

Building political alliances to reconnect citizens with the EU

As the two EU political institutions with a direct link to citizens, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Parliament today joined forces to restore citizens' trust ahead of the European Parliament elections in 2019. They proposed joint measures to bring the European Union closer to citizens and deliver concrete answers to their concerns. From the side of the European Commission, the CoR was tasked to help bridge the gap between what people expect from the EU and what Europe is actually able to deliver on the ground.

Despite the recent victories of pro-EU candidates in France, the Netherlands and Austria, political leaders in Europe's regions and cities are still hearing calls from their citizens for Europe to change. Opening the CoR plenary session, alongside European Parliament President, **Antonio Tajani**, today, CoR President Markku Markkula stressed: " *As politicians elected in Europe's regions and cities, we have to use our leverage to show the concrete results and added value of the European project, while also addressing their real concerns. It is up to each one of us to bring the EU closer to them.* " This echoes the Declaration of Rome, in which Member States and EU leaders made a plea to better listening to citizens by working "together at the level that makes a real difference, be it the European Union, national, regional, or local, and in a spirit of trust and loyal cooperation, both among Member States and between them and the EU institutions, in line with the principle of subsidiarity."

President Tajani responded by highlighting that citizens have granted the EU an opportunity to change: " *As local representatives, you have a leading role in increasing the efficacy of EU funds in your regions and communicating Europe to our citizens at the local level. Last week's vote in France indicates that when properly explained, citizens can endorse the added-value of the single currency, and Europe as a whole* ", he stressed, before citing cohesion funds as the most visible part of the EU budget for citizens. " *We believe that our money should follow our political objectives and make a leap forward on the governance of EU funds while focussing on priorities to address citizens' concerns* .", he said.

CoR First Vice-President **Karl-Heinz Lambertz** added: " *Citizens rightly expect more from the European project. To restore trust, everyone working for and with the EU must fulfil the promise of more social and economic progress whilst standing up for European solidarity. This needs a far more flexible approach to local public investment to demonstrate that the EU does benefit the daily lives of every citizen* ".

This debate was further enriched with the participation of the European Commission Vice-President responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, **Jyrki Katainen**, who encouraged the CoR to take an active role in the debate on the [White Paper on the Future of Europe](#) . Addressing

the CoR members, Vice-President Katainen said: " I count on the European Committee of the Regions to continue participating to the reflection process on the Future of Europe, and make sure this debate will also reach the citizens. As representatives of regional and local authorities you play a crucial role in bridging the gap between what people expect of Europe and what Europe is actually able to deliver. I am looking forward to hearing the ideas and priorities Europe's regions and cities have for the future development of our Union. They will be an important part of our common answers ."

CoR members also took the occasion to welcome the European Commission's [reflection paper on "Harnessing globalisation"](#), which was published one day earlier and underlines that forging resilience is a shared responsibility at EU, national, regional and local level. " We want a more transparent and democratic EU, which defends the principles of subsidiarity, partnership and multilevel governance. In the face of increased globalisation, investment needs to address skills gaps and regulatory obstacles while being adapted to the territorial specificities ", President Markkula concluded.

This White Paper is intended to be a wake-up call: the starting point for an honest and wide-ranging debate in the Union's future beyond Brexit and will be the subject of a [Resolution](#), which is due to be adopted by the CoR tomorrow. Debates on the "Future of Europe", as well as the next Commission's reflection papers, will continue to be a priority for the CoR, including on the occasion of a conference on the "Future of Europe" as part of its [CIVEX](#) external meeting in Caen (France) on 21-22 September.

CoR's "Reflecting on Europe" campaign

As part of the ongoing reflection on the past, present and future of Europe, the CoR has launched a bottom up process called " [Reflecting on Europe](#) ", which aims to provide people with a local space to participate in an honest and open discussion about the way forward for the EU. This citizen-oriented process follows a request from the European Council's President, Donald Tusk, asking the CoR to send its recommendations on the ways to rebuild trust in the EU, through the voice of cities and regions. More recently, the European Commission 1 March White Paper calls for debates on the future of Europe in Parliaments, regions and cities. The CoR has also launched a [public online survey](#) that includes questions related to the future of EU policies. It will be used to collect and present citizens' feedback during local events and citizens' dialogues.

· Photos from the plenary session can be downloaded from our [CoR flickr gallery](#) .

Contact:

Nathalie Vandelle

Tel. +32 (0)2 282 24 99

nathalie.vandelle@cor.europa.eu