

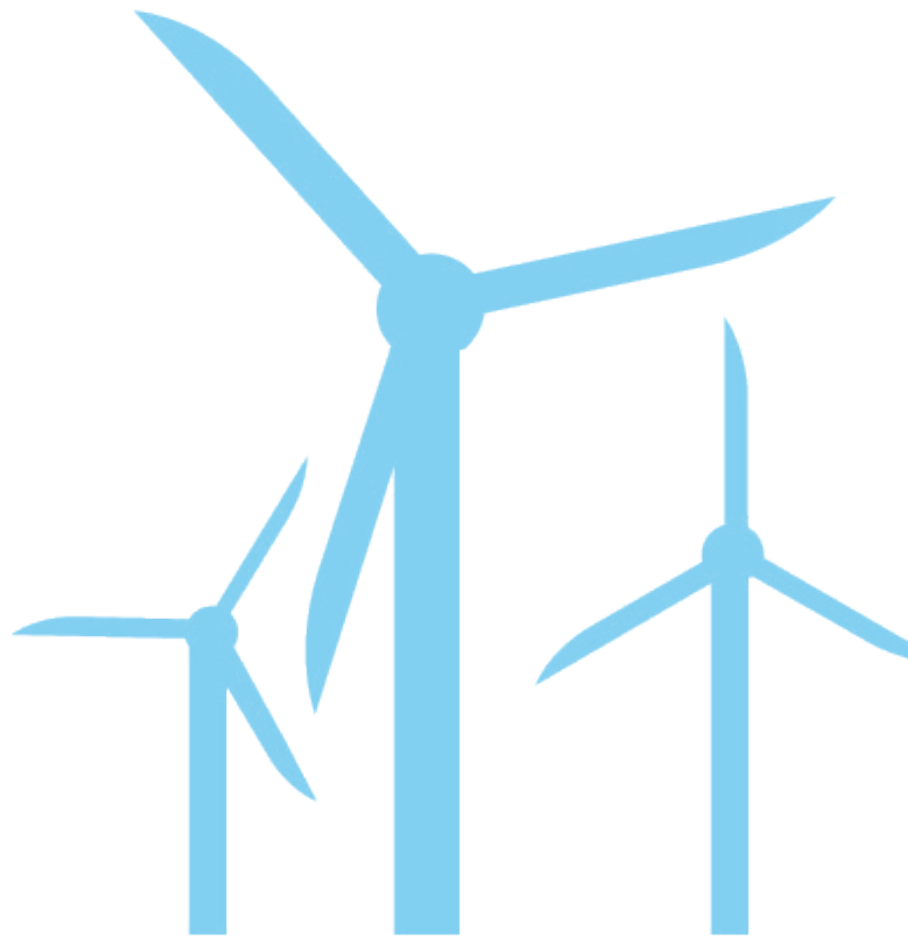
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DIPLOCAT AGORA 17

The key importance of multi-level governance for the future of the EU

The challenges to be overcome for a successful
green transition

GLOBAL DEBATE - 4 April 2022



DIPLOCA 



Conferència
sobre el **futur**
d'Europa

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1. Presentation

On 4 April 2022, DIPLOCAT and the Delegation of the Government of Catalonia to the European Union organised at the Palau Macaya in Barcelona a seminar on the subject “Multi-level governance at the core of the future EU”, focused on the challenges to be overcome in order to achieve a successful ecological transition. The objective of this event, as indicated by its moderator Ruth Gumbau, was to share viewpoints on how the various different levels of the European Union’s public administrative bodies are organised with a view to decision-making processes.

Gerard Vives Fernández, the Director General for EU Affairs and the Institutional Representation Abroad, welcomed those attending and initiated the proceedings, and Philippe de Lombaerde, director of the United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) since January 2022, gave the keynote speech.

The debate continued with a round-table discussion on the subject of multi-level governance with the participation of Tsvetelina Natcheva, representing the European Commission; Maciej Sytek, representing the Polish region of Wielkopolska; Gianluca Spinaci, representing the European Committee of the Regions; and Gorka Knörr, who is the representative of the Government of Catalonia to the European Union. Finally, the event was brought to a close by the Secretary General of DIPLOCAT, Laura Foraster i Lloret.

2. Introduction

Public administrations take decisions at a range of different levels, from the highest, such as the European Union or the Member States, to the lowest, such as the regions, provincial councils, municipal councils or local communities. While it is true that the lower the level is, the further away we are from the institutions of the European Union, we are also in fact closer to the citizens. It is for this reason that these more local administrations should have a relevant role to play in the taking of decisions that most directly affect citizens’ lives, such as the fight against climate change.

