



European Committee  
of the Regions

# 2025 2030 NEW MANDATE

## SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT

## Opening statement in the Plenary Session by Kata TÜTTŐ, President of the European Committee of the Regions.

Dear colleagues, dear guests, dear friends,

It is not so easy to talk here. It is very different from talking at home. Because when you prepare your speech for the European Committee of the Regions, you get kind advice. Like "Kata, you will be President, you can speak freely, but we advise you that you write it down, and give it to translation. Because otherwise, maybe some bits of your thoughts will be lost in translation".

So it's here, written down, because I want you to understand me. But remember this one thing: if you ever see me, without my papers, talking in my Hungarian native language, in my mother's tongue, with my grandfather's local accent, it means I don't want you to understand me. I just need to tell something to my friend Jácint, Mayor of Nagykanizsa. The other kind advice I received, because they know me, is "Kata, you can do whatever you want, but please don't tell jokes, okay? No jokes." I get it. But that's really hard for me, because humour is, for me, one of the most profoundly human things. It helps us navigate complexity, it brings understanding. Laughing together is like drinking together, it's like eating together. It builds social cohesion, and it also lowers tension.

Lowering tension, social cohesion, understanding, humanity: these are things that we are very much in need of these days. The year 2025 marks the birth of a new generation, it is called the Beta Generation. By definition, the Beta Generation – everybody born this year – will grow up in a world that is shaped by artificial intelligence, virtual reality, automation. The lines between real and unreal, human-made, machine-made, human and machine, it is getting very, very blurry.

So, we talk a lot about challenges, but I think one of our biggest challenges will be in the upcoming decade: to hold on to our humanity, to fight for our humanity. There is an ongoing transformation, we all know that, we see that, the change is constant.

What is new? It is the speed, that's new. Because the transformation is happening so fast that we can almost feel the ground moving beneath our feet; and when the ground moves under your feet, that is very scary. You want to hold on to something stable, something strong. People want to slow down time, even reverse time, to go back to a place which they understand. And I understand this need. I do. But going back in time, that is an illusion. And the longer we linger in that illusion, the higher the price we will pay for that. Because maybe, the past seems like a very safe harbor, but time only flows in one direction. So, okay, but how do we perceive the world today? Things are falling apart; it is very similar to looking into a kaleidoscope. I think all of us had a kaleidoscope. You look into the kaleidoscope, you turn it, and you see stability breaking. It is constantly shifting, fragmented, it is very unpredictable. But if you look into the kaleidoscope, you also know that change is not just destruction, it is also creation. Because from disorder, new forms take place, and from broken pieces, new patterns emerge.

What is the question for us? How do we shape this transformation? And how do we limit the suffering that comes with every transformation? What is the story of the European Committee of the Regions here? To find our story, I had to go back to our common cultural past, into Greek mythology.

In Greek mythology, I found our story. It is the story of Antaeus the Giant. He was invincible, he could not be beaten in battle. He was very strong as long as he stayed connected to Earth, who was his mother Gaia, because he drew his strength from his mother Gaia. He could not be beaten, until one day, the mythological hero, we all know, Hercules came. He understood this connection.

So, what did he do? He lifted Antaeus from the ground. He lost his connection to Earth, weakened, and this way it could be defeated. This is our story.

Our strength, the strength of Europe, is being grounded in our local realities. And when Europe loses this connection with the ground, when policies feel too complex, too abstract, when people feel disconnected from all the major shifts and decisions, we weaken and we risk being defeated. Here, we, the European Committee of the Regions, are the body that connects complex European policies to the ground.

We are very important vertical stabilisers here. How do we do that? We make all the complex policies real, but it's not just a one-way direction. We also bring our common sense and the big innovation capacity to the European decision-making. And I know not everything can be understood from the ground, we all know that. Sometimes you need distance to understand problems, to see the patterns, to grab the bigger picture. But we also know that there are some problems and there is pain that can only be understood when you are close to the ground. And many problems can only be fixed by those who are on the ground.

Here, in the European Committee of the Regions, we are problem solvers. This is what we do at home. And from time to time, we come to Brussels, to see if our problems that we are dealing with at home are local problems or systemic problems. We connect to each other, we exchange our experiences, we support each other. And with this energy, with this network, we strengthen the very fabric of the European Union. We are very important horizontal stabilisers in the time of growing uncertainty.

What else do we do as leaders? We balance. How do we balance? It's like balancing on the edge of a cliff on one foot. Because we have to balance between emotional connections with our citizens and rational, complex policymaking. We balance short-term goals, putting out fires, and balance long-term goals. Centralisation, decentralisation, regulation, deregulation, flexibility, stability, fight or flight by choosing our battles. I have been balancing on cliffs for a while. I don't make many promises, but one promise I will make: I will never dismiss real-life experience, real-life suffering of people or any territory. Because as a woman over forty, I experienced firsthand how women's pain and health concerns are gaslighted, dismissed, overlooked, not just in medical research, but in healthcare policies and practice. This systemic neglect led to the unnecessary suffering of millions of women in Europe. I'm not talking about the past, it's about today. So, you will understand that as a President, I will also have to do something for women.

I talked about our role as stabilisers. What tools do we have? There is one very important tool that was designed for stabilising, it was designed for it, it's called Cohesion Policy. That's the most important stabilising tool of the European Union. It is a powerful tool, but it must be calibrated and recalibrated all the time.

It cannot be over-centralised, it cannot be over-regulated, because when it's over-centralised, it becomes rigid. And when it becomes rigid, it is not useful in this running of adaptation. Hence, Cohesion Policy must be flexible, must be decentralised, and must be innovative.

But does Cohesion Policy work? We get this question. We can prove it. You have been presented, I have been presented with all the facts and figures and graphs. Why don't our citizens feel it? That's a very good question. And with this question, we will go from Greek mythology to Alice in Wonderland, the second book, Alice Through the Looking Glass. In that story, Alice entered the looking glass, went to a different world, and there she met the Red Queen. And the Red Queen told her, "Here you have to run as fast as you can just to stay in one place". That is what people feel today. Constantly running, constantly adapting to change, and they are very exhausted by the speed of transformation. And you cannot ignore those who are tired, but at the same time, we know we cannot stop running.

So the EU must adapt, has to run, but we have to make sure that no one runs alone. The mayor of Budapest who is here today, he usually says that if you want to go fast, you go alone. But if you want to go far, you go together. This family, we go together.

We see the clash of centralised machines, this is what we see outside. But the European Union is not a centralised machine, we are not, it's a network. And just as the Internet depends on highly connected nodes, the EU depends on well-connected leaders on all levels. National level, regional level, local level. And when we put energy into these networks, into these connections, we reinforce the very fabric of the European Union. Because the future of the European Union will not be decided in Brussels alone. It will be shaped city by city, region by region, leader by leader.

I know, I heard you yesterday, that there is a little bit of gloom in the air. Uncertainty about the future grows, with it, anxiety emerges. Pessimism crawls in like cold November mist. But what do I think about it? Not just now, in the past decade, in Budapest I have been relying on the thoughts of Hungarian-born scientist Ede Teller, who understood entropy, that naturally all complex systems go from order to disorder, if there is not enough energy invested in it to keep it order.

Okay, what was he saying about this? He said, who is a pessimist? A pessimist is a person who is always right, but he's not happy. He has no joy in being right. So who is an optimist? An optimist is a person who thinks that the future is uncertain. So she does everything in her power to change the future for the better. That is our duty, that is our path, to be the optimists of Europe, to be the glue that strengthens the fabric of the European Union by investing energy in city-to-city, region-to-region cooperation, staying in touch with the ground, bringing common sense into decision-making, building on the trust we hold, and this way we shape our common European future for the better.

Thank you very much. Thank you for your trust.

Y ahora, invito a mi compañero en este camino, el Presidente de Andalucía, Juan Manuel Moreno Bonilla. Juntos formamos un equipo para estos cinco años que está basado en comunicación sincera, en confianza, en cooperación y nuestra pasión por Europa.



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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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