



Regions, Representation, Subsidiarity

What prospect for Regional Governments?

by **Raffaele Cattaneo**

President of the Lombardy Regional Council and President of CALRE

It gives me great satisfaction to see gathered here so many friends and colleagues who come from regions from all over the world! Welcome to everybody! Thanks for being here, thanks for accepting the invitation of the CALRE and of the Legislative Assembly of Lombardy.

I thank President Roberto Maroni, governor of Lombardy, with whom I have a personal friendship in a spirit of active cooperation, for his participation and his greeting. I extend my greetings and my thanks to each of you. I want to address a special thought to those who come from far and represents important associations of regional and sub-national parliaments.

I therefore welcome **President Curt Bramble**, of the NCSL, National Conference of State Legislatures of U.S.A; Mr. **Lin Chin-Chang**, TCF President - Taiwan Local Councils Representatives from Taiwan, China; Mr. **Yoshiaki Matsuda**, JLC President - Japanese Local councilors Alliance from Japan; Mr. **François Ouimet**, Vice President of the National Assembly of Quebec, from Canada; **Mr. Sandro Locutor**, UNALE President, National Union of Legislators and states with legislative power of Brazil and Mrs. **Maria Leobeth Deslate-Delicana**, adviser to the PCL, Philippine councilors League, from Philippine.

With them I greet their delegations and all the participants who come from other Continents

I would like to greet all the European colleagues beginning with Mr. **Markku Markkula**, President of the COR, the Committee of the Regions, the institution that officially represents Regions and local governments to the European Union and of which I am proud to be a member; Mr. **Karl Heinz Lambertz**, President of AEBR - Association of European Regions of the border, and first Vice President of the CoR; Mr. **Clemens Lammerskitten**, Vice President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe; Mr. **Magnus Berntsson**, Vice President Treasurer of the Assembly of European Regions (AER).

Special thanks to the colleagues of CALRE and in particular to the Vice-President Mrs. **Pilar Rojo Noguera**, to the members of the Steering Committee and to the Presidents of the Working Groups. I welcome Mr. **Franco Iacop**, President of the Conference of Presidents of the Legislative Assemblies of the Regions and Italian Autonomous Provinces.

The century that we left behind deliveries to history extraordinary goals, such as the incredible technological development, the conquest of the moon, space travels, a wide spread of wealth and growth, although still unevenly distributed. Similarly, the twentieth century was marked by tragic events, from dramas of some size, previously unknown to humanity, as the two world wars and the unimaginable consequences of totalitarian regimes.

However, the twentieth century, I believe, will be remembered as the century of democracy.

Entire peoples around the world have fought for it, often with unspeakable sacrifices, and many of them have succeeded.

For the first time in history in fact democracy has asserted itself on the world stage becoming a global standard, recognized by the international community as a model of legitimacy for state and especially desired and loved by people throughout the world as a guarantee of freedom, participation and leadership from below.

In practice, we are still very far from the idea of a true global democracy. But it is undeniable that the "government of the people", with its formal rules and ethos, represents a goal to which most of humanity looks with hope, as the best model of possible government.

The 21st (twenty first) century began in the name of globalization. It is a complex phenomenon that generated a major boost towards the integration between countries, not only at economic levels. The ease of communication and exchange between individuals and people, in fact, brings with it the demand for greater pluralism and more freedom. Therefore it asks for more democracy.

The force of globalization had a disruptive effect in several areas, political and institutional ones included. It triggered or otherwise accentuated processes of great political transformation, with a strengthening of supranational institutions – starting from international Organizations till to political Unions as the EU - and a simultaneous weakening of nation states and their systems.

We have known democracy as a form of government closely connected to the birth or to the development of Nations and nation States. Democracy has grown within the borders of States; the borders represents its limits and its guarantees: passing national borders -

manned by police weapons and armies - one could enter or leave a democratic state. How many men and women lost their lives in this effort, in search of that freedom to which, by nature, the heart of every single man aspires, and of which democracy is the custodian and guarantor!

Today, with globalization, state borders and boundaries of citizenship are becoming less rigid, less defined, more permeable. The same sense of belonging to a territory is changing: with the tools of global communication we can talk, stay in touch, we can see us in real time while living thousands of kilometers away, from all over the world including the more remote places.

To move physically has become easier and less expensive, not only for goods but also for people, although the mass migration, that we are witnessing in the world, reminds us that unfortunately it is not so easy and safe for all of us. In Europe, with the application of the Schengen Treaty, we are used to go from one state to another without borders, barriers, police checks. The borders have fallen, democracy seems to assert itself globally.

But in this context democracy, as we have traditionally known it, has more difficulties to deal with the complex relationships that characterize the social, economic, political life. The relationship between the territory and institutions is changing radically and not always for the better.

The traditional democratic institutions, parliaments and national governments, suffer erosion of state sovereignty, in a context where power moves upwards towards supranational levels. Not only political power but also the economic, financial, of media one.

The consequence is that it is more difficult to support the demand that comes from our citizens, it is more difficult to give them concrete answers and manage a real power through the instrument of law, as a result of democratic debate in parliaments.

It is difficult to do so without compromising the expectations of citizens and the very nature of democracy.

How many times facing global problems such as climate change, the government of speculative finance, the fight against hunger, the relaunch of the growth, national and regional parliaments have felt invested with a power more formal than real? Citizens perceive these difficulties and react losing their trust in institutions.

Yes, the outcome of this change is a major crisis of confidence. Our citizens, all over the world, send signals of distrust in the traditional democratic institutions. They feel supranational and global institutions too distant from them, from their problems and daily lives. Institutions often governed by impersonal bureaucracies and out of direct democratic control. At the same time they feel local and national democratic institutions too inadequate to solve their problems.

This is proved by international studies that confirm that in the world citizens' confidence in national parliaments is extremely low. Most of the time parliaments rank last among the different institutions tested for the degree of public confidence.

This is combined with an overall declining trend of citizen participation in elections. It is another warning sign. This framework is probably determined also by bureaucratic and administrative inadequacies, as well as by phenomenon of patronage and corruption, which undermine the same universalist promises of democracy.

We cannot ignore what is happening! We need to understand the change and have to propose appropriate solutions.

Understanding this change means first of all recognize that today the parliamentary democracy of the nation state is not sufficient to itself.

In my opinion the issue seems deeper than it may appear to be today and the malaise of democracy appears more radical.

In these two days we have to wonder how to clean up this distrust before it becomes a democratic deficit. When so many people in so many parts of the world are no longer able to grasp the positive relationship between democratic institutions and their daily lives, the future becomes more uncertain and worrying.

I believe, but I'm sure that I can state that we all believe that strengthening the role of sub-state parliaments can give new life into democracy, increasing the confidence of those represented in their representatives.

From where it could start a process of trust in democracy and in institutions if not from below? Our citizens will be able to find adequate reasons to trust in the ability of democratic institutions to give voice to their interests and their aspirations if we will offer them a future "new world order" based only on a single or on few global institutions? No, they will not! The day in which the sun will rise over a single planetary Parliament, called to replace all other forms of democratic representation, I hope I will be dead!

Democracy will regain impetus and vitality only by restarting from local communities and from the territory, from the level that citizens know to be closer to them and that they can control more directly.

For these reasons the level of sub-state sovereignty acquires today a strategic importance at all latitudes.

Each local community feels a constitutive bond with its own land. Each of us is bonded from the soul, in the deepest chords of his being with the place where he was born and grew up, where our loved ones are buried, where our roots, our families and closer friends are. The bond with our village or city, as well as the one with our region, county, lander or state, is original and constitutive, is deeper than the belonging to a nation-state or a supranational community.

I am Italian and European, but I am and I will always be first of all Lombard, because being Lombard best describes the tradition, the culture where I feel I belong: a specific way of thinking, of eating, of conceiving the work, the relationship with reality and with the others. Who among us cannot say the same of his state in the US or in Brazil, of his land in Germany or his autonomous Comunidad in Spain or of his province or region in Japan, China or in the Philippines?

We can and must have the world as our horizon, but we always born in a particular place, where our roots are firmly planted and where the varied traits and cultural codes of each community manifest themselves.

The key to a possible solution to the questions posed by globalization and by the crisis of trust is therefore the relationship between local and global.

Localism alone is not able to meet the challenges of our time and closes in an unproductive selfcentredness.

Globalization, if loses connection with the territory, generates standardization, creates models without cultural roots that are rejected by the communities that will feel them distant and fruits of a prevailing mentality.

We need to think about new models that will give substance to the idea of a "global", democracy, that is global and local at the same time.

In response to this situation, common in different countries, with different forms and degrees, what role local legislative assemblies has to play? What are the problems to be solved and the tools to be used? Where a new claim of sovereignty can find a new foundation?

This is also the subject about that **Piero Bassetti**, president of the think tank Globus et Locus, President of the Giannino Bassetti Foundation, who works on innovation issues and its impact on society - in his Keynote Speech on the future of sovereignty. Piero as well as a great friend, teacher and great intellectual is a connoisseur of politics and administration, especially at regional levels. He was one of the fathers of Italian regionalism and the first president of the Region of Lombardy after its birth in the early 70s.

The discussion about democracy today echoes what was in the first half of '800 the debate on freedom of the ancients and the moderns, when **Benjamin Constant**¹ theorized the centrality of the representative system as the most suitable to govern the society of the time, getting bigger and complex. He argued that people's delegation of the defence of their freedom to their representatives was the condition to ensure both.

¹ The freedom of the ancients compared to the freedom of modern, speech of 1819 at the University of Paris. From Constant. Anthology of political writings, Il Mulino, Bologna 1982

In the Greece of Pericles, man, on the contrary, found in direct political activity, in the participation in the *Agorà*, the confirmation of belonging to the polis and therefore of freedom.

Today the debate, we all are very well aware, cannot be more between representative democracy or direct democracy. In the great "agora" of global society different levels of participation and representation have to live together, able to talk to each other in a symphony relationship, just as in an orchestra different instruments do, each with its own timbre, sounding a common theme.

Wonder about the ways in which local identities and regional representatives can find new strength is an important step to begin to outline a "global" democracy suitable for this century of globalization and major changes.

How can we tackle a democracy that have to be rethought in a different relationship between local, national and supranational level, with the redistribution of shares of sovereignty in more institutional levels, but also the involvement of social players, in a collective effort to take advantage of the great opportunities of this century of transition?

In this process comes to our aid the work of Professor **Gary Marks**, who teaches at Chapel Hill University of North Carolina and also at the University of Amsterdam. He, really distinguished guest, coined the term *Multilevel governance* to describe a method of decision-making not necessarily institutionalized. To him we entrusted the second Keynote Speech. The Theory of the Multilevel Governance perhaps is today the most significant scientific instrument we have for our reflections, in an attempt to answer to the political questions that we made. A theoretical approach of great significance that enables us to illuminate the processes by which decisions are made, which cannot be simply identified as an implementation of the summit will but will have to take account of various interests and of the different levels of government.

Dear colleagues, members of our regional and sub-national parliamentary,

Dear guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

We need a rescue of our parliaments!

We need a renaissance of democracy!

We need women and men who feel the responsibility to attempt the difficult re-legitimization of regional parliaments and more generally of parliamentary democracy.

