

# Future of Europe: politicians and academics share view that more regional and local authorities' power must be reflected in the EU

EU policy-makers have recently come up with policy proposals and scenarios on the way forward for Europe. Yet many of these proposals remain silent about the role of regions and cities – even if their follow-up might significantly impact local governments' leverage in a renewed Union. Regions will however have to be granted more influence in the EU architecture to facilitate policy-making and ownership of policy decision on the ground. This was one of the key messages expressed by politicians and academics at a [conference](#) organised yesterday by the European Committee of the Regions' Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs ([CIVEX](#)).

In the context of the debate on the future of the EU, the rise of regional separatist movements and the ongoing work of the [Task Force on Subsidiarity](#), this [one-day conference](#) brought together politicians from local and regional governments, members of the European Parliament and academics to shed some light on the role that regions and local communities could and should play in the future EU27. The event was co-organised by the CoR, the University of Tübingen (Germany), and Danube University Krems (Austria). The outcome of discussions will feed into the CoR opinion on the Future of Europe – to be adopted on 9 October – as asked by the European Council President.

CoR President **Karl-Heinz Lambertz** stressed that: *“Europe is not Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg but its where its citizens live – its regions, cities, towns and villages. A stronger, more united EU is only possible by improving the lives of every citizen. This doesn't mean less Europe but a more effective Europe. This will only be achieved by strengthening the role of local and regional authorities and ensuring every level of government work together to show the EU's added value in the lives of the people it serves“.*

Speakers to the conference recalled that stronger demands for a “Europe of the regions” were voiced in the early 1990s, leading to a number of reforms, including the creation of the CoR. In this regards, **Barbara Duden (DE/PES)**, CIVEX commission President and member of the Hamburg City Parliament, was eager to underline: *“ We need to be careful that the ‘Europe of the Regions’, which some consider an outdated concept, is not played off against the ‘Europe of the Cities’ that is nowadays more fashionable. In the CoR, we represent local and regional authorities of very different sizes and structures, and we need both, cities and regions, with a stronger role in European integration, to make it work for citizens. ”*

**MEP Danuta Hübner (PL/EPP)** , Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs and former EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, emphasised: *“Regions, cities and local communities have always played a unique role in linking citizens’*

*daily life with Europe. In these times, this link must not be a missing link*". She further pointed out that subsidiarity should not be used as an instrument to defend local or national interest against the European one, but that it should focus on effectiveness to determine which level is the more effective for policy action.

**Prof Dr Gabriele Abels** , Director of Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence PRRIDE, University of Tübingen, Germany, insisted on the need to focus on the EU institutional architecture so as to tackle the perceived democratic deficit of the EU. In particular, she suggested a better involvement of regional parliaments in EU policy-making; notably by securing more seats to members of regional parliaments in the CoR. She further called for a more systematic use of territorial impact assessments to evaluate the likely impact of policies, programmes and projects at local and regional levels.

The conference was followed by an evening debate on the regional impact of Brexit. Participants discussed among others the results of the recent [CoR report](#) detailing the consequences of Brexit on trade and economy in the EU27 regions and cities. Speakers included **Mairi Angela Gougeon**, Member of the Scottish Parliament and CoR member

**Michael Murphy** , head of the Irish EPP delegation to the CoR and Councillor from Tipperary County Council, **Prof Dr Raquel Ortega Argilés** from the University of Birmingham, UK, and **Prof Dr Ulrike Guérot** from Danube University Krems, Austria.

#### **About the event:**

Co-organised by the CoR, and Prof Dr Gabriele Abels, Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence PRRIDE, University of Tübingen, Germany, in cooperation with Prof Dr Ulrike Guérot, Danube University Krems, Austria, founder of the European Democracy Lab., the event entitled " [The future of the EU and the role of the regions / BREXIT: a regional perspective](#) " aimed to investigate the role of regions as actors of democracy at the European level through various angles: "multi-speed Europe", subsidiarity, macroregional strategies, economic governance, solidarity, democracy in the European regional governance, and the regional consequences of Brexit.

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