



Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies

Second meeting

Standing Committee

Friday 1 July 2022

VERBATIM

SECOND MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

Chairmanship of Mr Marcourt, President of the Conference of European Legislative Assemblies
(CALRE)

OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. OPENING SESSION

Speech by Mr Jean-Claude Marcourt, President of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE)

Mr President. - Dear colleagues, I propose that we begin our work. I welcome you to this second annual meeting of the Standing Committee of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies. As you know, our rules of procedure state that two of our annual meetings should preferably be held in Brussels on the premises of the European Committee of the Regions. It is with pleasure that I welcome this morning those who are present here in the room, but also those who are with us from afar.

I would like to welcome the presence - he will be joining us shortly - of Mr Vasco Alves Cordeiro, who was elected President of the European Committee of the Regions on Wednesday. On behalf of CALRE, I congratulate him on his election and wish him every success in his new position.

I would also like to thank President Tzitzikostas for the tremendous work he has done during his term of office. His commitment and adaptability have enabled the European Committee of the Regions to fulfil its primary function as the voice of Europe's regions and cities in a particularly difficult health and economic context.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee of the Regions for welcoming us today in this building named after Jacques Delors, which reminds us of the work of the architect of the contemporary European Union.

Ladies and gentlemen, in his first speech to the European Parliament as President of the Commission, Jacques Delors recalled the words spoken by Jean Monnet at the birth of the ECSC, namely that European integration is not only a political concept, but also an ideal to guarantee peace in Europe. With these words, he recognised the notion of peace as the fundamental *raison d'être* of the European Community. Jacques Delors recalled this in 1985.

Since its foundation almost 25 years ago, our conference has been trying to work towards strengthening democracy in Europe. Faithful to this founding principle, but also aware of the historic nature of the drama unfolding a few hundred kilometres away, we have taken initiatives to include Ukraine in the European project.

In the early days of the Russian intervention, on 24 February, our Standing Committee urgently adopted a declaration condemning, in the strongest possible terms, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and expressing its full support for the Ukrainian people, who are once again facing war. On 16 March, we met in an extraordinary session to exchange views with experts on the reception of Ukrainian refugees by European regions and Ukraine's application for membership of the Union.

Following this meeting, Vice-President Matos Expósito and I signed a declaration in which we called on the institutions to formulate a joint, effective and permanent response to the problem of managing migration and asylum within the territory of the Union.

Finally, many of our member assemblies showed their support for the Ukrainian people from the very first days of the invasion by raising the Ukrainian flag on their buildings or by adopting declarations of support.

The war in Ukraine demonstrates once again the leading role of regional elected representatives within the democratic system. I would like to pay tribute to all democratically elected women and men who are on the front line against the Russian aggressor and who are showing immense courage in coming to the aid of their people.

Once the war is over, it will be the same people who will allow the reconstruction of Ukraine and its full membership of the Union.

It is our duty to support them in their struggle, not least through the Alliance for the Reconstruction of Ukrainian Cities and Regions, which I had the honour of launching yesterday at the plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions.

I welcome the new President of the Committee of the Regions, Mr Vasco Alves Cordeiro, whom I thank for his presence.

Speech by Mrs Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament

Mr President. - Dear colleagues, following the election of Mrs. Roberta Metsola as President of the European Parliament last January, I wanted to give her the floor at our meeting so that she could speak about the priorities of her presidency. Unfortunately, Mrs Metsola was unable to attend the meeting due to the preparations for the next plenary session of the Parliament, but she was keen to send us a video message which I suggest you listen to.

(Video projection)

Mrs Metsola has the floor.

Mrs Metsola, President of the European Parliament. - *Dear President Marcourt, dear colleagues, it is a pleasure for me to address the annual meeting of the Conference of Legislative Assemblies of the regions of Europe.*

Democracy is a bottom-up exercise and regional assemblies are essential in the democratic process, and you as regional representatives are close to European regions and local communities. Through your daily work, you know first-hand, what European citizens are concerned about, what they hope for, and what keeps them up at night.

As president of the European Parliament, I want to know this as well. I want to know because I am determined to bring the European Parliament closer to its citizens. To show them that their voice is being heard, that making a difference is a right that belongs to each and every individual European. For that reason, I am committed to working closely with you during the course of my presidency to ensure that no region, no city, and no village in Europe is left behind. Conferences, such as this one, are of paramount importance for dialogue and exchange, especially now that the world is recovering from the worst Public Health Crisis that any of us have seen in our lifetime. Today we are called upon to address the most monumental challenge of our time, Climate Change. Together we will ensure the sustainability of our planet and the EU will be on the forefront of this effort, leading by example.

Of course, there is another area, where we, as European leaders must be decisive. The unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by President Putin has opened one of the darkest chapters of European History. We have a collective obligation to support Ukrainians because they are not just fighting to protect their homes and their territory, they are fighting for the freedom and democracy that we all believe in. Across European Union regions, cities and villages, locals are opening their doors and opening their hearts to welcoming thousands of Ukrainians, especially women and children. A demonstration of European solidarity at its best. European, local, and regional representatives offer an inspiring model of solidarity to follow. In this turbulent period, where respect for the international community and its institutions is being challenged, and where the values and principles, which are intrinsic to Europeans, are being threatened by Russia's attack on Ukraine, we, as representatives of the European people, have to reflect on this essential question: Are we going to let Putin's belligerent autocracy prevail? The EU has given an answer: it is an unequivocal no. Our values and principles are much more than proclamations, they are part of our DNA. We will not water them down to appease despots. Our commitment to democracy and the rule of law is unwavering.

I wish you all the best for a productive meeting ahead. Thank you.

Speech by Mr Vasco Alves Cordeiro, President of the European Committee of the Regions

Mr President. - I call Mr Alves Cordeiro.

Mr Alves Cordeiro, President of the European Committee of the Regions. - *Je vous remercie de l'invitation que vous m'avez adressée d'être présent aujourd'hui. C'est pour moi un énorme plaisir et un honneur d'être ici, dans cette réunion, et de pouvoir m'adresser, en tant que président du Comité des régions, à tous ses membres.*

Cher Président Marcourt, hier, nous avons eu l'opportunité d'être ensemble lors de la réunion de démarrage de l'Alliance des villes et des régions d'Europe pour la reconstruction de l'Ukraine et, aujourd'hui, nous sommes ensemble dans cette réunion de la CALRE. Je voudrais mettre en avant, dans cette réunion, le fait que c'est un grand plaisir pour tous les membres. J'ai également à mes côtés le président Lambertz, qui a été président du Comité des régions. Il est très important de mettre cela en avant et ces différences entre les assemblées et les comités.

I would like to stress in this meeting and in this intervention is, first of all, a greeting to all of its members and of course I think you will allow me a special reference to my president, President Luis Garcia, from the Parliament of the Azores. So, he is my boss. And let me say, as a member of a regional parliament, being elected as President of the Committee of the Regions and I had the opportunity to stress that during my speech, it is also very important. I also have by my side, President Lambertz, who was the President of the Committee of the Regions and is also President of a Regional Assembly. But it's very, very important to have this kind of recognition, but also this kind of act with political significance to regions and to political assemblies all across Europe.

In present circumstances, we live in very troubling times. We are still getting out of a pandemic, we are facing a war with all its economic, social, and political consequences and in all these aspects, in all these issues, in all these emergencies, regions were the ones who were in the forefront, demonstrating that we can not only take political stances on these issues, but mainly we are the first ones to make it happen. When we proclaim solidarity, regions, and cities across Europe, were the first ones to make it happen during the pandemic. Not only creating measures, not only creating initiatives that have helped save lives, but also creating initiatives that help save jobs, businesses, income for families. I think this is very, very important, not only in practical terms, but also from a political point of view.

During the war in Ukraine, once again, regions and cities were in the forefront of welcoming refugees. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to make a special reference to the fact that CALRE is one of our partners in the European Alliance of cities and regions for the reconstruction of Ukraine. Why do I think it is so important? Because CALRE is one of the institutions that brings together these two levels: the political one, with assemblies taking political stances and positions on this issue, but also the fact that our regional represents the importance of regions, tackling these challenges in very practical terms.

President Marcourt, it was a real pleasure and an honour having you yesterday, but especially having you as partner of the Committee of Regions in this alliance because it's very important that when all across Europe sometimes the role and importance of regions and cities are seen in a more administrative way, in practical terms, the fact that CALRE is our partner and that you President Marcourt, were there yesterday, represents the political significance of regions through their assemblies, with legislative powers of taking that kind of stance and that kind of action. So allow me once more, President Marcourt, to thank you for being available to be partner in this initiative also for being there yesterday in our launching ceremony of the alliance. There are also, not only challenges that arise from these kinds of situations, but also there is a very strong challenge for regions and cities across Europe and, of course, for regions with legislative powers and that is the post-conference for the future of Europe. I would like to stress that because there are several issues at stake here. The first one is something that frustrates me because other European Institutions weren't able to live up to this moment. The almost ashamed reaction of the council of the European Union about the conclusions of the conference

(Absence d'enregistrement)

The almost ashamed reaction of the council of the European Union about the conclusions of the conference. The council is one of the institutions that has citizens to participate: the Commission the Parliament. And now, when you have this massive exercise of participation, at the end what you say is that we take due note. Something is missing here. I think it is up to the institutions like CARLE, under your leadership President Marcourt, like the Committee of the Regions and other institutions to say: "Wait a minute, that's not what we are here for. We have participated, we want to participate". But I think it is a lack of respect for people, for citizens, who took their time, sometimes at a cost, to make their voice heard, just to take due note. Well, I think regions, cities and citizens must also take due note of the behaviour of the Council of the European Union. .