But how can we listen to everyone? How can we ensure that everyone has a voice? To initiate the discussion, the moderator welcomed the Director General for EU Affairs and the Institutional Representation Abroad, Gerard Vives Fernández, who reminded that the event was part of the debates on the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), promoted by European institutions, and in which Catalonia had also participated through the campaign *Listen, Europe!* The aim of the campaign was to call on the citizens of Catalonia to express their proposals and expectations.

Vives explained that the question of multi-level governance is fully covered and elucidated in Article 5 of the European Union Treaty through the principle of subsidiarity. Under this principle, except for those remits that are exclusively within the European Union’s own competence or those cases in which its own intervention would prove to be more effective, decisions in terms of public policies must always originate from as near to the local citizen as possible.

In 2009, the Treaty of Lisbon specifically included the local and regional dimension of subsidiarity, enshrining a role for sub-national authorities whenever the latter are in a position to manage a remit more effectively than central governments. Nevertheless, Vives noted that “all too often the cycle of European public policies has not taken regional and local authorities sufficiently into account.”

The Director-General observed that we are currently living through a very complex period, having emerged from the pandemic to find ourselves confronted by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and its impact on the economy and supply chains throughout the European Union. He said that in this context

both the Member States and the European institutions, “whether because they want to act rapidly or for a series of other reasons”, have tended to apply measures that directly or indirectly caused confusion and, in certain cases, even involved an invasion of competences or a clear recentralisation of responsibilities.

As an example of this, Vives mentioned the management of European funding for post-Covid recovery, the Next Generation fund. The representative of the Government of Catalonia regretted the fact that the largest package of stimuli ever financed at a European level had in his opinion been created “with a design defect of capital importance”, which was that, unlike other structural funds, it considers the Member States as the only valid partners.

For this reason, Vives explained that during the summer of 2020 the Government of Catalonia launched the initiative ‘Regions for EU Recovery’, which brings together over 30 European regions demanding a role in the strategy of recovery and in its decision-taking structures. In his view, the preliminary results showed that national recovery plans, particularly in the case of Spain, had not respected the principle of subsidiarity, despite the fact that the regions that are responsible for the final application of 70% of European Union regulations are one of the key elements of the policy of cohesion.

The Director-General also reminded those present that a survey published by the Centre of Opinion Studies showed that 71% of Catalans think that the Government of Catalonia should have more decision-taking power for the designation and management of Next Generation funds.

Vives referred to the European Green Deal, which establishes for the year 2030 a reduction of at least 55% of emissions compared with 1990, together with the use of 40% of renewable energies and a reduction of between 36% and 39% of energy consumption to achieve a climatically neutral economy for the EU by 2050. He explained that for this reason Catalonia wished to contribute and would contribute to the European Green Deal to the best of its abilities, and that, in order to do so, it would once again be necessary to count on the local and regional levels of governance. Mr Vives said that the European Commission had already committed itself to helping central or national governments to design the coordination of green policies and to guarantee that no person or region would be left behind.

The Director-General explained that multi-level governance must continue to be the mainstay of Catalonia’s external action, especially within the framework of the EU. He warned that if decision-making in the EU continued to be restricted to certain European capitals and if we ignored the principle of subsidiarity, the future of the European project would be endangered. Vives defended the objective of the CoFoE, which was, he said, to bring the European project closer to the local citizen, which is also precisely what is defended when multi-level governance is promoted.

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3. The keynote address

The seminar’s keynote address, under the title “How different levels of governance can work together to deal with the EU’s most urgent issues,” was given by the Director of the United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS), Philippe De Lombaerde. Before assuming this post, he worked as a research lecturer at various universities and also took part in research and policy consultancy projects for, among others, the governments of Belgium, Flanders and the United Kingdom, for the UNDP, UNESCO, the World Bank and the European Commission.

De Lombaerde explained that, as a member of the United Nations University and the Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies, he studied and analysed regional structures all over the world, looking at how different levels of governance interact in different fields. His talk would define concepts and would provide context to the debate with regard to the subsequent round-table discussion.

There are many different definitions of multi-level governance. One would be that it is the process by which the authorities and representatives of public policy represent the different levels of government: supranational, national and subnational. De Lombaerde observed that the key factor here is not only that there are different levels of governance but also that the participants are different. The concept of multi-level governance first emerged in the 1990s and is essentially descriptive and analytical by nature, but not necessarily regulatory. Nowadays, in fact, we tend to speak more in terms of levels of governance with systems that overlap one another.

In this sense, he noted that the concept was first developed with the European Union in mind, which leaves open to doubt whether it can be exported to other contexts or not. He nevertheless recognised that as a concept it is also increasingly used in contexts other than that of the European Union. “Although the European Union is a very specific structure, we can see all over the world such more complex movements and systems of governance that in specific areas of public policy display this kind of combination of different levels of authority, with different participants who sometimes form alliances or sometimes compete or enter into conflict”, he explains.

