



## **PRESIDENT'S SPEECH AT THE 2021 PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

Honourable members of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies.

It is two years now, since the Canary Island Parliament, and myself as its representative, undertook the challenge of presiding over CALRE, having taken over from the Region of Umbria's Presidency.

The most important challenges at that time were those brought about by Brexit, the anti-European movements in one or two member states, and the President of the European Commission's proposal to put into effect a great participative process in the future of Europe.

Along these lines, the first of the Conference's initiatives, within the Cohesion Alliance, were aimed at guaranteeing funding for political cohesion against possible cuts in the Multiannual Financial Framework. This was the case presented in the letter which the Cohesion Alliance sent to Charles Michel, President of the European Council in 2019.

By the way, the letter included concepts regarding the principles of association and multi-level government, which should be reinforced in order to improve efficiency in EU spending. These concepts are basic to many future strategies.

The whole outlook changed when COVID 19 broke out, followed by the pandemic, which plunged the world into a massive health, economic and social crisis.



The EU response was based upon maintaining a united front against adversity, confronting each aspect of the crisis with solidarity.

In response to the health crisis, a firm undertaking that all European citizens would have the same possible accessibility to vaccines.

In response to the economic crisis, establishing a temporary recovery fund aimed at paying for the recovery plan, the Next Generation EU.

Making these funds, the SURE funding, available to Member States, as a temporary support instrument, to mitigate risks of unemployment brought about by the emergency, protected citizens and helped alleviate the extremely negative socioeconomic effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Besides those, in response to environmental challenges, the European Green Deal.

In short, the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, together with the Next Generation EU, constitute the biggest ever financial stimulus package aimed at creating a more ecological, digital and resilient Europe.

As Ursula Von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, expressed in her State of the Union in 2021 speech, quoting Robert Schumann, *“Europe needs a soul, an ideal, and the political will to serve this ideal”*, “I am convinced that it is when we are tested that our spirit, our true soul, really shines through”.

We are now on the way to recovery, but we should ensure it is a just recovery, with nobody left behind, without producing inequalities within the EU.



It needs to be a recovery that allows us to tackle new challenges, which will arise.

It has to be a recovery placing citizens at the heart of European politics, and making Europe a main player in global strategy.

### **The role for the Regions**

We have said on many occasions that the Regions are on the first line in terms of meeting any new obstacle.

That is why the Regions have to play an important role in the drawing up and executing any recovery strategy.

Furthermore, this recovery should benefit every single citizen and, for that reason, those recovery plans should be centred on the people.

With this in mind, I propose we concentrate our efforts on obtaining greater participation from the Regions in the process of redefining Europe, with real citizen involvement, especially young people, and that it becomes an antidote to the growing public disaffection towards their political institutions.

European Regional Parliaments and Assemblies should strengthen the democratic values and solidarity upon which the EU was founded. Therefore we need to establish an alliance between citizens, Regional Parliaments, EU institutions and Member States in order to constitute a strategy for Multi-Level Governance, and with a perspective for cooperation between institutions.



In that respect, I would like to tell you about the experience gained during the La Palma volcanic eruption and the catastrophic consequences for the citizens on that island.

From the very beginning, every institution involved, local, island, regional or state institutions, cooperated in alleviating the effects of the eruption, as well as in the process of material reconstruction and in the life projects of those who have lost everything.

This cooperation was established by creating the Joint Commission for the reconstruction, recovery and support for the island of La Palma. This was made up of representatives from the Spanish Government, the Canary Island Government, the La Palma Island Council and the town councils of Los Llanos de Aridane, El Paso and Tazacorte. A single window system was also opened to gather every bit of information regarding damages, help and the situation of properties and farms.

### **The Role for CALRE**

Honourable members of CALRE, we are at a crucial moment for the world and for the EU. We face huge challenges that are putting the institutions and principles of the European project to the test. These are challenges which are putting at risk the concept of Europe as a space of freedom, of respect for human rights, of guaranteed right of law, of respect for diversity, and of welcome and asylum for those who decide to leave their own countries in search of an opportunity to develop a life project in safety.



It is therefore time to contribute to the support and to reinforce our idea of Europe.

With that in mind, CALRE should be capable of contributing its point of view in the forming of legislation and in the decision-making process at the heart of the EU whilst, at the same time, becoming not only a tool for consolidating democratic values but, also, a central nerve system transmitting the will of the people to their institutions.

It is perhaps time, my fellow Presidents, to strengthen the bonds that unite us, to increase our involvement, to accept the commitments we have made to our Region's citizens, and to widen our Conference's sphere of influence by establishing new alliances whilst strengthening those we already have.

In essence, and to conclude, let us each contribute to ensure CALRE matches up to the challenges the EU needs to confront.

Please allow me to express my gratitude to you for placing your trust in this President managing CALRE's work during these two years, and for the support and assistance of everyone in the organisation of the events we have held.

It has been an enriching experience. It has been a huge challenge, but one that has been enormously satisfying.

Thank you very much.