



2016 CALRE STATEMENT

Varese, 25th November 2016

Plenary Assembly

The Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies, recognises the difficulties which Europe is going through. In light of the inevitable renewal process of the European Union, CALRE reaffirms and **continues to support a** multi-level vision of the community experience, the idea of a Europe built bottom up, starting from the promotion of the differences which represent the patrimony necessary to the development of prolific relations of the European Union with the rest of the world.

It is necessary to bring back the issue of a new and revived "**European regionalism**" within the Community debate, which seriously places regions in the first place but also the territories, the euro regions and the macro-regions, according to the various institutional peculiarities present in the various States and European regions, the protagonists of a common democratic path of growth and development.

CALRE considers it necessary to base this vision on some of the cardinal principles of its *mission*: the value of the individual and of the community, subsidiarity, proportionality, freedom and representative democracy; without forgetting the principles of equality and solidarity present in the spirit of the European common project. Principles thanks to which it is possible to face a more

effective and efficient rapprochement process of the citizenship and territories of the European institutions and of the recovery of the original value of the European political project.

As stated in the Declaration of Milan in 2015 in fact, *"CALRE represents the place where territories and plural communities, with different characteristics and experiences, but equally engaged in giving new impetus to the European political integration, are represented, with the aim of continuing to guarantee a peaceful and prosperous future"*.

The on-going challenge within the European Union

We are witnessing the persistence of one of the most complex periods in the life of the European Union and in particular 2016 will be remembered as the watershed year of major challenges and dramatic historical events at a global and European level:

- **Brexit:** For the first time in the history of the European project, a Member State, the United Kingdom, has chosen to undertake the path of leaving the Union. This choice, dictated by the will of the people expressed through a referendum, has decisively shown a rift between the citizenship of the United Kingdom and the European institutions. The referendum has shown that the process of building and maintaining the European project cannot take place without the consent and awareness of European citizenship in respect of Community policies. The common desire of European citizenship and territories in fact is to be active participants who are aware of EU policies and not only their passive final recipients. In the light of this, we refer to the contents of the adopted Brexit resolution of the Plenary Assembly.

Special mention should be made of Brexit's situation in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia (Spain), which shares a border with the British territory of Gibraltar. CALRE advocates dialogue to achieve a common understanding in the face of this particular situation facing both territories, as well as Spanish and British citizens living and working on both sides of the border, once the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union is completed.

- **The challenge of immigration:**

In view of the challenge of immigration and the movement of refugees to Europe, CALRE calls for a reflection and a determined will on the part of the European Union to achieve a more social and solidarity-based Union that offers a better and adequate solution to this phenomenon.

CALRE expresses the imperative need for the EU to act in the countries of origin in order to improve people's living conditions as much as possible so that they do not have to risk them for a better future.

CALRE, while deploring the disappearance of some 10,000 refugee minors, expresses its utmost concern for unaccompanied minors who are arriving in European Union territory and demands that they be treated as minors in order to receive the appropriate treatment as minors who they are.

Together with an economic crisis that is still ongoing, Europe is having to face what the United Nations has described as "*the greatest crisis of refugees and displaced persons of our time*". Various voices have been raised throughout Europe requesting a reform of the Dublin III Regulation; nevertheless, the extraordinary informal summit of the 27-member states of the European Union, held in Bratislava in September 2016, dramatically highlighted the lack of unity which characterises Europe in terms of emergency migratory management, for which effective solutions are still waiting to be processed, shared and suggested.

As of now in some Member States, it is possible to glimpse the firm political will to reject the relocation quota system established by the Union. CALRE takes note of the efforts undertaken so far which include the closure of the "Balkan route" as well as the EU-Turkey refugee deal. CALRE is also convinced that the means for Italy and Greece need to be increased in order to ensure consistent implementation and effective border control of the external border by the Member States. Furthermore it is vital to strive for agreements with EU neighbouring states. The EU should also show greater solidarity in form of financial support with those third countries receiving refugees.

In this complex context, CALRE acknowledges the importance of the territories as direct key players for receiving migrants and refugees, through the provision of services and accommodation and of security management.

This means that the exclusive powers of national States on this matter should be subject to greater decentralization in decision making to allow the corresponding policies to be applied and implemented by sub-national entities.

In this regard, CALRE welcomes the proposal set out in the European Commission's Urban Agenda of August 2016 establishing a partnership at a European level for the integration of migrants and refugees. CALRE therefore calls for a more effective diplomatic action at a European level in persecuting the crime of trafficking human beings, in controlling irregular immigration and in complying with the Geneva Convention of 1951 on refugees.

To this regard, our territories should be focused on the migrants' human rights protection avoiding hate speech and strengthening social inclusion and civic commitment, notably taking care of gender equality because women and children are the most vulnerable to fall into trafficking human being networks.

The challenge of terrorism: Europe is facing the fear of international terrorism which has marked and affected public life and the “model of coexistence” of European citizenship. This is why CALRE, as was expressed in the recent resolution adopted by the Standing Committee, hopes that *“European institutions and the international community, will undertake unanimously diplomatic actions of dialogue and of intervention to stop and combat terrorism, avoiding more pain, massacres and deaths and will promote initiatives to ensure that no type of economic, financial assets or forms of support are available to terrorist groups. The European institutions and the international community undertake, with unanimous position, common and shared diplomatic actions to prevent and fight terrorism while promoting the construction of bridges and demolition of the walls”*. The Presidents presented in this conference, therefore, ensure their commitment to

promoting, within the regional and sub-national assemblies over which they preside, the values of freedom and democracy, the freedom of expression, of religion, of cultural pluralism and integration whilst following up the EU Security Agenda with actions towards a Security Union and to strengthen controls at the EU external borders.

Faced with the complexity created by these circumstances, the European Union is showing an alarming fragility, and has begun to show significant cracks in the balance of relations both between and within the Member States. A populist tendency to defend exclusively national interests is becoming increasingly widespread and entrenched, far removed from the spirit and values on which the European Union was built. Now more than ever there is a real need for the European Union to show vision, responsibility and leadership in responding to these challenges.

Given this reality, CALRE appeals to the values that underpin the European common project, to the cardinal principles of its mission, to build a project for the future.

As well, and as a means to respond to this complex scenario, CALRE considers vital to revitalize representative democracy. The countries that underpinned the European common project are repositories of a long and historic struggle for the consolidation of public rights and freedoms, in particular those inherent in their own democratic functioning as a mechanism for fair, equitable and equal political and social organization. In the rest of the challenges that are pointed out in the present resolution, a transverse axis is glimpsed as to how the systems of representation can provide ways of solution.

In this regard, it is also necessary to emphasize the role of political representatives in legislative and executive bodies in the different spheres of European governance systems.

It is essential, in order to reinforce and deepen the quality of democratic models, to increase the symbolic links of the classic representations of values and interests of the citizenry, to revalue the effective control of public activity through institutional mechanisms and incentives to political

organizations for their co-responsibility, and to promote a culture of collaboration and consensus of all the actors involved in those issues where large political and social majorities are needed to reinforce the implementation of effective and inclusive measures that provide solutions to these challenges.

- Natural disasters

Climate change is the major cause of the increase in natural disasters in Europe, which are becoming more frequent and common.

In the last few years Italy has experienced more frequent severe seismic events that have affected several areas with serious repercussions on living conditions, the natural environment and the economy.

Regions, as local authorities closest to the communities, are facing problems daily due to emergency situations.

The risk of natural disaster is not only Italy's problem as demonstrated by the number of interventions by the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) (71 in support of 24 Member States) established by the Regulation (EU) No 2012/2002.

For this reason, the risk of natural disasters is one of the challenges that the European Union faces; as evidenced by the establishment of EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

The actions of European Union on these such issues are many: taking the lead in combating climate change, the support of local communities to improve the ability to handle natural disasters, not only during an emergency but by implementing preventive measures and greater flexibility in the Stability and Growth Pact, towards affected States.

CALRE, therefore, hopes to gain more attention on the topic of natural disasters, from European Institutions.

CALRE and the state of the Union, between present and future

Within the spirit of "global partnership for development" promoted by the United Nations and supported by the European Union, CALRE is committed to supporting sustainable economic growth and a shared and equitable distribution of resources. In order to ensure the welfare of all European citizenship, CALRE suggests the need to promote social policies which will enable full enjoyment of civil and social rights, enshrined in the European treaties and in the model of the welfare state, promoting increased integration from a social perspective.

In terms of the work program of the European Commission, CALRE considers as essential:

- that the work of the Commission should continue to express its commitment to ensure respect of the **subsidiarity principle**, implementing an **integrated** and multi-level policy **approach**, and calls for an increasing involvement of local and regional authorities in the European decision-making process. It is necessary, in fact, that regional authorities should develop an increased capacity for programming and implementing matters within their jurisdiction, with the objective of building an actual **European governance**, the result of a real synergy between local, national and European levels.
- Recent negotiations of CETA have shown the European institutions have, in the framework of mixed treaties, to listen more to the voice of the member states and the entitled regions with legislative powers and respect the opinion of every authority.
- **Strongly reiterating the essence of the cohesion policy in Europe**, which remains the main EU investment policy. It supports job creation, **EU companies' competitiveness**, **smart** growth, sustainable development, overcoming structural barriers **and the development of a polycentric Europe for the effective** improvement of the quality of life of citizenship in all regions and cities of the European Union. The cohesion policy is the expression of true European solidarity and ensures a harmonious development of the EU as a whole. A strong and effective cohesion policy **must continue to cover every single region in the period after to 2020 and become** a prerequisite for overcoming the traps that lie ahead. It is the section of politics which most affects

citizenship as it promotes projects, innovation and development in the territories, creating visible effects and thereby ensuring that the positive action of being a part of this Europe is understood. These are political matters which citizenship are not sufficiently informed of. It is important to bridge this distance, and to **explain**, on the one hand, **the benefits of the cohesion policy** to European citizenship, which are at the same time the advantages of belonging to the European Union; and on the other, to dialogue with the European institutions, first and foremost the Commission, concerning the need to implement this policy, and thus to its full refinancing, its usefulness in the long run and of the priorities which are identified within it: governance, simplification, territoriality and flexibility.

