



European Committee
of the Regions



Europe for everyone, by everyone

An agenda for change for the European
Committee of the Regions

Address to the Plenary Session of the European Committee of the
Regions by President **Vasco Alves Cordeiro**

20 November 2024

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by Vasco Alves Cordeiro

President of the European Committee of the Regions

Madam President of the European Parliament, Dear Roberta,

First Vice-President, Dear Apostolos,

Former Presidents of the European Committee of the Regions, President Blanc, President Bore, President Bresso, President Markkula, and President Lambertz,

Representatives of other European Institutions,

Dear members,

Dear Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start first by thanking the President of the European Parliament, dear Roberta Metsola, for being with us today, signalling once more that she is a constant ally of the European Committee of the Regions.

It is truly an honour for me, as President of the European Committee of the Regions, to welcome you all to this session that celebrates, not only the 30th anniversary of a European institution, but mainly celebrates democracy, celebrates the key political fabric that constitutes this European Union of ours, celebrates our regions and cities as the beating heart of Europe.

This is also the moment to pay tribute to the work of the many local and regional representatives, which this house has the honour to stand for.

This is why I would like to acknowledge and praise the presence here today of the former presidents of this institution, who, by accepting our invitation, honour us all, and allows me, on behalf of all the members of this House, to thank them all of those,

members and staff, who, during these 30 years, contributed to the work and consolidation of the European Committee of the Regions.

The vision of the late President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, was instrumental on setting up this Committee as the missing piece of the institutional architecture of what is now the European Union.

With its creation by the Treaty of Maastricht, there was now a forum for local and regional authorities not only to meet, exchange and debate but to contribute to policy and legislation making via formal opinions.

The mission was clear then and is still ambitious now: a political assembly for all regions and cities that strengthens the democratic legitimacy of the European project, rooting it on the ground, standing for the wide diversity of territories that composes our Union.

From the Azores in the middle of the Atlantic to Tulcea county in the Danube Delta.

From Kiruna, beyond the Arctic circle, to the shores of Valleta, in the the Mediterranean.

It was, and it is still today, essential to recognise this diversity that makes Europe.



The Treaty of Maastricht also institutionalised the principle of subsidiarity, meaning that decisions must be taken at the level closest to the citizens.

And this idea, so clear, so simple – one may say so obvious! -, is not something that we can take for granted.

Today, new dangers arise for this key pillar, for this fundamental principle of the functioning of the European Union, either in the form of a centralisation in Brussels or a renationalisation of the management of policies, instruments, and resources.

If nobody else, the regions and cities of Europe, and, with them, the European Committee of the Regions, must be vigilant, proactive, and ready.

Ready, if necessary, to use the powers that the treaties granted this institution, including the right to go before the Court of Justice of the European Union in case the subsidiarity principle is undermined.

Caring for and defending the subsidiarity principle is too important and too valuable to be left only to the European Union or to national governments...



Madam President,

Colleagues and Guests,

For 30 years, the European Committee of the Regions has contributed to the success of cohesion policy and to the strengthening of its golden principles.

Cohesion policy has meant progress for all regions and cities in the European Union, and it has meant recognition and consolidation of the European project in our citizens minds and hearts.

By the end of the current programming period, cohesion policy will have created around 1.5 million jobs and supported 500.000 SME's, and will have ensured access to healthcare of 60 million Europeans.

Only in the past five years it has already improved the energy performance of almost 400.000 households.

But let us not forget, and let us not allow anyone to forget, that cohesion policy is not only about regions and cities. Cohesion policy is not only about financing, programmes, and rules.

Cohesion policy is, above all, about Europe.

It is about the dream and the ambition of having a European Union that leaves no person and no place behind.

Cohesion policy is about a Union that, more than being built in the Berlaymont, the Justus Lipsius, or in this building, is built in the hearts and minds of the European citizens, because through cohesion policy, they see Europe happening in their lives, in their villages and cities, in their regions.

This is why cohesion policy is so important and so vital: it makes Europe happen everywhere. And it is the single European policy that is able to do that.



Throughout the past 30 years, the European Committee of the Regions has been at the forefront of tackling the challenges that Europe faces.

When we opened our horizons, welcoming new regions, and cities from new Member states.

When we stood for a social Europe, for gender equality and for meaningful youth participation.

When we brought the voices of rural and outermost regions to the table.

When we ensured that the common agricultural policy is being developed with the farmlands at its core.

When we stood in solidarity with people seeking in Europe a new start and better conditions in their lives and for their families.

When we were in the vanguard of fighting the climate crisis and putting the local dimension front and centre when it comes to the implementation of the European Green Deal.

When we were on the front line to address the consequences of the pandemic.

When we were preparing for the future of Europe, also bringing new and younger voices to our debates.

Standing with people where they live, being the voice of regions and cities.

This is still what the European Committee of the Regions still stands for today.

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Madam President,

Dear colleagues,

Building Europe with solidarity does not only mean looking internally. It also means offering a hand to those in need.

This is why, from day one, we stood in solidarity with the people of Ukraine in the face of the Russian aggression.

Bringing together more than 55 regions and cities, the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine has been working tirelessly to provide support to our partners in Ukraine, and to put it on the path towards EU membership, alongside all candidate countries.

I am proud that communities across Europe welcomed more than 3.000 children to give them a bit of peace and friendship during the summer times.

Yesterday, marked 1000 days since the start of the invasion.

For 1000 days more, and longer if necessary, we will continue to support Ukraine.

We will not give up on the captured mayors and local officials that remain hostage in the hands of the Russian invader and, once again, we call for their immediate release!

Dear colleagues,

Dear friends,

The arduous work of the past decades has laid the ground for more.

Our Union must now cope for a new, difficult, and complex geopolitical reality across the world.

War drums are sounding louder and louder in Europe and beyond.

Our Union must step up, take the necessary measures to address the climate crisis, fight against inequalities, foster progress and ensure peaceful societies.

Let us always remember that the state of Europe is the state of its regions and cities. The European Union cannot exist without them. It cannot exist if it is lead top down from Brussels and if it forgets that it is made up of the many distinct parts that are its diverse territories.

The European Union cannot be us, the institutions, versus them but it can only be us, Europe!

There is a growing sense of need and urgency to reform and improve the way the EU works.

This cannot happen without strengthening the role of the European Committee of the Regions in the institutional architecture of the EU, giving regions and cities not only the voice that they deserve but recognising, that regions and cities have the power to deliver.

We have done that for thirty years.

We will keep doing so.

We will keep fighting for a stronger and fairer Europe, a Europe made for everyone, made by everyone.

Thank you.

Vasco Alves Cordeiro



European Committee of the Regions

Created in 1994, the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's political assembly of 329 regional and local representatives such as regional presidents or city-mayors from all 27 Member States, representing over 446 million Europeans.

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