



**34th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional  
Authorities of the Council of Europe  
Session of the Chamber of Regions  
Hemicycle of the Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg  
28.03.2018 - 9h00 / 12h00**

Allow me to start my speech by congratulating and thanking Madam President of the Chamber of Regions of the Congress, Gunn Marit Helgesen, for the kind invitation to participate in this session, on behalf of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE).

I praise henceforth the relevance and interest of the subject of our discussion today and, specially, of this panel, “Regional identity and integrity of the nation-State”, two inseparable concepts when debating the present and future of Europe. In this regard, I would like to congratulate the previous speakers, Professor Laurent DAVEZIES and the General Rapporteur on local and regional authorities of the Committee on Social Affairs, *Luís LEITE RAMOS*, on their interesting and relevant reflection.



I also greet all the members of the Chamber, dear colleagues from European regions and municipalities of the Council of Europe, on the conviction that CALRE's mission, twenty years after its foundation, has much in common with the goals that inspire the action of the Congress and, in particular, of the Chamber of Regions.

In other words, both CALRE, within the European Union, and the Congress, within the context of the Council of Europe, aim at, through their work, deepening the democratic and participative principles, promoting decentralisation and subsidiarity, regionalism and interregional cooperation, as well as the defence of Human Rights.

*Madam President of the Chamber, Dear Colleagues,*

CALRE, which represents about 250 million Europeans, gathers seventy-four regional autonomous parliaments from eight Member States of the Council of Europe and the European Union - Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom.



All these parliaments have in common the fact they are elected directly by the people and their regions have broad political and legislative powers.

With this in mind, we have no doubts that a strong regional identity has been the essential substratum for the political assertion of the regional democracy of CALRE members.

The existence of such identity constitutes the top foundation of the broad regional policy decentralisation implemented by their own States.

And this happens not only in the fully decentralised or federal States – in the case of the Spanish communities or the German and Austrian federal states – but also in the case of partially decentralised national States, such as the Portuguese archipelagos of Azores and Madeira and the Finnish Åland Islands.

Furthermore, it seems clear that the existence of a strong regionalism and a clear political decentralisation – namely in which the parliamentary body has legislative powers – is



responsible for boosting and promoting this same regional unity.

Take the example of my region, the Azores: if, on the one hand, the first claims for insular autonomy date back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, on the other hand, only 70 years later, in 1976, the Autonomous Region was finally established, founded upon territorial features, such as insularity and isolation, and the Azorean identity.

But after that, it was also necessary to build a real and effective regional unity of these nine islands and their people – which has been done, for the last four decades, with success – also reinforcing the Azorean People identity through the results of self-governance and internal cohesion and unity.

*Dear Colleagues,*

This does not mean that the existence of a strong regional identity, namely when promoted by political decentralisation, inevitably leads to movements against the nation-state.



In fact, regional identity isn't – at all – incompatible with the nation-state nor it is, even, a prior or pioneer state of regional nationalism, the same way decentralisation is not a synonym for weak State. On the contrary.

The institutional recognition, at national State level, of a regional identity which is established in a regime of political and legislative Autonomy and the resulting process of development close to the concerns of the population can only have as consequence the reinforcement of national unity.

This is, likewise, the case of my region, where the process of convergence of the levels of well-being and wealth with the nation as whole – notwithstanding the numberless challenges and obstacles yet to be overcome – strengthened the ties of solidarity between all Portuguese and the sense of belonging of the Azores and Azoreans to Portugal.

This is to say that centralism and distance from political power, as well as disinvestment and lack of resources must be considered the leading cause for disbelief in nation-state and for disappointment of citizens towards the institutions of centralised power.



Much can be said about the topicality of the nation-state concept, or not. However, from the exercise of political power perspective, we should underline that the European nation-states cannot face regionalism, decentralisation, subsidiarity or multilevel governance as a threat to its subsistence.

These are not the threats to its integrity: the real threats are the disbelief of populations towards their institutions, distrust towards political agents, the lack of social responses and the nationalisms – not the regional nationalisms, but those which are based on intolerance, authoritarianism, in all forms of oppression of freedom, racism and populism, which, regrettably, have been emerging at every European electoral cycle.

*Dear Colleagues,*

In today's world, in tomorrow's Europe, all and each one of us has different senses of belonging, as well as feelings of identity and many affinities, which complement each other in overlapping circles, but not conflicting, of identity: the



regional identity (that can, or not, be synonymous with national identity), the state identity (that can, or not, be a nation-state) and the European identity, which should always be the Europe of the good multilevel governance and decentralisation.

The fact that CALRE regions help actively to achieve and apply the rules and policies within its territories, which results from the institutional political powers of CALRE members, is obviously inseparable from a greater responsibility of these regions to show that European Regionalism cannot be built against the nation-state, much less to favour, by its own, the European project.

*Dear Colleagues,*

Some may be tempted to think that the future of Europe is – just as Jean-Jacques Rousseau stated to be in 1772, almost two centuries and a half ago – that “today there are no French, Germans, Spanish, even English; there are only Europeans”.

No. The secret of Europe’s success, of this Europe of respect for Democracy and popular sovereignty, of Cohesion, Tolerance, Europe of Human Rights, is precisely that, today



and tomorrow, there will be French, Germans, Spanish and Portuguese, the same way we will continue to be proud Azoreans, Galicians and Flemish, as well as proud Europeans. We believe this is and will continue be the significance and success of Europe of the regions.

Thank you for your attention.

Strasbourg, 28 of March 2018

The President of the Conference of European Regional  
Legislative Assemblies

Ana Luísa Luís