According to De Lombaerde, the concept of multi-level governance is dynamic and has evolved over time. Initially we referred to government and levels of government, but we now talk of governance of each national state and of participants at a state or para-state level. Rather than on hierarchy, the emphasis is now placed on the complexity of public action, which may or may not be based on binding rules. We can increasingly observe that in different locations and at different levels public action is conducted from a more activist viewpoint. Approaches to governance are also diversifying and we are moving from relationships between more formal levels towards greater institutional coordination and other types of interaction.

The concept has undergone the same type of change as has happened with regionalism, which has evolved at the same time as the instruments used to analyse it. In this sense, De Lombaerde declared that there has always been an element of participation in public action from outside the state, but now we have the conceptual instruments to analyse and describe this phenomenon. These instruments have improved and have become more sophisticated, while at the same time the reality has also changed. For example, in the context of the European Union there has been a change towards different types of interaction that have sometimes been institutional and at other times have been at a more practical level. For the Director of UNU-CRIS, the reality has changed and our way of seeing it has changed too.

He then referred to the principle of subsidiarity, which is a very important concept that is far from new in terms of multi-level governance. It first emerged in the 1970s and, in the context of the European Union, it began to appear in the 1980s and was included in the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992. The original application was restricted to the domain of public policies towards the environment. Subsidiarity is a regulatory concept, which indicates what action needs to be taken, the level of governance and government, and at which level decisions should be taken in a given area of public policy. Along these lines, he noted that a certain evolution of the concept had been identified towards a more passive form of subsidiarity as a system for monitoring what is decided on a European level in terms of active subsidiarity. He also referred to pre-legislative consultations and the possibility that subnational and local governments can express their opinion on the subject concerned.

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Another of the concepts that De Lombaerde mentioned briefly is that of multiple interested parties, which also overlaps with the concept of multi-level governance. In this case, it is a concept that first emerged in the decade after the year 2000, at least in the context of public policy, and refers to very specific areas of public policy and also to the participation of different types of participants in the process of decision-making, with or without links to national governments.

Once this conceptual introduction had been completed, De Lombaerde explored the connection between multi-level governance and the ecological transition. He indicated that it was currently very difficult to know what the impact would be of the process of reflection on the future of Europe initiated a couple of years ago. He also admitted that there are people who are sceptical about the process, but noted that, in his opinion, it is an extremely interesting exercise, even if it does not have an immediate impact. Among the recommendations produced by the debate under the aegis of the CoFoE there are some very interesting ideas and De Lombaerde was convinced that some of these will come to fruition.

The CoFoE process enables us to reflect, on the one hand, on the system of multi-level governance and its state of stability, robustness and coherence, together with the various options for its consolidation, and, on the other hand, on how transversal the policy of ecological transition is in Europe now. The speaker asked what directions needed to be taken for the future, and how we should distribute responsibilities and powers in this domain.



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De Lombaerde next analysed the recommendations that are on the table in relation to the environment, and noted that in a third of the cases there is a demand for new regulations. Another part of these recommendations refers to subsidies, and in the rest there is information about the activities that need to be financed and also the new taxes and new restrictions on imports at the external frontier of the Union. The question could be asked as to whether it is appropriate for these policy instruments to be implemented at different levels. In his opinion, with the exception of the restrictions on imports, all the other cases can indeed be implemented at different levels.

In his analysis of proposals, De Lombaerde declared that in the field of ecological transition there is very little reflection on how policies are to be applied. There is plenty of information about what we want: we want more eco-taxes, more restriction at the external frontiers, we want to invest in this and that, etc. The key question however is the European Union. It is not always clear exactly what we mean when we talk of the European Union. Are we talking about the European Union as an institution or as a series of European institutions? Are we referring to the European Union as a whole with all its Member States and citizens? This is not always very clear.

In this respect, the speaker concluded that in the reflections and debates that take place in the context of the CoFoE very little mention is made of the governmental aspect of the policies that we wish to implement. In very few cases is any reference made to the EU or to the Member States, and only in 4 out of the 51 do we see any reference to other levels of governance. With regard to the majority of recommendations or initiatives, there is no mention of the level of governance at all, which the speaker found very surprising.

On examining the panel's recommendations concerning European democracy and security, De Lombaerde also tried to find reflections on multi-level governance. There are recommendations, for example, on citizen participation relating to the creation of digital platforms, in some cases channelling the latter on a local scale. Yet multi-level governance is practically totally absent from these reflections.

