



***2018 Plenary Assembly Declaration of the
Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE)***

DECLARATION OF THE AZORES

- *Considering the importance of the European Union's institutional present time for the future of the European project, as well as for the integration and participation of its regions;*
- *Considering, especially, the negotiations regarding the funds and policies of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework, that are occurring since the presentation of the European Commission proposals, in May 2018;*
- *Considering the pre-election period and atmosphere, taking into account the elections to the European Parliament, which will run from 23rd to 26th May 2019, as well as the approval, according to those results, of the European Commission and of the members of the future European Commission;*
- *Considering the difficult process of negotiations for Brexit, still in progress, and the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, on 29th March 2019;*
- *Considering, furthermore, the impact that Brexit could have on the CALRE, in particular regarding to Regional Assemblies of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland;*
- *Considering the growing political pressure for an agreement in principle concerning the financial framework 2021-2027 to be finalised by the Sibiu Summit in Romania on 9th May 2019;*



- *Considering, within this context, the work developed by the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE) throughout 2018, in particular through its presidency, vice-presidency, standing committee and working groups, focused on CALRE's Work and Activity Programme called "Building on Europe through the Regions", presented at the meeting of the Standing Committee on 15th March 2018;*
- *Considering thus, in the above-mentioned context, the renewed and committed contribution of CALRE during 2018 to strengthen the political and institutional bond among the regional parliaments and assemblies of Europe, fostering synergies to promote the values and principles of regional democracy and respect and consolidation of the principle of subsidiarity in the European Union;*
- *Considering, also, that during 2018, the parliaments and assemblies were involved in the reflection about the future of CALRE, a challenge set at the Plenary Assembly in 2017 and present in the Seville Declaration, with the purpose of boosting the organisation and functioning, objectives and action strategies and prepare this Conference for the next 20 years.*

The Plenary Assembly of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies, gathered at the Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region of the Azores, on 21st November 2018:

- REAFIRMS the importance and topicality of the European project and its key principles, such as Peace, Democracy, values expressed in art. 2 TEU and REAFIRMS the centrality of the Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, together with the Multilevel Governance and of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.
- ALERTS for the numerous challenges and dangers faced by the European project, in particular the increasing division and disaggregation of the Union.



- EXPRESSES, particularly in the context of the European elections next May, its deep concern about the increase, under the various forms and manifestations, of racism and xenophobia, exacerbated and disrupted nationalism and numerous ways of populism, that try to weaken the construction of the European project, fostering the distance and lack of interest of the citizens towards politics and its elected representatives.

- CONSIDERS to be fundamental the participation of the people of both the European Union, in general, and of their regions, particularly, in the elections of May 2019 and WISHES that this electoral act leads to the necessary and vital cooperation reinforcement among the Member-States and among the Peoples of Europe, as well as a renewed ambition and vision for the European Union.

- CONSIDERS crucial the concrete support of the EU institutions to EU Macro-Regional Strategies in order to strengthen these fundamental cooperation tools and to promote collaboration and mutual understanding among Member States and among European citizens.

- EXPRESSES, on the other hand, its concern about the effects of a possible hard exit of the United Kingdom off the European Union, and, specially, on what concerns the frontiers of CALRE member regions, the economic impact and other issues, like safety, the fight against organised crime and the trade relations.

- WISHES that the negotiations for Brexit, regardless of its outcome, takes due account of the issue of the Northern Ireland borders with the Republic of Ireland.

- BELIEVES that, in the context of the ongoing negotiations on the post-2020 period, need an appropriate response to all the current challenges faced by the European project should be based on a Multiannual Financial Framework that can reaffirm the path of cohesion and convergence among European regions, *and, consequently, we demand a greater ambition in the proposal of the European Commission,*



*particularly regarding the cohesion policy, the common agricultural policy and maritime policy and fisheries.**

- AFFIRMS that the **cohesion policy** is one of the fundamental pillars for a balanced and harmonious development of Europe and its Regions, *reason why we value positively the constructive spirit of the European Parliament for the improvement of the proposals presented by the European Commission, as well as the work developed by the European Committee of the Regions through its opinions.* In this regard, HIGHLIGHTS the initiatives carried out in coalition with other organisations of European inter-regional cooperation having in sight *the defence of an ambitious European framework post-2020 strategy and that meets the expectations and needs of the European regions, such is the paradigmatic case of the #CohesionAlliance.**

- VALUES, specially, the spirit of cooperation and collaboration with the European Committee of the Regions throughout 2018, specifically, through the support and partnership in the participation, for the first time, of CALRE, in the European Week of Regions and Cities, through the organisation of the workshop "*Regional Legislative Parliaments: what role in the EU's Cohesion Policy beyond 2020?*" and the participation of CALRE in a meeting of the ECON Committee of the European Committee of the Regions in April 2018 about the ways to reinforce the democratic dimension of the EU trade policy.

- RENEWS the affirmation of the importance of the principles of good governance and multilevel governance, where the regions should be engaged and actively participate in the elaboration of European public policies with a direct impact on the territories, being, therefore, necessary to continue to develop direct and fast channels among the regional assemblies and parliaments, the national parliaments and the European institutions, in compliance with the principle of **subsidiarity**.