I would also like to give you a very brief insight about what I think lies ahead for the Committee of the Regions for the next 2.5 years. I think all this context, and the situation as a whole, places us before certain challenges. I think the answer to those challenges, the way we can overcome them lies in two main ideas that I would like to share with you.

The first one is that this situation demonstrates that we need a stronger and fairer Europe for all. A stronger Europe begins with its democratic life because Europe can be stronger if citizens are more involved, if citizens feel more represented, if the democratic methods of participation are accountable. I would like to praise one of the President Karl-Heinz Lambertz's initiatives to propose a permanent mechanism of consultation to citizens across Europe. So stronger Europe also means this: not only above the competences, not only above the reach, but the way that democratic life in Europe is lived. This makes a stronger Europe; a fairer Europe and I think it is important to stress that.

Of course, we have what we may call, civilisational challenges, gender balance, LGBTQI inclusion. But let us never forget that a fairer Europe for all also means that people need an answer when the fear for their job, when they fear the possibility of giving their children access to education, access to health. This is also a way of Europe becoming fairer. So, this does not mean we can diminish the importance of any other aspect, it means we cannot forget these ones because our communities across Europe also feel this need; they are also afraid. Europe is the answer; Europe must be the answer to addressing those who are afraid, and that is a way to make it fairer, but also stronger.

The second idea, and I will conclude very quickly, is one of the biggest challenges regions and cities across Europe will face in the next three years: What is the fate of cohesion policy? I think we have to mobilise ourselves to defend it.

We have to mobilise ourselves to hold our ground because cohesion policy is the very essence of the European dream. It touches the very essence of the European idea, of the European project. Of course, and I think that everybody understands that we had to put cohesion policy to work in order to address emergency needs. Nobody would understand if it hadn't been done this way. But never forget the structural importance of cohesion policy. Let us never forget that the best way to defend cohesion policy is not within European Institutions. It's with us, regions, and cities because the best way to defend it is to use it and use it wisely. We have to be aware of that. But the time has come, I think, to join forces to defend this important policy, not only for regions or cities, but most importantly for Europe.

Precisely because, and I will finish with this because it touches the very essence, the political core and idea of Europe no one left behind. President Marcourt, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to be here with you today. I look forward to working with you in the future, not only within the context of CALRE. I think there is a lot of work to be done and I would like to join you in your appreciation of the partnership, of the work that has been done between CALRE and the Committee of Regions. I am at your disposal for whatever you need. We have a lot of work to do and I look forward to the possibility of achieving the results and goals that we have set. Thank you and thank you for giving me the time.

Mr President. - Thank you very much, President Cordero, for your message, but also for what you are proposing, what you are going to do at the level of the Committee of the Regions. You can count on CALRE - I think I can speak on behalf of my colleagues - to commit itself resolutely to the defence of the Committee of the Regions, of CALRE and above all to the defence of the citizens, and to improve the lives of our fellow citizens and to support democracy and peace in these troubled times.

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING OF CALRE'S STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr President. - Dear colleagues, you have received the minutes of the last meeting of CALRE's Standing Committee. It is up to us to approve these minutes, but before doing so, to consult you to see if there are any remarks on the minutes.

If there are no comments, I consider that the minutes are approved.

3. CONCLUSION OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Speech by Ms Karolina Zubel and Mr Jan Bazyli Klakla, co-authors of the report "The territorial dimension of the Conference on the Future of Europe and its follow-up"

Mr President. - Dear colleagues, the Conference on the Future of Europe, which ended a few weeks ago, was intended to contribute to bridging the gap between the Union and its citizens, whatever their region, city or locality of origin.

Following the conclusion of this conference, I wished to invite to this meeting Ms Karolina Zubel and Mr Jan Bazyli Klakla, who have co-drafted a report for the Commission for Citizenship, Governance and Institutional and External Affairs of the European Committee of the Regions on the territorial dimension of the Conference on the future of Europe and its follow-up. I therefore invite them to present their conclusions on this territorial dimension, particularly in terms of deepening political integration and on the follow-up to the proposals of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

I call Mrs Zubel.

Mrs Zubel, co-author of the report "The territorial dimension of the Conference on the Future of Europe and its follow-up". - *I will try to share my screen right away. I hope it works. Good morning, everyone. My name is Karolina Zubel and together with my colleague Jan Bazyli Klakla we would like to present to you some of the conclusions and*

recommendations that evolved from our study called *The territorial dimension of the Conference on the Future of Europe and its follow-ups*. We have had a chance to prepare for the Committee of the Region and I think it was finalised last week and for good because it has been on the website. We both represent CASE which stands for the Centre for Social and Economic Research. One of the three of us is, unfortunately, not with us today but if you have any questions, we would, of course, be happy to answer them after the presentation.

So, what were the key objectives of the study? So, as you can see from the title, we are very much focussed on strengthening the role of local and regional authorities in European Democracy and the functioning of the European Union. The Committee of the Region showed us the three principles, the three key objectives that they had for the conference, that we should consider when looking at the crazy amounts of inputs that the conference overall evolved with. So we are looking at all those ideas that somehow show the promotion of the role of European representative democracy at the very local level. We were also looking at those ideas that promote multilevel governance in the EU and we were also looking at ideas or rather concrete recommendations that address the territorial dimension of European policies. But in a way that answers those three objectives on the idea of strengthening the role of local and regional authorities

Our approach was actually three-fold. We started with conducting a literature review, which you can see as an annex to our study. We mapped and analysed all of the resources available on the conference website, which was a huge amount of information. Finally, we analysed the adopted proposals, which included around 49 proposals and 328 concrete measures across 9 themes. But those, of course, are based on all 178 recommendations from the European Citizens Panels and to our surprise, 16,000 recorded on the platform itself. So, we are very much starting to get the voices of the citizens that took their time to come up with ideas, concrete recommendations, to put them on the platform. We are also interested in what came up from the National Citizens' Panels with regard to European democracy and institutional issues. All of this together came up with a report which has been provided in four thematic groupings. Those were initially slightly different but while the conference evolved, we were trying to answer those groupings in the same way as they are answered in the final report of the conference.

Here are the four main thematic groupings:

- Citizens' information, participation, and youth. The largest number of inputs was presented here. All these ideas very much cover anything spanning from youth engagement in the democratic process to information points across all cities and regions in the EU, showcasing what the EU actually does.
 - The second core theme is Democracy and elections. As you can imagine, it's all about the European Parliament elections, fostering transnational debate on European issues and all the issues that are somehow related to the democratic process.
 - As for the third issue, EU decision-making process, we were mainly looking at the ideas on how the EU could become more accessible when it comes to guaranteeing a transparent and understandable process for the citizens.
 - Last but not least, Subsidiarity, of course. This is something that did not, for some reason, evolve from the citizen panels or from the platform. We were also actually observing the European democracy working group during the conference and this is the topic that was very heavily mentioned in that conference.
- So these four thematic groupings are very much in line with the ideas that popped out during our research.

Mr President. - I call Mr Klakla.

Mr Klakla, Co-author of the report "The territorial dimension of the Conference on the Future of Europe and its follow-up". - I would like to talk a little bit about the necessary legal changes that are required for those propositions that we analysed to come into life.

We did analyse all those propositions, considering the necessary treaty changes as these are the most difficult ones. Here you have the table that presents the overview of our analysis. Due to the lack of time, I will not go into detail for each of the propositions. You can find all of this in our report, and I encourage you to look there. But as you can see here, most of the propositions do not require much treaty change. In fact, most of them require minor or no treaty change at all.

Our conclusions begin by stating that most of the proposals can be achieved in a variety of ways. This ranges from the use of soft law measures, lobbying and political influence, to far-reaching treaty changes. But this also means that each scenario, each proposition, should be carefully evaluated in terms of its costs and potential benefits before it is implemented. This is because some ideas that seem like they may need some treaty change can actually be implemented without the difficult-to-implement change in the treaties. On the other hand, some other propositions, mostly those that are centred around creating some new institutions or new bodies that would foster the citizens' participation in the legislative process for example. They might be, of course, implemented without any treaty change. But then, at the same

time, they might actually benefit from being anchored in the treaties, which would rise their visibility and profile. So this is the important thing to note.

The EU treaties can actually be seen from two different perspectives while looking at dual role in implementing citizens' proposals. First, they can be seen as some kind of an obstacle in the current wording, as something that needs to be changed in order for these ideas to come to fruition. In our analysis we pointed out the articles that are those articles that most require change in order for those ideas to come to life, articles regarding the Committee of Regions and strengthening its role. Then there is article 17 on the TEU on the European Commission and article 5 on subsidiarity. But on the other hand, there is potential in the treaty that the existing provisions of the treaty can serve as a basis for such changes and can provide the legal basis and justification. In this context it is very important to remember article 10 and 11 about representative democracy and also article 15 of the TEFU that concerns transparency and access to information. Making good use of those provisions might actually be crucial to the success of the proposals.

Whilst we were mostly focussing on the necessary legal changes, we actually noticed that many of those propositions aren't calling for a change in the law, but rather a change in the practice of applying the law. I don't think that this is something that I need to remind you, but I would like to put an important statement forward. One is not always related to the other. Even the best regulations can be inappropriately put into practice and then there is an existing legal framework that can, in the spirit of citizen's proposal, be put to better use than it has been so far. It is also visible in the proposals that most of them focus on a very grassroots level, which is actually closer to the citizens level themselves than to their local and regional authorities. It is then possible that only this entirely grassroots action, which will be afterwards receives the necessary support and institutional framework from local and regional authorities, national authorities, EU bodies. Only this kind of a bottom-up movement will be recognised by citizens as real change for democratisation. If we want to shift the focus of these initiatives to put the LRAs in the centre, for example, this should be approached with caution as it can be interpreted by citizens as a misappropriation of their original intent. – Thank you and I give the floor back to Karolina.