Can citizens' bodies be strengthened at a local and regional scale by creating parallel bodies? And what will the next step be? What advantages will this bring for European democracy? De Lombaerde stated that he was not suggesting that the platforms concerned are not important, but merely wished to underline the lack of debate about multi-level governance.

He was however able to identify a reflection on multi-level governance among the contributions made by the Committee of the Regions. De Lombaerde mentioned, for example, the idea of creating hubs, i.e. nerve-centres constituting levels of concentration in different countries, that could coincide with the provinces or regions in each country.

De Lombaerde considered it interesting to examine the way we set up these connections between citizens' participation and already existing structures or institutions. He pointed out that the question becomes more complex when talking about competences and their distribution between the different levels.

He noted that in the recommendations the declaration about climate policy would be made on a clearly European scale, while in other policy areas there is an argument in favour of lowering the level of decision-making, as in the case of the Common Agricultural Policy, transport or energy. The speaker emphasised the difficulty of clearly establishing which level should be responsible for the various content areas of a policy, since in the majority of cases all levels have a relevant role to play.

De Lombaerde referred to the case of energy policy as an example. He noted that this is a field in which many measures can be taken at a local level to reduce consumption or carry out the transition from one source of energy to another. Yet he considered that some decisions needed to be taken at a higher level, such as, for example, those that refer to the geopolitical impact of energy policies.

De Lombaerde made a number of observations in conclusion. Firstly, he noted that when we face up to the challenges of climate change, action at all levels and multi-level governance is in fact clearly already present, but pointed out that public action also needs to be coherent. Coherence was required when fostering participation and inclusion at all levels.

The speaker indicated that the final result of the Conference on the Future of Europe was not clear, but that, given the current geopolitical situation, it was not impossible that there would be a demand for new initiatives and reforms that would enjoy considerable success. He noted that another possible scenario would be a centre that would be better integrated with its surrounding regions, or an economic space.

4. Round table

The round-table discussion took place with the participation of Tsvetelina Natcheva, from the European Commission; Maciej Sytek, representing the Polish region of Wielkopolska; Gianluca Spinaci, from the European Committee of the Regions; and Gorka Knörr, the representative of the Government of Catalonia to the European Union.

With the adoption of the European Union Treaty and in particular the Treaty of Lisbon, the principle of subsidiarity and multi-level governance were placed at the heart of the policies of the EU. At a crucial time like the present, when the European Union has set out on the path of transition towards a green economy but in a highly complex international environment with the war in Ukraine at its doorstep, we can see how these two principles are more important than ever.

In this respect, today's decisions and those taken in the future will directly affect the lives of European citizens and we need to ensure that they are involved in them, and that the diversity of the different territories and societies of the EU is respected.

We know that multi-level government is essential, therefore, for dealing with international threats and

at the same time for ensuring that this transition will be successful and is carried out in the interests of European citizens. In this sense, the different levels of public administration need to be present so that they can also feel jointly responsible for future changes. We could however examine how much progress we have made so far.

Tsvetelina Natcheva, Deputy Head of Unit for Unit A3 – Climate Governance, Plans & Mainstreaming, of the European Commission

What is the European Union doing to take into account the various different levels of multi-governance, from the Member States right down to local bodies and stakeholders, when it comes to dealing with the issues related to the environment and climate change?

On a EU scale, it must be said that the institutions alone cannot achieve the European Green Deal. We need to achieve ecological neutrality by 2030, and we need to reduce CO2 emissions. This will affect the lives of all the citizens of the European Union and we need to bear in mind that there are groups who are vulnerable with regard to this transition. Therefore, we will not succeed if we do not have the full support of governing entities at all levels - local, regional and national included.

Natcheva also favours the designing of renewable energy systems that will enable us to undertake this transition successfully. To combat climate change she considers that we need a very wide public debate with the participation of the various interested parties, together with the need to implement regional objectives through policies in the field carried out at two levels. She highlights standards for cars, a policy that benefits from the single internal market and the greater contribution made on a European scale. She points out that there are also, however, other ways in which the actions of the Member States define what is needed to achieve a reduction of emissions. Different factors affect buildings, transport systems, and so forth.

She reminded those present of the importance of speaking to the interested parties, to Member States, to organisations in the field and to civil society as a whole. The EU budget is also used to ensure that investments are carried out and to do so coordination with the regions is required. The regions explain how they contribute to the objective of reducing emissions by 2030 through a global solution: the creation of missions and social challenges that need to be achieved thanks to new technologies and the involvement of all the regions to adapt to the effects of climate change.

She also reminded those present that the fight against climate change will not be won without citizens' participation. Cities and their citizens need to make their own commitments. They have a major role to play in the mobilisation of their citizens, who are the people who are closest to their communities. One of the key elements in the framework of European regulation is that it requires Member States to become involved in conversations and multi-level climate and energy dialogues at a local and regional level also. The Member States had already prepared their plans in 2020, but this is not a static process, but rather an interactive one, in which the various plans need to be updated by late 2024.