- In this regard, COMMITS to deepen the relation with the organisations with which has protocols, aiming always at the defence of the subsidiarity and proportionality.
- COMMITS, also, to undertake efforts with the purpose to formalise an institutional cooperation with the European Parliament, so, in the scope of a multilevel governance, its opinions can make part of the studies that the European Parliament undertakes to support the legislative decision, as well as to continue to make efforts in the creation of the “green card”, that allows the presentation of legislative proposals supported by a sufficient number of regional and national parliaments.
- AFFIRMS the importance of the regional parliaments and assemblies to carry out the **policy evaluation** and the analysis of their territorial impact, assessing, on the ground, whether they meet the needs of citizenship, and thereby reduce the gap between them and the policy-makers.
- EMPHASISES in this respect the added value of **interactive democracy** and ENCOURAGES the use of innovative approaches, including but not limited to new information and communication technologies. Such approaches should aim at promoting institutional transparency, at enhancing communication between citizenship and regional assemblies and parliaments and at strengthening the direct involvement of citizens in decision-making. In view of the complementarity between participatory and representative democracies, citizen participation must be based on legitimate parliamentary representation.
- CALLS UPON the European Commission and the others relevant EU institutions to simplify and make more accessible the European Citizens’ Initiative, the main instrument of the participatory democracy.



- BELIEVES that the issue of the **refugees** and **migrants**, namely of the **unaccompanied minors**, continues to be urgent to the European Union, recognising the improvements - although still insufficient - in the coordination of the response of the Union and its Member-States to the humanitarian crises and flows management, as well as the role and responsibilities undertaken by many regions, which are the governance level closer to the citizenship, as first receivers of the refugee people.

- In this regard, CALLS UPON the EU institutions and the Member States to demonstrate solidarity with the Member States more exposed to migration flows, in compliance with art. 80 TFEU and the related principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, including its financial implications.

- ALERTS for the risks caused by **depopulation and demographic ageing**, verified especially in rural, mountainous, island and outermost areas, and REITERATES the importance of the territorial cohesion and the European funds to tackle this worrying framework and make these territories more attractive, as well as the importance of a prior consultation to the governing bodies of the regions when distributing these funds.

- RECLAIMS a greater commitment of the European Union in the consecution of the **Sustainable Development Goals** set out in the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations and the guidelines identified for its implementation and UNDERLINES the importance of global action to achieve a better, fairer and more social world, and prepared to meet the global challenges.

- In this sense, and despite the legislative advances made regarding **Gender Equality**, UNDERLINES that there are still worrying economic and social gaps between men and women, gender violence persists as a common scourge for all regions with greater or less intensity and salary and labor opportunities are



different according to sex, consequently **INSISTS** that there is still much to be done, highlighting the essential role of parliaments and regional assemblies to achieve equality of opportunities between men and women as soon as possible and the eradication of gender violence.

- **ALERTS** to the fact that climate change is the main cause to the increase of **natural disasters** in Europe, which are becoming more frequent and common, and **CALLS UPON** the European Union to continue defending the Paris Climate Agreement, supporting research in this area through the European funds, and to strengthen the mechanisms of European civil protection. Furthermore, with a view to prevention and mitigation of natural disasters, **POINTS** to the importance of introducing at European level the same method for the analysis of the natural disaster risk and the usefulness of a protection soil policy.

- **HIGHLIGHTS** the importance of the European Cultural Heritage, celebrated more intensely this year, and its diversity, that unites, enriches and identifies Europe, namely the **linguistic diversity**, essential to the strengthening and enrichment of the European common culture, established in the article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and, equally, in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

- **SHARES** the vision of the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, in his last annual speech on the State of the Union, delivered on 13th September 2018, that "Europe is the guardian of peace" and that we should be thankful for "being a peaceful continent, made possible by the European Union", the main reason why we must respect, defend and continue working on it.

- **AGREES**, in sum, that the European Union, although the challenges that faces, guarantees the principals that were in its origin, namely, the pursuit for peace among its peoples and territories. Effectively, the European project must evolve



in order to face new challenges, mentioned in this Declaration of the Azores, and, in this regard, REITERATES, the need to put the citizenship in the centre of the European policies, highlighting the role of the assemblies and the regional parliaments in the European legislative process.

- In this regard, and with the purpose to raise awareness to the role and importance of the regions with legislative powers in the European construction scope, CALRE CALLS ON its members to participate in important events of European scope entities, such as the structured dialogues of the European Committee of the Regions, events of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, or of other similar entities, as well as organise, when possible, an event of European coverage, like the European Week of Regions and Cities.

- Therefore, after more than 20 years of its constitution, CALRE, gathering the parliaments elected directly by the citizens, assumes a special relevance, and having carried out a reflection that prepares it for the future, COMMITS to reaffirm the importance of the dialogue, the sharing and the action stated as a whole, celebrating annually CALRE's Day, on 7th October, day that marks the signature of the first declaration of the Conference.

Azores, Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region of the Azores, 21 November 2018

**With abstentions of the Austrian Parliaments, identified in italic.*