

One year of our mandate and of the pandemic: message by Apostolos Tzitzikostas, President of the European Committee of the Regions and Governor of the region of Central Macedonia to the Members



☐☐☐ Dear Members of the European Committee of the Regions, dear colleagues, dear friends,

The first year of our mandate has coincided with one of the most difficult periods the European Union has faced in recent years. Over the last twelve months, the COVID-19 pandemic swept across Europe.

It has forced us to restrict the lives of our people and introduce other urgent unprecedented measures. This dreadful virus has tragically taken almost 600,000 lives in the European Union and 2.5 million across the world. It has destroyed millions of European livelihoods.

Throughout these difficult times, our Committee never stopped working. We managed to play a key role in voicing the needs of the EU's 1 million regional and local elected politicians. Together, we have strived to keep the promise we made at the beginning of our mandate: to ensure the EU best serves our people living in our regions, cities and villages.

When the pandemic first hit, we put together an Action Plan and launched our [COVID-19 exchange platform](#).

We set our political compass based on three political priorities for 2020-25.

We launched our first ever regional and local Barometer and discussed it with Chancellor Angela Merkel and the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen.

We opened a new era of concrete cooperation with the European Commission on the [Green Deal](#), [Migration](#), as well as [Research and innovation](#).

We welcomed the Mayor of London for the first time to discuss Brexit.

We joined forces with the World Health Organisation and with the OECD.

We launched a [High Level Group on European democracy, chaired by Herman Van Rompuy](#), to prepare our contribution to the upcoming Conference on the future of Europe.

We held our first ever hybrid and online plenary sessions and managed to swiftly introduce and use new technologies to continue our work.

We continue to place cohesion as a fundamental value at the centre of the European project.

None of this would have been possible without the energy, commitment and strong will of each and every one of you.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for what you have done for our Committee, our communities and for Europe.

I want to thank every political family and national delegation for their constructive approach.

I am also grateful to our highly committed staff for their great work during this difficult year.

As the crisis has clearly shown, our Union's foundations lie in our local communities and individuals, supported by public investment and served by local and regional governments.

As local leaders, our responsibilities are great – from running health services and schools to providing social services – even when our resources are limited.

We have found new ways to encourage research, support businesses, adapt the local economy, and work with civil society. We have been fighting side by side with doctors and nurses.

The months ahead will continue to be difficult for all of us, but there is light at the end of the tunnel if we work in solidarity and strive for a smooth and comprehensive vaccination campaign.

Europe must emerge from this crisis more resilient and formally recognise the central importance of local and regional administrations. We are a cornerstone for the health, prosperity, resilience and vibrancy of our local communities.

To restart Europe together we must strengthen its foundations: EU regions, cities and villages. Trust will pull us through this crisis, and for our citizens we are the most trusted level of government and the ones that best understands their needs. Decisions must be taken as close as possible to the people, and we – regionally and locally elected leaders of Europe – can make this happen.

We must ensure that EU funds are used effectively to help the recovery of our local communities. We must invest time, resources and our political capital into forging policies that manage the fundamental societal transformations that we face. COVID-19 is one of those transforming forces. So too are the climate crisis, the digitalisation of our economies and demographic evolution.

We must improve our communities' ability to recover from shock and adapt to change and make them more resilient. We must enhance the democratic functioning of our political institutions – locally, nationally and at the European level – to build together our common House of European Democracy and make sure our European project emerges strengthened from this crisis.

Our common home – the European Committee of the Regions – will continue to be at the forefront of this fight, and I am sure I can count on your support, commitment and enthusiasm. We will continue to work shoulder to shoulder as that is how we will overcome the challenges today, and tomorrow. Together we must continue our work to reunite, rebuild and restart Europe. This is how we will bring Europe closer to people.

Together, united. ☐☐

Apostolos Tzitzikostas, ☐

President ☐ of the European Committee of the Regions

and Governor of the region of Central Macedonia

[President Michel mandates Christian Danielsson to engage as personal envoy, in EU-mediated political dialogue in Georgia](#)



Christian Danielsson

Christian Danielsson has been mandated by President Michel, in cooperation with High Representative Borrell, to engage in the EU-backed mediation effort in Georgia, in follow up to the relaunch of the political dialogue during President Michel's visit to Tbilisi on 1 March.

Mr. Danielsson will mediate the relaunched dialogue among Georgia's political parties, working closely with the Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, Carl Hartzell, with the aim to overcome the current political tensions in Georgia.

Mr. Danielsson will be travelling to Georgia in the coming days to engage with all stakeholders to the process.