- Expressing its concern to the European Commission at the presentation of the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework, which has already reached its limits, instead of a full across the board review which would enable the European Union to find solutions to the challenges it is facing and to ensure that the EU budget should focus its interventions in the sustainable growth-providing areas and in the creation of jobs, with a strong European added value, and therefore we expect that the next MFF should take a significant step forward towards modernising the EU budget in order to enable the Union to meet future challenges, in addition to the new priorities which are emerging ahead; to this regard, it should be re-examined the cohesion policy clause of macroeconomic conditionality, in order to avoid regions' punishment in case of macroeconomic imbalances in a given Member State and ensure an appropriate use of EU funding in complying regions. CALRE acknowledges that economic recovery can be achieved by reforms within the Member States with respect to the requirements of the Stability and Growth Pact. Only a sensible economic policy and structural reforms within the Member States will create a favorable economic situation within the Eurozone.
- That the Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) should adopt various measures to ensure complementarity and additionality between the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFIS) and the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF funds) and other EU-funded

programs; in this context it will therefore be necessary to fully involve local and regional authorities, also through the Committee of the Regions, in implementing, monitoring and evaluating the investment plan, particularly in relation to promoting investment platforms and analysing the true impact of ESIF in remedying the lack of investment at a regional and local level.

- Simplifying and rationalising procedures in order to make the impact of ESIF programs stronger and more effective, improving their implementation and adopting without delay a number of simplification measures for the current programming period;
- Developing an EU strategy concerning demographic challenges; relaunching the *not only GDP* debate and examining the need and opportunity to develop additional economic performance, well-being and sustainable development indicators; focusing efforts towards eliminating cross-border, transnational and interregional transport and digital connection gaps within EU territories avoiding risks of social exclusion.

In this context, this Declaration reaffirms the principles expressed in the Resolution approved by the Standing Committee in April which well expresses the specific and strategic lines that CALRE wants to continue to address and monitor.

The European project is going through difficult times, but CALRE believes in its fundamental values and is convinced that now is the time to move forward, to strengthen our common goal, to work in partnership and to show a stronger European leadership at all levels of governance. A key step in this process is the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, which will be celebrated in Rome on 25th March 2017. That occasion might represent an interesting and challenging opportunity for CALRE to seriously tackle the issue of European regionalism as a strategic factor from which to reactivate the reconstruction of a European perspective. Still as concerns this last point, CALRE is also carefully looking at the "Reflections on EU" political roadmap, as has successfully been done in the Committee of the Regions and in the European Parliament and to continue its thoughts on the future of European institutions. From this context, there is emerging interest in deepening a

dialogue and multi-level and inter-institutional consultation, in particular with the European Parliament and with the Committee of the Regions on “Reflecting on the EU” and the future of the EU Institutions, in order to increase the authority and representativeness of the regions in the European Union.

To this extent, it should be stressed the need to get regional legislative representatives in all national delegations within the CoR.

Intensification of relations with the main associations of European regionalism: the territories at the heart of the Community policy

With reference to the program priorities of CALRE for 2016, the focus of the Conference’s political agenda this past year has benefited from the consolidation of the dialogue with EU institutions at a European level, in particular with the Committee of the Regions.

CALRE therefore intends to continue along the common path undertaken with the various forms of representation of the wide range of European regional life, in order to meet the challenge given by the current state of the Union and to respond to the centrifugal forces active across Europe with a solid and shared vision of collaboration, a shared dialogue and a direct discussion, with the objective of reaching convergent positions on common issues of regional and local interest, and specifically on those issues likely to have substantial effects on the represented regions and territories.

In parallel, with the conviction of the need to also continue fostering CALRE’s activities on the international stage, the Conference has constantly promoted the development of successful and fruitful international relations with different non-European legislative organisations, in order to favour the exchange of best practices and significant experiences on issues of priority regional concern, through discussions and dialogues with our regions.

As stated by Pope Francis at the award of the Charlemagne Prize *“The community of European peoples will thus be able to overcome the temptation of falling back on unilateral paradigms and opting for forms of “ideological colonization”. Instead, it will rediscover the breadth of the European soul, born of the encounter of civilizations and peoples. The soul of Europe is in fact greater than the present borders of the Union and is called to become a model of new syntheses and of dialogue. The true face of Europe is seen not in confrontation, but in the richness of its various cultures and the beauty of its commitment to openness”.*

The challenge for us is to take this path together, continuing to relaunch a constructive position which may really constitute a foundation stone for building a Europe of peoples and regions united into diversity, within an open and continuous relationship with all the institutional players which we will meet on the European scene. A Europe closer to its territories and citizenship, with a stronger representative democracy, as the highest form of popular representation which finds its main expression in the every-day work of our regional parliaments.

Moreover, the interactivity between citizens and representatives should also be enhanced.