

CALRE 2016 Plenary Assembly

Speech by Raffaele Cattaneo, CALRE 2016 President

First session, 24 November 2016



Distinguished colleagues, dear guests,

I am very happy and honoured to welcome you all to the 2016 Plenary Assembly of the Conference of the European Regional Legislative Assemblies.

I would like to especially thank the host, the President of the Chamber of Commerce of Varese, Mr. Giuseppe Albertini and the Mayor of Varese, Mr. Davide Galimberti, the President of the Committee of the Regions, Mr. Markku Markkula, the Vice-President of the Lombardy Region, Mr. Fabrizio Sala.

I thank in particular the attending European associations: I am glad you enjoyed and accepted the invitation to our Plenary Assembly, and the constructive and cooperative approach that has guided us and that will find a suitable occasion for development during the second session of the plenary assembly, to be held tomorrow afternoon, during the Conference "Regions and the future of Europe".

On this occasion we will discuss together the issues that are important for our communities and for Europe, and we will bring to a conclusion the cooperation path that we started in a positive way in recent years, with the approval of the document on "A Strengthened Role at European Level of Regional Authorities and Associations representing European Regions and Territories" which will be presented this afternoon.

Meanwhile, I hope you will appreciate the work of this Assembly, the presentation of the results of the activity that we conducted during this year with our Working Groups, and the presentation of the prospects and commitments that await us in 2017.

Thanks again and welcome.

I would like to open the works of this Plenary Assembly with a personal note: tomorrow, at the end of the day, we will have elected the new President of CALRE for 2017 and therefore my experience at the helm of the Conference will conclude.

It was a great honor and a great pride for me to chair CALRE in these two years: I am a full supporter of the value of **European regionalism** and of the **participation of European citizens in the democratic life**, interpreted as a *pivotal role* of the territories in the bottom-up policy-making: CALRE for me is exactly one of the main places where you can and where you should express that pivotal role.

CALRE has always had the purpose to respect some basic principles:

- recovering the **original value of the political project of the European integration**, *united in diversity*, respecting the specific characteristics of every single Region, as well as far from an undifferentiated and centralist project;
- the **value of the individual person and of the community**, of the **freedom** and of the **representative democracy**;
- the assertion of the prerogatives of the different levels of territorial government through a **multilevel governance**, that is **reticular** and **really shared**, based on the respect for **subsidiarity** not as a procedure but as a founding principle of institutional relations between different levels of government.

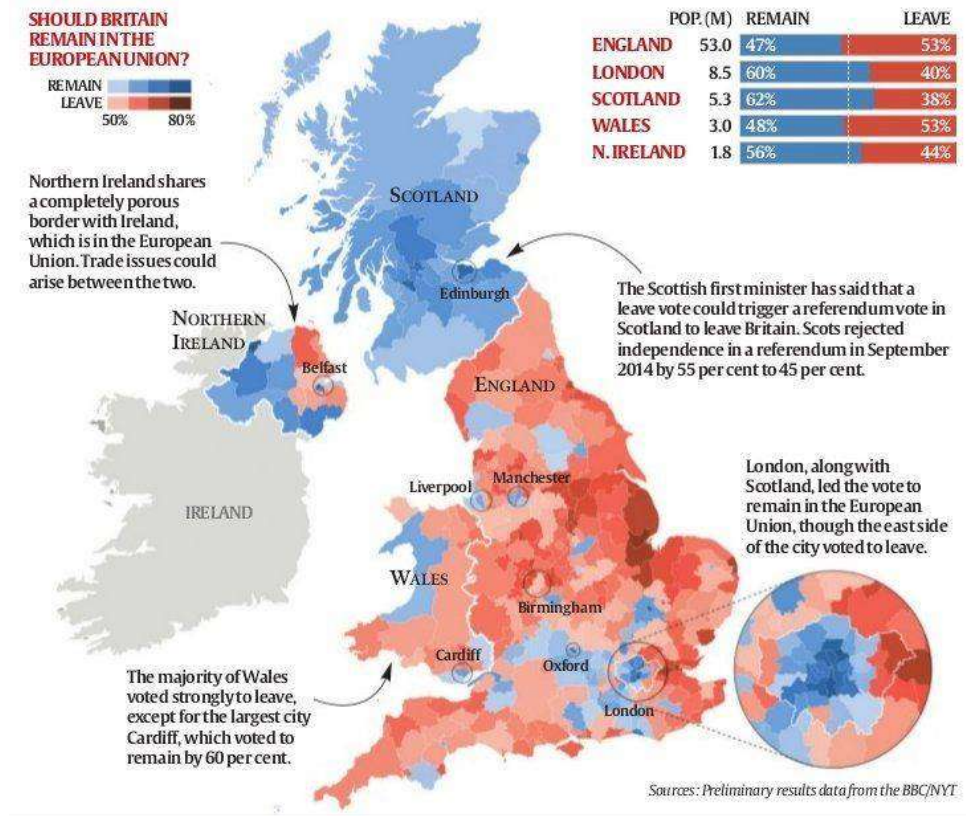
All this has inspired and led the activities of CALRE over the years, and I personally will be happy to continue to give my contribution in the future, in order for us to achieve our goals together. In addition to being a great honour, it has definitely been a big commitment, because, as we all know, the last two years have been very challenging for Europe.