President Michel and the High Representative Borrell encourage all political actors in Georgia to commit fully to the dialogue in a constructive spirit and with a view to pursuing mutually agreeable outcomes, in the interest of a stable, democratic and reform-oriented Georgia, able to successfully advance

on its pro-European path.

Background

Christian Danielsson was formerly Permanent Representative for Sweden before he became Deputy Secretary-General of the European Commission in 2011. In 2013 he became Director-General for Enlargement and in 2015 he was appointed Director-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. He is currently the Head of the European Commission's Representation in Sweden.

[Press release – International Women's Day celebrated in plenary](#)



Just before the opening of the session on Monday, Parliament marked 2021 International Women's Day, focussing on women's empowerment and leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In his opening speech, **EP President David Sassoli** stated: "The pandemic risks wiping out decades of achievements gained by European women's struggle for the right to work, to share care work, for autonomy, for respect and for the right to make their own choices." Regarding the gender pay gap, he added, "Women in Europe earn on average 14.1% less than men. This is not

acceptable. The Commission's proposal for binding pay transparency measures will be central to our work.'" President Sassoli concluded by calling for all member states to ratify the Istanbul Convention, and for the EU to make violence against women a European-wide crime.

In a pre-recorded video message, the **Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern**, stressed that COVID-19 has exacerbated structural inequalities between women and men. "Only by fully – and meaningfully – including women in leadership at all levels can we ensure that our responses to the pandemic meet the needs of everyone'", she said. "As we look towards the year ahead, we all know it will be tough. We, as leaders, will be tested, but we must resist the false promises in the face of those tests of protectionism and nationalism in our recovery from COVID-19. We must also do more to support women-led business to be part of the recovery, so they can more readily experience the benefits of trade."

In her pre-recorded video message, the first female **Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris**, focussed on the many challenges facing women during the crisis. "We must ensure women's safety at home and in every community. We must treat them with dignity at work and put in place the structures needed so that they can both care for their families and excel in the workforce. Finally, we must give women an equal voice in decision-making, for this is essential to free and fair democracies. This not just an act of goodwill; this is a show of strength. If we build a world that works for women, our nations will all be safer, stronger and more prosperous."

Kamala Harris also commented on the future of EU-US relations: "President Biden and I look forward to working with members of this Parliament in fortifying the transatlantic alliance." Considering the many crises the world is facing, she added: "It is essential that we work together to advance those principles that strengthen democracies: accountability and transparency, the rule of law and humans rights. Let us not overlook the opportunities right in front of us to do that."

The celebration ended with a speech by **Commission President Ursula von der Leyen**, in the chamber. "Too many women in Europe lack the fundamental opportunity to work and earn a living. Today, the employment rate for women is 67%, while that of men is 78%. This is simply not acceptable. Last week, we set a new target for Europe: we must cut the gender employment gap by half, and by the end of this decade, 78% of all Europeans must have a job. It will not be easy but we will do everything in our power to reach this goal", she said. "The Commission required that all member states put women at the centre of their post-COVID-19 recovery plans. It will only be a true recovery if these plans are for all", she concluded.

To watch the individual statements, click on the links below:

[David Sassoli](#), President of the European Parliament

[Jacinda Ardern](#), Prime Minister of New Zealand

[Kamala Harris](#), Vice President of the United States

Press release – Opening – March plenary session



On behalf of Parliament, President Sassoli offered his deepest condolences to the family and friends of those killed in an attack on a UN convoy in the Democratic Republic of Congo on 22 February.

Changes to the agenda

Monday

Pursuant to Rule 163 on urgent procedure, the following files are added for adoption:

- *Equivalence of forest reproductive material produced in the UK, and*
- *Equivalence of field inspections and equivalence of checks on practices for the maintenance of varieties of agricultural plant species carried out in the UK.*

These requests will be put to the vote on Monday.

Tuesday

The Commission statement on *Tackling the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by focusing on investment, competitiveness and skills* will be debated as the third item in the afternoon, after the report by Ms Guillaume on *Activities of the European Ombudsman*.

Requests by committees to start negotiations with Council and Commission

Decisions by committees to enter into inter-institutional negotiations (Rule 71) are published [on the plenary website](#).

If no request for a vote in Parliament on the decision to enter into negotiations is made by Tuesday 12.00 midnight, the committees may start negotiations.

Information on the extraordinary remote participation procedure is available [here](#).

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Learn more about the EUIPO's Alternative Dispute Resolution service



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Additional information on the [EDR SME COVID-19 special service](#) is given to those SMEs that are willing to solve their IP dispute using a more cost-effective alternative. One aim of opting for this service is to avoid complex litigation proceedings.