



PRESIDENCY 2012

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN REGIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES (CALRE)

DECLARATION OF MÉRIDA

Mérida, 29th and 30th November 2012

The Presidents of the European regional legislative assemblies listed below:

- Parlamento de Extremadura
- Cortes de Aragón
- Cortes de Castilla y León
- Parlament de les Illes Balears
- Parlamento de Andalucía
- Parlamento de Canarias
- Parlamento de La Rioja
- Corts Valencianes
- Junta General del Principado de Asturias
- Asamblea de Madrid
- Consiglio regionale del Veneto
- Consiglio regionale del Trentino Alto Adige
- Consiglio regionale della Lombardia
- Parlament der Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens
- Parlement de la Communauté Française de Belgique
- Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale
- Parlement Wallon
- Vlaams Parlement
- Landtag Steiermark
- Kärntner Landtag
- Oberösterreichischer Landtag
- Sächsischer Landtag
- Landtag Rheinland-Pfalz
- Assembleia Legislativa da Região Autónoma dos Açores
- Ålands lagting

have attended the 16th CALRE Plenary Session held in Mérida (Extremadura, Spain) on 29th and 30th November 2012 and agreed on and adopted the following declaration:

DECLARATION OF MÉRIDA

Towards unity, coworking and transparency in the current context of economic recession and crisis of institutional values

INTRODUCTION

This year is the 15th anniversary of the signing of the founding Declaration of CALRE in Oviedo. The Conference was established with the goal of promoting, from its own view of parliamentary institutions, ways of participation in the construction of the European Union. For this purpose, CALRE aims to focus the efforts basically in three directions. The first one is the implementation of the procedures of parliamentary monitoring and control of the European affairs in every region. The second one is the link and communication among the sectoral parliamentary committees and, above all, among the European affairs committees of the different legislative entities. And, thirdly, there is the establishment of channels for active exchange with the respective national parliaments and with the European Parliament.

After this period, the time has come to make a reflection on **what type of forum has CALRE become in Europe, its role and its idiosyncrasy** in relation to other associations of the many already existent in the complex organizational structure emerged both within the European Union, and at the different institutional levels of its Member States, to deal with European matters. Only in this way it will be possible to successfully design a forward-looking project of CALRE that will lead the expectations and wishes of that first Conference in Asturias to a successful conclusion.

However, this introspection of the achievements should be made taking into account the current socio-economic context, so it is necessary to be reaffirmed in the interest of a search of efficient solutions.

I. THE ROLE OF CALRE IN EUROPE

Regional parliaments in the architecture of Europe

The regionalist movement in Europe dates back to the end of the '80s in accordance with the named *subnational mobilization*. The regional dimension has had some room at a relatively late stage in the European Union and its recognition started at first from an economic perspective to later move to a more institutional approach.

The regional entities with legislative power could remain diluted and underestimated in their specific political and institutional strength, despite of holding the political representation of the corresponding regions and being the holders of the legislative power within the scope of their responsibilities.

Nevertheless, the Treaty of Lisbon has led to the rethinking of a new model of responsibility and governance shared by all political levels in the European Union. Therefore, the role of the regional legislative assemblies has grown significantly in Europe, with an active participation in the Community policies.

The regions with legislative power apply more than 70% of the legislation of the EU without going through the state structures, and in the current context of economic crisis, the local and regional capital resources are subject to greater restrictions. Thus, CALRE, being aware of the role of its members in the accommodation of EU legislation, advocates for a more efficient use of the existing resources within a coherent legislative framework.

Regional parliaments and subsidiarity

The complex context of the current economic crisis we are experiencing has been affecting the European decision-making process since years. Today, this is often reflected in a trend towards centralisation which could, in turn, hinder the various sensibilities that make up the EU from participating adequately. To this respect, Regional Assemblies, due to the direct democratic legitimacy they enjoy and their proximity to their respective citizens, cannot and should not be left on the sidelines. Now, more than ever, the idea of a strong and united Europe based on its enriching diversity, a Europe that is as close as possible to its citizens and their problems has to be reiterated. To this aim, a claim to the principle of subsidiarity, which has always figured in the work of the CALRE, has an even greater significance today. Therefore, the

CALRE reiterates the fact that the participation of the regional legislative assemblies in the procedure of the monitoring of the Subsidiarity principle is essential to guarantee, in the European process of decision-making, optimal levels of transparency and efficiency, in short, of democracy.