To paraphrase the great **Karl Popper**, voters and citizens, are particularly disoriented because they cannot identify the face of the current "enemy of democracy", which leads to a weakening, in practice, of representation. This creates distrust and disillusionment. The feeling, that we often fill, of exercising power in many ways marginal, of being reduced to mere "administrative province" of decisions taken elsewhere, maybe predominantly out of politics, is a feeling that in public mind is amplified and projected as a formless mosaic of an "headless" democracy to which, in different contexts, elected but authoritarian forms of government are opposed.

At the same time, however, our daily experience tells us that without the contribution of our parliaments and our regional and local communities we cannot really address nor solve the great issues of our time.

Themes such as those that we will face tomorrow in the working groups: the competitiveness of our territories and the new paradigms of growth; the fight against extreme poverty and the goal of zero hunger; the building of networks of welfare really effective even when facing historic challenges such as migration of entire peoples; the sustainability of global development as indicated in the Millennium Goals of the United Nations; resources to fund policies truly effective and measurable in their results; the rethinking of the value of rule and policies.

Are surely issues that we cannot solve on our own, but at the same time that cannot be addressed and solved without our contribution.

Then, how can we start this venture? On what ships can we embark to challenge the unknown sea of the future of democracy ?.

We must start from the territory. Our meetings are the most effective interpreters of our communities. First of all, our parliaments are expression of the territories and of local communities with which they maintain a direct relationship and in which power is emerging more clearly, not clouded by screens of supranational systems. These are our real strengths that allow us to aim for a more active role on the political scene, which are also a food of that precious commodity that is the responsible participation of citizens in the political life, from which our authority comes from.

We also can start from some shared values and principles. They are those we wrote in the Manifesto of Milan that we are going to approve at the end of our work .

We all believe in the centrality of the person, with his rights and his dignity, but also as a subject capable of positive action, the real protagonist of social life, able to join others with confidence in the will to cooperate in order to respond to individual and community needs. We believe that citizens are able to do their work because they convey an ethos that consists with the values of democracy.

We believe in the power of the Principle of Subsidiarity. It has its roots in the assumption that society, with its creativity and initiative capacity was born and comes before State, as well as local institutions come before the global ones. So it is not permissible that the institutions of higher levels take the place of the lower level ones, such as those representative of local communities, if the latter can better meet, in the exercise of its functions, the needs of their communities. It is an idea that affirms the responsibility of the different levels of government and requires both the trust in our societies and in the individuals who compose them.

We all firmly believe in parliamentary democracy as a more mature form of expression of the popular will, and we aspire to a full and complete global democracy because we

are aware of the importance that Parliaments have as places where to take collective decisions and settle disputes among men, communities and peoples through the use of speech and dialogue instead of violence.

Finally, we all recognize the essential role of a policy pursued with strong sense of responsibility, dignity and honor, to serve the community, in order to make decisions that meet the needs of the community, respecting liberties at stake and exercising political activity as pursuit of the common good and the public interest.

These are the tools of our profession. With them we can deal with the political perspective, high politics, that questions us; this first Forum is meant to be an opportunity to give life to a substantial reflection on these issues and the beginning of a path to establish an international network of regional and sub-state parliaments, able to make a real contribution to the global consolidation of democracy. This is why I hope that it will not remain a single, isolated event but that someone will take up this heritage and will run for re-organizing it.

Colleagues, Members of our Parliaments,

We are the ants of democracy! Ants every day make their small but significant work. They care about land, with humility and sacrifice. They not rise presumptuous towards infinite spaces. Often they are loaded with weights greater than themselves to serve and to be truly useful to their communities. They are tireless and they never stop working. They are many and work together for a common good. If one gets crushed the others take its place.

We, like ants, must be tireless in building together day after day, the home of democracy. An always fragile building, because it is exposed to the wind of freedom, but where everyone can find their own place to live in peace and harmony with everybody. So we want to bring our contribution in order to a true global democracy or rather a local one.

Thank you all. I wish to our World Forum of regional and sub-national Legislative Assemblies every success.

I hope all people from all nations can experience the greatness of democracy and freedom now and always.

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