



CALRE

Conference of European Regional Legislative
Assemblies

REPORT

Summary of the meetings of the Standing Committee and the Plenary Assembly of CALRE, held by videoconference on January 23rd, 2025, under the Presidency of José Manuel Rodrigues.

**Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous
Region of Madeira**

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CALRE – CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN REGIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES

On the 23rd of January 2025, the first meetings of the year of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE) were held, with the purpose of discussing the work done during 2024 and affirming strategies within the framework of European policies. The outgoing President of CALRE, José Manuel Rodrigues, convened the Standing Committee and the Plenary of CALRE for the first month of the year, with a very busy agenda.

Given the political crisis that marked Madeira last year, José Manuel Rodrigues understood that there were no conditions for holding a major, in-person meeting in the Region with the Presidents of all Regional Assemblies with legislative capacity, so the meeting was carried out by videoconference, which was aired on CALRE TV, the institution's YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@calre>).

The CALRE Standing Committee meeting began at 11:00 am (GMT) on January 23rd. José Manuel Rodrigues began by taking stock of the initiatives developed in 2024 and talking about the need to strengthen the European cohesion policy.

Afterwards, the candidacies for the Presidency of CALRE 2025 and the proposals for the creation of new Working Groups were presented, culminating the meeting with the intervention of the members of CALRE. The afternoon was reserved for the Plenary Assembly, where the proposals drawn up by the Standing Committee were voted on and the new Presidency of CALRE for this year was elected, which was handed over to the Canary Islands.



CALRE STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING

Framing

José Manuel Rodrigues officially took office as President of CALRE on March 7, 2024, in a ceremony that brought to the Region the President of the Brussels Parliament, Rachid Madrane, who held the presidency of this institution during the year of 2023. It was a mandate in which the President of the Madeiran Parliament assumed as a priority the reinforcement of the “power of the Conference of Regional Legislative Assemblies with the various institutions of the European Union, namely in the construction of the legislative process”, as well as “strengthening the weight of the Parliaments and the Regional Governments, as mediators between European institutions and citizens”, in order to cement the “construction of a true European citizenship”.

The work developed by the CALRE presidency in 2024

At the CALRE Standing Committee, José Manuel Rodrigues explained all the initiatives promoted on behalf of the European Parliaments.

On the 10th of April, at the Committee for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX) of the European Committee of the Regions, the Madeiran leader proposed “active subsidiarity” and “new mechanisms for the relationship between Regional Parliaments in the institutional life of the Union”, having also suggested the “creation of a Senate of the Regions, in a future institutional reform of the European Union”.

On the 26th of July, the President CALRE addressed a letter to the Presidents of the European Council, António Costa, of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, and of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, calling for the strengthening of CALRE's power “with the various institutions of the European Union (EU)”, where he also requested a new Cohesion Policy in the next Community Support Framework; essential conditions, he considers, for “a harmonious development of the European Union”. In this letter, José Manuel



Rodrigues demanded that the Conference gain more authority “in the construction of the legislative process, in line with the implementation of the European Union’s Cohesion Policy”, in order to ensure that “common European policies are adapted to these territories, based on of their singularities, aiming at a true European Social Cohesion Policy, considering that the Outermost Regions are decisive for the political and strategic dimension of the European Union in the World”. A position that was articulated with the President of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, Vasco Cordeiro.

In Paris, at the International Meeting for Peace promoted by the Community of Sant'Egidio, between September 22nd and 24th, 2024, the President of CALRE and of the Madeiran Parliament, before representatives of the main religions and world governments, and personalities from civil society and culture from 27 countries, stressed the urgency of having greater proximity



between peoples, more respect for cultures, and greater effectiveness of the United Nations (UN) in mediating conflicts. These three guidelines are, for José Manuel Rodrigues, essential elements for the promotion and maintenance of Peace, and for the existence of more tolerant societies that respect differences, throughout the world.

