



**European Committee
of the Regions**

check against delivery

Speech on **the State of Regions and Cities in the European Union**

Address by **Vasco Alves Cordeiro**, President of the European Committee of the Regions

#SOTEULocal

2022



**Speech on the State of Regions and Cities in the European Union
by President Vasco Alves Cordeiro**

“Regions and Cities as beacons of Solidarity, Progress and Hope”

*151st Plenary Session of the European Committee of the Regions
Tuesday 11th October 2022*

Dear colleagues,

I come to you at this moment and at this place to address the state of regions and cities of our Union.

I think I could do it with a fancy speech, nice words and good sounding phrases.

But, right here and right now, I want to start by bringing out the voice of the ones who make our cities, our regions, our communities:

The voice of the worker, of the farmer, of the entrepreneur, of the businessman... The voice of the citizens.

So, let me be the voice of that young person who is eager to live independently, but who is lost in a relentless fight to find decent housing;

Let me be the voice of that parent who struggles to find decent and affordable day-care for their child.

Let me be the voice of that worker who doesn't know if there will be a decent job, once the factory closes.

Let us be the voice of the small business owner, who had to shut down their store and fire their staff because the costs have increased by ten times.

Let us be the voice of the one among the millions who fled a European country, Ukraine, leaving everything behind, their lives ravaged by a brutal and illegal war, and questioning themselves “what happens now?”

Let us be the voice of that tourist and camper who ran away from wildfires.

Let us be the voice of the ones who doubt if their grandchildren will be able to grow old in a liveable and breathable environment.

Let us, here and once more, be the voice of citizens who don't know if they are being heard...

The state of regions and cities can only be the state of people's lives across Europe, in all their diversities, the same way the state of the European Union cannot be fully and completely assessed if we forget the state of its regions and cities.

We, the local and regional democratic representatives, know - because we face them on a daily basis - that the doubts and fears of millions of Europeans exist, are legitimate and require answers.

All of us, bound by our political duty, bound by our democratic responsibility, we don't run away from providing answers.

And indeed, we have been providing answers. With solidarity.

Aqui, hoje, podemos inspirar-nos em muitas histórias que nos deixam orgulhosos. Isso deve deixar a nossa União orgulhosa.

Orgulho na cidade de Varsóvia, na Polónia, que mobilizou 14.000 voluntários para acolher mais refugiados ucranianos do que a Itália e a França juntas, fornecendo-lhes habitação, assistência médica, educação e assistência jurídica.

Orgulho em Antuérpia, por ser pioneira na abordagem das consequências para a saúde mental da pandemia de COVID-19 entre os mais vulneráveis, especialmente os jovens.

Orgulho em Lappeenranta, na Finlândia, onde sete pântanos artificiais de águas pluviais foram construídos para proteger a nossa biodiversidade.

Orgulho na região da Morávia-Silésia, na República Checa, que está a liderar a transição para uma economia neutra em relação ao clima, requalificando 5.000 pessoas, agora mudando para carros elétricos e de emissão zero.

Orgulho em La Rioja, em Espanha, que nos inspira a ancorar a igualdade de género na forma como administram o seu governo: do orçamento à administração, criando planos para apoiar o equilíbrio entre vida profissional e pessoal e impulsionando as empresas para melhorar o acesso das mulheres ao emprego.

Orgulho em Poitiers na França, onde – no espírito do diálogo permanente por nós solicitado – foi estabelecida uma assembleia de cidadãos juntando inquilinos de habitação social, voluntários, empresas locais ou atores da sociedade civil para moldar a sua comunidade.

E poderíamos continuar com tantos outros exemplos, tantas outras histórias sobre regiões e cidades em toda a nossa União que demonstram, todos os dias, o caminho a seguir, respondendo às dúvidas e receios que as pessoas enfrentam e oferecendo oportunidades e soluções.

