play a key role in most Europe 2020 policy areas, despite their different sizes and administrative capacities and differing constitutional provisions in the Member States.”

Jean-Louis Destans
President of the Eure
It should, therefore, have a clearer territorial dimension, with territorially differentiated targets.

Addressing the critical importance of regions and cities in delivering, inclusive, sustainable and job-rich growth for Europe, Yves Leterme started by admitting that the path from crisis to recovery had already been long. One of the consequences was a significant drop to a record low of 40% in the level of public trust in politicians, authorities and institutions. The economic recovery remained very fragile and everyone was worried by high unemployment and in particular by youth unemployment. In at least 10 OECD countries more than 40% of the increase in unemployment figures had accrued in very concentrated areas of one or two regions in any given country. Similar disparities could be seen in the evolution of per capita GDP.

One of the crucial questions nowadays was how to foster inclusive and sustainable job-rich growth. It was necessary to create better policies and ensure better spending. Two-thirds of the USD 1.2 trillion spent on public investment in OECD countries (2012) was carried out by regional and city governments. Unfortunately, between 2010 and 2012, there had been a fall of over 20% in sub-national public investment in the EU. There was a clear need to learn how to do better with less. The OECD had clearly defined three priorities for this: coordination, capacity and framework conditions. To conclude, Yves Leterme welcomed the proposal for collaboration with the Committee of the Regions.

Marek Woźniak centred on the economic crisis and European competitiveness. Europe’s competitiveness could be described as the sum of the competitiveness of Europe’s diverse regions each with their own potential. Each region should be allowed to work towards its own realistic objectives. The estimated investment needs relating to Europe 2020 amounted to EUR 1.8 trillion. That was why there was a need to align budgets at all levels and to look for synergies. This was particularly important because the resources at local and regional level had been reduced and the contribution from the private sector was not yet there. Another issue was consistency between all the measures. There was a need for joint action at all levels of government, looking for the most effective budget synergies. The national reform programmes could be seen as good governance tools.

Dimitrios Kalogeropoulos highlighted the significant administrative reform that had taken place in Greece, reducing the size and the number of local authorities. Over 50 prefectures had been replaced by only 13 regions. With less money and a smaller number of authorities, there was a need for greater efficiency in dealing with growing demands, also from the central level. The new responsibilities delegated to the local and regional authorities were unfortunately not tied to appropriate resources or finances. At the same time, own resources were shrinking because of reduced revenue from local and regional taxes. The difficulties were huge but the local and regional authorities were trying to deliver the best results possible. These challenges were not peculiar to Greece alone and there were similar situations in Portugal and Cyprus. Ordinary people needed to be more involved in the debate about what kind of Europe they wanted.

Bas Verkerk outlined solutions applied in the city of Delft, aimed at generating jobs and growth. Despite the fact that 20% of the population had little or no education, Delft was a well-known “tech-town”, with the largest concentration of technical institutes and clusters in the Netherlands. Education and institutions attracted the best talent but also technological companies that brought investment and support for the local economy. The main strategy was to generate a trickle-down effect. In this respect, the knowledge economy was a job generator for
all citizens, even those with the fewest qualifications. To achieve this goal, the city focused its policies on education and on the social return on investment. Delft called on its universities and other institutes as well as the private sector to be socially accountable and, more specifically, to help solve the problem of youth unemployment. The city administration set a good example, by means of job-generating tendering procedures and better municipal work placements.

Annika Annerby Jansson focused on the problem of youth unemployment and stressed the importance of implementing the youth guarantee scheme. That was especially important for Greece and Spain where more than 50% of young people were unemployed. Referring to a recent conference on that matter, she reminded participants that the total cost of implementing the youth guarantee would be EUR 22 billion. On the other hand, according to the International Labour Organisation, just the direct cost of doing nothing might be as much as EUR 153 billion. One way to navigate away from these problems and to reduce youth unemployment figures was to use the regional competences and possibilities regions had to improve cooperation between education systems, employers and state agencies.

Georges Dassis presented in brief the contribution of the labour movement to current European Union integration. With regard to the economic crisis, he stressed that the investment needed to act against unemployment and poverty was immense and that resources were lacking. The amount dedicated to tackling youth unemployment was only EUR 6 billion for the seven-year period, whereas what was needed was around EUR 21 billion a year. The EESC had suggested certain solutions with regard to the transaction tax that could generate additional resources but this initiative had not been properly taken on board. Youth unemployment was in fact undermining the European Union. The local and regional authorities had a big role to play on this issue but appropriate resources need to be provided first. In his concluding remarks, Mr Dassis expressed support for the Europe 2020 Strategy and for the earlier aims of the Lisbon Strategy. Unfortunately, the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy had been easily forgotten with the first signs of the economic crisis. He expressed his hope that the same would not happen with the new objectives. There was nothing better to pass on to the next generation than a Europe that guaranteed peace, welfare and jobs for all.

