

Conference of Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe (CALRE)
Plenary Assembly – Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain, 26 November 2021

Speech by Harald SONDEREGGER (Austria, EPP/CCE)

President of the Chamber of Regions

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Opening session

Parliament of the Canary Islands, 26 November 2021

(8 minutes)

President Matos,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the organisers and in particular President Gustavo MATOS for the opportunity to address this Plenary Assembly, for the first time since my election in March as President of the Chamber of Regions in the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

Our two assemblies enjoy a long-standing relationship of partnership and co-operation, based on the shared objectives of advancing regional democracy, improving regional governance and strengthening the role of regions in Europe. It is not surprising that many areas of our work represent common interest to our two institutions, and that many of your member regions are also represented in the Congress. I am myself President of the Regional Parliament of Vorarlberg in Austria, and understand first-hand the challenges and importance of the work of regional legislatures.

Our co-operation gained a new momentum with the signing of a co-operation agreement in September 2010. Since then, your Presidents have been regularly addressing plenary sessions of the Congress, and Congress representatives contributed to the work of your Plenary Assembly, your working groups and other activities organised by CALRE.

This year alone, the Congress President took part in the online conference on “The place of regions in the European Union architecture” co-organised by CALRE in June, and contributed to the debate on the future of Europe and the role of regions. Also in June, we had the pleasure of welcoming your President Gustavo MATOS during the Chamber of Regions’ debate on the role of regions in ensuring an appropriate response to the pandemic; and I should say that we very much appreciated his contribution to this debate.

In the past, CALRE also contributed to the Chamber of Regions’ debate on regional identity and integrity of the State, which led to the preparation of a Congress report on the subject. I could also mention our co-operation in the work on regional or minority languages, resulting in a Congress recommendation, or co-operation on regional implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, which started right before the pandemic.

This is why I am pleased to have this opportunity today to discuss the prospects of our co-operation going forward – especially in the context of the current pandemic, which had a deep impact on our societies and our regions in particular. During the debate in June, the Chamber of Regions stressed the important role of regions in both responding to the crisis and ensuring post-crisis recovery.

We underlined in particular the need for a stronger system of multi-level governance in Europe, better dialogue between the region and the State, proper competences and funding for the regions, and regaining citizens’ confidence in both elected representatives and institutions of regional governance.

We are convinced that multi-level governance and trust between citizens and their elected representatives is more necessary than ever today, as we rethink our societies in the aftermath of the health crisis. Regional legislative assemblies have a crucial role to play in this area, and this is where we can build greater synergies and deepen our co-operation.

In this regard, the workshop on “Multi-level governance and active subsidiarity for sustainable recovery and resilience”, co-organised by CALRE in September, was a good opportunity to propose measures for ensuring a sustainable and equal recovery for all regions.

Dear colleagues,

Responses to the health crisis is of course just one area of our potential synergies. In March this year, the Congress adopted its priorities for 2021-2026, aimed at building territorial communities that are resilient, cohesive, sustainable and put digitalisation at the service of democracy. A comparison with the current priorities of CALRE shows many areas of common interest: such as improving the quality of regional democracy, engaging citizens in regional governance, protecting the environment, taking action on climate, and reducing inequalities in our communities.

Today, it is clear that our ambitions for economic growth must go hand in hand with a commitment to environmental sustainability. Today, regional parliaments and governments are working to align their objectives of recovery with the need to address climate change and accelerate the ecological transition. In this regard, we in the Congress underline the importance of the full application of the principle of subsidiarity in the implementation of Agenda 2030 and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 13 on climate action, at local and regional level. CALRE is also very active in this area, which presents a great potential for our closer co-operation.

Reducing inequalities and promoting territorial cohesion is another area where we can build further synergies. In June, the Chamber of Regions debated a report on “Territorial solidarity: the role regions can play”, for which I was Rapporteur. We continue work to make regions better equipped to address the existing inequalities that were also highlighted, and worsened, by the Covid pandemic. This response includes better co-operation between regions themselves, the importance of which was again underscored by the Chamber of Regions last October, during the debate on “Inter-regional and cross-border co-operation for better territorial integration in Europe”. We believe that here, too, CLARE can make a valuable contribution.

I could also mention fighting discrimination, promoting inclusion of vulnerable groups, fostering gender equality and reducing the urban/rural divide – all these are areas where our two assemblies can work together and where there is a good potential for synergies between us.

We in the Congress are convinced that both our institutions can benefit greatly from each other’s expertise and complementary action, and that we should develop further dialogue on common subjects at the level of our respective committees, working groups and rapporteurs.

I would like to conclude by wishing every success to your Plenary Assembly and your important work for strengthening regional democracy, and reaffirming the Congress' commitment to our continued co-operation.

We look forward to joining forces with CALRE in building sustainable regional communities in Europe and raising the quality of regional democracy for the benefit of our citizens.

Thank you.