For the first time, this year the European Commission has withdrawn a legislative proposal, meeting the demands of the national parliaments relating to non-compliance of the EU Subsidiarity principle.

This proves the practical effectiveness of the Early Warning System created by the Lisbon Treaty and encourages the European Regional Assemblies to continue monitoring European legislative proposals based on the conditions laid down by the principle of subsidiarity.

The Presidents consider that the monitoring Subsidiarity network of the Committee of the Regions is a useful tool to promote the information exchange among the regional entities in the monitoring procedure of the principles of Subsidiarity and proportionality, especially via the REGPEX platform.

To this effect, the CALRE calls on the participating Regional Assemblies to use this tool that allows the exchange of information with respect to subsidiarity between them, thus being able to access, in real time, the content of European legislative proposals in the drafting phase, eventual opinions of other Regional Assemblies as also any other relevant documentation in this area.

In addition, the CALRE considers that the process of the deepening the ties between European Regional Assemblies with legislative competencies should continue, in order to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices with respect to defending the principle of subsidiarity, and with the ultimate goal of adopting common positions regarding European legislative proposals that especially affect regional interests.

Democratic deficit, coworking and transparency

The existence of the regional legislative assemblies helps to combat or challenge one of the central issues facing the EU, namely the question of democratic legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. It is imperative that regional parliaments, as the accountable bodies closest to the citizen, have a strong and active role in the EU decision-making process.

On the other hand, the **exercise of politics**, as a service for the search and the

attainment of freedom and common good, also suffers the consequences of a crisis of institutional values by the citizens.

This way, CALRE supports the promotion of the improvement of channels of participation, from a point of view of greater quality, where that representative delegation that the regional parliaments hold based on **coworking** will be updated on a permanent basis, integrating all the agents involved, and **transparency**, as essential premises to restore the citizens' confidence.

The **European parliamentary offices**, designed as bodies for dialogue among the political representatives, the citizens and the institutions, via which it is possible to co-participate in the projects started by their governments, could be an efficient mechanism to provide the citizens with a direct and permanent service, collecting proposals and suggestions that they make as individuals or collectively, and giving the users information on the policies started by their representatives.

Next year 2013, when the 20th anniversary of the introduction of EU citizenship in the Treaty of Maastricht will be celebrated, has been designated the "**European Year of the Citizens**". A large number of tangible progresses have been achieved that have a direct effect on the lives of millions of people. However, there are still some obstacles that need to be cleared in achieving that the citizens being able to freely exercise their rights, by participating in the EU policy-making. It is in that area where CALRE must and wishes to encourage a commitment of a proactive search of solutions that will be to benefit in the commons.

Thus, CALRE shows its interest in actively participating in the tasks that will be carried out around the **celebration of the European years**, echoing the problems that directly affect the citizens, such as unemployment, immigration or social disparities.

II. CALRE AS FORUM FOR DIALOGUE WITH THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS AND ENTITIES

European Parliament: interparliamentary cooperation

Over time, the Treaties have been given the European Parliament a more relevant role. However, the current crisis has imposed the need of new paths

for reinventing the EU, thus overcoming one of the outstanding tasks: the democratic legitimacy.

In this respect, CALRE welcomes the **dialogue raised with the European Parliament**, especially via its President and its Commission of Regional Policy, and approves its continuation by allowing the intensification of institutional collaboration at the European parliamentary level.

Cooperation is the fundamental feature of the parliamentarianism that fits the present time.

Modern parliamentarism requires the development of new concepts such as “Open Parliament”, based on the establishment of channels of direct citizen participation, which transmit their needs and concerns to the Regional Legislative Assemblies so that they would make available to the European Parliament to reduce the distance between European citizens and the European institutions. This concept aims to establish interinstitutional communication channels, by which the Regional Legislative Assemblies gather the concerns of European citizens through tools such as Parliament 2.0 and transmit to the European Parliament.

A kind of parliamentarism that is able to speak with a single voice and that accepts the perspective of a future work on the major issues of the Union, and that must make its electorate to understand that the recommendations, controls and investigations of every Chamber elected only have sense if they take into account the interdependency of the problems. In short, the aim is to create a chain of institutional solidarity that ensures the citizens that their vote in Europe will have the effectiveness and the outcome of full elections.

In this regard, in 2014 the elections to the European Parliament will take place. This is a key moment that should lead to mobilize citizens for a great European project, in achieving an authentic political union that will be able to face the crisis not only with rules but above all with EU institutional mechanisms.