Mr President. - I call Mrs Zubel.

Mrs Zubel, Co-author of the report « *La dimension territoriale de la Conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe et ses suites* ». - Thank you so much Jan Bazyli. You've obviously heard a lot of conclusions and also to a certain extent, some recommendations from me and Bazyli so I don't want to repeat that but there are two things that we believe are crucial as an overall conclusion.

In general, we do have the impression, and this is something we all agreed on, that all the proposals with concrete numbers of corresponding measures are very much coherent with one another. They really identify the priorities of the citizens that should quickly analysed and developed further but like Bazyli said, their success and or failure will depend on how and when they will be translated into concrete proposals and this is especially relevant for local and regional authorities because if we see a lack of interest from national or EU authorities, we can also go along with acts of local law. This is one of the main conclusions.

Our analysis also showed that democracy was the key topic of interest of all the citizens that contributed, especially on the platform website. What surprised us a bit was that it was not so obvious when it comes to European Citizens' Panels. They mentioned, to some extent, European democracy but not as much as we had envisaged.

Last but not least, what also surprised us a bit is the fact that European democracy, especially at this very grassroots or local level, was of interest for only a couple of Member States (Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, France and Italy). Of course, this might result from the fact that those countries made the biggest steps in terms of involving a number of citizens in their National Citizens' Panels, but this is something that we should perhaps look at.

As for the recommendations, i'm not going to lie, these are all very relevant for local and regional authorities, for the Committee of the Regions, and CALRE as well. We would like to perhaps highlight four points that we have analysed in our report.

This is to strengthen the role of local and regional authorities as intermediaries between citizens' voices at local and regional levels on the one hand, and national and European levels on the other. We have clearly seen that there is a lack of this middleman. Local and regional authorities should also take an active role in defining and operationalising the idea of active subsidiarity but, of course, it will change from one member state to another.

We also recommend some concrete measures to address the territorial dimensions of European Policies in order to achieve the EU's overall cohesion objectives, which is something we discussed in the previous presentation.

Last but not least, the local and regional authorities should continue its attempts to strengthen its consultative role in the EU decision-making-process. This is something that we clearly see as one of those gaps that our citizens mentioned.

These are only a couple of points that we have covered in our report. If you have the time and if you're interested in the topic, we very much invite you to have a look at it. Thank you very much. That's all from our side.

Mr President. - Thank you, Mrs Zubel and Mr Klakla.

I now turn to the assembly to see if there are any requests to speak.

Mr Hägglom has the floor.

Mr Hägglom. - Thank you, Mr Hägglom. I will speak in Swedish, if that is okay.

When we look at democracy, I represent Åland, a parliament in the Republic of Finland. We find a problem and I would like to know if the other representatives find it too: we work with opinions towards the European Union. In this case, there is just one ship or one point that the EU takes into account, whereas we have competence in several areas. This has to be changed.

Our confidence in the European institutions is diminishing. If the small regions are not taken into account, there is also a risk of a lack of democracy here. We also see this when citizens have to elect their representatives to the European Parliament. We have 40% of the citizens participating in these elections, whereas in local elections we have 80%.

When discussing the future of the EU, we must therefore strengthen these aspects. We have to take into account the regional and local institutions, because here in Åland many farmers have stopped farming because it is so bureaucratic. There are so many rules. We have 6,500 islands in our archipelago. We have fished a lot, but we only have five active ones left, five players at this moment. This is due to the European Union. Our Region does not have confidence in the European Union. We must therefore work to strengthen Europe in this area. It is important not to make the lives of citizens problematic.

Mr President. - Thank you very much, Mr Hägglom. I do not know whether others wish to speak. If not, I will give you the floor again, Mrs Zubel. Excuse me, Mr Morera Català, I give you the floor.

Mr Morera Català. - *I just wanted to express my thanks to the two professors. There are many recommendations here, many proposals that come out of the debate on the future of Europe, and we consider it with great interest. Very seriously, it is a very serious work and there is something that interests us very much: the question of multi-level subsidiarity. What decisions of the Union can and should be taken at the regional levels of the European Union? There are many proposals here and we really congratulate you on this very dense work, but very interesting with regard to the themes that we have been analysing for a very long time within CALRE. So, thank you very much for this work. We will really try to involve our regional authorities in the implementation of the measures proposed here.*

Mr President. - Mr Ciambetti has the floor.

Mr Ciambetti. - Thank you, Mr President. *The study that has been presented is very interesting. I would like to say that I was a member of the Conference on the Future of Europe and my experience in this field makes me express my enthusiasm. I have been in charge of different institutional mandates, but the situation I was able to experience in this conference on the future of Europe was really enriching. I have rarely seen this. It must be said that there was a lack of organisation. We started in June 2021 and worked until December-January 2021. We are not really together, physically, so to speak, and we worked with a lack of coordination. The study refers to the citizens' panels which ended on 21 February 2022.*

Unfortunately, the world had changed in the meantime, because of the Russian intervention in Ukraine, and during the work of the following weeks, not all of this was taken into account and everything became fossilised, even though these panels had been held before the war. You cannot have taken into consideration what happened afterwards.

As a regional reality, we have 18 representatives at the level of the Committee of the Regions, and a number of them were participating in this Conference on the future of Europe. I was part of the Health working group. We, as a region, the national parliaments and the European Parliament had some doubts about what the citizens' panel was saying or doing. However, it is essential to have this level of citizens. I will say this with some caution, but there was a representation of citizens at different levels, and they were less important than what came out directly from the panels. Secondly, what I was pleased to see in the study that I read: there is an effort to give space and voice to regional, local and institutional pathways. If we look at what we were able to do in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, it must be said that our voice was not adequately heard. There was limited time, the work was compressed into a few weeks and

there was this absolute deadline that had to be met during the six months of the French Presidency. I sincerely hope that the Conference on the Future of Europe will have a future, and will be able to develop in a more linear and democratic way. This has not been possible within this conference itself. There has not been this possible regional autonomy within this conference.

Finally, one last thing: the citizens' panels involved more than 50,000 citizens on the platform that was made available; this is not a lot, compared to the hundreds of millions of inhabitants of the European Union. Those who represented the citizens in the conference, the 'sceptics', had a fairly strong orientation. What was said in the citizens' panels recorded on the platform was not heard in the local physical meetings in the different countries. It is important to listen to the local structures, the regional legislatures, because in this way Europe could really know what the citizens feel and think. Thank you.

Mr President. - I call Mr Garcia.

Mr Garcia. - I would like to thank you for the presentation of this work.

I would like to say that we are fans, we have participated a lot, we have welcomed this Conference on the future of Europe. It is with some concern that we listen to the President of the Committee of the Regions mentioning some less than positive reactions to the conclusions of this conference. In our opinion, this Conference on the Future of Europe must have consequences. We must act accordingly. We must ask the citizens what they want from Europe and then do nothing and take concrete action after this consultation with our citizens. I believe that this would be a way of discrediting European institutions. It would accentuate the divorce that we have felt, even in our region and in our country, the divorce between the European project and the citizens. I am concerned about the fears that have been expressed about the European Council's implementation of certain conclusions expressed in this Conference on the future of Europe. One of these conclusions, the question of participatory democracy, involves strengthening the Regions, the cities, in the construction of the future of Europe. We must have no doubt about this. It is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that the conclusions of this conference are effectively heard, that they have consequences and that they are put into practice. For our part, after this Conference on the Future of Europe, we will continue to develop this process of bringing citizens closer to the European institutions. In this sense, we will organise a conference on the future of cohesion policy in the Azores, on the island of Flores, the most westerly point of Europe, where we will count on the presence of the Commissioner for Cohesion Policies, to discuss the future of cohesion policy as a structuring factor for our regions and our cities. This is the appeal I would like to make to you, to the President, but also to all my colleagues, so that we have this responsibility and that we take up this challenge, i.e. not to allow the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe to remain a dead letter. We must mobilise ourselves to build a more democratic and participatory Europe. Thank you very much.

Mr President. - I give the floor to Mrs Zubel and Mr Klakla for their reactions to the various remarks that have just been made.

Mrs Zubel, co-author of the report "The territorial dimension of the Conference on the future of Europe and its follow-up". - Thank you much, Sir. Perhaps I will start then give the floor back to Bazyli.

Just a short clarification

Indeed, we are well aware that European Citizens' Panels are not covered by our study, but this is somehow mitigated by the fact that we took all the inputs on the platform website under consideration up until the 9th of May. So, basically everything has been covered when it comes to inputs that were present on the platform itself.

I know it might not be enough but like you said, we do believe that the follow-up of the conference is equally important, if not more important than the conference, the process that took place last year. But what we do also believe is that the political deepening, the integration that we were talking about is somehow being stopped by those 13 Member States and some of the parties that I don't want to mention. The reluctance is, of course, one thing but we still believe that there is a lot that can be done at the very local level. This is why we do encourage you to look at the recommendations because we do believe that there several things that can be done at the very local level.