In the updating of the plans, there are elements that reflect the new ambitions of the *Fit for 55 process*. The Member States, together with the regions, have prepared a series of transition plans that for those regions with the highest intensity of carbon emissions will need to include specific plans to enable them to benefit from the transition.

Maciej Sytek, representative of the Wielkopolska region in Poland

The next to speak was Maciej Sytek, the ambassador of the Regional Administration of Wielkopolska (a historic region of Greater Poland) with responsibility for the restructuring of Eastern Wielkopolska. Wielkopolska is one of the regions of Poland that is most strongly focused on the green transition of

its economy. In comparison with other coal-mining regions in the European Union, Wielkopolska has adopted a very ambitious plan to move away from coal by the year 2030.

First of all, Sytek was asked about the most important aspects to make this process successful, especially with regard to public acceptance of this transition. He declared that they have very ambitious plans with regard to climate change. One of these is to come out of carbon by 2030, and the other is to reduce CO2 emissions. They would like to achieve climate neutrality for their region by 2040. To this end, they have designed tools and an appropriate strategy. The most important factor for success is the participation of society. An attempt has been made to involve in this process all the region's stakeholders, including, for example, the regional governments and companies, so that everybody is involved in this challenge and all need to work together in one another's interest.

In order to achieve all this, Sytek emphasises that it is essential for citizens to be interested in the policy concerned and to be able to participate in it. It involves the construction of an entire new regional identity, which will lead not only to certain jobs being replaced by others, but much more than this, since the region's miners, for example, will change all their professional orientation. This does not mean that they will all need to train to become florists (to give a humorous example), but the really important thing is that the regions should be able to build a new identity, to move away from the coal industry and to become aware that they are participating in a process that goes beyond just earning money. They wish to continue to be a dynamic region and need to find another specialisation, based for example on renewable resources. The workplaces will however need to change, in terms of production, mobility and the creation of factories.

In this sense, he emphasises that one of the most important factories will produce pure hydrogen, a fuel used for buses. This will create new jobs, but will also fulfil other conditions, such as providing support for local governments. He also pointed out that we need to bear in mind that local governments will no longer receive taxes from coal production and will need to replace these in some way.

Since in his contribution he has just explained that he attaches great importance to social participation and that of the stakeholders concerned, we would like to know if Maciej Sytek considers that this process could take place without multi-level governance. He shows quite categorically that this is not the case. He declares that without multi-level participation this change could not take place. This goes against the expectations of the central government, which is more directly focused on coal issues. He gives the example of his small mining region. Since they are small and they participate in all the meetings of the international plans implemented by the EU and the World Bank, but while keeping a certain freedom of action because Wielkopolska is independent from the central government, this means that they can take their own decisions. Warsaw does not know what goes on in the small localities in Wielkopolska, but they do. "It is important to have freedom of action and that financing should be created in such a way that we can use it and decide what to do with it", he says.

Sytek is in favour of implementing a model that is close to local citizens, since this proximity inspires confidence. He reminds us that he comes from a small town, Konin, and it is there that it is necessary to be with the population, and to explain to them why this formula is so important. He is confident that the current process will be difficult to stop and that they will be able to move out of coal even before the year 2030. The process is accelerating and he emphasises that it is very important to be able to share their experience at events like this. Mining regions are being transformed and the experiences of Wielkopolska can help to transform other mining regions. It was initially thought in Poland that the transformation plan would have to be a single central concept planned by Warsaw, but it has been demonstrated that this is not the case. "This is a route that works well and it should be the preferred system within the EU, since democracy is put into practice through the regions and not only through central governments", he concludes.

Gianluca Spinaci, Green Deal Advisor at the European Committee of the Regions

With the release of the European Green Deal, a massive volume of new legislation and financing has

now been launched or is on its way, like the Fit for 55 legislative package and the financing through the recovery plans and new budget programmes for 2021-27. Which initiatives has the European Committee of the Regions (CR) put in place to ensure that the local and regional authorities can be authentic partners for the massive change towards European carbon neutrality?

Before explaining what the CR does, Spinaci wished to reply to a point raised by Maciej Sytek. He explained that the mechanism of transition for the regions is recovering the real spirit of European policies after the last 25-30 years, during which it was often thought that such policies were only mechanisms for transferring financing. He also thanked Tsvetelina Natcheva for the work undertaken by the Commission and the services offered and the initiatives undertaken in favour of the European Green Deal.