At the end of the tunnel of the current economic crisis there is the hope of a true European political union, against the increasing criticism of those who speak against Europe and its institutions. Thus, CALRE is called upon to encourage the citizen participation at the next European elections in order to reinforce the democratic legitimacy of the EU.

For this purpose, the CALRE could actively promote the mobilization of European citizens to overcome high levels of abstention in European elections,

by conducting an day of open doors to analyze the achievements of the European Parliament for its citizens in all Assemblies European regional legislative, possibly by establishing a common date may be connected by videoconference different parliaments, to explain to people the importance of these upcoming European Parliament elections 2014 and the impact of the policies of the European chamber in their lives.

European Commission

CALRE welcomes the predisposition of the European Commission towards entering into dialogue with the regional entities at the preliminary stage of the process of legislative elaboration and in discussion of the Commission's annual working programme, opening possibilities for participation in defending the principle of subsidiarity, in addition to those offered by the Early Warning System, in a phase previous to said process.

The Conference stresses the need that the European Commission takes more into account the territorial, constitutional and cultural diversity of the European regions, as well as the specific characteristics of each of them.

CALRE raises its bid for a territorial approach based on **multi-level governance**, and thus, on the application of the **Europe 2020 strategy** the budget of the EU should have the sufficient financial instruments to respond to the new competences of the Union and to be subject to a better design in order to enable, equip and provide with resources to the regional entities.

The Presidents agree that the future **cohesion policy** should encourage the principle of the territorial cohesion and take into account the diversity of Europe's territorial diversity and its different needs and levels, as well as cover all the regions in the European Union and concentrate the largest share of the allocations for the convergence regions, without prejudice to specifically supporting, or providing a security network for, the intermediate regions that abandon the convergence objective, and in support of the most competitive regions.

Finally, CALRE calls for a more simple and efficient management of territorial funds, and also for the design, application, and monitoring and assessment of the programs being developed, to be open to the official participation of the local and regional entities.

In short, CALRE confirms its availability to extend its willingness for dialogue with the European Commission, establishing a direct communication channel

for the concerns and interests of the European citizens, ensuring that they are duly heard and thus, assuming the role of privileged intermediaries in achieving a consensus, as unanimous as possible, that leads the European Union towards a future of security, peace and welfare.

Committee of the Regions: the main speaker of the regions in Europe

The cooperation relations between CALRE and the Committee of the Regions have a long history.

CALRE is pleased of having reached this year a preliminary new agreement that will be integrated in the Common Action Plan that was signed with the CoR, although this time it is focused on strengthening and improving the channels of institutional coordination and communication in the light of the need of establishing joint structural actions, of working in the improvement of the involvement of the regional authorities in the European political debate and in the process of the EU decision-making, all that by optimizing its resources for a greater diffusion of the information on the European Union to the citizens.

III. CALRE AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE COORDINATION WITH OTHER ENTITIES THAT REPRESENT THE REGIONAL INTEREST AT EUROPEAN LEVEL: MULTI-LEVEL INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

The integrated and coordinated approach strengthens the effectiveness. The mutual enrichment and comparison contribute to the aim of reducing the fragmentation of the messages we wish to reach the citizens.

The improvement of our efficiency as institutions that represent the regional sovereignty is the best credential for being a reference point in the bottom-up decision-making process at European level and for further strengthening the regional dimension in Europe.

The Presidents agree in the fact that the development of trans-border and transnational programs, have often contributed to overcome the institutional inertia and have provided with social, cultural and economic exchanges. Therefore, they welcome the collaboration agreement between CALRE and **AEBR**, the strengthening of the already existing ties with the **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe** and the **maintenance of the relations with REGLEG**. They believe that these agreements will benefit the European regionalism.

Therefore, CALRE confirms its determination and willingness to co-operate with regional organizations at the different levels of competence, considering that there are areas of activity in common which could lead to joint actions marked by greater efficacy, better use of positive synergies and considerable savings in energy and resources.

IV. CALRE AND THE PROMOTION OF THE REGIONAL INSTITUTIONAL MODEL

The regional Legislative Assemblies are considered as an institutional model for the whole Europe because of their adaptability to the local needs and their strong connection to the European history.

CALRE agrees to promote the regionalization in the Member States of the European Union, when appropriate, and to invite the regions to develop legislative competences.

The Presidents believe that the cross-border and interregional cooperation that become the link between the regions of the current Member States and the candidate countries, especially at the level of the regional parliaments, could be a valuable contribution to the rapprochement and integration of those States in the Union.

