

# President Tzitzikostas and Minister Eichtinger back strong EU regional funds to combat the Coronavirus



□The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) President, Apostolos Tzitzikostas, and Lower Austria's Minister for Housing, Labour and International Affairs, Martin Eichtinger, exchanged views on the EU's measures to combat the current crisis, as well as and Lower Austria's apprentice offensive during a teleconference call.□

**President Tzitzikostas** explained the work being undertaken by the CoR to bring together the experiences of Europe's local and regional authorities as means to measure, assess and improve the EU's policies to tackle the emergency. He argued that the EU needed to come together, agreeing the next EU budget and sufficient investment to support all regions and cities. "Cohesion policy and its unique partnership between EU, national and regional governments, are key for Europe to contain the pandemic and to relaunch Europe's economy. The divisions among Member States must be overcome to secure an adequate EU recovery plan, based on a bold EU budget, by June. Otherwise we risk to seriously weaken our capacity to protect citizens' health and social rights, preserve Europe's productive capacity, help businesses survive the emergency and invest in a sustainable future", said **President Tzitzikostas**.□

"The European Committee of the Regions is the voice of Europe regions and as such promotes a strong solidarity and cohesion," said Lower Austria's Minister for Housing, Labour and International Affairs **Martin Eichtinger** said during a video conference with the **President Tzitzikostas**. **Eichtinger** said that he appreciated the efforts and measures taken by the EU's institutions to mitigate the current COVID19 Pandemic□.

## **Lower Austria's apprentice measures as an international model**

The discussions focussed especially on effective measures and coordinated strategies across Europe to tackle the corona crisis. Protecting jobs and boosting the economy were key issues for all local and regional governments. The Lower Austria's apprentice offensive is one example of best practice in that respect: "European regions can adapt this model and adjust it to their corresponding labour market structures. The concept of building a regional network with three training pillars together with the social partners has proven to be an effective recipe against youth unemployment in Lower Austria", said **Minister Eichtinger**. He added that, "In 2019 Lower Austria had the highest decrease in youth unemployment compared to all other Austrian regions". The EU supports the Lower Austria apprentice offensive with around 6.75 million from the European Social Fund. "It is also a question of keeping regional funding at a sufficient level in the EU's multi-annual financial framework", **Minister Eichtinger** emphasised.

## **Learning from the corona crisis – promoting citizen exchange**

It was agreed that the current situation only increases the urgency of the Conference on the Future of Europe, as proposed by **Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission**. As part of this Conference the European Commission would like to build on new ways of more actively involving citizens in open, inclusive, transparent and structured debates, based on established citizen dialogues. “The conference would be the appropriate forum to think about how to be more citizen-oriented and efficient and how we can make the EU an active, independent and credible global player. The EU has to learn from the corona crisis”, said **Minister Eichtinger**. □