With regard to De Lombaerde's point on multi-level governments, he reminded those present that a lot has been said about subsidiarity and multi-level governance in the context of the legislative process, and this is certainly important, but the nature of the EU is in fact changing. For this reason, he declared, within the future concept of multi-level governance it will be necessary to confront new issues, for which it will not be sufficient to merely have a head of state's command room, but for which the regions will also need to be included in order to solve the issues concerned. For all these reasons, he said that decisions cannot be taken without the participation of the regions, as has been shown with the COVID-19 health crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

Spinaci reminded those present that the Green Deal would be impossible without involving and placing at the centre of the stage those who know best how these legislative items will operate. He also observed that when we talk about the environment and the climate, we are talking about challenges and cross-border solutions. For example, how can we resolve differences between regional states such as Italy and centralised states such as Slovenia, Albania or Croatia, when it comes to creating a climate plan in the Adriatic region? In this respect, he emphasised that there is a clear need to operate across, or between, the different levels of governance.

The reply can be transmitted through various different approaches. The first is the very nature of the treaty that gives the CR a role as a consultant and contact forum with regional authorities. We need to participate in the improvement of the legislation in an active way, through assessment in the field and proposing improvements. He explained that this is what they do at the CR and why the Government of Catalonia has a very important role. He also reminded those present that the local Green Deal has been launched, which enables them to work together on six theme-based committees, since the theme is horizontal and this means that there may be interactions between committees (for transport, energy, social matters, etc.).

Another avenue of approach is through mobilisation. Through the *Green Deal Going Local* campaign, resources can be mobilised with regard to renewable energies, energy efficiency, planting trees in cities, etc., and already existing instruments such as the Covenant of Mayors are used. Spinaci asks to be able to keep a European marker on the Green Deal, because there is a very great shortage of aggregated data, and for this reason they ask to work in conjunction with Eurostat.

Spinaci reminded us that the EU pays Russia nearly a billion euros every year for energy (in terms of oil, gas and coal), six times more than what is paid for renewable energies, and is now in favour of changing this state of affairs. In his opinion, however, this process has to start and has to accelerate and, in order to accelerate it, the regions and cities need to agree since the need for solar energy or the identification of sites for wind farms is not only decided by the Member States, but also by the regions.

Another question to be dealt with is whether regional and local governments, together with citizens, have enough voice when giving their opinions and helping to resolve major global problems, such as the energy issue. Spinaci compares two national programmes. "In Italy, they carry out renovation work for 100 euros and they receive 110, and there is no discrimination in terms of personal revenue (they can

have two houses, two second homes, two large cars, etc.). By contrast, in Belgium, the National Recovery Plan discriminates in terms of personal income and it is managed by the local municipal or regional council. If you present a project, you have to adjust to a whole series of factors that are coherent with the municipal and regional plan. With the same intervention, therefore, you cannot just have the roof insulated and that's all, which is what you would do in your own home. Instead of this, you form part of a larger renovation project that has to comply with certain requisites. This is the difference between a Renovation Plan that is managed centrally and which is in one way or another closer to certain specific authorities, especially economic authorities, compared with a plan that is closer to citizens”.

Spinaci indicated that he is in favour of collaborating in this project with the regions, cities or municipalities and all other local entities, but he says that this has to be achieved by actions rather than words, and he defends the Committee of the Regions with regard to the automotive industry. With regard to energy austerity, he believes that this will no doubt be adopted, but needs to be linked to a good model on a local scale. He also refers to the long-term plan with regard to how to replace fossil fuels. He admits that we are now in a situation that is clearly critical, but says that this cannot be prolonged forever. “If we have to start a new plan with what the Commission called the front load of 50-55, in other words, achieving the highest standards, with the 27 Member States achieving the same objectives, this involves the need for a forum of Energy Ministers”, Spinaci maintains.

Gorka Knörr, representative of the Government of Catalonia to the European Union

Catalonia has been working to promote and to lead the green transformation. This objective is explicitly included in the Government of Catalonia's programme for the current legislature. Gorka Knörr is asked if he could give an example of the implementation of multi-level governance in this context.

The representative of the Government of Catalonia to the EU wishes to make a complaint, but does so in a humorous tone. He assures us that multi-level governance is like Nessie, the Loch Ness Monster: everybody talks about it, but nobody has ever seen it. He declares that some participation mechanisms established in Spain are of little use and that despite the fact that Von der Leyen has called for the reinforcement of the regional and municipal levels of governance, the precise opposite is being put into practice, especially since the pandemic.

Knörr criticised the fact that the Spanish Recovery Plan was presented in Brussels without any previous consultation with the regional authorities at all. “They said there had been consultation, but this is completely untrue”, he stated. How can objectives be achieved if the regions are not consulted? This will only result in producing definitive plans that are not related to local and regional needs.

