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CALRE 2016 Plenary Assembly

Speech by **Raffaele Cattaneo**, President of CALRE 2016



Second Session, 25 November 2016

CONFERENCE: Regions and the future of Europe

Dear colleagues, dear guests,

thank you for being here. Your presence today shows that the role of the Regions and the evolution of regionalism are essential themes to measure up with the challenges that Europe is facing.

A particularly warm welcome to the European associations, in particular:

- *the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)*, represented by its President, *Karl-Heinz Lambertz*, also First Vice President of the Committee of the Regions,
- *The Assembly of European Regions (EAR)*, represented by Vice President *Magnus Berntsson*,
- and the *Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe*, represented by President *Gudrun Mosler-Törnström*, also Vice-President of the Regional Parliament of Salzburg.

I would like to thank also the Associations for sharing with CALRE a constructive approach and direct dialogue on issues that are so important to us.

A warm welcome and thanks also to the moderators who will accompany the evolution of the conference, *Luciano Clerico* ANSA, *Maurizio Lucchi*, Director of La Prealpina and *Riccardo Sorrentino* of Il Sole 24 Ore.

Today's meeting has a strong ***symbolic*** value which goes beyond the individual associations actively participating in it, because combining the questions about the future of Europe with the ones about the future of the Regions and regionalism means choosing to assign to the latter the

important and difficult task of playing a role, both ideal and structural, in the evolution of the **Community policies** in the coming years.

The symbolic value will find a practical implementation in the document on a strengthened role of Regional Authorities and Associations, that we will have the privilege to hand-over to the President of the Committee of the Regions, **Markku Markkula**, to whom I express my gratitude for being here in Varese.

We believe that the **quality of the representation** of regional interests is strongly linked to a **positive and constructive outcome in the way citizens relate to institutions**, aware that an increasing involvement of local authorities in the European decision-making process is more than ever **historically appropriate**.

Implementing key principles such as subsidiarity, proportionality, multilevel governance can start a process of **rapprochement of citizens to Europe through the territories, in order to reach the very heart of the European political project**.

It is a priority recovering - instead of dispersing - **the value and passion at the origin of the European integration project, enhancing the value of Europe for being a Union of peoples and territories**.

As a consequence CALRE's will to intensify and strengthen the relations with the main associations of European regionalism can be understood, as it is a **response** to the disruptive and centrifugal forces of actual **political debate, based on dialogue and sharing, a collaborative vision and a convergence of positions on key issues of regional importance**.

Therefore today we will face and analyze the characteristics and challenges of European regionalism, examining in depth two important aspects of European current affairs, cohesion policies and the migrants crisis, thanks to the contribution, for each of the three panels, of a CALRE representative and of a representative of the Associations of European regionalism. This approach represents a **collaborative and dynamic dialectic**, which as CALRE we have strongly desired for today's meeting.

In the title of today's conference, "*Regions and future of Europe*", we identify the need of giving to **regional and local dimension**, the level closest to citizens, **a specific and meaningful role in the construction of a Europe able to enhance the territorial vision;**

an approach that requires an exchange of experiences and knowledge among associations, for which it is necessary to claim the dignity of the fundamental elements of the diverse EU policies, sectorial or not.

The institutional relationship that this evolution entails is therefore necessarily *bottom-up*, and it is based on the awareness that territories should be placed at the centre of the EU policies processing, conceiving and review, and that **local and regional authorities should be involved in the processing of their own development.**

This year, that is approaching its conclusion, leaves us an important heritage:

- 2016 has taught us that current challenges require, indeed claim a deep reflection on the future of the European Union;
- 2016 has taught us that talking about a two-speed or multi-speed European integration does not detract the priority to the fact that the European Union needs to be revitalized in its original core;
- 2016 has taught us that the reforms, for which we are working, must reflect what our citizens need, of which we are the first and closest interpreters;
- 2016 has taught us that to the question "**Does my voice matter in the EU?**" **58%** of Europeans answered *No* or *Don't know*.

So, which are the signals that are launched to us with a strength, that we can't no longer ignore? Europe is experiencing an *existential crisis* – I am quoting the President of the European Commission, Juncker in his State of the Union address, the same speech in which regions and regional policy aren't mentioned, not even once, making clear that Europe seems not to have understood yet the deep cause of its own existential crisis.

Distance between Brussels institutions and citizens has never been so wide, distrust has never been so remarkable, eurosceptic opinions have never been so prevalent, hence Brexit should really act as a warning for a sharp turn of the **European Union towards a path of deep and intelligent reform**, having as its centre and point of reference the needs of citizens and territories.

This is why it is so important to be here today, to reiterate once again that a process of rebuilding trust in democracy and institutions is what the European Union mostly needs to face the future, and that this path can start only from the bottom.

We now want to reflect in particular on the need of giving strength to the voice of local and regional players in Europe in a time when Europe is facing a "volatile" world and fast changing.

In today's world no one is saved alone, each one has its own responsibility.

Facing multiple challenges undermining its own vision and existence, the Union must succeed in the gigantic effort to build on the *interdependencies* of the continent, an appeal that involves everyone, **Member States, Regions, Associations, citizens.**

In this context, strengthening the territorial dimension of European governance means promoting and supporting the development of a *strategy*, of a *vision* of the **European regionalist trajectory**, that takes in due account the challenges of migration, climate change, but also the changes in our societies, the ideas of development that Europe will have to implement and the regional development and cohesion policies that will inform the EU in the coming years.

United in diversity, this is the principle governing the entire European framework, and this must also be applied to our associations. In my opinion being separate now towards the ideal trajectory of the Union would be an unforgivable mistake.

Working with the Committee of the Regions is an opportunity that we must seize as best as we can, certainly with reference to the content of the **measures and opinions**, but above all with respect to the reflections on the **future of the CoR itself in the EU institutional framework.**

We have organized three different panels, two have a particular and very relevant theme in the current historical moment: the management of the migrant crisis and the future of regional development and cohesion policies; the third panel has a more general subject because it aims to investigate the role that we can and want to have in the construction of future European policies. These are three basic arguments for regional authorities, associations and cities present today. I hope that a lively and fruitful debate will develop.

In view of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, next year in March, a **deep reflection on the role that we want to play**, on the values that we want to represent at European level, on the objective of enhancing the participation of regions, cities, communities and associations in building a common future is more necessary than ever. If we do not fill up this space today with a true spirit of dialogue and debate, anti-European movements and particularism will do it in our stead. Let's commit then to define together the trajectory of the **European parabola.**

Thank you again for being here. I give the floor to the President of the CoR, Markku Markkula.