Mr Klakla, Co-author of the report "The territorial dimension of the Conference on the future of Europe and its follow-up". If I may, I would like to add to things. I would like to say a few things about the comment made by the representative of Finland as it mentioned a very important issue, which is trust in the European Union, which I believe underlined a lot of the propositions. A lot of them aimed actually to build distrust, whether they were propositions concerning the more participatory engagement of citizens or the propositions that were concerned with the education and

the sharing of common European Values. They were all talking about trust, and this is something important to keep in mind, while trying to bring these ideas to life.

I would like to support the voices of the other commentaries and Karolina, despite some obstacles, organisational and political and others, the conference did manage to produce very interesting ideas. Despite the fact that the world did indeed change since the end of the conference, those ideas are still relevant. It is now up to the authorities to bring these ideas to life and I believe that all the authorities, no matter the level, have their own role to play in this regard.

Thank you very much for those comments.

Mr President. - Thank you, Mrs Zubel and Mr Klakla, for your contributions. I would like to say that I will be attentive to the remarks that have been made so as to relay them to the other European institutions and so that this conference does not remain a dead letter. You have insisted on subsidiarity and on the fact that small regions must be treated on an equal footing with large ones. I believe that these are elements that are in CALRE's DNA and I will certainly relay them again.

4. PREPARATION OF RESOLUTIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

Mr President. - Dear colleagues, in the work programme on the basis of which I was elected to the presidency, I expressed my conviction that the messages from CALRE should as far as possible take the form of resolutions adopted in plenary assembly and focus on major European issues.

The themes linked to social Europe, to the Europe of environmental and digital transitions, and to the Europe of freedoms seemed to me to open up interesting perspectives with a view to the forthcoming adoption of resolutions to be transmitted to the European institutions. In this context, I wanted to invite a hearing on each of the three themes I have just mentioned.

4.1. RESOLUTION ON SOCIAL EUROPE

Speech by Ms Anne Karjalainen, President of the Municipal Council of the City of Kerava and Chair of the Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) of the European Committee of the Regions

Mr President. - I invite Mrs Karjalainen to present the position of the Commission she chairs on the social policy of the European Union, particularly from a regional point of view.

I call Mrs Karjalainen.

Mrs Karjalainen, President of the Municipal Council of the City of Kerava and Chair of the Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) of the European Committee of the Regions. - *Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great honour to be able to participate in your conference. I am particularly grateful for the invitation to speak about the CARLE's resolution on social Europe and strengthening the social dimension of the European Union. It is one of the main ambitions of the Commission on social policy, education, employment and research and culture, which I chair.*

There is no doubt that we are facing a trying period for the social dimension of the European Union. The recent COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine are putting unprecedented pressure to an already fragile social fabric and a social protection framework throughout the EU. As a result, inflation is currently on the rise, reducing the purchasing power of EU citizens, increasing destitution and social exclusion. The number of people at work has taken a hit due to the pandemic, with women and young people being impacted the most. Healthcare and long-term care systems have to tend to an increased number of people without the substantial increase in funding or personnel. EU energy autonomy is at risk, leading to an increasing number of people facing conditions of energy poverty.

The Committee of Regions is committed to the implementation of the European pillar of social rights. We participated in the social summit of May 2021 and wholly endorsed the action plan for implementing the social pillar. We strongly believe that no effort should be spared to achieve the 2030 headline targets, namely at least 78% of the population aged 20-64 should be in employment by 2030. At least 60% of all adults should be participating in training every year by 2030. A reduction of at least 50 million in people at the risk of poverty and social exclusion. However, achieving these goals is only a fraction of our ambitions. The social dimension of the EU requires a mix of policy implementation, decisive action and most of all, willingness for change. The Committee of Regions has been thoroughly committed in their efforts to

improve the lives of all European citizens. Through our opinions and resolutions, we strive to bring forward a bolder approach when dealing with social challenges and it is my firm belief that when it comes to social policies, the Committee of Regions is more outspoken than most European Institutions. The Committee of Regions has expressed its persistence clearly in its relevant opinions. In our opinions on transparent and predictable working conditions in the EU and European labour authority, we called for clear and proper employment conditions for all workers and stronger monitoring of the implementation.

In our opinion on the EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027, we supposed the prevision to reduce work related accidents and deaths. We stressed that mental health issues need to be dealt with more effectively and we called for more efficient monitoring. We underlined the need for workers on digital platforms to enjoy proper employment classification, added social protection and the right to collective bargaining and rights to reduce the potential harmful consequences of algorithmic management by adopting two opinions on the topic. We pledged our commitment to the European Social Pillar by adopting the opinions on the strong social Europe for just transitions and also the implementation of the European Pillar of social rights from a local and regional perspective. We support an EU where equal opportunities exist for everyone. We adopted opinions on the gender equality strategy, the EU strategy framework for equality, inclusion, and participation. The strategy on the rights of people with disabilities and on the EU anti-racism action plan and the LGBTQI equality strategy.

We have adopted a view on European Strategy in plenary. We expressed our concerns about the democratic challenges and brain drain and proposed solutions to reduce their negative effects. We stressed the need to support the weaker among us by adopting opinions on adequate minimum wages, on the social economy and eradicating homelessness, advocating adequate support and financing in order to reduce poverty and assist our fellow citizens in need. We advocated for creating opportunities and providing adequate support to children and young people in the European Union. In the second semester of 2022, we planned to deal with issues relating to healthcare and, especially, long-term care services. The possibility of introducing a minimum income scheme in the EU and the strengthening social dialogue and we hope that CARLE will be collaborating with us in dealing with all these issues. It's worth nothing that on the 29th of June 2022, during our plenary, we adopted the resolution of the European Committee of Regions' proposals regarding the European Commission work programme for 2023, where we urge the need for social housing, establishing a European housing agenda for youth involvement in the democratic process and for a regulatory framework for the end for unpaid traineeships. Finally, we reiterate the CARLE view that specific democratic characteristic needs and the challenges faced by peripheral and insular regions including the Archipelagos and other most regions dedicated and target support from the EU.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude by saying that ensuring a fair, just, and equal society is no easy task. It requires wholehearted and dedicated effort from all of us to achieve it. I am eagerly anticipating CARLE's resolution on Social Europe as it will no doubt be an additional step in our government efforts. I share my wish with you for closer cooperation between our two institutions in order to achieve a better world for all European citizens. Thank you very much.

Mr President. - Thank you very much. Madam President. I shall now turn to the assembly to see if there are any requests to speak. I do not see any requests to speak. Yes, our colleague Sonderegger, I give you the floor.

Mr Sonderegger. - *We also agree on the way in which Europe in general must be pushed to achieve a certain balance between the different countries and the committees. All of this always within the framework of existing legislation. We know that social issues, although they are often for us, as regions, to give, to find solutions, the region does not have all this authority. As we talked about subsidiarity, in Austria, when there are social issues and the competence is pushed to the national level.*

We always have to be very critical because this always means that there are treaty changes. We must ensure that these treaties are respected and that subsidiarity is always ensured. We may have to make certain concessions at European level that are not consistent in Europe. If we, as translators at the European level, are to bring these discussions to our citizens at all costs, we have to be sure that our competences can be regulated in such a way that the citizens understand this and that it can be adapted to the regional level and ensure that the competences remain at our level. That is why we, as Austrians and Germans, are always a bit critical in these discussions.

Mr President. - I call Mrs Karjalainen.

Mrs Karjalainen, President of the Municipal Council of the City of Kerava and Chair of the Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) of the European Committee of the Regions.

There is some technical problems.

It is true that municipalities, regions and cities are responsible for the social issues. I think that for the citizens of the European Union, the most important things are often the social issues: to have a job, to have a good education, affordable housing, and nowadays, of course, energy costs are very important for normal people and, of course, having access to good healthcare services. I hope that in the future these social issues can be important and one of the main issues in the EU but also in this local and regional level. Thank you very much and have a nice conference.

4.2. RESOLUTION ON THE EUROPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND DIGITAL TRANSITIONS

Speech by Mr Jacques-François Marchandise, Director of Research and Forecasting at the Association pour la fondation d'un internet nouvelle génération

Mr President. - In March 2018, several French organisations published a white paper presenting 26 proposals for action to public players to put the transformational potential of digital technology at the service of the ecological transition.

I wanted to invite Mr Jacques-François Marchandise, Director of Research and Forecasting at the Association pour la fondation d'un internet nouvelle génération to present some of the conclusions of this report, which could inspire us in our actions.

I call Mr Marchandise.

Mr Marchandise, Director of Research and Forecasting at the Association pour la fondation d'un internet nouvelle génération. - Thank you very much for your invitation to speak.

On the one hand, I am quite intimidated to have this opportunity to speak before CALRE, and as a European citizen, I can tell you that it is not so often that small associative actors are invited in this type of hemicycle, even if I had the chance to know the Parliament in which you are, a few months ago, notably in the context of the AIMF.

As you mentioned, a number of associations and organisations took up digital and environmental issues in France a few years ago. As far as we are concerned, at the FING, we were until the end of June - until yesterday, since we have just closed our activity - and for 22 years what is commonly called a think tank, a place for collective reflection on digital transformations in a very general way, covering subjects such as the transformation of work, the mutation of territories, personal data, economic and social developments, and many others. It was only in 2015 that we were alerted by some of our members, telling us: "We have the impression, digital actors, that we are not up to date and we are not present in the preparation, at the time of the COP21". We therefore took the initiative, with the French National Digital Council, from a call that we called "Transition squared", which aimed to say that the ecological transition knows exactly where it is going, but that it is not able to draw its path. On the other hand, the digital transition is very powerful, but it does not know particularly well where it is going. Since each needs the other, what can we do to put digital technology at the service of the ecological transition? We conducted a series of collective works and in particular, in 2018, this white paper, which we did with the WWF, IDDRI, the Green IT Club and other actors as well as with the team from the French National Digital Council, which we submitted to the French Government Secretary of State in charge of Digital and the Environment, who had not asked us for it. It turned out that French public policies have taken it on board to some extent. We are a little further along. I am going to share a few elements with you in the next few minutes, and then I will be at your disposal for your reactions.