He also defended the fact that Catalonia made all the necessary applications months before the launching of the recovery funds but that not a single one of them has been taken into consideration by the Spanish authorities. The role of the CR is very important to us. Many regions are anxious despite having given multiple examples of their efficiency. They agree with the objectives but want to talk about the subject, to decide jointly how they are to be implemented, but the access is blocked, says Knörr, and he reminds us that Catalonia, which represents 19% of Spanish GDP and 16% of the Spanish population, has only received 7.4% of Next Generation funding.

To what extent would the EU be prepared to intervene to correct these anomalies? Can multi-level governance really function correctly when not all the levels of governance are taken into account in the decision-making process? Knörr was quite categorical, said that the EU needs to pass from words to acts and should listen more to the voice of the regions. “From time to time we have the opportunity to go to EU offices and to make our voice heard, but we get nothing from the Member States, or at least not in the Spanish case, although I know that Belgium does cooperate, for example”, he said.

Knörr reacted to the question of cross-border issues highlighted by Gianluca Spinaci and asked for the relevant tools to be made available. He referred to the example of the first cross-border hospital in Europe, in the Cerdanya region, and complained that it is hampered by the total ineffectiveness of the channels of communication with the Spanish central authorities. “We have problems with things as absurd as the recognition of the qualifications on both sides of the frontier, administration and joint management problems, precisely because we are obliged to work through the Spanish central government administration”, he complained. He also qualified Spinaci’s comments highlighting that France is a highly centralised state, explaining that in actual practice the French regions manage cohesion funds directly with the European Commission. “We however, who live in a state that is supposedly more decentralised than France, do not have the status of a managing authority”, Knörr observed.

5. Round of questions

During the round of questions, Hannah Abdullah, from the CIDOB Global Citizens’ Programme, emphasised the importance of local government entities, since city authorities have pioneered action on the climate. She explained that cities are laboratories for innovation and experimentation, and for this reason, she calls for more resources for them.

Subsequently, Gracia Vara, from the European Institute of Public Administration in the Netherlands, explained that the Committee of the Regions has focused on the historic demands for multi-level governance and noted that this organism should now take the initiative and urge European institutions such as the Parliament and the European Commission to give real support to multi-level governance. In this respect, Gorka Knörr admitted that many people on the Committee of the Regions had shown reluctance in this regard, but attitudes had now changed.

6. Closure

Laura Foraster i Lloret, Secretary General of DIPLOCAT, addressed a few words to those attending to end the seminar. In her address, she affirmed that a debate like the one that has just taken place fully complies with DIPLOCAT’s objectives, because it has established new connections, projected a positive image of the country and provided training in the concept of multi-level governance. She also thanked all the speakers and participants who had shared their experiences and expertise, and thanked the DIPLOCAT staff and the Delegation of the Government of Catalonia to the EU for all their work.

With regard to the words of Gerard Vives, Director General for EU Affairs and the Institutional Representation Abroad of the Government of Catalonia, she emphasised that the sub-national authorities, despite the fact that in the European system of multi-level governance they are, together with municipal councils and local organisms, the institutions that are closest to local citizens and that have the deepest knowledge of local realities, they have not had their voice strengthened on this occasion.

She also thanked Philippe De Lombaerde for reviewing the 51 recommendations made by the Conference on the Future of Europe in relation to climate change, the environment and health, and emphasised the remark that there were few references to multi-level governance, although these do appear in the contributions provided by the Committee of the Regions.

She then gave a brief summary of the ideas that arose during the course of the round table discussion, during which we learned the opinions of different institutions involved in decision-making and the implementation of policies, from the European administration down to the regional level.

Finally, Foraster concluded that the European strategy aimed at sustainable development will only succeed if there is truly effective multi-level governance, with shared responsibilities, that can be implemented and can develop and apply the necessary measures to achieve sustainability.

Annex. Participants



> PHILIPPE DE LOMBAERDE

DIRECTOR OF UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE ON COMPARATIVE REGIONAL INTEGRATION STUDIES (UNU-CRIS)

Philippe De Lombaerde was appointed Director of UNU-CRIS on the first of January of 2022. Currently on leave, he has also been Associate Professor of International Economics at Neoma Business School since January 2016. Previously, he worked as Director, Associate Director and Research Fellow at UNU-CRIS in 2020-21, 2008-16 and 2002-08, respectively. He also worked as Associate Professor of International Economics at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (1997-2004), as Researcher and Lecturer at the University of Antwerp (1985-93 and 1999-2002) and as Researcher at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) (1993-94), among others.

