

## Change the present to grant the future

The response against the threat to the rights and freedoms which were so hard to achieve depends on each and every one of you, citizens!

In front of the expansion of the authoritarian drifts that endanger the stability in a large number of nations around the world, the European response is key to preserve the democratic spirit and values. Since its foundation, the European Union has been referent in the defense of human rights and public freedoms.

70 years have gone by since Schuman advocated for a gradual integration of the European federation. Starting with the monetary union, followed by the economic integration with the goal of achieving political unity. The future of the European Union depends on reaching this final stage.

The accomplishment of that objective makes it essential to face the legitimacy crisis that overflies the Union. This implies a decision-making process that finds its origins in the citizens' empowerment.

One of the sources of wealth of the European Union is its great diversity and plurality, a clear sign of which are the regions that shape it. The proximity facilitates the involvement in the decision-making process and it will lead to the awaited legitimacy.

When we say regions, we do not refer to the creation of territorial boundaries. Instead, we are suggesting to delve into the way through a more politically integrated Europe. That is why we need to construct a Europe which belongs to the citizens and made by the citizens themselves.

We suggest the direct engagement of the people in the election of the Committee of the Regions members, allowing the change for higher accountability. To come to that purpose it is required for every single region which is part of the committee to be able to elect, through universal suffrage, its representative at the Committee with the mandate to defend the regional interests.

The adopted measures resulting from the Committee, would not only have effects at a regional level but also at the European level. That is due to the fact that this project has no boundaries. A major implication of the regions in the decision-making process will increase the citizens' interest in the European affairs since they will be an active part and will see their interests reflected in the decisions that are made.

Concurrently, a cooperation between the Committee of Regions and the European Parliament is needed in order to guarantee that both, the regions and the citizens' interests, are represented. This cooperation means putting the Committee of Regions' power at the same

level in which other institutions with legislative capacities are, making its consent essential for the approval of legislation.

Europe is a complex governance system that has evolved trying to reach goals that seemed unreachable. For the future, it is necessary to reach an equilibrium between the power of the states, represented at the Council of the European Union, and citizen power, represented by the European Parliament and the Committee of Regions. A tricameral system should be established.

This tricameral system is not only a goal, but also a mean to advance towards the creation of a sense of European belonging, the *demos* appealed by the french poet Victor Hugo. The election of the representatives to the Committee, through universal suffrage, increases accountability, and that allows the citizens to develop a feeling of belonging due to its major influence capacity.

The aim is that European citizens give the same importance to the European elections as to the national ones, something that has not always been achieved. Because... how will Europe move on if it does not represent its own citizens?

Generating the consciousness that in both elections, to the European Parliament and to the Committee of Regions, there is a lot at stake, is crucial in order to increase participation, legitimacy, and finally create the sense of European citizenship.

The European Union is an unprecedented worldwide governance system facing a crucial point in its history. In order that all efforts made so far have not been in vain, it is necessary to firmly advance towards greater political integration. It is the moment to make Europe a model in which future generations find their reference!

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