Estas histórias de toda a Europa, que partilho convosco, são um testemunho poderoso de regiões e cidades como “faróis” de solidariedade, progresso e esperança. Regiões e cidades como faróis dos valores e princípios europeus.

Quero, por isso, hoje e agora, prestar homenagem ao trabalho essencial que presidentes de câmara, vereadores, governadores e ministros regionais, juntamente com todas as administrações públicas fazem na nossa União todos os dias, em todos os lugares.

Vous faites l'Europe du quotidien.

Isso não pode ser esquecido por ninguém.

Isso deve ser reconhecido por todos.

Dear colleagues,

The state of regions and cities I bring you today does not happen in isolation, behind our borders or far from the challenges of the world.

It has been now more than seven months now that Vladimir Putin unleashed his brutal war machine against Ukraine, bringing death and destruction in a way that our continent had long forgotten. This attack, which is not only an attack on a sovereign country, is also an attack on our values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

It is an attack on what the European Union stands for.

It is an attack on each and every one of us.

Since day one, regions and cities across Europe have answered to the sirens of war with the face of solidarity.

We provided shelter, opened our schools, set up dorms, distributed first aid kits, sent vehicles.

While we were first responders, we immediately looked into the future. A bright future with a reconstructed Ukraine, at

peace and moving towards the European Union membership.

The European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, which we have launched along with our partner associations of local and regional authorities in the EU and in Ukraine, aims to contribute to the success of the reconstruction effort by fostering city-to-city and region-to-region cooperation. The Alliance has also the role to stress the importance of local and regional levels of governance in the reconstruction effort.

Especially today, especially after yesterday's terrible attacks on Ukrainian cities, it reminds us that the road to peace is still long and resolve must remain our compass. We stand for a sovereign Ukraine and its territorial integrity and unity. No sham referenda will alter this reality.

This is the message of solidarity and resolve I want to convey to the Ukrainian people and to Ukrainian regions and cities, on behalf of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union.

You are not alone and you have our full and you have our continuous support in this terrible endeavour.

This is also the message I would like to convey to President von der Leyen and to the European Commission. The task to rebuild Ukraine is of historical proportions. We praised the announcement of 100 million euros to rebuild Ukraine's schools as a commitment for the future. The local and

regional authorities have an important role to play there, we are willing help!

I would also like to take this opportunity to present a concrete proposal in view of the Berlin Reconstruction Conference: a specific budget line available for regional and local cooperation in reconstruction efforts.

We answered the call and stand ready to do more.

Give us the tools and we will help to get the job done!

Chers collègues,

Les conséquences sociales et économiques de cette terrible guerre sont aussi profondément ressenties parmi nous.

La crise énergétique que nous vivons frappe les ménages, en particulier les plus fragiles, les entreprises et les administrations publiques.

À l'approche de l'hiver, nous devons faire face à l'urgence et, une fois de plus, les régions et les villes sont les premières à devoir amortir le poids qui pèse sur les épaules des gens.

Nous entendons des signaux inquiétants à travers l'Europe, avec nos villes qui risquent de manquer d'électricité et qui luttent pour fournir des services essentiels à leurs citoyens, comme les transports publics, la gestion des déchets ou simplement pour garder leurs enfants au chaud à l'école

afin qu'ils ne soient pas renvoyés chez eux pour apprendre à distance.

Réduire la température ambiante dans les bâtiments publics, éteindre l'éclairage nocturne des monuments, réduire les limitations de vitesse sur les routes municipales, investir dans les énergies renouvelables, sensibiliser la population. Les initiatives prises aux niveaux régional et local sont nombreuses et diverses.

Mais ce n'est pas facile, et la solidarité est à nouveau en jeu en Europe. C'est pourquoi les autorités locales et régionales doivent être soutenues dans leurs efforts d'économies d'énergie et nous y contribuerons.

A Union in which people have to choose between eating and heating is not a Union that can stand.

Dear colleagues,

The dire situation we face today in the field of energy is part of a larger equation, a larger transformation of our societies.