Arnaldo Abruzzini confirmed that the European business community shared the same concerns as the previous speakers. The subjects touched on at the meeting included the notion of investment, development strategies, effective spending and multi-level governance. Business partners expected concrete measures and straight-forward policies. The first face of government they came across was that of local and regional authorities, the municipalities. That was where businesses were created, and they were beneficial to society, generating growth and jobs. He highlighted the role of the SMEs, which constituted the majority of Europe’s 20 million businesses. The importance business attached to local government’s capacity to deliver was immense. They expected skills, accessible finance and affordable energy. For example, the academic world should enable business to hire locally and it was local banks that lent the strongest support to the local business environment. Reflecting on multi-level governance he warned that it could easily become an additional burden, an additional cost, that had to be avoided. Whatever tier of government was involved, it needed to have the capacity, knowledge and experience to deliver results that were beneficial to the business community and society.
Getting delivery right: involving Europe’s regions and cities

Workshop

Delivering better governance at EU, national, regional and local level was the focus of debate in the second summit workshop. The Committee of the Regions presented its point of view on the gaps in governing, delivering and financing Europe’s growth and jobs strategy. It considered the different options for its further development in the second half of the decade and put forward the views of regional and local government.

The workshop was moderated by Stamatis Giannisis, a journalist at Euronews Greece, and introduced by Markku Markkula, Member of Espoo City Council, Finland, and of the CoR’s Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform Steering Committee. Philip McCann, Professor of economic geography at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, presented some key research findings on the topic. This was followed by statements and comments from a panel of politicians and external stakeholders: António Costa, Mayor of Lisbon, Portugal, and Chair of the CoR Commission on Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs, Malcolm Harbour, Chair of the European Parliament’s Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, Marc Hendrickx, Member of the Flemish Parliament, Belgium, and CoR member, Valeria Ronzitti, Secretary General of the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public services (CEEP), and Andreas Andreadis, President of the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE).

According to Markku Markkula, Europe 2020 had to be given a territorial dimension, overcoming the present top-down approach of country targets fitting all regions irrespectively. Smart specialisation strategies made it possible to build on each region’s specific starting points and assets. To stress the crucial role that local and regional authorities could play in the 2014-2020 programming period, Mr Markkula listed their 10 most significant priorities: (1) focusing more on impacts, especially societal impacts; (2) drawing more innovation from research results; (3) “We need to speed up the implementation of Europe 2020, and this is strongly related to multi-level governance.”

Markku Markkula
CoR Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform
promoting user-driven developments; (4) adopting regional innovation strategies based on smart specialisation; (5) going beyond mere support for clusters, towards regional innovation ecosystems; (6) being multi-disciplinary; (7) developing a bottom-up mindset; (8) using cohesion funds to promote innovation and capacity building; (9) pursuing synergies both within Horizon 2020 and between it and the cohesion funds; (10) promoting multi-finance solutions to the funding puzzle.

Mapping the main theme of the workshop, Philip McCann reminded participants that a shift in thinking towards a multi-dimensional, multi-thematic and territorial approach to growth and development had been taking place before the global financial crisis in 2008. This shift was apparent in the official documents of several international bodies, such as the EU, the OECD and the World Bank. The Europe 2020 strategy’s approach to growth was part of this trend. Growth was a multi-faceted concept, and Europe 2020 could not be seen as a shopping list or a menu from which one might choose between mutually exclusive alternatives. The existing links between the smart, sustainable and inclusive dimensions of growth made it necessary to identify complementarities and trade-offs. Neither exclusively top-down nor exclusively bottom-up policy-making could achieve these outcomes. Regions and cities played a key role in responding to these challenges, because of the importance on building on local and regional knowledge. It was essential to mobilise them in the policy design and delivery processes alongside central government. The EU supported this mobilisation through its Common Strategic Framework 2014-2020, which allowed for integrated policy measures, as well as by supporting smart specialisation strategies (by means of the RIS3 Platform for instance). To promote regional differentiation and specificity through smart specialisation, the EU had advocated a result-oriented policy. Self-awareness and transparency were critical for capacity building and good policy design. To this end, there was a need for data, baselines, monitoring and evaluation.