The president of the Legislative Assembly of Madeira took advantage of the International Meeting for Peace to question the role of the United Nations (UN). “The best demonstration that the international order we have built since the middle of the last century is outdated is the failure of the United Nations to mediate the recent conflicts that have erupted in various areas of the world,” began by saying the leader of the main body of Madeira's own government.

“Today, this institution is not respected by States, its decisions are not accepted, its mediation space has become a dialogue of the deaf and no one seems to be interested in reforming this organization and giving it a new impetus to pursue the objectives for which it was created was created”.



Therefore, José Manuel Rodrigues believes that it is time “for disunited nations to reflect on what they want to do with the UN and whether they want it to be, as it was in the past, a great world organization capable of anticipating and stopping conflicts, decisive and effective in mediating between countries to avoid wars, influential and respected by all who signed its Fundamental Charter”.

“The truth is that the United Nations Organization no longer reflects in its powers and balances the evolution of the world, the development registered in the various continents, the growth of the various States, the weight of each country in the economy and in international politics, the importance of each of the nations in the geopolitical context, and here lies its disconnection with the reality of the days in which we live and its marked loss of importance as a major organization, where the superior interests of Humanity should converge.

José Manuel Rodrigues met with Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, from Italy, and exchanged views on what is happening in the world and the role that all of society should play in building bridges for the common good and social development.



Peace is possible, was the sentiment, in a tone of hope, most conveyed in the opening session of the International

Meeting for Peace, which brought thousands of religious, political and civil society leaders to Paris, and which was also attended by the President of the Legislative Assembly of Madeira, José Manuel Rodrigues, at the invitation of the Community of Sant' Egidio and the Archdiocese of Paris.



The President of France, who presided over the ceremony, expressed concern about the increase in the number of wars. “There are more than 50 conflicts around the world,” Emmanuel Macron told an audience of more than 3,500 people who packed the Palais de Congrès.

“The fight for Peace must be through dialogue”, he began by defending.

Emmanuel Macron pointed to coexistence between peoples as the key to Peace in the Middle East. “Imagining peace is a challenge because Peace is more precarious than war. Peace is infinitely more fragile,” he said. That is why he called for the defense of “rehumanization”. “To be able to imagine peace, we need to rehumanize, understand and be in the other person’s shoes, and religions have a fundamental role to play,” stressed the French President.

The migration phenomenon in Europe was also discussed at the International Meeting for Peace. The problems faced by different countries do not have an easy solution, but experts from all over the world understand that it is necessary to act not only in terms of reception and socialization, but also in the countries of origin.

The President of the Legislative Assembly of Madeira participated in the Forum called “A future policy for migration”, a topic of extreme importance for CALRE, of which José Manuel Rodrigues is also President.





The Madeiran leader recommended that more attention be paid to the new international political order, “because the institutions that exist to regulate this order date back to after the Second World War. The world has evolved a lot and it is necessary to adapt these institutions, namely the United Nations, the European Union itself and NATO, to the new social, political and economic reality”. And from this point of view, migration is one of the biggest challenges for Europe, “which is sought out by people seeking new life opportunities, fleeing wars, conflicts, political and religious persecution, poverty and climate change”, stressed the President of the Madeiran Parliament.

At the Committee of the Regions, held on the 25th of October 2024, in Warsaw (11th Conference on Subsidiarity), the president of CALRE once again called for a “reform of the European Union” that would give more “robustness to cohesion policy”. José Manuel Rodrigues justified the measure as a way of mitigating the “disparities between the richest and poorest regions” and combating the “immense problems” that these differences generate.



On November 21st, at the European Committee of the Regions, José Manuel Rodrigues was represented by the Vice-President of the Legislative Assembly of Madeira, at the meeting that aimed to express the support of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the reconstruction of Ukraine. Rubina Leal demonstrated Madeira's solidarity with the Ukrainian people and stressed that European solidarity must be an unshakable pillar, not only in immediate assistance, but also in the reconstruction of a devastated nation. In this regard, he expressed the importance of cohesion policies, noting that this difficult experience demonstrates that even small regions can play a significant role in supporting victims of war.



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It was also up to Rubina Leal, representing the President of the Legislative Assembly of Madeira, to sign the Declaration of Support from Cities and Regions for the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine, which thus includes the partition of the Autonomous Region of Madeira. This document reinforced the commitment of its signatories to support Ukraine's desire to become a member state of the Union.



On the 23rd of January 2025, the Standing Committee of CALRE called on the European Union to strengthen cohesion policy in the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework and “its decentralisation within the principle of active subsidiarity practiced by the the European Union”. The regions are aware of the new challenges that the European Union is facing, particularly in the areas of defence, security,



economic competitiveness and digital transition, but they stress that “these new challenges cannot be made at the cost of reducing cohesion fund allocations”, he explained José Manuel Rodrigues. The President of CALRE recalled that “these funds have contributed to the development of the European Union since its creation”, thus highlighting the importance of maintaining this community support that has helped to “reduce inequalities between the richest and poorest regions”. “The regions do not accept in any way that European programmes and funds are centralised in the Member States or in the European institutions”,



knowing that “54% of public investment has been made, up until now, by the Regions and municipalities”, he said.

The Legislative Assembly of Madeira presided over CALRE in 2024. This year the presidency should be handed over to the Parliament of the Canary Islands. Astrid Pérez, President of the Canary Islands Parliament, outlined as objectives “the strengthening of the power of CALRE, in its articulation with the European institutions”, the “improvement of the joint work of the Regions, in order to boost the development of the



populations furthest from the decision-making centres of the European Union”, “the construction of a Europe of values”, the “creation of solutions that respond to the migration crisis, which also affects the Canary Islands” and a project for the “construction of a permanent CALRE office” in Brussels.

The election of the new presidency of CALRE took place at the Plenary Assembly, which took place in the afternoon, via videoconference, broadcast by CALRE TV, on the YouTube channel.

The President of the Legislative Assembly of Madeira was one of the supporters of the Canary Islands' candidacy for the presidency of CALRE, together with the parliaments of the Azores, Italy and Spain, which expressed support for the proposals presented by Astrid Pérez.

Carlo Borghetti, from the Regional Council of Lombardy, was one of the participants in the Standing Committee of CALRE, where he defended a reform of CALRE that would enshrine a “minimum physical structure in Brussels” that would support “the successive presidencies” of this association, which brings together 69 Regional European Parliaments with legislative capacity. To this end, he requested the contribution of “all



Parliaments in financing a permanent secretariat”, which, in addition to guiding meetings and events, contributes to “creating the historical memory and archive of CALRE”, as well as providing “stable logistical support”. The Italian representation understands that this is a way of speeding up responses, together with European bodies, to “the problems of the Regions”.



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The President of the Assembly of the Azores, Luís Garcia, proposed the creation of a Working Group on “artificial intelligence and democracy”. The Azorean leader justified the in-depth reflection “with the accelerated digital development that brings new challenges to democratic institutions”. He proposed the definition of strategies that guarantee, in the future, the normal functioning of Parliaments and democracies.



Roberto Ciambetti, from the Veneto Regional Council (Italy), in name of the Region of Trentino Alto Adige, suggested a Working Group to define policies “for mountainous and inland regions”. The objective is to “think about the difficulties of those who live in these areas and draw up plans to improve the quality of life of these populations”, he stressed.

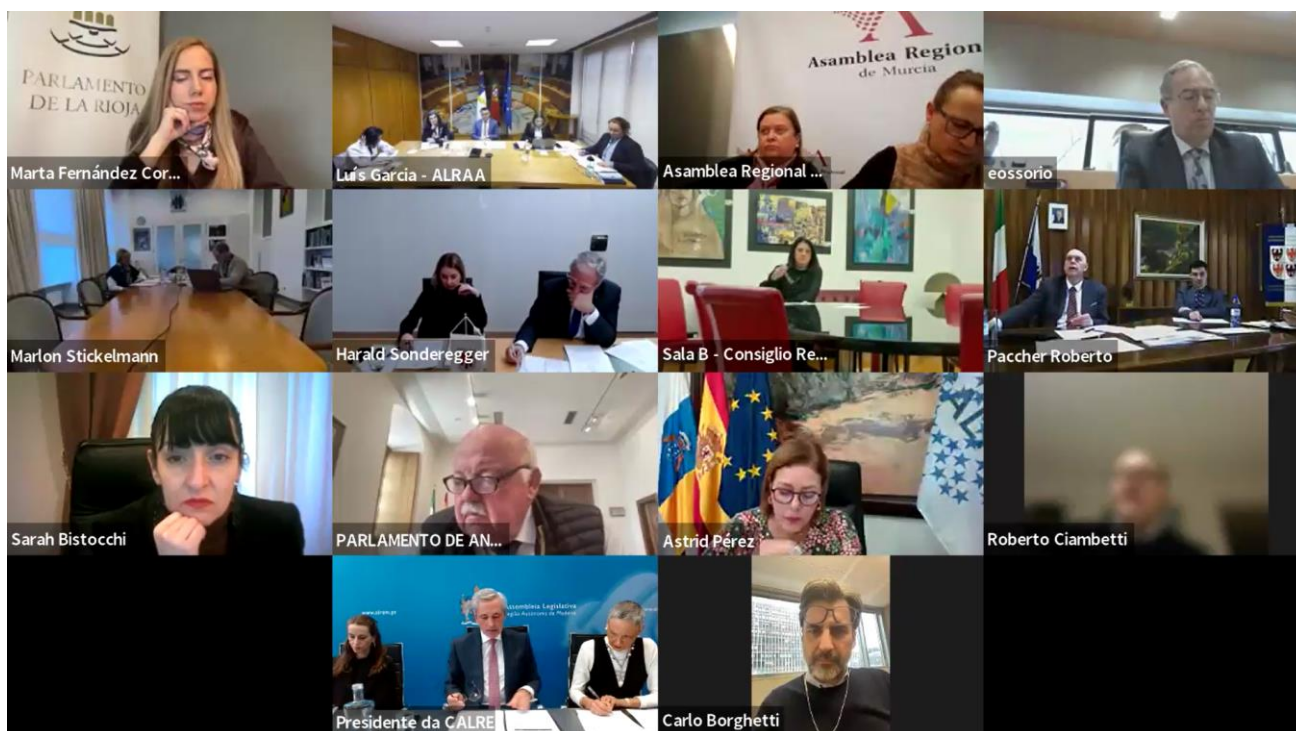




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CALRE PLENARY ASSEMBLY MEETING

The members of CALRE reinforced the importance of a Working Group to discuss “The future and reform of CALRE”, which will be chaired by the Legislative Assembly of Madeira. The decision fortified at the Plenary Assembly came following the meeting of the Standing Committee, where the Regional Parliaments highlighted the urgency of giving more impetus to this association of Parliaments with a physical structure and a permanent secretariat. It is now up to the Madeiran Parliament to present a plan that gives substance to the idea of “making CALRE more representative within the European Union”, based in Brussels, with a view to “active participation in the European legislative process”, explained the President of the Legislative Assembly from Madeira.



The Parliaments gave a positive review to the work of the Madeiran Parliament at the head of CALRE, “within the special political circumstances that Madeira has been experiencing for a year”, clarified José Manuel Rodrigues at the end of the meeting that took place via videoconference. “It was possible, together with the European Committee of the Regions, to raise awareness among European institutions about the specificities



of the European Regions and the very important role they play in European construction”, highlighted the Madeiran leader.

CALRE currently represents 69 parliaments with legislative capacity, and which try to curb the idea “of centralizing European programs and funds in the Member States or in the European institutions. At this moment, this decision-making capacity lies with the regions and local authorities themselves and we hope that this continues to be the case”, highlighted the President of the Legislative Assembly of Madeira, who handed over the Presidency of CALRE to the Parliament of the Canary Islands, while maintaining the Vice-Presidency of this institution, in accordance with regulations.

Astrid Pérez, the President-elect, unanimously thanked everyone for their trust and promised to defend “the decentralisation of the European decision-making process”, centred on the principles of territorial cohesion and subsidiarity. She reinforced the importance of having a permanent office in Brussels with a physical secretariat and to this end requested the commitment of the Legislative Assembly of Madeira in implementing this project.

CALRE calls for more solidarity in the face of the immigration problem in the Canary Islands

In 2024, the Parliament of the Canary Islands chaired the Working Group on “Migration Policies”. Migrants arrive in the Canary Islands from countries such as Morocco, Senegal, Gambia and Mali. “The situation is alarming, with an unprecedented migration crisis. In 2023, 39,910 migrants arrived, an increase of 154% compared to the previous year,” explained Astrid Pérez. “The number of boats arriving at the islands has also increased significantly, from





350 in 2022 to 610 in 2023 and 506 in October 2024. The route has become extremely dangerous, being one of the deadliest in the world.”

“The situation of unaccompanied foreign minors in the Canary Islands is truly worrying. There are almost 6,000 minors, which represents half of all those who have arrived in Spain in the last year and a half,” said the President of the Canary Islands Parliament, who proposed a “Pact on Migration and Asylum” that covers the whole of Europe. The report suggests the redistribution of asylum seekers, with clear transfer rules in order to give dignity to people seeking better socioeconomic opportunities in European territory. It also recommends the creation of a solidarity mechanism, with the aim of “achieving a fairer distribution of asylum seekers within European territory, with the participation of all Member States and with the financing of the distribution”.

The Working Group believes that legislation must be created to guarantee the “rights of asylum seekers and people with international protection status. The new regulations should focus on returning to their home territory those who do not have the right to remain in the EU, as well as reducing the time needed for asylum procedures and ensuring that applicants meet the requirements to remain in any Member State.”

José Manuel Rodrigues coordinated this Working Group in 2023, at a time when “a migratory route from Morocco, Mauritania, Mali and Senegal, heading towards the Canary Islands was beginning to emerge”. Faced with the new data, he expressed concern and called for the European Union to intervene through “a more cohesive and supportive migration policy”, instead of “nationalist policies that lead nowhere and that tend to export the problem and not to solve it”, he concluded.

Cortes de Castilla-La Mancha presented Working Group on “Accessibility for people with disabilities”

The Cortes of Castile-La Mancha has taken a new step in the development of a Working Group on universal accessibility for people with disabilities. The President of the Autonomous Parliament, Pablo Bellido, participated in the annual meeting of CALRE, where he presented the action plan of this Working Group and called for the participation of all parliaments with a view to “sharing experiences and explore advances” in



this social area. In this regard, a questionnaire and a text were sent to all parliaments. In the year 2024, no work was developed, however Pablo Bellido highlighted data that reveal the urgency of discussing strategies to help people with disabilities.

“According to the Council of Europe, by 2022, 27% of the European Union population over the age of 16 will have some type of disability, which represents 101 million people, or one in four adults (EUROSTAT data). Research shows that it becomes more likely to have a disability as you get older, so that 52.2 percent of all people with disabilities in the European Union are aged 65 or over. There is also a gender



differentiation in the statistics and across Member States. The percentage of women with disabilities is higher than that of men. The EU average is 29.5% of the female population with some form of disability, compared to 24.4% of men”.

The President of the Cortes of Castile and La Mancha said, in the text shared with other members of CALRE, that “for all these reasons, it is convenient to transform this Working Group into a forum for discussion and analysis to diagnose the initial situation of the regional parliaments present in CALRE in terms of accessibility, to serve as a space for exchanging experiences, and to be a frame of reference for dialogue with organizations of people with disabilities, in order to contribute to channeling their demands to other administrations and organizations”.

This Working Group has the following objectives:

- Collect information on the situation of universal accessibility in the regional parliaments represented in CALRE, through a questionnaire to collect information on architectural barriers, the presence or absence of political representatives or workers with disabilities in the parliaments and the existence of committees that act specifically in this area, among other issues.



- Carry out a diagnosis, taking into account the information received, which allows for an idea of the initial situation of parliaments in terms of accessibility.
- Establish contacts and alliances with organisations representing people with disabilities, both at national and European level, to jointly define the minimum standards that parliaments must achieve in terms of accessibility.
- Create a space where regional parliaments in Europe can exchange experiences and proposals on accessibility and promote legislation and policies for people with disabilities.
- Organize an Interparliamentary Forum on Disability and Accessibility at European level. This forum will serve as a place to meet, debate and exchange actions and policies on disability and accessibility, culminating in commitments for action.
- Consolidate the Working Group as a valid interlocutor with the European institutions, capable of transferring the vision and work of regional parliaments on disability and accessibility to the policies to be implemented.

Pablo Bellido Acevedo suggested a meeting of the Working Group and holding a forum to present the results obtained, exchange experiences and make commitments regarding accessibility.

This meeting is scheduled to take place in October, in the Spanish city of Toledo.

The Regional Assembly of Murcia presented conclusions on the “Sustainable Development and Water” Working Group

Due to health problems, the President of the Regional Assembly of Murcia, Visitación Martínez, forwarded the presentation of the conclusions of the Working Group on “Sustainable Development and Water” to the president of the Parliament of the Canary Islands, Astrid Pérez.

“The Region of Murcia, rich in history and culture, faces the challenge of reconciling economic development with the preservation of our natural environment. Water, a precious resource that sustains life, a necessary



and, unfortunately, scarce resource, has become one of the key elements in this equation”, can be read in the introduction of the presented report.

“Southeastern Spain is characterized by accentuated seasonality and water scarcity that worsens every year. This is confirmed by the available data: the Region of Murcia has an average rainfall of less than 300 millimeters, with an average of more than 3,100 hours of sunshine - figures that are worse in the year 2023, with an average of 197 mm in the Region of Murcia, compared to the national average of 536 mm”.

Faced with this reality, Astrid Pérez, who also participated in this Working Group, put forward as conclusions the need to reinforce wastewater treatment and reuse plants. “Today, the Region of Murcia has more than 100 treatment plants capable of purifying more than 99% of its wastewater, which allows 98% of its



resources to be reused.” This commitment, which serves as an example, places Murcia as a world leader in wastewater treatment, which is the result not only of technological advances, but also of “firm political will and the commitment to citizens to promote responsible water consumption habits”, where governments, companies, universities, researchers and civil society have played a fundamental role.

Since the beginning of the Legislature, the Regional Assembly of Murcia has debated around 50 initiatives related to water and water infrastructures, and agriculture has been one of the sectors that has benefited most from this water policy, thanks to water reuse. “The agricultural sector has 120 cubic hectometers per year, which represents 15% of the necessary resources.”

For this reason, the Spanish parliaments intend to promote more “legislative measures that favor the use of wastewater, eliminating or modifying those that prevent water savings”.

There was also a call for the practice of “co-governance and alliance between public administrations, companies, universities, researchers and civil society with the aim of outlining sustainable development and water strategies”. As well as a request for “the promotion of research and the continuous introduction of



new technologies, including artificial intelligence, not only for water treatment, but also for its application in the agricultural sector in those regions that suffer from water leakage”.

The Regional Assembly of Murcia also recommended the creation of Strategic Plans that guarantee Sustainability, and the promotion of hydraulic infrastructures, such as water transfers, to complement water treatment in areas with low rainfall and water scarcity.

