



European Committee
of the Regions

SPEECH BY 1ST VICE PRESIDENT TZITZIKOSTAS

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE

A NEW CHAPTER FOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

MOVING TOWARDS A MORE RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE AND CITIZEN-CENTRED DEMOCRACY

9 MARCH 2023

Dear colleagues,

On behalf of the European Committee of the Regions,
it is my great pleasure to welcome you

to this kick-off conference on
"A new Chapter for participatory democracy".

I would like to express my gratitude
to Vice-President of the European Commission, Dubravka Suica,
for joining me in greeting the participants today.

This project,
run in collaboration with the Bertelsmann Foundation,
has been launched during my Presidency of the CoR,
and more in particular in the context
of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Since 2016, we have been at the forefront

of promoting participatory and deliberative democracy in regions and cities.

Since then, we have organized nearly 300 events, engaging hundreds of local and regional authorities, and reaching tens of thousands of participants.

This impressive track record can only lead to more dialogue.

Indeed, what we are doing nowadays is implementing the call for setting a permanent dialogue mechanism with citizens, which was made by my predecessor, President Lambertz, and which was echoed at the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The Recommendations adopted by the COFE showed the added value of a more structured citizens' participation in our democratic debate.

Participatory democracy is a catalytic tool which can improve representative democracy: it works by complementing it, not by taking its place; it has to be used to listen to the people, and by so doing helping to close the doors to populism.

By continuously engaging with citizens, by ensuring this permanent dialogue, the European policies we develop, the decisions we enact, will be more in tune with the realities on the ground and with what really matters in people's lives.

We, local and regional representatives, understood that, and this is why regions and cities have initiated deliberative practices in our assemblies, putting forward innovative instruments such as the participatory budgets.

Indeed, democracy is not a static concept, and it calls for opening to new technologies and new ways to interact with citizens.

We therefore can only but welcome the fact that the European Commission wants to further use citizens' panels in the elaboration of its proposals.

But I urge the Commission to fully involve local and regional authorities in the organization of citizens' panels, so that Europe can truly become Local and vice versa.

Dear colleagues, our project will further build the capacity of local and regional authorities to implement deliberative methods.

Today, we lead a movement which can combine the trust citizens have in their mayors and regional councilors with the willingness to better involve citizens in the institutional decision-making process.

As we are driven by the spirit of continuous dialogue, let this be our guide also in view of the next European elections,

in an effort to engage with as many citizens as possible,
by organizing public debates
and by showing that representation and participation
go hand in hand.

This is especially important as citizens expect more
in terms of the transparency and openness
of the democratic process,
and we are in a position to deliver.

I look forward to hearing about your conclusions.

The European Committee of the Regions is ready
to play its role so that we can write a new chapter,
from the bottom up,
of the European democracy

Thank you.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY