



**European Committee
of the Regions**

**PRESIDENCY ELECTION SPEECH,
APOSTOLOS TZITZIKOSTAS
BRUSSELS
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Dear colleagues, Dear friends,

I am here today to ask for your trust to be the next President of the European Committee of the Regions.

I know very well that this is a challenging endeavour, which I can only pursue with your full support.

I can assure you, that I intend to be a committed and responsible President, at the service of all the members of our political assembly, from all across Europe, from rural and urban areas, from every region and every country, big or small, eastern or western, northern or southern.

Together we are always stronger, and only by joining our forces, we can make the European Committee of the Regions, more visible, more effective, and more credible for all the people in the European Union.

Dear friends,

I share with you a rich and bottom-up experience in regional politics.

I have been trusted and directly elected by the people for the last 13 years in my country. I have worked restlessly to make life better for the 2 million citizens of my Region.

And I share with you the proudness of my geographical, cultural and political belonging.

My hometown is Thessaloniki, my home region is Central Macedonia, my home country is Greece.

But at the same time, I feel at home, in each and every corner of Europe, and that exactly is the strength of Europe.

It is the diversity found in our regions, cities, towns and villages that makes our Union stronger.



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Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe in a Committee that is led by inclusiveness, that respects differences and engages in dialogue that puts in the top of its priorities gender balance and women empowerment.

I intend to use all my knowledge, all my experience, all my commitment, to make our institution the reference point for all Europe-an local and regional elected politicians.

Together, we must make our Committee the bridge be-tween Europe and its citizens.

During this mandate, I will push for the modernisation of our administration, which must finally put members first.

I will also work hard to maximise the impact of our legislative and communication work, in order for the Committee to become the reference point in the European Union, for all local and regional matters.

We must not be simple followers of what other EU institutions do.

We need to be pioneers, we need to set the agenda.

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

Let me briefly explain how I want this change to happen through three main priorities.

My first priority to make sure that the European Union is permanently at the service of its people and their places of living.

That is why the Committee needs to focus its work on specific policies that have the greatest regional and local relevance in terms of EU's impact on people's lives.

Such as supporting cohesion through securing adequate financial means and ensuring their effective absorption.

Boosting local and regional economy and long-term employment through strong entrepreneurial ecosystems, cutting-edge innovation and research, and smart specialisation in our cities and regions.

Ensuring the positive local impacts of EU transport networks in our communities.

And of course, ensuring that the EU creates more channels for effective youth engagement.



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The second priority that I am proposing is for our institution to focus on understanding and responding to the profound transformations that the current green, digital and demographic revolutions entail for our local communities.

I am referring to the changes that fundamentally affect our society and for which, regional and local authorities must be prepared to provide solutions for the citizens.

In concrete terms, this is what we have to do, first for the environment:

Translate the Green Deal into local climate action while supporting the communities who will be the most affected.

The fight against climate change will be won or lost in our regions and cities.

We need to:

Build local capacity to respond to extreme weather events with increased frequency and severity, one of the most visible results of climate change.

Continue to localise the sustainable development goals in close partnership with citizens, universities and industry.

Make sure that the EU invests in every region and city, unlocking green investment and supporting each region to make the sustainable transition.

Second for the digital age, Europe's competitiveness on the world stage depends on our ability to embrace technological change.

We must focus on closing the local digital divide and on digitalising subnational public services in the fields of transportation, communication, education, health, innovation.

This can be done by:

Better exploiting the investment and the programmes offered by the EU to ensure all our citizens benefit from high-speed broadband.

Encouraging innovation, work across borders, investments in start-ups and in smart technologies.

Fostering business creation reducing administrative burdens and boosting the growth of our local economies. Because when our regions and cities grow the whole of Europe grows.



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By doing all of this, we can deepen territorial cohesion, achieve our energy and climate ambitions, and ensure every citizen reaps the benefit of the single market.

Third, Demography: the demographic change affects our daily work and our lives. Hundreds of thousands small and medium cities risk de-population.