What is at stake today? It's the fact that digital technology has started to make a lot of environmental promises, by saying: "With digital technology, with data, with artificial intelligence, with technical optimisation, we, the digital people, often have solutions to everything, including problems that we do not always understand. We have solutions to poverty, health, the environment and many other things. It turned out that these promises were sometimes very limited, sometimes very controversial and sometimes untenable. They are limited because most experts tell us: "If it's just a matter of optimising energy systems or mobility systems, we're going to gain, here and there, 5, 10 or 20% of performance on these systems at a local, national or continental scale. Something rather annoying is going to happen, and that is that we are going to systematically reconsume the savings that are made - what is known as the rebound effect. For example, data centres have been optimised tremendously over the last few years, up to a factor of 6, and this saving means that we have been able to do much more with the same data centres. Another example is that the 5G networks that are being rolled out are 11 times more energy efficient than 4G networks. On the other hand, it is quite plausible that 5G will be a disaster in terms of equipment renewal, data traffic and the deployment of infrastructure that is required, and in the end that the results will be very negative. These are complicated promises to keep and, above all, we understood that we were dealing with subjects that lacked maturity. On a whole series of things, the simple fact of obtaining reliable figures on energy consumption, the impact of digital technology on mobility, what is called "demobility", in particular the fact of reducing the distances between home and work. All this was not very well observed and there is therefore already a very strong

knowledge challenge. What is certain, however, is that digital sobriety is a reasonable choice for the future. Today's digital technology is not at all suited to tomorrow's world. It is far too greedy, it is not at all resilient enough and it is a factor in very large global imbalances. If I were to caricature it, I could say that poor countries are a bit like the dustbin of rich countries, because we dump all our old equipment on them and we cause a lot of damage with the mining necessary for digital technology. Yet today we have very exciting challenges for digital innovators and designers. If we say to them: "Be more sober", they are interested, because it is a fairly strong technical challenge.

On the other hand, there is a growing demand from future IT employees, many of whom say: "We don't want to work in companies that are bad for the planet." There are growing demands from consumers, because there are more and more collective actions on obsolescence and this type of subject. There is also a growing demand from public and private sponsors and investors who are starting to ask more and more for ecological criteria for the money they invest in digital.

One of the first observations we have made in recent years is about public money. The public players, the States, regions and metropolises that put money into digital technology do so in several ways. They buy equipment, they invest in infrastructure, they support innovative companies and they also make innovative purchases. Most of the time, all this money put into digital - taxpayers' money - has no ecological footprint criteria. Companies don't care about the energy footprint, life cycle and reparability of hardware. If cities or infrastructure players set up the Internet of Things, IOT, we will not ask ourselves whether we are dealing with objects that we will be able to repair and maintain over time. However, most of the ecological footprint of digital technology is made up of materials and equipment and their manufacture: PCs, infrastructures, connected objects and so on. It would be fair to say that, for many years now, the public players have been rather blind and that IT manufacturers are paradoxically less active in environmental matters than the automobile or energy industries. They themselves did not realise the extent of their footprint.

As a corollary, we note that the methods and issues linked to the environment, sustainable development, green IT and the ecological transition are barely taught in our engineering schools. Today, we have young graduates who will be taking up their posts in 2022 in IT companies or in IT missions within local communities or public authorities and who will never have heard of the environmental challenges of digital technology. In the same way, we have just talked about social issues and we are going to talk about freedom issues - these three subjects are very much linked - today, when we train you in information technologies, we train you first and foremost in excellence and not so much in the methods that will enable us to move towards a chosen digital environment.

The last observation is that there is a lot of environmental data produced here and there. There are huge European, national and sometimes local databases that are produced. There is a lot of local data that is relevant in terms of energy, mobility, biodiversity, and so on. This data is not well known, is very compartmentalised and is not very accessible to local players, citizens, NGOs and associations. I'll give you a very small example: I don't know any local councillor in France who can tell me what energy we are currently using in our area at a local level. But this data exists.

If I had access to this data, I could take local initiatives in terms of, for example, local energy cooperatives, renewable energy, etc. In the same way, data on local waste, what is increasingly called local metabolism, what is going to come in and what is going to go out, on local logistics, is data that is absolutely accessible, but absolutely out of reach for citizens and for local authorities if they do not have specific resources and skills on the spot. There is considerable room for improvement. This is good news, that is, whatever we do today will be so much better than where we were at the beginning. What inspired our white paper Digital and the Environment was a set of tracks. The first track, I shall summarise it, is that of green IT, how to reduce the ecological footprint of digital technology itself. I have just given you a few elements. Firstly, being vigilant about hardware and its life cycle is one of the major things. To do this, we must act on design, on demand and on waste.

The second track is to integrate the digital dimension into the design of ecological policies. Here we have something that is major, but which is not at all legislative, which is the fact that the players in these cross-cutting policies know each other very poorly and sometimes even have a kind of cultural adversity. Many players in the ecological transition are a bit technophobic and, conversely, many players and champions of the digital sector find that environmental issues make them lose time in terms of innovation. Somewhere there is a big cultural and human construction site to be completed. This dimension of building ecological policies is also something on which we must be wary of simply obtaining technical promises. We have to consider that a huge part of the subject is awareness-raising.

The third subject is that we have noticed that, in public policies to support innovation - in France we have in particular French Tech, which is quite active, quite powerful and quite spread out over our territory - most of the time, the criteria and mechanisms for supporting innovation know very little about integrating criteria for innovation that are not profit criteria. Incubators, investors, and the project leaders themselves have difficulty telling themselves that they are also pursuing objectives of general interest, objectives of the planet, and that it is a question of survival. We have carried out work to say: how can we have a reference framework, a guide to what we have called factor IV innovation, radical innovation, enabling us to equip the actors of innovation on the methodological level by saying "how can we not give up

the prospects of profit and viability of companies? In any case, it is a question of combining, on the side of the theories of change, "long-termist" objectives with the objectives of survival.

The last aspect is: how can we better mobilise the potential of data for the ecological transition? How do we actually better understand the point from which we are coming? I can take some very interesting examples: in France, we have the agglomeration of La Rochelle, which has a very large "Zero Carbon Territory in 2050" programme and which, in order to carry out this programme, has undertaken to aggregate and list a whole range of local data, including data on buildings, energy, mobility, etc., and which needed to say to itself: how are we going to integrate the data produced by citizens without being liberticidal? For me, this subject of data and control by data is a very big subject that must be taken up for the future, both because data are necessary and because the abuse of data can have consequences in terms of freedoms. The more we have to control things that are of the order of scarcity of access to resources, the more we risk imposing authoritarian ways of using data to control citizens. So we need to pay close attention to this data and its fertility, and at the same time pay close attention to respecting freedoms when we use this data.

I think that I am about to reach the end of the time that you have suggested, so I will stop here and I remain at your disposal to answer your questions and possibly extend my presentation.

Mr President. - Thank you very much, Mr Marchandise.

Mr Matos Expósito has the floor.

Mr Matos Expósito. - Thank you, Mr President.

First of all, I would like to congratulate the people who have done this work. This work is sufficiently profound, very profound indeed. It is also interesting to see the relationship between the digital world and sustainability and perpetuation.

I would really like to congratulate you on the richness of this document and also thank you for the interventions that have been made on the document and that have helped us to understand it better. It is a document that we will be able to use frequently because it contains a lot of interesting information and very important conclusions. I would like to share an idea that we should always keep in mind, especially being involved in this very current debate about citizens' participation in public affairs. Direct participation, more powerful participation would probably be part of the solution to the disinterest of citizens in institutions, including European institutions.

Also, whenever we talk about the digital world, the digital world, we cannot forget that there is a phenomenon that we see throughout Europe: it is the fact that we are witnessing the creation of what is called a digital divide, that is to say that there is a part of our population, whether for economic reasons, or for reasons of remoteness, or for a question of belonging to a certain generation, there is this whole part of the population that finds itself excluded from the digital world, from the digital world. In Spain, for example, there has recently been a fairly large movement of citizens, among pensioners in fact, who have serious problems of access to the digital world. As a result, this prevents them from having fluid relations with their bank, for example, because they are not familiar with digital technology and because, very often, they no longer have the possibility of being received by a person, by an employee. The world is moving towards digitisation, towards total digitalisation. From an environmental point of view, this entails a lot of things and that is the subject of this study. We really have to insist that a part of the population not be excluded from this digital transition because, on the one hand, it is unfair and, on the other hand, it certainly does not contribute to achieving an objective of creating an alliance between the digital transition and ecological sustainability. If a large part of the population remains excluded from the digital world, they will slow down, this aspect will slow down the marriage and alliance between these two aspects. The necessary means and strategies must be put in place to detect the causes of this digital divide and to put in place the means to bridge it. This digital divide is due to different causes, to geographical location, the possibility of access to the network does not exist everywhere because of "geographical handicaps". There are also economic issues, there are citizens who are excluded from the digital world because of the economic situation. There is also the generation gap: the older generations have not had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the digital world, and I believe that we must take this into account in our debates. We must take advantage of the magnificent work that has been done to include this dimension in the debate.

Mr President. - I call Mr Marchandise.