Lombardy Regional Council presents conclusions of the Working Group on “Health in Europe”

Carlo Borghetti, delegate of the Regional Council of Lombardy, explained the conclusions of the Working Group on health inequalities, which began before the pandemic. “Over the years, 7 main factors that create inequalities in social-health services have been identified: territory of residence, income, age, working conditions, neglected diseases, foreign citizenship and gender (with reference to the inequalities experienced by women also in health)”.



The best practices adopted by the regions to face the pandemic and the new inequalities created after the socioeconomic crisis were compared, which is why the need to integrate hospital services with social services was diagnosed, in order to achieve a more cohesive society and better health, which is also the basis of good economic development.

This Working Group will continue in 2025 with the purpose of “working on the theme of relaunching territorial health care to improve health responses.” It also aims to help in the “development of a stronger European Union, which assumes a new role of drive and coordination, also with regard to Health.



The Legislative Assembly of the Azores will work on the theme “eDemocracy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence”

The President of the Legislative Assembly of Azores saw the creation of a Working Group approved to reflect on the theme of “eDemocracy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence”. “It emerges as a challenge that we all face in our daily lives and in our institutions, which is the digital challenge”, began Luís Garcia. According to the Azorean president, States, Regions and institutions such as CALRE must promote cooperation, through Parliaments, in the creation of common strategies to “deal with issues such as Artificial Intelligence, cybersecurity and data governance”.

The task force will have the mission of reflecting on and strengthening “the basis of democracies in the digital age, seeking to ensure that all processes in which all European citizens participate are democratic, transparent, accessible to all, based on truth and that no one is left behind”, clarified Luís Garcia.

Trentino Regional Council creates group to reflect on “Problems of Mountain and Inland Areas”

Roberto Paccher, President of the Regional Council of Trentino Alto Adige, proposed the creation of a Working Group to think about “Problems of Mountain and Inland Areas”, with the aim of developing environmental conservation policies, management of natural resources and mobility in areas further away from large cities.

“These realities require in-depth study because, given their geographical characteristics, these regions are at risk of depopulation,” explained the Italian leader, who asked for better attention from European regional parliaments to seek solutions to the problems common to the different regions, focusing attention on the areas of “environmental conservation, the management of natural resources, especially water and mobility, because living in the mountains is difficult





and requires more investment, and the creation of public services to serve those who live outside the major centers or in more isolated areas.”

Astrid Pérez, elected president of Europe's regional parliaments

“Cohesion policy is the most effective instrument for maintaining the specific status of the continent’s most isolated territories.” Pérez becomes the first woman from the Canary Islands to preside over CALRE.

The President of the Parliament of the Canary Islands, Astrid Pérez, has been unanimously elected President of CALRE for the year 2025. She will become the first woman from the Canary Islands to preside over this international body. The vote took place within the scope of the celebration of the Standing Committee and the Assembly of this international organization. “It is an honor to represent my fellow presidents and the presidents of all the European Parliaments,” began the Canary Islands President, who was the first to recognize the support of the representatives of the Spanish Autonomous Chambers, who proposed this candidacy. Astrid Pérez defended the need to ensure that “our regions are co-participants in the adoption of decisions of European relevance”, and also insisted that “cohesion policy is the most effective instrument to maintain the specific status of the most remote territories on the continent”. In her speech, the President stressed that she will preside over CALRE with the primary objective of strengthening European democracy and the values that served as the basis for the founding of the Union, preserving coexistence, tolerance and territorial singularities. Regarding the Canary Islands, Astrid Pérez states that “Europe must continue to compensate for the losses it assumes as an outermost region”, an aspect that “must be reflected in the Financial Framework for the period 2027-2033”. She highlighted the need to “defend and consolidate decentralization and establish a commitment to unity in decisions relating to the uniqueness of territories”. Regarding the current situation of communication networks, the President of CALRE stated that “Artificial Intelligence and technologies mark a new era in the global and European socio-economic scenario and the Conference must have a strategy to defend its citizens”. In conclusion, Astrid Pérez invited all representatives of the CALRE Assemblies and Parliaments to work together for the progress of Europe and the regions.

