

CEREMONY OF THE TRANSFER

OF THE CARLE PRESIDENCY

Seville, 27 January 2017

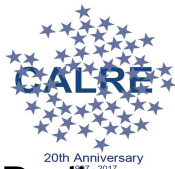
Good afternoon, welcome to the Andalusian Parliament

I thank you for attending this act in which we formally receive the Presidency of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies, of CALRE.

President Cattaneo thank you, to you and to all your team, for the achievements of the last two years, 2015 and 2016.

I am delighted to be able to continue counting on your contribution, your experience and your excellent work, now as Vice President. I have no doubt that you will be an important pillar to support my mandate in CALRE.

I also wish to say that it will be an honour to represent my fellow presidents of the Spanish Regional Parliaments, who show their support by electing me unanimously to this post. Some of them are here today and I would especially like to thank them for their attendance. President of the Principality of Asturias, President of the Assembly of Murcia, President of the Parliament of Castilla-La Mancha, President of the Canary Islands Parliament, President of the Regional Parliament of Extremadura, President of the Regional



Parliament of Valencia who I would ask, in his capacity as President of COPREPA, to pass on my gratitude to all the members who have not been able to accompany us.

I am sure that all of them will contribute the best of themselves to this project to achieve all that we would wish in 2017.

It is an honour for the Andalusian Parliament and for me to assume the Presidency of CALRE in a year that is special for many reasons:

It is very special for this House, which was born 35 years ago by the express will of the Andalusian people, who wanted their own government and institutions. Those years were crucial in the history of Andalusia, since this region had to face very complicated challenges, particularly social and economic issues, in order to keep pace with the most advanced regions of Spain and Europe.

In this year, 2017, our continent is facing a scenario that will define its near future, in which we will have to meet new challenges in economic policy, security and the fight against terrorism and the rise of extreme nationalism. We will have to tackle issues like trust in the institutions, the fight against climate change, the consequences of Brexit and the treatment of refugees, to name just a few.

The solution to these challenges can only come through dialogue and consensus within our European institutions. Let us never forget that the rules and decisions taken in Brussels acquire their true meaning only once they become an instrument that can solve the daily problems of the citizens.

It is now, I believe, that the European regions have to play an essential role in the consolidation of the European model and rapprochement with the people. The future of our continent requires a guarantee of the welfare of its territories, reducing the differences between them and increasing their cohesion. CALRE has to play a role to facilitate this at both regional and local level, which is fundamental to achieve these goals.

I have no doubt that the contribution of the regions is fundamental for the construction of Europe, and I am convinced that our autonomous parliaments, in collaboration with their governments, must become bridges to directly connect the citizens of our territories with the European institutions.

How can we achieve this? What is the formula for success?

We may find the answer in the Founding Declaration of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies, which in 2017, another very special date, will celebrate its 20th anniversary.

The Oviedo Declaration, signed in 1997, clearly states that our autonomous regions must feel that they are partners in European decision-making. In other words, the local and regional policy-makers should be present and their opinion be taken into account when discussing and passing the laws that affect each and every citizen. In short, in creating efficient policies, which is the only way forward in these times.

This is the objective pursued in recent years by CALRE and that we will keep promoting throughout the mandate that starts today, while cultivating the relationship of our Conference with the European institutions, in particular with the Committee of the Regions, which is the interlocutor of the regional and local authorities within the Union.

Let us always heed our Treaties: European Union decisions should be taken at the closest practical level to the citizens.

This is, as you know, the principle of subsidiarity, a basic principle that we must consolidate as a guarantee of the correct implementation of the policies adopted by Brussels.

Parliaments represent the citizens democratically, we are not outside society, because we are born from it and all our efforts are aimed at the benefit of society.

We have to walk together at a pace marked by society, which requires quick decisions, accountability, efficiency, participation, exemplarity and transparency. This is the only way to recover the citizens' trust in their institutions.

I am a strong advocate of the central role of our legislative Chambers in the achievement of a new European model of governance that is much closer and more useful to the people.

As the ex-President of Portugal, Mr. Mario Soares, who unfortunately left us a few weeks ago, said: *"We are all necessary to win the challenge of Europe together"*.

For this reason, now more than ever, we are obliged to faithfully represent the citizens, with unity and responsibility, reaching agreements and consensus in favour of the citizens, seeking social and territorial cohesion, equality,

equity, job creation and better social services, and the Parliament is the best place to achieve these goals.

This is the best recipe to make a fairer and more united Europe: to put people at the centre of decision-making, against those who would erode our democratic system, against the anti-Europeans, extremists and xenophobes who claim that Europe is the problem.

I would invite them to read what the great Andalusian thinker, María Zambrano, wrote more than 70 years ago, in her article "The Agony of Europe", which was published in 1945, when the Second World War had sown destruction in our continent.

"We do not know (...) what it is that links us with everything European, and that, at this moment, is more relevant than any particular, individual, national characteristic. That which makes us feel Europe as a great unity in which we are fully included. It is only the testimony of our reliability (...), since far from wanting to break it, we want to know it so as never to betray it".

For this reason, it is essential to consolidate European democracy and the values on which the Union was founded, while preserving coexistence and tolerance, and putting people at the centre of our actions.

As I have said, 2017 is a special year. It is also the year when we commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, which obliges us, as CALRE, to keep working to implement measures and policies to foster, among the European population, the values that shaped our Union: peace, equality, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination.

This does not sit easily with the terrible images we are seeing of thousands of refugees shivering in the winter cold in different parts of Europe, many of whom have lost their lives.

The recent Conference of Regional Governments of Spain convened by the President of the Government, the President of the Andalusian Government, Susana Díaz, called for urgent aid for the refugees and for action to solve this situation: the Governments of the European Union must react immediately.

Andalusia and Spain are the frontier with Africa, and we have strong historic and cultural links with America. Therefore, from here, allow me to ask our institutions in Brussels to look to the South, and take advantage of the value offered by our strategic location.

I am convinced that Spain can contribute a lot to the objective of a stronger and more solid Europe of the regions, as this country has been a place of encounter and dialogue between different civilisations, and has shaped its identity on a basis of respect, concord and peaceful coexistence, that is: *"a personality built upon universal values, never exclusive"*, as the Statute of Autonomy of Andalusia declares.

Therefore, it is important also to point out that in the Conference of Regional Presidents held on 17 January, it was agreed at last to convene the Conference for European Union Affairs in 2017, with the objective of strengthening coordination and cooperation between the Autonomous Communities and the Government of Spain regarding decisions and political activities emanating from Brussels and which affect everybody.

I think it is positive that the different regional governments are joining forces to achieve objectives shared with the legislative assemblies of our regions.

I will conclude

In the European Parliament resolution of 14 January 2003, it is established that regional parliaments and assemblies *"significantly contribute to the construction of Europe on the basis of the principles of democracy, proximity and decentralisation of power"*.

We are the essential link, together with the regional governments, between the citizens and the institutions of the European Union. This, undoubtedly, can contribute to promoting Europeanism among the citizens. For this reason, CALRE must continue to promote actions aimed at strengthening the central role of our parliaments and assemblies in connecting with European citizens, at turning our continent into a great democratic, cultural and economic power that will ensure solidarity and fundamental rights.

In Varese, I committed myself to giving the best of myself and I remain at the disposal of all CALRE members. I reaffirm my desire to collaborate, from today, and to stay in

continuous communication to tackle any issue of regional or local interest addressed in the Committee of the Regions, and to make the most of the reflections of the working groups planned for this year 2017.

I thank you, once again, for the trust placed in the Andalusian Parliament and in my person by the presidents of COPREPA to take on all the tasks on our agenda. I invite you to accompany us because this a collective project: Europe must take the lead in a twenty-first century that is more committed to its citizens and must become a freer, fairer and more united space.

Thank you very much.