Regional and local policymaking should move away from league tables, towards appropriate and relevant policy learning.

In his first contribution to the debate, António Costa highlighted three interesting aspects of Europe 2020. First, a vision of networking: all levels of government - the EU, national, regional and local levels – were working together towards shared objectives. This vision needed to be translated into practice. Second, its objectives were complementary, not alternative, to each other. For the strategy to be sustainable, they could not be picked out à la carte, and smart specialisation was what enabled cities and regions to contribute to the shared goals. Third, the most important new lever provided by the 2014-2020

EU cohesion policy were the Integrated Territorial Investments, which provided an opportunity to integrate not only different funds, but also the visions and actions of different stakeholders. Local and regional authorities were important not only because they had knowledge of the local reality, not only because they were closer to people, but also because they were the best platforms on which to make Europe 2020 a strategy for the whole of European society.

Malcolm Harbour recalled the work done by the EP committee he chaired to strengthen the internal market so that it helped Europe 2020 to deliver. Within the context of the Innovation Union flagship initiative, a good example was provided by the European Innovation Partnerships tool in the procurement of energy efficient buildings. Other missing links in the single market, the repair of which would contribute to the Europe 2020 goals, were the
Marc Hendrickx argued that, to get the delivery of Europe 2020 right, responsibilities and resources should stay with the local and regional authorities, as they were closer to the public. This was truer in some policy fields than in others. Making clear where regional parliaments should be involved was what subsidiarity was about. The early warning system set up by the Lisbon Treaty was supposed to ensure that the EU and national parliaments complied with the subsidiarity principle. Local and regional authorities needed to be involved in the design and delivery of the National Reform Programs through multi-level governance arrangements. The Country Specific Recommendations should encourage the adoption of multi-level governance, especially in countries, such as Belgium, where regions had legislative powers. Though regional parliaments were best placed to assess and reflect citizens’ needs, their experience and competences are not given enough importance by national and federal parliaments, or even by the European Commission, which often set excessively short deadlines for consultation.

Valeria Ronzitti stressed that CEEP members were either local and regional authorities, providers of public services (water, health, etc.) or social partners (employers). CEEP members were in favour of local and regional stakeholders being more involved in reaching the Europe 2020 goals. The new EU directive on public procurement was a great example of how to achieve these goals. In accordance with the Lisbon Treaty, Article 1 of the directive granted local and regional authorities total freedom to organise services of general interest as they deemed necessary, which helped take local and regional specificities into account. The European Semester was a great tool, but local stakeholders were not involved in the drafting of the National Reform Programmes. It was the responsibility of CEEP members to be more proactive, both in key policy fields such as innovation - in the European Innovation Partnerships - and when it came to making better and fuller use of EU cohesion policy funds.

Andreas Andreadis stressed that his confederation represented more than 50 000 companies, with 400 000 employees. Tourism in Greece accounted for about 17 per cent of the country’s GDP, employing about 750 000 people. Last year, tourism in Greece generated EUR 12.2 billion in direct revenue and about EUR 35 billion in indirect revenue; if the country’s GDP had fallen by only 3.5%, rather than by 5%, it was because of tourism. A McKinsey study on the potential of tourism in Greece argued that, by 2020, visitors would increase from 18 million to 24 million a year and the sector would create 300 000 more jobs. But in Greece, unfortunately, local and regional authorities and the tourism industry did not talk to each other enough about how to implement future development plans. The tourism industry was made up predominantly of SMEs that could not do their own marketing: central or regional authorities should do it, but governments were generally unprepared – while education and accreditation systems were not harmonised in Europe.
Debate on the future of Europe

This high-level debate, which was moderated by Irish journalist Karen Coleman and Greek journalist Ilias Siakantaris, focused on the future of the EU in three main areas: the economic and social situation in the EU and in Greece in particular; the democratic legitimacy of the EU ahead of the upcoming European elections; the future challenges of the EU.

The Governor of the Attica Region, Ioannis Sgouros, welcomed the event’s participants. The debate which followed, and which was broadcast live by Greek state television, involved contributions from CoR President Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso, Mayor of Lisbon and CoR member, António Costa, Yves Leterme, Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD, and the president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, who spoke during part three of the debate. The Summit ended with two keynote addresses; one by President Barroso and the other by the Greek Minister of National Defence, Dimitris Avramopoulos, who spoke on behalf of the Prime Minister of Greece.

In his welcome address, Mr Sgouros tried to give voice to the Greek citizens who were currently in a difficult situation. Greek people were telling their politicians “enough is enough, we can’t take it anymore”. Mr Sgouros wanted to convey to the audience their frustration, which is often accompanied with feelings of anger, rage and pain. Then Mr Sgouros noted that Europe was on its way to finding a way out of a difficult situation for the good of its citizens. Furthermore, he highlighted the major structural changes that Greece had gone through and argued that unemployment was a vital issue that needed to be tackled. Mr Sgouros concluded by noting that Europe needed to move forward together in solidarity in order to grasp the opportunities which existed on the horizon.

The first part of the debate focused on the economic and social situation, and on the measures for overcoming the crisis and the progress that had been made towards achieving the Europe 2020 strategy. The moderators raised questions about the European economy on a sustainable path of recovery, about the increasing disparities between regions and local level, and about the role that regions and cities could play in the process of economic
recovery. In their replies, the panelists highlighted the uneven impact which the crisis had had on both different sections of society and on the regions and cities; there was therefore a need to strengthen certain aspects of multi-level governance.

Public authorities have to do more with less money. One can only do this by increasing the efficiency of the public sector. Regions, cities and provinces have an important role to play in this respect. Inclusive labour markets, a spirit of entrepreneurship, the two thirds of public investment they are responsible for are key factors here.

Yves Leterme
Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD

It’s in the cities, where we face the highest levels of unemployment and poverty, especially among young people. In my home town, we have to do a lot to restore the fabric of the city including in terms of energy efficiency and enhancing its attractiveness as a tourist destination. Therefore, we are looking into an intelligent specialisation for our city.

António Costa
Mayor of Lisbon and member of the CoR

During the second part of the debate, the journalists raised the issues of the EU’s democratic legitimacy, the elections to the European Parliament, and the public perception of the EU’s key tasks for the future. Ahead of the EP elections, the discussion also touched on the risk of populist rhetoric for democracy in Europe.

The idea of a hierarchy where we have the European leaders up here and the population down there is not an idea fit for the 21st century. We are in fact working in a network. We need the commitment of all levels and this is what I understand by subsidiarity, not the idea of restriction but, on the contrary, the idea of democratic participation.

José Manuel Barroso
President of the European Commission

As regional and local leaders, we are not only there to manage policies and budgets on a daily basis, we are also there to listen to the citizens, their hopes, dreams and daily frustrations. At the Committee of the Regions, we are trying to be a European platform so we can address the citizens’ concerns more effectively.

Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso
President of the Committee of the Regions

In his keynote speech, President Barroso congratulated the Committee of Regions on its 20th anniversary and thanked the committee for the extremely constructive cooperation which it had developed over the years with the European Commission. He highlighted the need for all EU institutions, including the Committee of Regions, to take enhanced ownership of the European project and of European policies on the ground.
He then recalled the critical moments of the crisis and noted that the stakes could not have been higher, not only in terms of the economic situation but also in view of the Union’s values such as democracy, human dignity, solidarity, shared prosperity, all of which lay at the very heart of European integration. The President asked for a reasonable assessment of the difficulties that had occurred and which still remained, arguing that the crisis was the result of accumulated imbalances, excessive public debt and irresponsible behaviour on the financial markets rather than due to the Euro itself.

Promoting fiscal consolidation, adjusting macro-economic imbalances and ensuring financial stability were all prerequisites for sustainable, sound growth. According to President Barroso, the European Stability Mechanism, which had a firepower of some EUR 500 billion, represented the biggest solidarity effort ever for promoting stabilisation between countries. Together with a sounder and more responsible financial sector and a strengthened economic governance framework, this was something which would have been unimaginable five years ago, the President added. Thanks to structural reforms in Ireland, Portugal and Greece, the first signs of recovery were in sight, which showed that it was indeed possible to emerge stronger from a deep crisis through political will combined with a sense of shared solidarity.

President Barroso concluded by stating that he believed that the active experience of regions and cities had been crucial and that their full engagement was even more necessary for the pursuit of the Europe 2020 objectives.

In his concluding keynote speech, Dimitris Avramopoulos welcomed the “Athens Declaration”, which the Committee of the Regions had adopted the day before, as a document which responded to the needs of citizens during the crisis. Mayors and regional authorities had done their utmost to strengthen economic stability and confidence in what had been very difficult circumstances and they would play a crucial role in bringing the Europe of the future closer to the citizens. The Minister concluded by saying that he was confident that the economy and public authorities, including at regional and local level, were on the right path towards stabilising the welfare and well-being of the citizens and implementing the European project.