Mr Marchandise, Director of Research and Forecasting at the Association pour la fondation d'un internet nouvelle génération. - I wanted to thank Mr Matos Expósito for his reaction. It is very important to make the link between the issues of social inequality and environmental inequality. It is something that is very much underestimated.

If I spoke earlier about freedom issues, it's because, on a global scale, the scarcer resources are, the scarcer access to water will be, the scarcer access to land will be, and so on, the more power issues will be at stake with that, and the more

difficulties there will be between what you mentioned in terms of digital inequalities and what we can mention in terms of environmental inequalities.

I wanted to emphasise two positive dimensions to work on: the first dimension is the attention to be paid in the coming years to accessible and repairable digital technology. The fact that we had the covid crisis showed us to what extent we were all dependent on distant places, to what extent digital technology had set up a global system where, when your equipment breaks down - not necessarily a computer system, it can be equipment containing electronics - you often have to depend on China, Singapore or the other end of the planet to repair it. Yet, reparability is necessary for our territories tomorrow and is necessary as a value to be defended, including in the choice of investments and the choice of public money and the ways in which, as a project owner, we act when we buy digital equipment.

The second thing that seems important to me is how we use digital technology to serve local communities and local solidarity. If we manage to use digital technology to strengthen the territory instead of overexposing it to what is distant, I think we will do everyone good. We can think about the positive impacts of digital technology to increase the socio-economic links between citizens, consumers, local businesses and their local suppliers, so as to enrich the dimension of short circuits in the development of activity, and enrich local human resources in terms of digital technology, which will make it possible not to always depend on distant countries.

Thank you for your attention and time. I look forward to seeing how you can move forward with a CALRE resolution on these issues.

Mr President. - The meeting is suspended.

MEETING RESUMED

Mr President. - The meeting is resumed.

4.3. RESOLUTION ON THE EUROPE OF FREEDOMS

Speech by Mr Stefaan De Rynck, Head of the European Commission Representation in Belgium

Mr President. - In the context of the preparation of a resolution on the Europe of freedoms, I wished to invite a representative of the European Commission to present the Commission's policy in terms of promoting, strengthening and defending the rights and values of the European Union in the context of maintaining open, democratic and inclusive societies. In this context, I am pleased to welcome this morning Mr Stefaan De Rynck, Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium.

I now give the floor to Mr De Rynck.

Mr De Rynck, Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium. - Mr President, as Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium, I am a friend of the regions and certainly of the regions with legislative powers.

On this very important subject of the rule of law and individual rights and freedoms, which is fundamental for the space of European freedoms as well as security and justice, but also the functioning of the internal market. It is crucial that all authorities, local, regional, national, and also companies and citizens can have trust in the independence of judiciaries in the countries. Before I review a number of instruments that the European Commission and European Union is using to promote and defend the rule of law and individual freedoms and fundamental rights, let me just say very briefly one word on Ukraine in this context. The aggression by Russia in Ukraine is also the aggression an authoritarian regime against a democratic and free country and also therefore an attack on fundamental and individual rights of people in Ukraine. We stand in different ways with Ukraine with our European Family, obviously to support Ukraine with military, financial and economic means but in the context of rule of law, I should mention two points here, I think. One is the issue of war crimes, where, recently, the European Commission has proposed to reinforce Eurojust, the agency in charge of judiciary cooperation, based in the Netherlands, to also help Ukrainian authorities and prosecute in Ukraine, to collect evidence and document war crimes, that are committed in Ukraine. This will also be very important in the context of international justice in the future.

The second issue is that of disinformation and propaganda, where the EU took important measures to ban Russia Today and Sputnik, media outlets affiliated with the Russian state, which, of course, raises fundamental questions on the freedom

of expression, on which we have to be incredibly mindful. But it is also clear from the Commission's perspective, that we have to step up the fight against disinformation and propaganda. Two weeks ago, we proposed a new code on disinformation, and we also have new regulatory and legislative instruments in the digital services act to make sure that people do not make money from the business model of proliferating disinformation on online platforms. Let me turn to the rule of law and fundamental rights in the European Union.

À présent, laissez-moi parler de l'État de droit et des droits fondamentaux au sein de l'Union européenne. Il y a quelques instruments que la Commission et l'Union européenne utilisent pour promouvoir et défendre l'État de droit. D'abord un instrument de prévention qui est maintenant le rapport annuel sur l'État de droit que la Commission a mis en place en 2020. C'est un nouveau mécanisme et un cycle annuel. C'est un rapport qui couvre les quatre grands piliers dans les 27 États membres, donc dans chaque État membre :

- sur les systèmes judiciaires ;*
- sur la lutte contre la corruption ;*
- sur la liberté des médias et le pluralisme des médias ;*
- d'autres questions institutionnelles notamment liées à l'équilibre entre les différents pouvoirs.*

L'objectif est d'avoir un dialogue politique pour prévenir les atteintes à l'État de droit, mais aussi promouvoir les bonnes pratiques. La présidence française, avec le Conseil, a discuté de plusieurs findings, de plusieurs éléments que ces rapports mettent sur la table. Actuellement, la Commission prépare le troisième rapport pour juillet, qui sera accompagné par 27 chapitres sur l'État de droit dans chaque État membre. Ce rapport se base aussi sur des centaines de contributions de la société civile qui jouent un rôle crucial dans ce dossier. Nous prenons en compte ces contributions. La nouveauté de ce rapport en juillet sera aussi que la Commission va adresser des recommandations aux États membres pour la première fois.

Let me switch to English. Beyond these political discussions, we are also legislating as European Commission and propose new legislation. I would like to briefly single out one of the four aspects I just mentioned, which are part of the annual reports on the rule of law in Member States, which is the question of media pluralism and media freedom, on which the Commission has worked a lot over the past month, which is under threat in some of our Member States. We are working on legislation to tackle against abusive litigation against journalists and we have also just closed the public consultation on a media freedom act, which is now being prepared in the Commission, which aims to have safeguards at EU level to protect the independence of media and media pluralism in each country. The Commission is not only an institution that proposes legislation and animates political discussion. We are also the guardian of the treaty, and we have a number of important infringement procedures pending against a number of countries, which I would like to draw your attention to in the context of the promotion and defence of the rule of law and the protection of individual freedoms. One concerns judicial independence, which is unfortunately under threat in specific contexts. The Court of Justice has already ruled quite a lot in 2006, 2018, on different aspects concerning Luxembourg and Portugal on the independence of judiciaries. We are unfortunately still faced with challenges in Poland and one particular worry in the bigger context is that a number of, or at least one ruling of the European Court of Justice is not fully implemented, which means that Poland faces daily penalties today in terms of implementing rules by the Court of Justice. The Commission cannot tolerate this situation, whereby the rulings of the Court of Justice are not fully respected by any Member State. The Commission also launched another infringement procedure concerning the polish constitutional tribunal and its interpretation of the polish constitution, which challenges the supremacy of EU law over national law.

At the same time, I should stress that our door remains open for the political dialogue, which we are conducting with the polish authorities and also that these infringement cases do not block us from making progress at the political front. We have recently closed a case against Poland concerning the retirement of polish Supreme Court judges.

In the same context of the protection of individual freedoms, let me draw attention to a number of infringement procedures that we had open against Hungary, which concerned the rights of civil society organisations, academic freedoms, the rights of migrants, asylum seekers and also LGBTIQ people. Beyond infringements we have a new instrument also about its conditionality, which means that the Commission can propose to the council to suspend EU funding in case a Member State breaches EU rule of law and European values in a way that endangers the protection of the financial management of the EU budget and the financial interests of the EU. In this context the Commission launched the conditionality mechanism towards Hungary. It is now an ongoing procedure, and we now need to see the observations that Hungary gives to us. Let me draw your attention, in this context of conditionality, also to the national plans on recovery and resilience, for which the Commission borrows on the financial markets and which it recommends the council to approve. A lot has been said recently on the Commission's recommendation to the council to remove the plan for recovery and resilience in Poland. I should stress that approval rests on very precise commitments by the Polish

Government on the independence of judges and on measures concerning the abolition of the disciplinary chamber, the reform of the disciplinary regime and measures pertaining to the judges affected by the past rulings of that chamber. These Polish commitments are translated into milestones in the national recovery and resilience plan and must be fulfilled before any payment takes place.

Other issues I would like to flag more and go towards the conclusion, Mr. President. Consideration for your resolution is what is happening under article 7 of the Treaty, where there are still two open procedures against Poland and Hungary in terms of serious violations of the rule of law, on which under the French Presidency, they have been hearings in the council, on Poland in February and on Hungary in May. The Charter on Fundamental Rights is also of determining fundamental importance in the context of the rule of law and the protection of individual freedoms. Here we also have a new instrument on the EU budget rules in terms of budget spending, which now includes a new obligation for Member States to comply with the Charter on Fundamental Rights. Member States must put in place, in the context of comprehensive partnerships, must include bodies that are responsible for the promotion of fundamental rights. In the Commission's view, national human rights institutions are the obvious candidates, given their independent status and their expertise on these matters, to report to the EU and also possibly report on non-compliance with the Charter on Fundamental Rights in the context of implementing new funding programmes.

Finally, we are still in negotiations and are also pursuing negotiations for the European Union to accede the European Convention of Human Rights. This is a priority for the European Union, as well as for the Council of Europe. That accession by the EU to the European Convention of Human Rights would also be a fundamental step for the protection of fundamental rights in the EU.

To conclude, Mr President, I have quickly reviewed the instruments that are necessary to promote and defend the rule of law and the protection of individual freedoms. There is no doubt that these challenges will continue to emerge in the future and that we must persevere in our common efforts to protect our fundamental values. The instruments I have mentioned are of course the public policy instruments that are under permanent review. We are therefore pleased that CALRE has decided to draw up a resolution on this subject, which will also be a source of inspiration and information for us in the committee to improve the work on this fundamental subject. Thank you very much.

Mr President. - Thank you very much, Mr De Rynck.

I now turn to the assembly and I think that our colleague Mr Morera wishes to speak. I give him the floor.

Mr Morera Catala. - *Thank you very much, Mr President. Thank you very much to Mr De Rynck for his presentation. Indeed, the European Union has its principles, its values, its fundamental law, and we cannot accept that a state violates them, as seems to be the case with Poland and Hungary.*

I wanted to take the opportunity to qualify an aspect that I find interesting, an issue that I find interesting. I believe that we in the European Union have acted as a united front in the face of the invasion, the aggression of Putin's regime in the Valencian Parliament, unanimously, on the day that the aggression began - 24 February. All the political groups agreed on a resolution. This shows that we are united in facing this action that violates all our fundamental principles. However, I would like to qualify this and say that we should differentiate between the Russian people and Putin's regime. I believe that there are 20,000 Russians who protested and who are being prosecuted by the Russian Putin regime. Thousands of people have left Russia. I believe that we have to differentiate between the Russian people and the criminal and invading Putin regime. I believe that the Commission is doing this and it seems to me to be correct. But it must be made clear that the measures we are taking at European Union level are not against the interests of the Russian people, but are aimed at restoring democracy in Russia. That is just to introduce this nuance.

Mr President, I call Mr De Rynck.

Mr De Rynck, Head of the European Commission Representation in Belgium. - *Thank you very much. I think that Mr Moreira raises a fundamental point and I would just like to draw your attention in this context to the fact that we financially support Russian and also Belarusian journalists who are in exile and who work in journalism centres. The European Union also supports these journalists financially so that the message can also be passed on to the Russian population from their side. I think this is an absolutely fundamental point.*

5. COUNCIL OF EUROPE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK FOR REGIONAL DEMOCRACY

Speech by Mr Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, Member of the Chamber of Regions of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Mr President. - Dear Colleagues, at the invitation of our colleague Mr Sonderegger, President of the Chamber of Regions of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, I had the opportunity to address the Chamber of Regions on 23 March this year. Following my speech, Mr Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium and member of our conference, recalled the existence of a reference framework for regional democracy which the Ministers of Local and Regional Government of the Council of Europe took note of at their session in Utrecht in 2009. I would like to thank President Lambertz for accepting my invitation to come and present this reference framework today, which, although not binding, paves the way for the adoption of a European Charter on Regional Democracy. You have the floor, President Lambertz.

Mr Lambertz, President of the Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, member of the Chamber of Regions of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe - *Thank you very much, Mr President. I would never have suspected that my little speech when you were in Strasbourg would have resulted in my presence here today, and I am particularly pleased about that. Firstly, because my parliament is also a member of CALRE, and I have had the opportunity on many occasions during my presidency of the European Committee of the Regions to exchange views with you or your predecessors, and sometimes even with others, in this room where we are today. I must now comment on a very well-written little book which explains practically everything you need to know about this reference framework for regional democracy. To do this, I must invite you to take a threefold journey. First of all, as Mr Marcourt said, we are now positioned within the framework of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. But this Council of Europe, and its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in particular, maintains close relations with the European Union, of course, but also with the European Committee of the Regions, particularly on the issue on which you invited me to speak. Second journey: we are here in the exclusive club of formula 1 regions, in a way regions with legislative powers. The reference framework concerns all regions, whatever they may be. The great difficulty is to define what a region is. I will come back to this in a few moments. And then, the third journey: it makes me a little nostalgic, because I was able to witness this period when I was a member of the government of my region. It's a journey through time. On the one hand, what I'm talking about takes place in the last decade of the last century and in the first decade of the new millennium, between 1990 and 2010. This will not, however, give rise to a historical analysis, but rather a reminder of things that we absolutely must know - this will be my conclusion - if we want to relaunch the debate on a charter of regional autonomy in Europe today. It is essential to know what happened at the beginning. This reference framework is the little sister of the charter on local self-government, a document adopted in 1985, which plays an important role in the work of local and regional authorities in Europe and which is, moreover, the subject of an important monitoring system in which all the member countries of the Council of Europe are regularly monitored to see how they have implemented this charter. This year, the monitoring took place in Belgium. Semantic subtlety, charter of local self-government and reference framework for regional democracy. A charter is something more binding than a frame of reference. Local self-government should naturally lead to regional self-government, but no, the 20 years of work on this issue led to a compromise that changed the concept of regional self-government into regional democracy. These two aspects explain all the debates that took place in the 1990s and the new century. In 1993, it started with a big congress in Geneva. It was felt that a more solid basis had to be found for defining what a region is in Europe. It is not by chance that this happened in Switzerland, which is perhaps the most classical federal state we know. Then, at the Congress of Local Authorities in Strasbourg in 1997, with the unanimous support of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, a draft charter of regional self-government was adopted. Everyone was sure that this would soon become a reality, but we were very much mistaken. As soon as these documents were on the table, the states began to deal with them in a very concrete way. There was a lot of resistance and all kinds of manoeuvres. I was actually able to take part in this kind of meeting. There were conferences at the time, which still existed, of ministers in charge of local and regional authorities in the different countries. There were more than 15 of them. In Budapest and Valencia, there were great debates on this question: are we going to allow a charter of regional autonomy to pass? I am not going to tell you who was against and who was for, or how alliances were made, sometimes against the grain. It was something very particular. But I would like to say that those who caused the most problems were the British and Spanish governments, for reasons that one can imagine. Very surprisingly, they had made an alliance of circumstance with the Germans. The German Government would normally have acted a little differently.*

In any case, when it came time to finish, a compromise was reached, and they said: "There is no agreement or consensus for a charter, so we are making a frame of reference and are trying to settle it once and for all. The Steering Committee for Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe was then asked to prepare this, together with the Congress and others. Finally, in November 2009 in Utrecht, this document was presented. Just as the Council of Ministers, the European Council, did with the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe to which President Cordero referred earlier; we did not approve this reference framework, we took note of it and since then, this reference framework

exists. It is used in certain circumstances, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Strasbourg uses it a little in its monitoring. But we have never gone further to say that we were going to base ourselves on this reference framework to make a real charter, because we have always felt, since that time, that it was not going to pass. Nevertheless, I believe that one day we must take up this issue again, and this is perhaps one of the objectives that CALRE can put on its flag, and also support, because I believe that in this Europe, with this extraordinary diversity of regional landscapes, there is a real added value in seeing an instrument of the kind of this reference framework transformed into a charter. Why is this? Because in the evolution of Europe, we will also have to look at how multilevel governance is going to be perfected, to evolve in the different States, without going towards unifications and harmonisations. This is completely impossible. Each state has its own history and tradition, but it is important that there is a supranational level everywhere that corresponds to the structure of the state and where responsibilities are taken into account. Our world here is division 1, if we were talking about football, because we are the regions with legislative power, but it can also work and it must also work elsewhere. In this document, and I'll leave it at that, we develop four topics and make suggestions on the organisation. It is very well explained, even if it is written in very small print. So I'm not going to repeat all that and I'll just mention the four areas.

There are the regional architectures. What is a region? That is already an important element. There is the question of the organs. What bodies should we have? There is financing which is very important, and international relations. Just as an example, what is written here on competences seems to me to be very important because it is said: "we need competences that are guaranteed in the constitutions or in laws voted in execution". We also say that we must not be able to change the competences or the territory of a region without its agreement, without having asked it. In the area of finances, for example, another very important subject, it is said that there must be finances of their own, either allocated by the State, but preferably finances that are not allocated to projects. There must be freedom of action, except when the regions exercise delegated missions, which is a very important principle. It is also said that the bodies must be elected by universal suffrage. And if there are executives, they must be accountable to these elected bodies, unless the executives are directly elected themselves, in which case they must report. These are some of the elements of this document. It is very interesting. It is also sometimes used as a basis and reference for reports that are made on particular subjects to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. This is where we see its usefulness in a very concrete way. Thank you very much.

6. CALRE'S WORKING GROUPS

Mr President. - Dear colleagues, we have several working groups on many topics. We come to the report. Mr Enric Morera i Català will speak and I give him the floor.

Mr Enric Morera i Català. - Thank you, Mr President. I am the only member of a working group present here in person. I would like to point out that the previous CALRE General Assembly in January 2021 renewed our mandate. We continued our work virtually, after the Canary Assembly, during which we renewed our working group. The year 2021 was a year in which we carried out investigations, research, on the basis of a whole series of documents from the European Union, to deal with the coronavirus crisis.

In order to deepen our knowledge of the situation of culture in Europe, I would like to point out that we have a reference document, that of the European Commission, which deals with a new European network for culture for the years 2019-2022. It is a very ambitious document that refers to the cultural framework of the European Union and is extremely interesting or relevant for our working group, in order to help it to propose improvements to this initiative of the European Commission.

We have also paid special attention to COFOE, the Conference on the Future of the European Union, which is putting forward a whole series of interesting ideas for the future of the European Union. The conclusions of this conference, as you all know, are based on the deepening of the democratic character of the Union, on the strengthening of participation and other issues outside the States in the decision-making process and in the institutional structures, as CALRE has always defended them. In this sense, our working proposal is quite clear: in the next quarter of this year, we are going to organise a face-to-face conference that will collect all the contributions, all the inputs gathered from the regional assemblies of CALRE. The aim is to present a proposal for the next CALRE General Assembly which, I think, should be held at the end of this year. We have a wealth of experience accumulated in relation to linguistic and cultural diversity, and all these elements also come from COFOE.