The challenges of 2016

2016 in particular has been a difficult year.

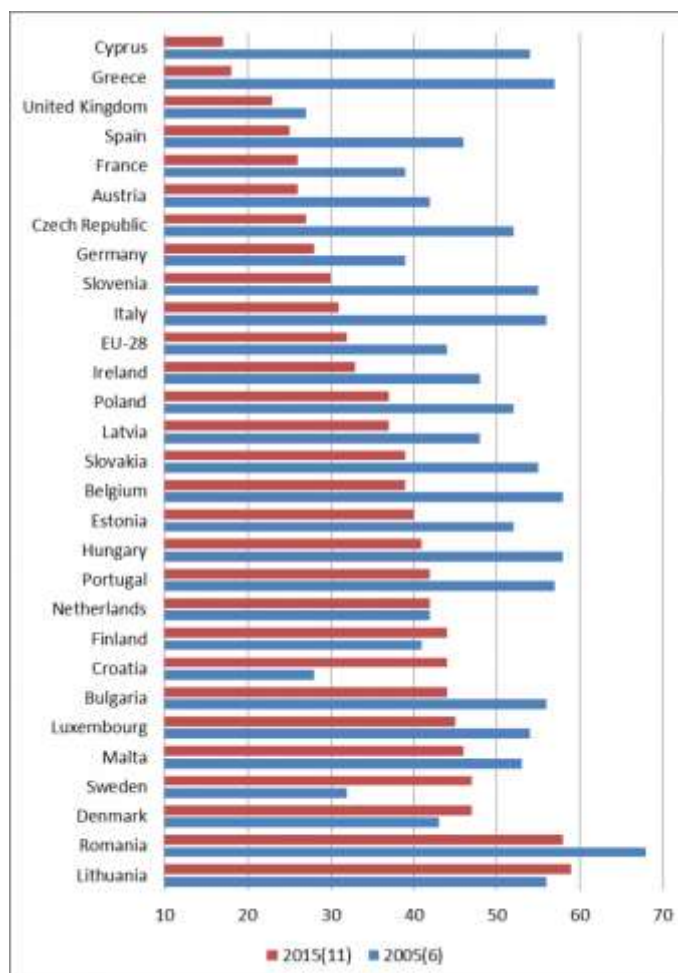
For the first time in the history of the European project **a Member State, the United Kingdom, chose to leave the Union**. This choice, made by popular will, has sharply showed the gap between citizens and British territories, and the European institutions. This vote has shown that the project of European integration can not be separated from the consensus and from the awareness of European citizens with regard to Community policies. European citizens and territories have to be again the active protagonist of the policies. Otherwise, **the risk is that the Brexit could be only the beginning**. This is why the CALRE, in a draft resolution that will be presented today, asks and will push for all EU institutions to make every effort to rebuild an inclusive Europe, able to hear the voice of people and local communities. In order to reverse the trend of this chart, drawn up on the day after the Brexit vote:

How Britain voted in the referendum



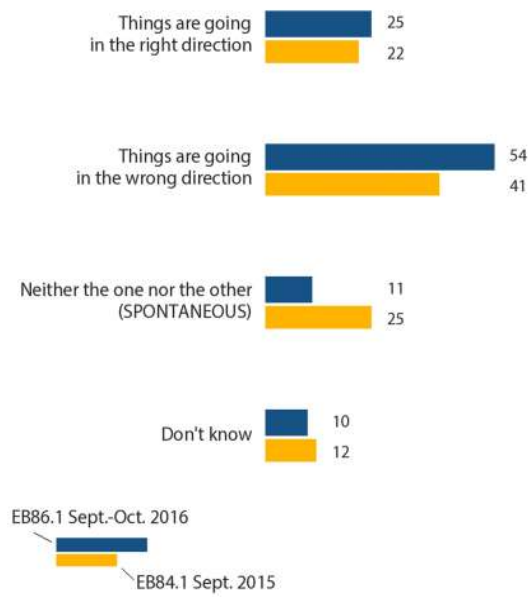
Starting from this, we can not be impressed by following more general data, thanks to which a **growing alienation** of citizens European institutions has been both cause and gap with respect to the Brussels. The EU distant from the actual citizens and, at times, understand the emerge in the unable to propose

Trust in the EU



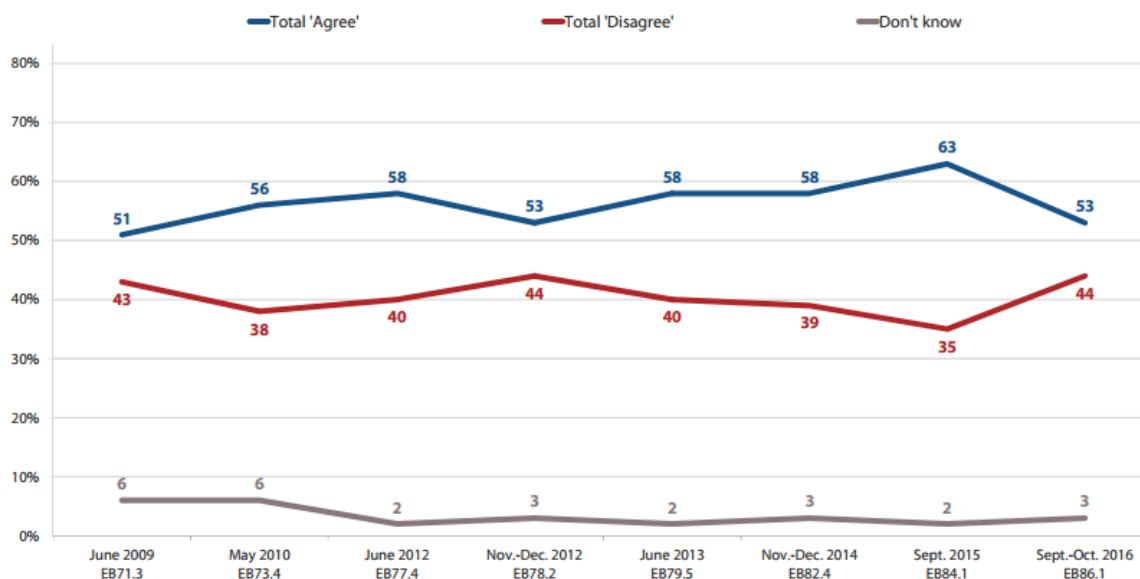
emerges towards the that, in recent years, effect of the perceived decision-makers in institutions are felt as life of European unable to fully **problems that territories and effective solutions.**

Question: Are things going in the right direction?



Does your voice matter

in the EU?



These data are merciless and are the result of years and years of European policies that are too centralized and too distant from the real perception of the citizens, in the framework of a silent institutional review process characterized by a **weakening** of **European Parliament** and **national parliaments** in European decision-making and by a rare appreciation of the efforts made by the **Committee of the Regions** as a consultative body representing regions and local authorities - institutional entities in which more than 70% of Community policies is implemented.

And the consequences from the processes are shaped in EU policies.

The weaknesses of the Union and in the solidarity between Member States become clear in the management of the refugees and migrants crisis. We are still awaiting an effective reform of the Common European Asylum System, and we see the difficulty in the implementation of the reception system, based on the relocation of migrants in different countries with a quota system. In this regard it is necessary to encourage a greater cooperation between regional and local authorities in order to identify working methods to achieve a shared and positive management of migration, according to the European legislation and the international treaties that protect migrants and asylum seekers.

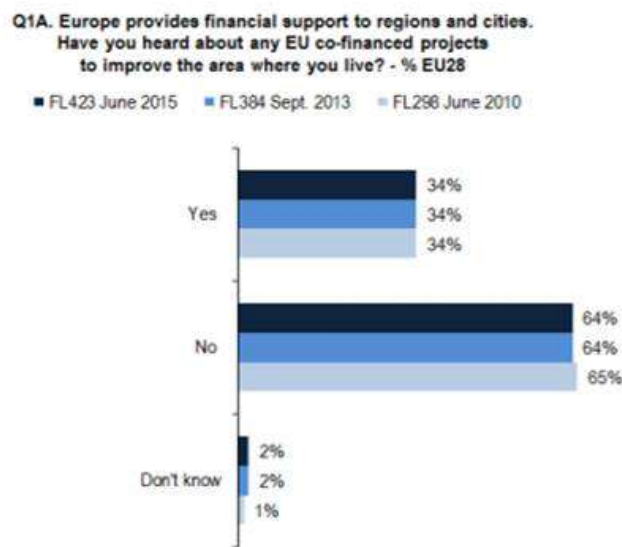
Given the complexity of these circumstances, Europe is showing an alarming fragility, influenced by a lack of vision and responsibility. To overcome the crisis of confidence, that is so widespread among European citizens, we have to rebuild it from the bottom, *from* the territory and *with* the territory.

Europe is struggling to strongly recover from the economic crisis, with the continuing problems of the lack of growth, youth unemployment, regional imbalances, while the debate on the next EU budget and the future of Cohesion Policy post 2020 is approaching.

Cohesion policy is the main European Union investment policy: it supports jobs creation, competitiveness between companies, economic growth, sustainable development and the overall improvement of the quality of life of citizens in all regions and cities of the European Union. The cohesion policy is the expression of a true European solidarity and ensures a harmonious development of the EU as a whole. It is the policy that most concretely affects citizens because it promotes projects, innovation and development in the territories, creating visible effects and showing in this manner the positive outcomes of belonging to this Europe.

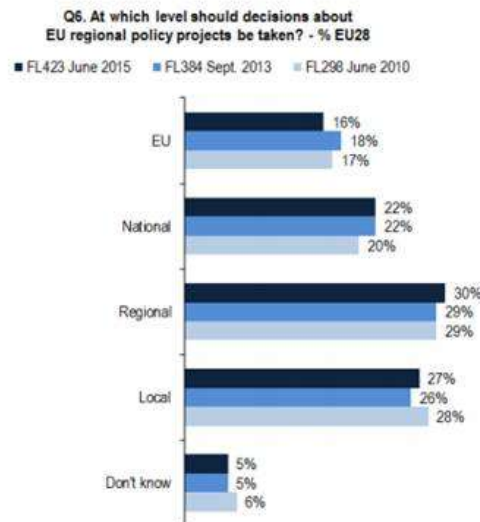
But the direction, to which the discussion is moving, is a downsizing of the European values and a tendency to centralization by the Commission, with a predominance of financial instruments directly managed by the EU. In this situation, we shall strongly defend cohesion policy in its true vocation: as a policy that contributes to the realization of concrete projects in the territories; and we shall counter its weakening towards a technocracy of centralized financial instruments not addressed directly to the development of the territories, a technocracy that bypasses the territories in the definition and implementation of projects.

