



**European Committee
of the Regions**

CHARLEMAGNE PRIZE FORUM ON EUROPE IN AACHEN "WITH NEW COURAGE"

1 OCTOBER 2021, 2PM

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be with you here today in Aachen, home to one of the great Europeans – Charlemagne.

This prize celebrates what unites us as Europeans, and comes shortly before Germany's national day, a day that commemorates Germany's reunification and symbolises Europe's integration.

I am sure that I speak for many when I say that restricting the freedom of movement and closing borders was necessary to protect people, but a decision made with a heavy heart.

Today, we look back at the hardships overcome, while discussing challenges and sharing our hopes for a common European future.

As the directly elected Governor of the Central Macedonia region in Greece representing 2 million people, I saw first-hand the incredible work of our health, emergency, and social services during the pandemic.

It was thanks to this sense of responsibility, together with targeted local financing, that we kept our public services and regional economy running.

And today, our focus is to relaunch our local economy and boost local jobs. This is what our people and businesses expect from all their leaders.

Investment in a greener innovative economy will fuel my region's recovery, which in turn will fuel both Greece and Europe's recovery.

We must be proud that in the midst of the crisis, our Union came together to approve an unprecedented €750 billion recovery plan.

In Greece, a €30.5 billion recovery and resilience plan has been adopted. Only a few days ago, Romania's €29.2 billion recovery and resilience plan was also approved.

We congratulate President Ioannidis for his commitment and encourage his government to work closely with the regional and local governments for its implementation.

Let me be clear: if we want to recover quickly and move on from this crisis, every region and city must be a real partner in designing this unprecedented level of investment.



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This is how we will meet the real needs of their economies, and their people.

This is how we can meet today's fundamental challenges: climate emergency, the digital transformation, resilience, inequality and global competitiveness.

To totally ignore the territorial dimension of these problems and solutions, as the European Commission's State of the Union recently speech did, Europe will not deliver for its people.

It will further lose their trust and we all fail.

It is therefore worrying that from a recent consultation of 25 EU national local government associations very few had been consulted by Member States in preparing their National Recovery and Resilience Plans.

To economically develop our villages, cities and regions, we must remember that it must be done in a balanced bottom-up manner.

Any form of centralisation in the design and delivery of public investment will hold back our recovery.

Ladies and gentlemen,

for the European Union to renew itself, it must be done cohesively, across and within all its member states.

Cohesion is not about money. Cohesion is a fundamental objective and a value of our Union.

It is proven that every EU member state economically benefits from cohesive investment.

We must invest locally together, to recover together, and grow together.

By investing locally in our economy and people, Europe will become stronger through the trust and determination, of our citizens living in their home regions, cities and villages.

Thank you for listening.