I would also like to point out that there is all the information concerning covid and the cultural creative industries in the European Union. So our working group is flexible, it is able to adapt to the realities that we know and that we are still suffering from. It is ready to suggest proposals in relation to culture and the creative industries in order to enrich the cultural and linguistic wealth in the European Union. This is a document that we will propose. We hope that it will contain

ideas that will really contribute to improvements in our European Union. That is one of the objectives of our working group.

Mr President. - Mr Borghetti has asked for the floor and I give it to him.

Mr Borghetti. - I wanted to thank Mr Marcourt for this meeting which was very rich in proposals and interventions. As CALRE and in collaboration with the Committee of the Regions and the European institutions, we have a lot of material to work with. What is important is that we can work in harmony. We worked on inequalities in the field of health. Of course, we have updated our work, taking into account the negative effects of the pandemic. During the last year, we have taken up all the experiences of various European organisations, all the difficulties that were faced during the pandemic. Everything that we imagined before the pandemic is now in an even more difficult situation.

For the plenary at the end of the year, we would like to draw up a document to bring the results of our work to your attention.

At a meeting in Milan - and I would like to thank Mr Marcourt and all those who went there - we were able to discuss the effects of the pandemic on health inequalities with the experts. There are many services that are not up to standard, there are inequalities between cities and rural areas. There are inequalities between young and old people. Not everyone is on the same level and not everyone has access to medical care. Also, the vaccine has not been distributed in the same way in all European regions. We will give some indications about this, but I can already tell you that a fundamental problem is to boost health, health care in all regions, not only in the cities. We want health not just to be outsourced to hospitals when it is really urgent, but to be able to carry out preventive health care for everyone, for all ages. I believe that there is a lot of work that we can do together. Independently of my own work, I hope that the group will be able to continue to work fruitfully in the future.

Mr President. - As I mentioned a moment ago, President Zanin is unable to join us, but he has recorded a video message which I suggest you listen to.

I call on Mr Zanin.

Mr Zanin. - Dear Mr Marcourt, dear colleagues, dear guests, I would like to greet you on behalf of our entire region, which I represent with great pride. I represent this legislative assembly. I am sorry that I cannot attend your meeting of the CALRE Standing Committee, but unfortunately I have other commitments in my region. I am sorry, because it is an important meeting. Indeed, meetings between people are very important, they are much richer and more useful than virtual meetings. This allows for the establishment of collaborations that become more stable over time. Moreover, the topics on the agenda are very important and interesting for our assembly: there is the result of the Conference on the future of Europe, the digital transition and the environmental transition. I would have liked to be here with you so that I could have enriched my cultural background following the high-level debates that will certainly take place during your meeting.

I would like to move quickly to the CALRE working group - which I have the pleasure of coordinating - on "Better regulation and evaluation of public policies". The theme of better regulation is at the heart of the institutional debate. A few days ago, on 28 June, a joint conference was held between the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Commission on the evaluation of legislative performance and its capacity to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The theme of better legislation is increasingly the subject of discussion between the legislative power on the one hand and the stakeholders on the other. It is important to emphasise the importance of the involvement of stakeholders, families, companies, associations and citizens. Each and every one of us, in our families, every day, in our work or in our daily private lives or as consumers, is confronted with the effects of the regulation of legislation. As participants in political decisions, we have a duty to take into account the contributions of all interested parties, of all citizens. It is important to have scientific data that can be relied upon to better understand the complex problems that we are facing and that will manifest themselves in the near future. Our function is therefore to collect the contributions that come from the territory in order to transfer them into the legislation. It is important to do this exercise thoroughly so that it is not just a rhetorical exercise.

During the 147th plenary session, the Committee of the Regions adopted an opinion on better lawmaking and joining forces to produce better laws. I had the honour and privilege of being the rapporteur for this session. A few weeks ago, on 17 May, the European Parliament's JURI Committee also voted on the draft report on this subject, with rapporteur Falcone. This corresponds exactly to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions. Some of the amendments proposed by the Parliament have been accepted in the draft report of the JURI Committee, in particular the issue of active subsidiarity, territorial impact assessment and the impact on territories.

In the light of these developments, I think that in order to continue the work of our working group, we have proposed a questionnaire that is based on the regional dimension of this theme. This survey, which in a way has already been sent by CALRE's secretariat to all of you, wants to try to participate in this working group which was held on 12 November 2021 and which is centred on work carried out by experts. I think it is important to deepen the situation and the knowledge of the field in order to be able to analyse and know the local and regional situation with the aim of analysing which are the tools of a better regulation that can be applied concretely on the territory and the member regions of CALRE and what is the specific role of the regional legislatures in this process. We have designed this questionnaire as a flexible tool, based on a few targeted requests and questions in order to favour this exchange and to have a better knowledge. The aim of this survey is to compare tools, advantages, critical points in terms of quality of legislation and also to evaluate public policies. The results will be in a synthesis document that will allow a better knowledge of certain practices that should be disseminated within the working group and CALRE as a whole. I am sure that CALRE will be able to show its spirit of mutual collaboration that characterises us. The different members will send back the answers to this questionnaire and by comparing our experiences, we will be able to make that qualitative leap in legislation that is expected by citizens. It is only by starting from the good practices shared at local level that we, as a regional legislative assembly, will be able to contribute to truly integrating the different institutions in order to act in favour of better regulation at national and local level.

I thank you for your attention and I hope to see you soon in person. I wish you good work.

Mr President - Here is the report from President Zanin.

Dear Colleagues, you will remember that we have begun to reflect on the permanent nature of certain working groups. As I have not yet had the opportunity to consult all the parties on this issue, I propose to come back to it at our next meeting.

7. CALRE'S "STARS OF EUROPE" AWARD

Mr President. - Dear colleagues, the CALRE "Star of Europe" award was created in 2016 with the aim of highlighting good practices and initiatives adopted by the CALRE member assemblies that concretely improve an aspect or sector of the economic, cultural or social life of their territories and communities, while underlining the positive impact of European institutions in regional realities.

By decision of our Standing Committee, all member assemblies of our conference have been invited to submit a maximum of two nominations. I am pleased to inform you that a total of 10 applications were submitted by nine different assemblies, which I would like to thank for their involvement in the resumption of this operation. The applications have been submitted on the platform.

We now need to make a selection from these 10 applications. Our Standing Committee having suggested, at its last meeting, that all the CALRE assemblies be involved in the vote, I would like to highlight three initiatives. First initiative: the Standing Committee could sponsor, by means of a vote, a first initiative among those not submitted by one of its members, that is to say seven candidatures among the 10 submitted. A second initiative could be voted for by all CALRE members through an online vote. Finally, citizens could be invited to put forward a third initiative through an online vote by member assemblies, in particular those that have submitted an application and that would promote the prize and, more generally, CALRE to their citizens.

The award ceremony could be held in conjunction with our November plenary meeting.

Are there any thoughts on this proposal? I do not see any, and I take your silence as consent. Thank you.

8. 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OVIEDO DECLARATION

Mr President. - Dear colleagues, the 7th of October will be the 25th anniversary of the Oviedo Declaration, which founded our conference. In this context, I have proposed to our colleague Marcelino Marcos Línas, President of the General Junta of the Principality of Asturias, the organisation in Oviedo of an event commemorating this anniversary.

The following activities would take place on Thursday 6 October: a debate on the current nature of the Declaration of Oviedo, followed by a gala dinner. For the morning of Friday 7 October: a re-signing ceremony of the Oviedo Declaration, in the same room where it was signed 25 years ago.

This event would bring together, among others, the presidents and directors of the member assemblies, but also the former presidents of CALRE, the presidents of the European institutions could also be invited to take part in the event and, if necessary, give a speech.

I do not see anyone wishing to react to this proposal. We therefore agree on this one.

9. POLL "A VIRTUAL SENATE OF EUROPE'S REGIONS"

Mr President. - Dear Colleagues, I have received a request from Dr. François Saint-Ouen of the University of Geneva who is conducting a prospective research on the idea of a virtual senate of European regions. The aim of such a platform would be to enable regional assemblies that so wish to draw up legislative proposals or proposals for legal amendments online. Among the legal changes mentioned are the submission of legislative proposals to the European Commission and exchanges with the European Parliament on proposed amendments.

A short questionnaire has been drafted in several languages - French, German, Italian, Spanish and English - in order to allow the 72 CALRE member legislatures to give their opinion on this idea. The questionnaire is available on the platform. I propose that this questionnaire be sent to all CALRE member assemblies on the understanding that the University of Geneva would manage the results of the questionnaire. Can you accept my proposal? Thank you very much.

10. MISCELLANEOUS

Mr President. - Colleagues, I propose that we finish our work with any other business. Does anyone have any other business to discuss?

No one. Thank you.

I would like to thank you very much for the quality of your work and I am looking forward to seeing you again on 17 and 18 November next in Namur for our third plenary assembly meeting, but also on 17 September in Namur, as part of the Fêtes de Wallonie, if you would like to join us there. Finally, on 6 and 7 October, in Oviedo for the 25th anniversary celebration. The time allotted has been slightly exceeded, but this seems reasonable in view of the quality of the presentations and the number of speakers. I thank you and wish you a good afternoon.

This concludes our business for today.

The meeting is closed.