



**17th Conference of Presidents of the Regional Legislative Parliaments of the
European Union (CALRE)**

from 20 to 22 October 2013, Brussels

Brussels Declaration

The Presidents, having participated in the 17th Conference of Regional Legislative Parliaments of the European Union on 21 and 22 October in Brussels,

Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale – Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Parlement
Parlement wallon
Parlement de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles
Parlament der deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft
Landtag von Baden-Württemberg
Sächsischer Landtag
Parlamento de Extremadura
Parlament de les Illes Balears – Parlamento de las Islas Baleares
Parlamento de Galicia
Parlamento de Murcia
Parlamento de Canarias
Parlamento de Castilla-La-Mancha
Parlamento de Andalucía
Parlamento de la Rioja
Eusko Legebiltzarra – Parlamento Vasco
Consiglio regionale de Trentino-Alto-Adige – Regionalrat Trentino-Südtirol
Consiglio regionale dell'Abruzzo
Consiglio regionale del Veneto
Consiglio regionale dell'Umbria
Consiglio regionale de Lombardia
Consiglio regionale del Friuli Venezia Giulia
Consiglio regionale del Lazio
Consiglio regionale della Puglia
Consiglio regionale del Molise

Consiglio regionale della Sicilia
Consiglio regionale del Piemonte
Landtag von Niederösterreich
Landtag von Steiermark
Assembleia Legislativa da Região Autónoma dos Açores
Ålands Lagting
Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru – National Assembly for Wales

have adopted, by mutual agreement, the following declaration:

1. General considerations

The member regions of CALRE, taking into account their significant cultural, linguistic, territorial, economic and social differences and possessing different legislative competencies, shall endeavour to work together and assume their responsibility as legislative bodies within their common point of reference: the European Union.

It is essential that the regional assemblies think more in European terms. They must assume their roles of regional assemblies within the EU in addition to that which they fulfil within their respective states.

Europe is increasingly defining regulations that are implemented at national level. The daily lives of our fellow citizens are being increasingly influenced by decisions made at European level, with the regional assemblies transposing into their legislation the Directives that have been crafted at European Union level. In order to avoid becoming limited to the role of a rubber stamping body, the regional assemblies must, therefore, be as proactive as possible with regard to European institutions.

While the existence of the EU enables us to enjoy the benefits of harmonised legislation when defining certain policies, the safeguarding, development and promotion of Europe's rich territorial, cultural and linguistic diversity must remain an essential component of the European project. The regions have a vital role to play in this mission.

With this in mind, it is essential that the regional assemblies maintain and consolidate the links forged since the general assembly held in Oviedo in 1997. By its very existence and through its activities, CALRE continues to pursue this objective.

Although the representation of women in the regional parliaments is about the same as the EU-28 average, the proportion of women does not as yet women's broader representation in society. So it is important that the CALRE assemblies commit themselves to work towards improving women's positions in their respective assemblies.

2. The role of regional parliaments within the European Union

The European institutions have the all-too-frequent habit of addressing themselves to the Member States even though, for certain policies, the regions dispose of legislative

competences and would be the more appropriate audience due to their experience and expertise in certain areas. Greater efficiency in European policy will, therefore, require more extensive consultation and better consideration of regional perspectives.

On the other hand CALRE considers that the dialogue raised with the European Parliament should continue 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.

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 discussion of the Commission's annual working programme. CALRE confirms its availability for direct dialogue with the European Commission in order to take more into account the territorial, constitutional and cultural diversity of the European regions, as well as the specific characteristics of each of them.

The Committee of the Regions plays an important role as an echo chamber for regional demands at European level. More than ever, CALRE wishes to maintain the links and excellent collaboration that it enjoys with the Committee of the Regions and, if possible, better articulate relationships with this institution. The definition, by regions with legislative power, of their political priorities, the management of their respective competencies and their leaders' accountability to electorates confer them with experience, expertise and legitimacy with regard to their European contacts. This therefore justifies them occupying a more important place within the Union and its institutions.

The regional assemblies are increasingly influenced in their work by European affairs. The application, at regional level, of certain European legislation gives the regions an important role in broadcasting Europe's "voice". The regions are, in effect, an important relay of European policies on the ground. They are well placed to highlight the unique features of their territory to the European institutions and to implement European legislation in accordance with the specific characteristics that each regional situation may present.

Finally, CALRE confirms its determination and willingness to co-operate with the 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 efficiency, better use of positive synergies and considerable savings in energy and resources.

CALRE is aware that it should be better known, among other things through inviting observers coming from regions showing interest in its activities.

3. The regional assemblies and monitoring subsidiarity

Since the establishment of the Subsidiarity Monitoring Network and the creation of the REGPEX database, the regional assemblies have been active in monitoring subsidiarity and are increasingly expressing their opinions on proposed European legislation. Nevertheless, while certain assemblies have taken on this role in an effective manner, the practice is still not widespread throughout all the assemblies.

CALRE calls on all those assemblies that are not yet active in this respect to seize the ability they have been given to verify whether proposed European legislation respects the principle of subsidiarity. Improving European legislation requires more extensive mobilisation of the regional assemblies.

