Future of Europe: Local and regional leaders support the call for a Convention to revise EU treaties

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A revision of the EU Treaties should lead to more involvement of local and regional levels in EU decision making process for a more democratic European Union that is closer to its citizens

Local and regional leaders adopted a resolution on the outcome and follow-up of the Conference on the Future of Europe (COFE) at their Plenary session. They call for the swift follow-up and implementation of the recommendations expressed in the report in order to meet citizens' expectations and they consider that an ambitious reform of the functioning of the EU to meet the challenges ahead requires Treaty revisions. A future Convention should fully involve members of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) to represent the voices of the over 1 million regionally and locally elected politicians in Europe, in order also to strengthen the local and regional dimensions of EU policies.

After a year of debates, the Conference on the Future of Europe ended on 9 May 2022 in Strasbourg. The Presidents of the European Parliament, Commission and Council received a final report from the Conference co- chairs containing 49 wide-ranging, ambitious and forward-looking proposals, detailed into 328 l measures. Since then, EU institutions are looking into how to follow-up on these recommendations. While the European Commission is "ready to work within the remits of the EU Treaties and to support Treaty change where needed", the European Council in its recent conclusions reiterates that "an effective follow-up to this report is to be ensured by the institutions,... in accordance with the Treaties". At its 150th Plenary session , the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), likewise the European Parliament earlier this month, took a step further in the follow up and adopted a resolution supporting the call

for the establishment of the Convention to revise EU Treaties in order to implement the COFE recommendations, especially the ones concerning the role of local and regional authorities.

New CoR President Vasco Alves Cordeiro (PT/PES) was member of the working group on European democracy at the COFE plenary. He said: “There are three lessons to be drawn from the Conference on the Future of Europe. The need to motivate citizens to take part, to empower their active role, and to make sure that there is accountability with a real follow up to show citizens concrete changes and that their calls don't stay unanswered. Regional and local authorities have always been pioneers on this front and remain committed to be part of the debate on the Future of Europe. We are not afraid to push for an ambitious agenda for Treaty change, and we stand ready to be fully involved in the process. At the same time, we will not wait to start work on bringing the concrete changes asked for by citizens during the Conference .”

Apostolos Tzitzikostas (EL/EPP), First Vice-President of the CoR and former CoR President, led the delegation of local and regional authorities at the COFE Plenary. He added: " Europe's citizens have spoken. Now we share the duty of delivering together the Conference's 49 recommendations to make Europe more efficient and green. Regional and local leaders are ready to take on their responsibility to improve the lives of our citizens and European leaders and civil servants must never forget that a distant and top-down Europe, will never be supported by the level of government most trusted by the people: our regions, cities and villages. It is time to call this House with the name that reflects our political mandate and our legal competences: European Assembly of Regions and Municipalities".

Member of the European Parliament Guy Verhofstadt (BE/Renew Europe), who was one of the three co-chairs of the Conference, participated in the debate with CoR members at the Plenary. He commented: “The Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament worked hand in hand in the Conference on the Future of Europe. Now we must do the same on follow-up: no cherry picking but consistently implement all of the conclusions including, I would say even starting with the hardest parts, where the Treaty needs to be updated to make Europe more tangible, effective and democratic.”

Other key elements of the CoR resolution are:

- The support of the COFE proposals aimed at complementing representative democracy by increasing citizens' participation in European democracy at all levels: a permanent and place-based mechanism for dialogue with citizens, supported by local and regional authorities would ensure a two-way communication and a meaningful interaction between the citizens and the EU institutions and lead to a better understanding of the local and regional impact of EU policies across the EU. The CoR has organised structured citizens' dialogues with the Bertelsmann Foundation the last 2 years and it has put together a good practice on which basis the next generation of citizens' dialogues could be implemented.

- The call for enhanced inter-institutional synergies involving the CoR in the work of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union because of its ability to provide a good knowledge and better understanding of how the EU functions on the ground;

- The support of the COFE proposal that "active subsidiarity and multi-level governance are key principles and fundamental features for EU functioning and democratic accountability " and the plea for a "systematic use a subsidiarity definition commonly agreed by all EU institutions" to clarify the level - European, national, regional or local level at which decisions to have to be taken. These proposals should help to clarify that subsidiarity is not about preventing the European level from taking action, but about identifying which level of government should have the lead role for an efficient legislation.

- The support of the COFE proposal to "create a system of local EU Councillors" as a way to reduce the distance between the EU institutions and citizens. In fact the CoR had already launched a European Network of Regional and Local Councillors in May 2021 and will build synergies with the European Commission which launched last week the project "Building Europe with Local Councillors".

- The support of the COFE proposal suggesting changing the names of the EU institutions, to clarify their functions and respective role in the EU decision-making process for citizens; to this end, the Committee proposes to change its own name in order to better reflect the political and legal responsibilities of its members as well its role as

the European assembly of regions and municipalities;

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