

Why we need a stronger Europe, with regions at the heart of delivering solutions

Written by Eleni Marianou on 26 July 2017



EU flag | *Photo credit: Press Association*

Earlier this year, the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) launched its own reflection on the future of Europe, set within the wider context of the debate at EU level, explains Eleni Marianou.

We have undertaken extensive work in Brussels and in our six geographical commissions to determine the key priorities and messages for Europe's peripheral and maritime regions, and launched a new web-forum to provide a space for our members to share their thoughts on how Europe can and should move forward. We also adopted a political statement on Europe Day setting out some initial conclusions from our work.

In October this year, at our annual general assembly in Helsinki, we will adopt a policy position developing this thinking further, which will be presented to European Commission President Jean-

Claude Juncker ahead of the December EU Summit. Then, in the autumn of 2018, we will adopt a CPMR manifesto on the future of Europe.

Over these past few months, we have seen quite a change in atmosphere about how Europe is discussed, with a breeze of optimism and positive thinking. This of course does not mean Europe's challenges have disappeared, but we have seen a sense of unity on Brexit and, following the election of Emmanuel Macron on a pro-European ticket, a much stronger sense of the European Union working together to address these challenges.

This is very much welcomed by the CPMR and chimes with the core messages that have come out of our work to date, encapsulated in the political statement we published on Europe Day: the central importance of the European Union to Europe's future, and the values and principles that it stands for including solidarity and respect of human rights; the key place for territorial cohesion in addressing the growing social and economic disparities in a sustainable way; the importance of co-operation and partnership working between and across

Europe's member states, and with the countries on the EU's borders, including the UK post-Brexit.

In all of these areas, Europe's regions are critical to the success of the European Union - in upholding and defending the key values the EU stands for, in promoting territorial cohesion and delivering concrete actions on the ground; in facilitating co-operation, creating partnerships and networks that bring people together.

We were disappointed with the Commission's initial white paper on the future of Europe for neglecting the regional level, and not really showing any awareness or understanding of the territorial dimension to European policy.

We see signs in the follow-up reflection papers that this is changing, and that our messages are starting to take hold, with clear recognition of the growing disparities across Europe and the need for place-based action to address this.

However, there still seems to be a misunderstanding about the status and role of regions. We are not just another stakeholder: regional governments are democratically elected institutions, with competences in many of the policy areas where the EU legislates.

In our political statement, it was clear that the CPMR wasn't ready to back one of the scenarios set out in the white paper. We gave a clear commitment to a Europe that walks at the same pace and avoids fragmentation. However, there are strong forces at EU level that are pushing the idea of multi-speed Europe.

Therefore, over the coming months the CPMR will be undertaking some analysis to consider what a multi-speed Europe could mean for regions: the different models, the advantages, challenges and risks associated with it.

For the second phase of our reflection, we will be shifting the focus of our work to the EU budget and the different scenarios for reforming the EU's finances post-Brexit.

In this second phase, we will also see more local events, local actions and initiatives on the future of Europe being organised by our regions, working through our geographical commissions. We want to see debate and discussion around issues that matter for people at the local and regional level, inspired by the discussions we have been having in Brussels.

The CPMR has embraced this reflection of the future of Europe and we are determined to ensure that

what comes out of this process is a stronger Europe, where regions play a central role in driving policy and actions that deliver solutions to the challenges faced by ordinary people.

About the author

Eleni Marianou is Secretary General of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)

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