CALRE points out that, almost four years after the subsidiarity early warning mechanism entered into force, it has become clear that the 8-weeks-term for subsidiarity scrutiny does not give parliaments, especially the regional parliaments with legislative power, enough time for a thorough examination of new EU legislative proposals. The thresholds to trigger the “yellow-card-” and the “orange-card”-mechanisms have proven too high, since the quorum for the “yellow card” has, within 4 years, only once been reached.

CALRE therefore calls, in the framework of the next change of the European treaties, for a substantial extension of the term for subsidiarity scrutiny, as well as for a reduction of the thresholds required for the “yellow card” and the “orange card”.

Some assemblies submit their subsidiarity opinions directly to the European Commission. CALRE calls on the Commission to introduce the practice of sending subsidiarity opinions directly to the Commission in the annual reports on subsidiarity and on the relations to the national Parliaments.

More extensive exchanging of information and best practices between assemblies is desirable. CALRE shall endeavour to put in place procedures for collaboration to ensure better sharing of information between regions. In addition, the subsidiarity opinions from the different assemblies on important topical matters should be compiled, in order to obtain an overview of the regional assemblies' points of view. This overview would constitute CALRE's point of view on a particular theme and would carry more weight than the sum of the different opinions.

In order to better disseminate the different subsidiarity opinions issued by the regional assemblies, the CALRE welcomes the initiative by the Subsidiarity Monitoring Network to provide a summary of their opinions. This process will enable the regional assemblies to gain a better awareness of the content of the subsidiarity opinions expressed by the other regional assemblies.

While the regional assemblies do currently adopt subsidiarity opinions, they do not, however, yet come within the framework of the formal procedure established by protocol no. 2 of the TFEU, which is reserved for national assemblies.

Nevertheless, like the system in force in Belgium, the national assemblies could assume the role of relay for the regional assemblies at European level, provided that the subsidiarity opinion concerns regional competencies.

The CALRE calls on the national assemblies of Member States with regions that have legislative powers to convey the subsidiarity opinions issued by the regional assemblies to the European institutions. Formal monitoring of subsidiarity cannot be limited to the competencies assumed at national level.

4. European budget

While the CALRE welcomes the conclusion of a compromise between the European Parliament and the Council regarding the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework, it nevertheless remains concerned by the amounts devoted to this budget.

Unfortunately, one wonders if the reductions in expenditure on innovation, research, transport and energy are likely to counter the ambitious targets that the European Union has set for itself. Achieving the targets of the 2020 strategy requires significant investment. It is therefore the question whether the multiannual financial framework lives up to the stated ambitions. The need for investment in European infrastructure is essential to ensure a prosperous future for the European Union and its Member States.

This investment will be borne, in part, by Europe, the Member States and their regional entities. Investment at European level may, if it has a clear added value, enable considerable economies of scale to be achieved, freeing up additional budgetary scope for other investments.

Significant investment in these sectors over the coming years would also provide jobs for some of the now 27 million unemployed within the European Union.

Multilevel governance and cooperation between various levels of government are essential to improve the implementation of the funds with the goal to achieving the objectives of the 2020 strategy.

5. 2014 European elections

The regional assemblies must also support any initiative aimed at reducing the democratic deficit in the European Union. This objective will be achieved by, amongst other things, better representativeness for Members of the European Parliament.

Effective representativeness in the European Parliament requires greater participation at the next election compared with the figures obtained in 2009. It is imperative that a satisfactory rate of participation is achieved so that the result of the election really conveys the political direction to be given to the European Union. If the rate of participation is too low, there is a risk of obscuring the direction in which the citizens want to steer it.

Mobilising citizens requires a proper understanding of the political, economic and social issues of this election. It is necessary to give due place to the transnational character of this electoral *rendezvous*.

The CALRE calls on the leading players in the upcoming electoral campaign to give due importance to European issues.

In the face of a certain amount of distrust by citizens towards the European Union, it is essential to bridge the gap that has opened up between the European institutions and the

population. This amounts to a real challenge for true Europhiles. The regional assemblies will attempt, as far as practicable, to encourage citizens to gain awareness of the importance of issues associated with the European election. The CALRE welcomes the initiatives that have been taken this year within this context.

6. Future of the CALRE

Since its creation, the CALRE has been a meeting place, a place for exchanging information and for sharing best practices and common experiences between regional assemblies. Working groups enable specific subjects to be focused on. The general consensus is that this method, while it has led to advances in certain areas, could be reformed.

The CALRE must ensure that this work produces real results at European level. With this in mind, the CALRE has initiated a review aimed at redefining its objectives and the organisation of its work. In particular, it intends to reduce its operating costs, speed up its work and increase the dissemination of the results obtained, and move a certain number of its meetings towards the centre in Brussels, the headquarters of European institutions.

This approach will take time and its result must be based on discussions with all of its members. We are nevertheless hopeful of reaching our goal. The willingness to work together, and the openness and closeness of relationships between CALRE's members which characterise these members will guarantee success.