

# Local and regional leaders are crucial to legitimate the bottom-up approach of the Conference on the future of Europe



□ Representatives from the European Parliament and academia confirm that the CoR should have an important role in gathering input from citizens on permanent basis because local and regional authorities are the closest and most trusted level of government

□ **Members of the CoR commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs – CIVEX – debated on how to strengthen the role of the CoR in the EU governance system, notably for the Conference on the future of Europe in the presence of MEP Domènec Ruiz Devesa (ES/S&D) and Professor Sarah Meyer, research associate at Danube-University Krems. The European Union’s democratic foundations are among the main issues that the Conference will address and local and regional authorities are the keepers of the EU’s democratic foundations on a daily basis and the ones who most practise participative democracy. It came out of the discussion that the Conference is an opportunity for demonstrating and promoting the role of the CoR as the institutional representative of cities and regions in the EU decision-making process within the framework of the existing Treaties. In a broader perspective, Treaty changes towards more legislative powers to the CoR could be considered in order to strengthen the democratic dimension of the EU.**

The Conference on the future of Europe will bring together in open, inclusive and transparent debates citizens, civil society, national, regional and local authorities and European institutions in order to give a new impulse to the European project and to strengthen European democracy. It is expected to be launched on 9 May, Europe Day 2021, with a delay of one year due to the covid-19 pandemic.

The questions raised during the debate were whether the current EU legal framework allows the CoR to fully play its role of voice of cities and regions in the EU and which specific role could be foreseen in the Conference on the future of Europe for the CoR and LRAs in a process led by the 3 EU-institutions European Commission, European Parliament and the Council of the EU.

**Mark Speich** (DE/EPP), Secretary of State for Federal, European and International Affairs, North Rhine-Westphalia and Chair of the CoR CIVEX commission said: “We as politicians at the regional and local level must formulate concrete ideas about the European Union of the future. We need a clear vision for the future of a Europe of the regions. The clearer this

vision is, the more effectively we can take the necessary steps for its realization and use the Conference on the Future of Europe as an opportunity in the process. We are constantly calling for greater consideration of local and regional authorities in European decision-making and legislation. Now it is essential to develop clear proposals so that this demand is also explicitly enshrined institutionally and procedurally.”

**[MEP Domènec Ruiz Devesa](#)** (ES/S&D) S&D coordinator in the European Parliament AFCO Committee presented the EP pilot project on *Building Europe with local entities* and explained how CoR members could contribute: “In order to bring Europe closer to its citizens and in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe we should strengthen the European dimension in the work with local and regional policy makers, setting up a more structured and permanent participatory way beside civil society organizations, social partners and citizens. With this goal, the Pilot Project “BELE – Building Europe with Local Entities” will be implemented to strengthen the direct communication to the citizens on political initiatives carried out by the Union through periodical declarations to media and debates led by local authorities. We have the responsibility to ensure with these initiatives that the Conference accomplishes a bottom-up approach for reaching a meaningful dialogue”.

**Sarah Meyer**, research associate at Danube-University Krems presented the **[REGIOPARL](#)** project which aims at looking into how the regional and local level can be crucial players for democratic participation and proper functioning of effective representation and problem solving in the EU democratic system of multilevel governance said: “As the Council clearly advocates a policy-first approach towards the Conference on the Future of Europe, the CoR could devote its efforts to a consequent and systematic inclusion of the regional and local perspective in all activities and outcomes of the Conference, topic-by-topic. When it comes to the direct involvement of citizens, expectation management will be crucial, since participation without decision-making or agenda-setting power is not likely to underpin the democratic legitimacy of EU policy-making.”

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