



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT TZITZIKOSTAS

CONFERENCE BY THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

FOR MORE WOMEN IN POLITICS

8 MARCH 2021

Dear Members of the European Parliament, Dear Members of the European Committee of the Regions, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is the International Women's Day today. And we need to speak the truth openly.

Today, out of our one million local and regional elected politicians, only one third are women, and even fewer, less than one in five, are the women who are mayors. This represents a serious democratic deficit. A lack in diversity in our decision making structures.

The perspectives of women are essential for better informed successful policymaking and for shaping societies to "build back better" after the pandemic. Therefore, improving gender parity, starting at the local and regional level, with the support of all political families as key partners, is a crucial step forward to more representative democracy.

Dear friends,

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed Europe and the world, and left a lasting impact on how we live and work. Unfortunately, women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic: Women have been at greater risk for exposure to the virus as health and care workers, and their employment has been hit worse than men's, with potential long-term impacts on pay and career.

The lockdowns have widened existing gender divide in unpaid care work, led to an increase in domestic violence against women and disrupted access to support services. In many ways, the pandemic has negatively impacted on gender equality.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends. This conference is about more women in politics. I believe we all agree, that identifying and tackling the barriers women face in entering politics at the local level, and their root causes – related to political campaigning, culture, funding, and candidate selection, or care responsibilities just to mention a few - is pivotal to changing the state-of-play.

To this end, we must put in place comprehensive and multifaceted strategies and engage with political parties and social partners, while increasing the role of media and social media, while at the same time combating the threat of hate speech.

The problem of violence against elected female politicians and women in public life needs to be addressed, including online intimidation on social media, which influences women's ability to take part in politics and public life on an equal footing. We must establish a zero tolerance policy to sexism with clear channels for reporting sexual harassment.

Dear friends,

As President of the European Committee of the Regions, I acknowledge that its membership is still lagging behind in gender parity. As you may know, we are not our own masters when it comes to the nomination of our members, and we must try to change this strange rule in the future.

Officially speaking, this is the responsibility of the national associations and of the national governments coming from the 27 member states. Since almost all our 27 national delegations are led by men I warmly call again and count on all our members and their political families to work together with the national associations and delegations representing the 27 member states in order to drastically improve the gender balance of the lists of members.

This progress cannot wait. It must be done after each regional and local election in every EU member state that generates new nominations of members to the European Committee of the Regions.

On the positive side, when it comes to the political decisions taken autonomously by our institution, in my mandate we have reached gender parity for our Commission Chairs, and we also have a political commitment to reach gender-balance for Rapporteurs over the current mandate. Also, I am proud to say that half of the distinguished members of our new High Level Group on European Democracy are women.

Moreover, I also continue to stress the importance of gender equality in our administration, and during the past year we have already seen improvements as per number of women in our senior positions.

And it is my political and personal engagement that we will continue this trend until the end of this political mandate.

Dear Ladies,

On the International Women's Day, allow me to wish you all the best for your professional and personal life. And my message to you is that we all must and we will continue to work together - European, National, Regional and Local institutions to make the equal participation of women and men in decision-making, a reality.

It is essential to launch initiatives that empower women ahead of local and regional elections to overcome the discrimination and obstacles they encounter. It is vital to support women to stand as candidates in municipal and regional elections, and for the political parties to show equal support to its candidates.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to close by saying that the European Committee of the Regions and all its political groups stand by all women aspiring to make a positive change in the local and regional communities, and continue to encourage women to stand for elections.

This is the way forward. This is the only way for more resilient, more inclusive, more representative communities. And this is also the way forward for a sustainable post-pandemic recovery. A recovery for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is now my pleasure to welcome our distinguished speakers, Members of the European Parliament, local elected politicians, and expert panelists.

I look forward to hearing your views. Thank you.