“I highly welcome the Committee of the Regions’ mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy. I am also counting on your active participation in the public consultation which the Commission will launch to gather the views of all stakeholders to develop the strategy further for 2015 and 2020. Of course, a stronger territorial dimension is necessary.”

José Manuel Barroso
President of the European Commission

“The economic crisis tests countries, regions and institutions. For Greece, achieving competitiveness and overcoming uncertainty are the challenges lying ahead.”

Dimitris Avramopoulos
Greek Minister of National Defence
The Committee of the Regions’ Athens Declaration

A territorial vision for growth and jobs

The Committee of the Regions adopted its Athens Declaration at the 6th European Summit of Regions and Cities. Consisting of seven key points, the declaration calls for a stronger territorial dimension in the shaping and implementation of Europe 2020 as a key solution for addressing the current shortcomings in the strategy’s progress and the increasing gaps among EU Member States and regions.

According to the CoR, the shift of focus under the Europe 2020 strategy towards the local dimension should be ensured by identifying regional indicators and targets. Furthermore, the current tools for coordinating Member States’ macroeconomic policies under the European Semester should be more oriented towards growth and job creation, providing an assessment of the measures proposed each year and the governance model adopted by each Member State for their delivery. In this context, there was also a need to clarify and improve the measurement of the contribution of the regions and cities towards achieving the Member States’ goals.

The Committee of the Regions’ seven-point plan for Europe 2020

1. Give the strategy a territorial dimension: Although the strategy has provided a framework for action, it ignores the strengths, weaknesses and development opportunities of Europe’s regions. There is a need to set territorially differentiated objectives and targets with updated and extended EU-wide regional data in order to measure progress locally.

2. National Reform Programmes in partnership: There is limited involvement on the part of local and regional authorities in the preparation of National Reform Programmes: they are consulted but are not treated as partners when setting goals and targets.

3. Make multi-level governance the standard approach: Multi-level governance enables coordination between different levels of government and is a precondition for the Europe 2020 Strategy for bringing added value in terms of growth, jobs and cohesion. Territorial Pacts and multi-level arrangements involving public authorities at all levels can help deliver a renewed Europe 2020 Strategy.

4. Align the European Semester with genuine long-term investment: The European Semester - the annual exercise for the coordination of fiscal and structural policies by the EU’s Member States - must be more closely aligned with
the Europe 2020 goals covered by the Flagship Initiatives, including the related need for long-term investments.

5. Use the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives for enhanced policy coordination: The seven Flagship Initiatives should become a lever for enhancing policy coordination at all levels in view of achieving the Europe 2020 targets.

6. Mobilise funding for long-term investment, ensuring better spending: the European Commission should publish a Green Paper on budget synergies between all levels of government which would allow them to “do more with less”. The European Investment Bank should strengthen its support for local and regional authorities. Private funds should be mobilised through innovative financial instruments.

The quality of public spending should be improved, making public investments more effective.

7. Strengthen administrative capacity for more effective implementation: Benchmarking, exchange of experiences and peer learning between regions and cities should be supported by the EU and the Member States, as well as through the use of EU instruments such as the European Territorial Cooperation programmes. A Public Sector Innovation Platform, aimed at supporting and coordinating public sector innovation, should also be set up.

The Summit in figures

More than 1,400 participants attended the Summit in Athens, among them 250 members of the Committee of the Regions, over 450 representatives of the political and civil society from Greece, 300 similar stakeholders from other EU member states, and over 170 journalists.

The Summit in the media

In addition to EU-specialised press, the Summit attracted nearly 90 different media coming from 17 countries. To date 344 reports on the Summit have been published or aired including 111 print articles, 181 online reports, 15 TV reports, 23 radio pieces and 14 news agency articles.

The Summit online

A large collection of speeches, presentations and background documentation has been published on the Summit’s website. Most of the key note speeches and panel debates were also video recorded and are available online: www.cor.europa.eu/athens2014
Proceedings of the 6th European Summit of Regions and Cities, organised in Athens on 7 and 8 March 2014 by the Committee of the Regions and the Region of Attica, with the support of the Hellenic Presidency of the Council of the EU.

MORE INFORMATION:
www.cor.europa.eu/athens2014

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