Following there are the answers to the question **“Have you ever heard about any EU-cofinanced projects to improve the quality of life in your region/city?”**



Base: all respondents (N=28,048)

Question: At which level should decisions about EU regional policy be taken?



Base: all respondents (N=28,048)

A concrete example: CALRE welcomes the recent decision of the European Commission not to proceed with the suspension of structural and investment funds for Spain and Portugal. We have always strongly affirmed that the regions can not be penalized for the violation of national standards by the respective Member States, and this is a victory in this case.

What to do: The strength of the Conference lies in the ability to represent as much as possible the needs of the territories. If we want President Juncker - *and here I am also addressing to the President Markkula* – **to recognize the added value of cities and regions in rebuilding the trust of citizens in the Union** in his next State of the Union address, it will be necessary to continue along the set path and even develop our partnership, to share a strong position on the contents and methods of the Community measures.

The European project is experiencing a difficult period, and in my opinion it experienced difficult periods also in the past (perhaps in more violent ways, but still worrisome and, to date, undervalued) but CALRE believes in its fundamental values and is convinced of the need to strengthen our common goal, to work for a stronger partnership at all levels of government. 2017 is the year of the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaty, on March 25, 2017. In this framework, for CALRE it could be challenging to continue to support with determination the issue of **European regionalism** as a key factor to restart. As part of the reflection on the future of the European institutions it would be interesting to deepen a multi-level and inter-institutional dialogue, with a view also to the **prospect of creating a third European chamber with legislative power representing local and regional interest**, in order to increase authority and representativeness of the regions.

But we first need to restart from ourselves, from the regional legislative assemblies and from the territories: **increasing the awareness** about the importance of EU legislation and its territorial impact,

collaborating with the authorities and the civil society in the participation and in the development of projects related to the European Union (I am talking about the Interreg projects or the Cohesion Policy), **developing proposals and contents** within the places of representation and inter-parliamentary dialogue with the national Parliament and the European Parliament.

Pope Francis in his address at the conferral of the Charlemagne Prize, said:

[...] we would do well to turn to the founding fathers of Europe. They were prepared to pursue alternative and innovative paths in a world scarred by war. Not only did they boldly conceive the idea of Europe, but they dared to change radically the models that had led only to violence and destruction. They dared to seek multilateral solutions to increasingly shared problems. Robert Schuman, at the very birth of the first European community, stated that “Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity”. Today, in our own world, marked by so much conflict and suffering, there is a need to return to the same de facto solidarity and concrete generosity that followed the Second World War, because, as Schuman noted, “world peace cannot be safeguarded without making creative efforts proportionate to the dangers threatening it”. The founding fathers were heralds of peace and prophets of the future. Today more than ever, their vision inspires us to build bridges and tear down walls. That vision urges us not to be content with cosmetic retouches or convoluted compromises aimed at correcting this or that treaty, but courageously to lay new and solid foundations. As Alcide De Gasperi stated, “equally inspired by concern for the common good of our European homeland”, all are called to embark fearlessly on a “construction project that demands our full quota of patience and our ongoing cooperation”.

The challenge for us is to undertake this path together, by boosting a constructive position in an open and continuous relationship with all the institutional players that we will meet in the European scenario, so that this constructive position will be able to act as a “brick” in the building of a Europe of peoples and regions.

In conclusion, as you all know, my term as President of CALRE is about to expire. I am sure that who will succeed as head of CALRE will continue the work to date, and I would like to express to the next President my best wishes and assure him/her all my availability for an effective cooperation. My commitment to CALRE will not however end in 2016, because I will stay as vice-President and offer my cooperation for the growth of CALRE’s action, in support of a Europe closer to territories and citizens! Thank you all, I wish every success to our 2016 Plenary Assembly and a fruitful work!