It is challenging our capacity to organize social and health services, the sustainability of public finances, the fairness of the relation between generations.

More efforts are needed now to: Map the effects of the current demographic challenges in our cities and regions and identify local answers to the current and future challenges.

And also protect human dignity and well-being, promote participation, equality and cohesion, encourage innovation and sustainability.

Finally, as a third political priority for this mandate, believe that the Committee must look into how the European democracy works today and how it must be modernised, to give more strength to the regional and local authorities in order for the European Union to answer more efficiently people's needs.

Dear colleagues,

During the last decade, Europe has lost much of its connection with its people in cities and regions, and the next years will not be easier.

Brexit has to be the wake-up call. Europe must be closer to its people, and our institution has a key role to play.

As elected politicians, we need to reach the hearts of those who feel neglected and forgotten.

We need to make sure that our Committee speaks loud and clear, and that this voice of European regions and cities is heard here in Brussels and in the capitals of our member states.

Dear friends,

The so far dominant two-dimensional politics have failed to address the daily challenges of the people, who do not feel understood and represented in Europe.

Therefore we need to ensure a proper functioning of a threefold democratic legitimacy with all three levels of politics working hand in hand: local, regional, national and European.



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The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, clearly recognised the importance of directly elected politicians at all levels, starting from local and regional, reaching to national and European.

While this is something all of us agree upon, at the same time we all know that this is very far from being a reality.

But dear colleagues we can make it happen, we can make it work, this is our role, this is what this mandate is for.

We must fight for decisions to be taken as close as possible to the citizens.

We can make Europe act more effectively in meeting the citizens' demands and regaining their trust.

The upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe offers an opportunity for all of us.

Europe must prove that it can listen and change. It must prove that it can respond to people's real needs, worries, concerns, and expectations.

If we don't want it to be another disappointment, the Conference must be open and inclusive.

It must avoid being top-down, centralised and Brussels driven. This would only generate mistrust and increase the gap between the European institutions and the citizens.

So I intend to make clear that without the voices of cities and regions the Conference will not succeed.

It is time for everyone to understand that Europe must become more just and cohesive.

Dear colleagues,

During the last decade, we have experienced some of the worst crisis in our post-war history.

During the financial crisis local authorities and the local communities payed the highest price from austerity. On the other hand, the migration crisis showed the limits of European solidarity.

Many local communities were abandoned when they needed Europe the most.



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At the same time the institutional crisis led to the radicalisation of Euroscepticism and the withdrawal of the third largest country of the Union.

Faced by these challenges, millions of citizens, businesses, families and local leaders, showed courage, creativity and determination.

They changed their mentality, their way of thinking, they found solutions, they started new projects.

Europe has to follow their example, react to the crisis, adapt and change.

Too many people have lost hope and belief in the way the EU works.

We as elected politicians need to bridge this gap.

Dear friends,

We are part of the one million local and regional elected politicians, and we must be at the centre of modernising Europe and moving it forward.

We are the politicians who are closest to the people of Europe and we represent the most trusted level of government.

We measure the pulse of democracy regularly at regional and local elections.

We are responsible for delivering key EU policies.

We know what works and what doesn't for citizens.

We make democracy happen, every day, in Europe.

We can help the European Union meet the citizens' demands and regain their trust.

But we can only do it by working together, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder.

That is why, as president, I will do my best to visit you and your people living in small rural communities, urban areas, remote, coastal and cross-border regions in all the Member States.

Throughout this mandate, I want to hear your views and ideas, and be in contact with you at any time and by any means.



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Today I am asking for your support and your trust.

I would be really honored and humbled to lead our Committee.

I will be a president who will serve each and every member of this House, no matter where you belong, no matter what your political background is, whether you come from EPP, PES, Renew Europe, ECR, EA or Greens.

I will always be accountable to you, to all members.

My commitment to you is to always lead with integrity, listen and discuss openly, be a team player, and act together.

Because only when we are together, we are stronger.

For Europe. For the future. For the people.

Thank you!

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY