



2016 CALRE Plenary Assembly, Second Session, "Regions and the European future", Panel I

Friday, 25 November 2016, Varese, Lombardy

Mrs Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, President of the Congress "The European migrant crisis: a global issue, a territorial issue"

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Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure for me to address the Plenary Assembly of CALRE today – and to be back two years after Santiago de Compostela, where I also represented both the Congress and my own regional parliament of Land Salzburg.

The Congress is a natural partner of CALRE: We share the same values of democracy and human rights. We have a common cause that is the promotion of territorial democracy, as well as multi-level and cross-border cooperation. This cooperation is more than ever crucial, especially in the context of the European refugee and migrant crisis.

The challenges raised by this crisis for us are manifold. Local and regional authorities are the first port of call in cases of emergency and they are often left with limited means and guidance to tackle the current situation.

Many regions have been severely affected in different ways: as regions of arrival, regions of transit and as regions of destination of the refugees. They were and they are shouldering an important part of the burden of this crisis.

National governments have been slow in developing and coordinating their policies and in showing solidarity and in applying their decisions at European level.

For weeks ago, in October, in one of our committees our members from 47 countries adopted a report on the role of local and regional authorities in the reception of refugees and integration of migrants. And also the Congress members from your regions and member states endorsed the report and the recommendation. We underlined in that report that conceptions and approach must be changed urgently:

Firstly, we must stop seeing local and regional authorities as being primarily involved at – or rather confronted with - the end phase of the reception and integration process. On the contrary, local and regional policies promoting migrants' integration should be seen as a pre-condition for the development of a systemic reception policy. Governments must consult with regional and local authorities and coordinate their action, providing legislative and financial backing. What happened in Calais in France is a good example of how not to do it.

Secondly, our motto must be service provision to the individual human being, regardless of their status as asylum seeker, refugee or migrant. Treating refugees and migrants as somehow "less" than others is a risky business. It leads not only to disrespect of their rights as humans but, very importantly, it leads to prejudiced, racist and xenophobic beliefs to take root in the host communities.

Thirdly, integration must start as early as possible, from the moment of arrival. Regional and local authorities must develop programmes that bring newcomers and host communities together in activities, such as sports or intercultural events, even if the asylum seekers do not stay in the region very long.

You can find a link to the relevant Congress documents and this report in the compilation of Congress documents which was prepared by our secretariat for this conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many of today's migrants are tomorrow's fellow citizens. To understand this is something that is essential for policy making. To enable this transformation, we need to promote dialogue, education and active participation of newcomers as well as closer cooperation and better coordination between all levels of governments.

Regional governments and parliaments have a particularly important role to play here: They can coordinate the work of local authorities, set up networks to exchange information and greater transfrontier cooperation, and promote intercultural education to encourage host communities' knowledge of migrants' rich backgrounds.

It is also more than ever urgent for us to defend and promote territorial democracy if we want to tackle the current migration crisis.

I would like to invite CALRE members to liaise with the Congress members coming from their respective parliaments. All German, all Belgian, many Italian, Spanish and British regional parliaments have members in the Congress. They were recently appointed for a four year-mandate. These members are the natural link between the important thematic work done by CALRE in the different working groups and our Congress. Fighting corruption, monitoring and developing regionalisation as well as migration and integration and the respect of human rights, are key areas of common interest.

Thank you for your attention,