The speed at which now we are reducing our dependency from fossil fuels should not, I repeat, should not only be because it comes from Russia.

This is what we should have been doing already for decades to shift towards a climate-neutral economy. The terrible fires of this summer are another stark reminder of the

climate emergency we live in today. This is a question of survival.

Tomorrow, we will debate our vision ahead of the COP27. As the global goal for adaptation is on the table, let's ensure that it finds its roots on what is done at local level. Overcoming global challenges such as the climate crisis will be faster, easier and more efficient if done with us and with citizens.

As an institution, we also have a duty to act. This is why we are already moving to put the Committee of the Regions on track to become a climate-neutral institution, with the objective of cutting our yearly carbon dioxide emissions by thirty percent by the end of 2030. We will also implement immediate actions as an institution to reduce our energy consumption.

This should not remain within the walls of our administration only and therefore, starting at our next external Bureau in Sweden next spring, I suggest having political reporting of our climate action. I count on every one of you to take part to this effort and again to lead by example.

Dear colleagues,

With the existential threat of the climate crisis and the consequences of the brutal war against Ukraine, let us not forget that we spent almost the last three years dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. We now live with it, with its human, social and economic cost.

All these challenges narrow down to the need to make our Union fit for purpose, making the lives of our people better every day in a healthy environment and with respect to our fundamental values. And this starts with proper investment.

For decades, cohesion policy contributed to the reduction of the territorial divide. I am proud to count on a strong partnership with Commissioner Elisa Ferreira, our closest ally.

The crises we face, from the pandemic management and its recovery to welcoming displaced people from Ukraine and the energy crunch, have heavily mobilised cohesion policy.

This is why it is now time to start the debate on the future of cohesion policy. Tomorrow, we will launch a new Cohesion Alliance, together with the main associations of regions and cities in order to be the main arena for discussion, to mobilise allies but also those who are yet to be convinced of the added value of cohesion policy.

"Do no harm to cohesion" should not be a dead letter and the work starts now.

It must help us ensuring a strong territorial dimension across all EU policies with high territorial impact beyond cohesion policy itself.

This why the Committee of the Regions will work on ensuring that all EU policies integrate the 'do no harm to cohesion'

principle introduced by Commissioner Elisa Ferreira earlier this year.

This is particularly timely also in view of the review of the Multiannual Financial Framework announced by the European Commission for next year. This budget was prepared in a different context and it needs to be repurposed to ensure Europe's strategic autonomy, to prepare for the reconstruction of Ukraine and to prepare ourselves for any new health threats. We therefore need to adapt it and make an ambitious budget that will deliver to all citizens. However, the review should not be used to affect fundamental policies such as cohesion policy.

Future EU investment policies and instruments should learn from the experience of Next Generation EU, which poorly engaged with regional and local authorities both in drafting and implementing it. Again and again and again, I repeat, only by involving regions and cities will EU policies and programmes achieve their best results and strengthen our communities.

Ensuring sustainable investments and engaging reforms that will make our Union fairer and more effective go hand-in-hand with the social contract that unite us. I have mentioned it already, the social distress is high today in Europe and as we are now devising the policies of tomorrow, let's not forget the initial mission of European integration: ensuring social progress.

As a Union, in our regions, in our cities, we shall ensure access to housing, lift children out of poverty, promote gender equality, provide quality jobs, educate our youth, develop our hospitals. As 2023 will be the European Year of Skills, let's use all our local and regional talents to build this social Europe that leaves no one behind.

Colegas,

Antes de ouvir as vossas opiniões sobre o estado das regiões e cidades da União Europeia, gostaria de vos dizer porque acho que estamos todos envolvidos nesta missão. Estamos todos envolvidos e comprometidos com as mudanças porque temos não apenas um mandato democrático, temos um dever democrático.

Há trinta anos, com a assinatura do Tratado de Maastricht, foi acrescentada uma nova dimensão à democracia europeia, aquela que hoje representamos: a dimensão local e regional, guardiã do princípio da subsidiariedade, pilar de uma União democrática.

Trinta anos depois, no momento em que a Conferência sobre o Futuro da Europa chegou às suas conclusões, há ainda mais exigências de um envolvimento regional e local mais forte em todas as políticas da UE e por novos canais de participação e diálogo.

Nós, no Comité das Regiões, já o tínhamos entendido, apelando a um diálogo permanente com os cidadãos. A democracia não é estática e está preparada para

expandir constantemente a sua base e aumentar as vias de participação, num equilíbrio subtil entre práticas representativas e deliberativas.

É por isso que temos sido pioneiros no envolvimento com os jovens. Não porque este ano seja dedicado aos jovens, mas simplesmente porque é isso que nós defendemos. Penso que estamos todos orgulhosos por lançarmos, na nossa próxima sessão plenária, a Carta da União Europeia sobre a Juventude e a Democracia, concebida em conjunto com os jovens e com as organizações juvenis.

É também por isso que o Comité das Regiões está disposto a associar-se aos Estados-Membros na organização de iniciativas para aumentar a participação das mulheres nas eleições locais e regionais.

Tal como desempenhamos um papel ativo na formulação das conclusões da Conferência sobre o Futuro da Europa, desempenharemos o nosso legítimo papel de implementar as suas conclusões ao nosso nível e também de fazer o nosso próprio trabalho interno, no quadro dos atuais Tratados. Evidentemente, caso seja lançada uma Convenção – ideia que esta assembleia apoia – estaremos prontos para contribuir e garantir a participação das vozes locais e regionais neste exercício constitucional.

Enquanto isso, não vamos ficar parados. Enquanto assembleia de representantes locais e regionais eleitos, temos o dever de assegurar que as vozes locais e regionais

contribuam atempadamente para o debate a nível europeu.

A Conferência pode ter acabado, mas o trabalho continua. Temos de começar a preparar as próximas eleições europeias e a próxima legislatura. Devemos lançar uma série de iniciativas para nos prepararmos e moldarmos uma visão para a próxima Agenda Estratégica e as próximas orientações políticas da futura Comissão Europeia, que serão apresentadas antes das próximas eleições europeias.

Dear colleagues,

The list of tasks is long. The expectations are high.

100 days ago, you have elected me as your President and I committed to work with all of you for a stronger and fairer Europe, to defend cohesion policy and to raise the political profile of our assembly.

We have a duty to deliver to help erase the doubts in the eyes and the fears in the voices of people in our cities and regions.

Let us deliver more solidarity, more cohesion, more democracy and the state of regions and cities in the European Union, and because of that, the state of the Union itself can only be stronger and brighter.

Thank you.



European Committee of the Regions

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is the EU's political assembly of 329 regional and local representatives from all 27 Member States. Our members are elected presidents of regions, regional councillors, mayors and local councillors - democratically accountable to more than 446 million European citizens. The CoR's main objectives are to involve regional and local authorities and the communities they represent in the EU's decision-making process and to inform them about EU policies. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council have to consult the Committee in policy areas affecting regions and cities. It can appeal to the Court of Justice of the European Union as a means of upholding EU law where there are breaches to the subsidiarity principle or failures to respect regional or local authorities.

Edited by the Directorate for Communication of the European Committee of the Regions

Brussels, October 2022
© European Union, 2022



Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 101 | 1040 Bruxelles/Brussel | BELGIQUE/BELGIË
Tel. +32 22822211 | e-mail: visuals@cor.europa.eu | www.cor.europa.eu

[@EU_CoR](https://twitter.com/EU_CoR) | [/european.committee.of.the.regions](https://www.facebook.com/european.committee.of.the.regions) | [/european-committee-of-the-regions](https://www.linkedin.com/company/european-committee-of-the-regions) | [@EU_regions_cities](https://www.instagram.com/EU_regions_cities)