

**DECLARATION OF ZARAGOZA
ADOPTED BY THE 11 TH CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS
OF REGIONS WITH LEGISLATIVE POWERS**

18-19 NOVEMBER 2010

At the invitation of the President of the Government of Aragon, the Presidents and their representatives of Åland, Andalucía, Baden-Württemberg, Illes Balears, Bayern, Région de Bruxelles Capitale – Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, Cantabria, Catalunya, Canarias, Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, Euskadi, Extremadura, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Galicia, Hamburg, Lombardia, Madeira, Murcia, Navarra, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Oberösterreich, Comunitat Valenciana, Sicilia, Scotland, Tirol, Vlaanderen, Wales, Wallonie, Wien all regions with legislative powers in the European Union met in Zaragoza on 18 and 19 November 2010 for their 11th Annual Conference.

Introduction

Seventy-three regions¹ spread across eight Member States of the European Union have governments and directly elected parliaments with law-making powers. More than two hundred million European citizens, almost 45% of the EU population, rely on these regional governments to develop and deliver environmental, economic and social benefits that the EU provides. They are responsible for transposing and implementing EU legislation and policies, and in some cases constitute the only level of government in a Member State, which has such powers. Some regions with legislative powers take part in the work of the EU Council of Ministers as part of their Member State delegations. Some bear a part of the financial contributions to the EU paid by their Member States. The estimated total amount of the budget that these authorities have to administer² is more than five times the EU 2010 budget³ and more than twice the allocated amount for the Cohesion Policy for the period 2007-2013⁴.

Added value of regions with legislative powers: legitimacy, effectiveness proximity and expertise

Regions with legislative powers hold legitimate competencies that are the result of the political and constitutional structures of the Member States which they are part of. So that these regions can comply with the obligations that emanate from their constitutional rules, they need to be involved directly in the legislative process. For this reason, their participation in the EU policy-making process, which take place when new legal proposals are prepared, is crucial. REGLEG also believes in the effect of a multilevel governance that involves European institutions, Member States and regions. In this way, a more effective European Union can be achieved, which would have direct and positive effects for its citizens and their perception of the work made by the EU.

¹ The word “regions” is used throughout as a convenient generic term to denote territories, below the level of the Member State, endowed with a democratically elected assembly or parliament and a government responsible to it. In the domestic context, these “regions” are defined variously as regions, nations, Länder, Stadtstaaten, communities, autonomous communities, etc.

² 820.806.041.703 €, estimated total amount - Budgets of REGLEG partners. Data compiled in November 2010 by the Aragon Presidency in collaboration with the REGLEG's Coordination Committee members.

³ 141.400.000.000 €, EU Budget 2010

⁴ 347.000.000.000 €, amount of the Cohesion Policy for the period 2007-2013.

Regions with legislative powers constitute the level of government closest to the citizens and whose active role increases transparency, allows for better governance and offers opportunities for the democratic involvement in public policy-making. The Governments of these regions hold both political and technical expertise, available for collaboration in the strengthening of EU policies. In this sense, the regions with legislative powers pro-actively accept their responsibilities and are prepared to work with Member States and EU institutions to produce and, where appropriate, implement effective policy devised in the interests of the citizen.

I. The Treaty of Lisbon – towards the first anniversary of the application

REGLEG has worked consistently over 10 years to contribute to the process that eventually resulted in the Lisbon Treaty. This journey began at Laeken and ended, finally, in Lisbon. The Presidents welcome the Lisbon Treaty and commit to monitoring its effectiveness for citizens. In particular they will monitor the effectiveness of the provisions relating to subsidiarity and they will judge, over time, whether this delivers results for national and regional parliaments and citizens.

The Presidents congratulate the Trio EU Presidency for the launch of the institutional changes established by the new Treaty, and for the boost of the European regional dimension. They advocate for this boost to be continued by the forthcoming Presidencies and they wish for a closer cooperation with the European institutions to achieve these objectives. This could be translated in an increased involvement of regions with legislative powers in the policy formulation and in the decision-making process, as REGLEG is being requesting from its beginnings and as the 'Partner Regions of the EU' concept encapsulates.

In this context, the Presidents look forward to the results of the current trio of presidencies of the EU - Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian on a 'roadmap' with the aim of 'making a qualitative leap in the participation of local and regional bodies' in defining and developing the policies of the EU, particularly the proposals related to the empowerment of the Committee of the Regions and to the mechanisms to put in place multilevel governance as conceived in the Committee of the Regions White Paper on the matter. On this matter, the Presidents also encourage the Committee to present the Multilevel Governance Charter and the Scoreboard on Multilevel Governance in order to assess and inform about the situation of European governance.

Multilevel governance together with the institutional cooperation mechanisms should address the need for of a coordinated action of the EU, Member States and regional and local authorities in the application of EU policies in order to build Europe in partnership. Subsidiarity is a key part of multilevel governance, and a crucial factor to bring Europe closer to citizens, given that EU decisions must be taken as closely as possible to its people. At the same time, the Presidents demand a coherent implementation of the new principle of territorial cohesion established in the Lisbon Treaty which should become a guiding principle of the EU policies.

The Presidents are mindful of the meaning and consequences of the Article 4 § 2 of the Treaty, which for the first time in EU-history not only recognizes the national identity of the Member States, but also the political and constitutional structure, including regional and local self government inherent in this national identity. More particularly they highlight the importance of the Protocol (No 26) on services of general interest, which underlines the essential role and the wide discretion of national, and explicitly of regional authorities in providing, commissioning and organising services of general economic interest. REGLEG will contribute to the elaboration and further institutional recognition of regions, in line with the new definitions, and underlines the relevance of regions with legislative powers in this context.

Also in light of Article 4 § 2 of the Treaty on European Union, the Presidents ask for guarantees regarding a wider use of languages with co-official status from Regions with Legislative Power in EU institutions, taking into account that the financial burden for such provisions lies with the requesting authorities.

The Presidents wish to renew their commitment for the efficient application of the Treaty, assuming responsibility and also making good use of the opportunities that it offers.

II. Challenges until 2013: Cohesion - Budget review – Budgetary stability – Financial Perspectives

Cohesion policy, from a regional approach, contributes considerably to the implementation of the renewed Lisbon strategy. Regions falling under the 'Convergence' objective and regions under the 'Regional Competitiveness and Employment' objective have an important role in the promotion of innovation and competitiveness in the EU. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that the current Cohesion objectives are maintained under Cohesion policy post 2013.

The Presidents welcome the Fifth Report on economic, social and territorial cohesion presented by the European Commission, particularly its intention to involve all levels of government to overcome the economic crisis. Also they agree with the report's acknowledgement of the key role that EU cohesion policy plays in translating the Europe 2020 targets into practice, although the Presidents would like to insist on the importance of maintaining the Cohesion policy main objective which is the reduction of wealth gaps between regions. On the other hand, REGLEG partners share the concerns expressed by the Committee of the Regions in its 'Contribution of Cohesion Policy to the Europe 2020 Strategy' related to the negative effect of the multiplication of sector-specific EU funding programmes and are also in favour of keeping the European Social Fund in the cohesion policy framework.

The EU Budget provides the instruments through which programmes can be implemented. The Presidents call on the institutions to note that EU programmes are frequently implemented at the regional level. This regional approach needs to be maintained and should be reflected in the language of all relevant Commission documents and strategies. REGLEG partners further urge them to maintain the current Structural Funds that must continue to form the basis of cohesion policy and shall keep taking into account the different development needs. In this way we can implement the essential principle of solidarity and territorial cohesion.

The Presidents of regions with legislative powers underline the impact of the budgets they are responsible for and the role of these regions regarding the responsible management of public finances and achievement of budgetary stability. In this sense, they understand that the priority, in the context of current crisis, should be the reduction of the deficit, nonetheless they show their worries about the possible effects that this can have in the incipient growth of the regional economies.

The Presidents request from the European Commission a proposal on the mechanisms allowing regions with legislative powers to participate in the decision-making process related to the new economic governance. In order to comply with the objectives of the coordination of the economic policy, the EU has to involve proportionately the regional authorities, in particular taking into consideration the regional competencies of some regions in taxes, finances and budget.

The Presidents are concerned about the cuts and the architecture of the sanction mechanisms that the EU plans to introduce in regional policy's instruments and the way it will affect regional economies. For regions with legislative powers, it is important that these investments will not drop drastically and that they will not damage the advances achieved in the field of cohesion, which increase economic activity and reduce social disparities.

The Presidents welcome the efforts undertaken by the Presidency Trio in the EU to promote cooperation between European territories in order to improve the economic growth. In particular, they take note of the debates in the Informal Meeting of Territorial Policy Ministers held in Malaga on the role of local and regional authorities in economic recovery, and in the definition of a new sustainable economic model, as key issues for the economic recovery and job creation, as well as for the definition of the European new strategy of growth 'Europe 2020'.

REGLEG also expects that the adoption of the next multiannual financial framework will give a sustained impulse to Cohesion policy and that sufficient resources must also be earmarked from the EU budget to support balanced territorial development in Europe.

III. Challenges Europe 2020

Europe has been plunged into deep economic crisis. The priority for Europe is to exit the crisis and move towards sustainable growth and prosperity. Therefore, regions have great challenges ahead, mainly, the creation of jobs and growth. In many cases legislative regions are motors of the European economy and we have special responsibilities for working with the EU institutions and Member States to create the conditions for sustainable growth.

REGLEG welcomes the European Commission's recognition that *"[...] we need a strategy for convergence and integration which recognises more explicitly the advanced interdependence of the EU: [...] Interdependence between different levels of government (EU, Member States, regions, social partners - multi-layer governance); [...]"*⁵. It also welcomes the decision of the European Council, upon adopting Europe 2020, that *"National parliaments, social partner, regions and other stakeholders will be involved, so as to increase ownership of the strategy"*⁶. Nevertheless, the establishment of a clear governance structure to make the new strategy effective has not been sufficiently developed in the Strategy. Furthermore, this aspect is characterized by the lack of any explicit recognition of the role that regions with legislative powers play in the relevant aspects of the new strategy: formulation, implementation and monitoring.

By establishing a permanent dialogue between various levels of governance, the priorities of the Union are brought closer to the citizens, strengthening the ownership needed to deliver Europe 2020 strategy.

Experience has shown from the implementation of former Lisbon Strategy that the success of the strategy for sustainable growth and jobs depends significantly on the active involvement of regional authorities. It therefore goes without saying that knowledge and capacities of the regions with legislative powers should be recognized on the national and European level and that they should have the opportunity as far upstream as possible to put forward their ideas according to their regional organization with regard to the newly adopted Europe 2020 strategy.

The Presidents support the proposal of the European Parliament and of the Committee of the Regions on the establishment of a Territorial Pact for Europe 2020 that stimulates the contribution of regions to the success of its objectives.

IV. Challenges 2030 - In line with the Report of the reflection group on the future of the EU in 2030

The Presidents take note of the document elaborated by the reflection group on the future of the EU in 2030, which presents the current crisis as a warning sign. They agree that there is a need of start an ambitious long-term reform programme for the next twenty years organised around seven priorities in which regions with legislative powers should take an active part: the renewal of the economic and social model; to privilege the growth through the knowledge; the beginning of a genuine industrial revolution to tackle the issues of energy security and climate change; to take up the demographic challenge to counterbalance the negative trends; to guarantee the external and internal security of the EU despite the unstable new world order; to confirm the place of the EU on the world stage and playing a leading role in establishing the new rules of global governance; and to strengthen the general public's feeling of belonging to the EU.

⁵ COM(2009)647 final

⁶ European Council conclusions, 25-26 March 2010 §6, i

The Presidents share the idea of the Reflection group that delivering 'good governance' is by far the EU's most powerful means of ensuring the continuous commitment and engagement of its citizens. They also agree that this 'good governance' should be based on the principles of openness, participation, power sharing, accountability, partnership and effectiveness and the respect of the principle of subsidiarity. Governance should take place for but also with the citizens.

The Presidents also consider absolutely necessary to give more transparency and accuracy to the way in which the political decision-making of the EU is communicated. They are convinced that European regions must assume a leading role in communicating and informing citizens about the European Union. Therefore, they encourage the EU institutions to continue the process of decentralisation of information and communication in favour of European regions through cooperation and provision of tools and resources to bring the EU closer to its citizens and to mobilize European citizens to participate actively in European construction. Transparency generates trust, and trust brings about the interest of citizens to participate in public life.

In this context, regions with legislative powers, which have competences and instruments facilitating an active role for civil society, will contribute to the call for political leadership and a strong agenda to reform the European Union so that the gap between the potential power of Europe and its real power will come to an end by 2030.

V. Future of REGLEG – priorities

From its beginnings, members of REGLEG have collaborated between themselves having as a main goal to be heard in the debate on the institutional reform. The Presidents reaffirm that REGLEG, as a network representing the interest of the regions with legislative powers, will continue its work to promote and defend a greater involvement of these regions in the decision-making process of the EU and in the implementation of the European Union legislation.

Presidents want to strengthen the visibility and influence of REGLEG in the European structure, in order to enhance the representation of the interests of Regions with Legislative Powers, ensuring the effective participation of these regions in the decision-making process of the EU and also giving a strong contribution towards their explicit recognition as actors involved in the relevant aspects of the multi-governance strategy.

The Presidents take note that during the present year cooperation has been strengthened with other European bodies and associations, such as the Committee of the Regions, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Conference of Regional Assemblies of Europe, with where the collaboration will be continued in order to move forward in the main topics of European policy.

In addition, they are pleased with the common positions established in the present year and they are determined to continue their coordination in order to give their opinion to the EU institutions, especially to the European Commission, via its open consultation.

The Presidents will include the following priorities and topics in their 2011 agenda:

- To continue tackling the challenges of the financial and economic crisis
- To continue informing to the European institutions as well as the citizens about the role and the responsibilities of the Regions with Legislative Powers
- To continue contributing to the reflexion process on the future of the EU
- To continue with the development of the concept of 'Partner Regions of the Union'
- To participate in the design and implementation of the future cohesion policy, as well as the definition and implementation of the concept of territorial cohesion.
- To participate in the implementation and the monitoring of the Europe 2020 Strategy.
- To follow-up the consultation on the EU budget review and the next financial framework to be proposed by the new Commission

- To continue cooperation with the Conference of European regional legislative assemblies (CALRE) on the basis of a common strategy
- To support the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in the fields of common interest
- To contribute to the initiative about the presentation of the Multilevel Governance Charter and the Scoreboard on Multilevel Governance in order to assess and inform about the situation of European governance.”
- To make good use of the opportunity that the review of the Regulation on the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation represents in order to remove the obstacles that the regions with legislative powers are facing at the national and European level
- To reflect on the 5th Cohesion Report and the challenges it identifies.

The participants of the 11th Conference of Presidents of Regions with Legislative Powers (REGLEG) ask all partner regions in the network to support these conclusions and recommendations at the national and the EU level.

They ask the Presidency to transmit them also to the European Institutions and bodies.

Adopted in Zaragoza on 19 November 2010