CALRE is ready to help in the promotion of the institutional model of the legislative assemblies with projects of institutional development, such as the one undertaken with the Congress, as well as by promoting the creation of networks of parliamentary cooperation.

On the other hand, CALRE wishes to reinforce the dialogue initiated with the Parliaments of the American States, based on the experiences and the contacts already established with the European regional legislative assemblies, setting up a communication channel, as a contribution of the Assemblies to a better transatlantic understanding and dialogue.

V. IDIOSYNCRASY OF CALRE: Principle of unity and cooperation among European legislative regional assemblies

The Presidents show their satisfaction because the joint and coordinated activity of CALRE over the last years has favoured the achievement of substantial results.

CALRE considers it is necessary to reinforce the cooperation among its members in order to enhance mutual awareness, to support the exchange of experiences, to initiate collaborative projects and to develop strategies aimed at the regional entities for promoting the growth of a European culture.

In order to strengthen the ties among the members of CALRE, it is necessary to stress the importance of the activities of the working groups. The results derived from their work contribute to the joint reflection on the matters of essential interest for the regions and to the establishment of a common and integrated position on them before the European institutions.

The commitment and alliance of all European regional parliaments are one of the best strategies to adopt for overcoming the economic crisis and exercising policies of service to citizens.

In short, CALRE must continue to bet on unity of action, coordination of forces and convergence of efforts as premises that define the goals and the means to achieve them.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

- ★ CALRE states that the regional legislative assemblies have the required legitimacy to **actively participate in the decision-making process of the European Union**, and is aware that much remained to be done for achieving the best framework of multi-level governance within the Community system and that the role of the assemblies can be improved.
- ★ The **participation of the regional parliaments at Community level is necessary for strengthening the European Union with greater democratic legitimacy**. Thus the necessary conditions should be created for them to carry out their tasks effectively and to adopt measures aimed at improving the access to information with the ultimate goal of being able to call for the corresponding political accountability in the decision-making.
- ★ In the current context of economic crisis and change in values that affect many countries, it is essential to reinforce the role of the parliaments as the direct representatives of popular sovereignty. Therefore, it is necessary to put value **on the exercise of politics to ensure that citizens, instead of seeing it as a problem**, can understand that it is an important instrument for resolving daily problems, at the service of society.

In this respect, it is essential that we all have a greater undertaking in order to encourage transparency in parliamentary work, opening our law-making institutions to citizens, through the application of good governance and conduct codes.

The European Year of Citizens 2013 provides an excellent opportunity to promote good governance and engagement with citizens in the democratic process, and CALRE underlines its commitment to active engagement with the Committee of the Regions, European Commission and European Parliament to ensure this is a successful initiative.

- ★ CALRE considers that **participation** is not just a space for dialogue, for speaking and listening, but it **should also allow the existence of coworking spaces**. Parliaments have the duty of informing and of actively binding citizens in the parliamentary processes and the decision-making, in order to efficiently represent them.

As a means to achieve that goal, it is essential to improve the use of computer and telecommunication instruments that facilitate exchange of information among the different parliaments and to encourage, through social networking, the possibility of interacting with members of parliaments and with the bodies of the legislative power.

- ★ CALRE reiterates that the **strengthening of European regional parliaments** contributes to ensure the political unity.

The regional parliaments are invited to assume a more active role in the process of formation of the European public opinion, by having a considerable capital in matters of proximity of decisions to the citizens as well as in the **principle of subsidiarity** that should be duly assessed in the context of the discussions on the future of the European Union.

- ★ CALRE considers the usefulness of **the exchange of best practices at interregional level** with the goal of improving the information and communication, reinforcing its attachment to democratic principles.

- ★ **Interparliamentary cooperation** is a successful mechanism for the progressive construction of a public opinion and of a European political space; thus a long-term and view may be provided.

- ★ **Unity and dialogue**, above ideologies, are basic premises in order to fight against the feeling of lack of representativeness and encourage more spaces for citizen participation as demanded by civil society



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The challenge of these times for the legislative power is to **adapt the institutional responses and the instruments of parliamentary representation**, to better reconcile the new demands coming, above all, from the local level.

The authorities must be able to take up citizens' demands to a greater extent and in that sense, the role in representing interests that parliaments play in democratic States must be strengthened, particularly by establishing mechanisms for the participation of citizens, accountability of public authorities and more spaces for dialogue between the representatives and the constituents.

Finally, the President that organizes the Conference is empowered to submit the approved documents to all the institutions concerned.