Philippe De Lombaerde (PhD, RWTH) studied economics, econometrics and political science at the universities of Ghent, Antwerp and Aachen. He has been involved in policy research and consultancy projects for, among others, the governments of Belgium, Flanders and United Kingdom and for UNDP, UNESCO, World Bank and European Commission.

Lastly, he is the co-author and co-editor of certain books such as *The Periphery of the Euro. Monetary and Exchange Rate Policy in CIS Countries* (Ashgate, London, 2006).



> LAURA FORASTER

SECRETARY GENERAL OF DIPLOCAT

Laura Foraster i Lloret (Barcelona, 1976) holds a degree in Economics and Business Administration at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), a degree in Humanities at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) and an MA in European Studies at the KU Leuven. She also has specific education in Public Diplomacy and in Election Observation Missions. Prior to her current position as Secretary General of DIPLOCAT, she was Executive Director of the entity until its temporary closure in April 2018.

Foraster has been Chief of Cabinet of the Minister for Innovation, Universities and Enterprise and of the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Consumer Affairs of the Government of Catalonia during two consecutive legislative terms, where she was responsible for the management of the Minister's Cabinet, the political assistance to the Minister and for European Union and international issues.

Her previous professional experience includes Parliamentary Assistant to Catalan Members of the European Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg, following the Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Foreign and Security Policy Committee and the Constitutional Affairs Committee. In Brussels, she also worked for the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the Catalan Government Delegation in the EU.



> GORKA KNÖRR

REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CATALONIA TO THE EU

Gorka Knörr is the current representative of the Government of Catalonia to the European Union. Trained in the Superior Technical School of Business in Donostia, he has worked in the field of culture, communication and teaching since 1971 and in both institutional and private domains with a special focus on international relations.

Between 1983 and 1985, he was the spokesperson for the Basque government and responsible for the press, publicity and public relations department, as well as the unit of external relations of the Basque government. Then, in July 1985, he joined the financial department of the Mondragon Corporation (MCC). After, between July 1998 and January 1999, he was the Basque Institute of Statistics director.

In the political sphere, once elected as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP), he founded the Greens/European Free Alliance (EFA) group, of which he became a member and Vice-President. Besides, from 1999 to 2003, he was the Secretary-General of Eusko Alkartasuna.

In June 2001, he turned down a seat in the European Parliament to become a member of the Basque Parliament, where he was the first Vice-President until the end of the mandate in 2005. From 2012 and until 2013, he was Director-General for the Catalan Arts Institute and in July 2019, he was appointed Representative of the Government of Catalonia to Madrid.



> TSVETELINA NATCHEVA

DEPUTY HEAD OF UNIT CLIMATE GOVERNANCE, PLANS AND MAINSTREAMING, EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Tsvetelina Natcheva joined the Directorate General For Climate Action in the European Commission in 2013. She worked on the development of climate policies to deliver on the Union's 2030 climate ambition as a policy analyst in the Strategy and Economic Analysis team.

Between 2018-2022, she was a policy assistant to the Director General. Since 2022, she is a Deputy Head of Unit Climate Governance, Plans and Mainstreaming.

She holds a Master of Science in Sustainable Development from HEC Paris and BA in Economics from Colby College, USA.



> GIANLUCA SPINACI

ADVISOR GREEN DEAL, EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Gianluca Spinaci joined the European Committee of the Regions in 2005. He is the Advisor on Green Deal Going Local since 2021. He was head of Cabinet of the Secretary General of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) between 2013 and 2020.

Gianluca has been previously in charge of climate, environment and energy as Member of the Cabinet of the CoR President. In this position, he contributed to the launch of the Covenant of Mayors, of the European Green Capital scheme, of the cooperation with the US Conference of Mayors and of the development of multilevel governance within the annual UN Conference of Parties on Climate.

His multilevel governance activities include the co-authoring of the CoR White Paper on Multilevel Governance, as well as the launch of the CoR Platform on European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation.

Before joining Brussels, he worked on the field with INTERREG Programmes at the Austrian Federal Chancellery in Vienna; with strategic planning and budgeting at the Regional Government of Marche in Italy; and in a municipal consortium of public utilities investing in infrastructures and providing energy and environmental services to rural communities.

He holds a Doctorate in Law, Law of Regions and local authorities (Università Politecnica delle Marche), he has a Degree in Economics (Università degli Studi di Ancona) and Master in Business Administration and Marketing (South Bank University).



> MACIEJ SYTEK

THE PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE WIELKOPOLSKA REGION BOARD FOR THE RESTRUCTURING OF EASTERN WIELKOPOLSKA

Maciej Sytek is a member of the Board of Wielkopolska Region. As member, he is responsible for the work of the Department of Health, the Department of Implementation of Regional Operating Programmes, and the Department of Economy.

His focus has always been local self-government. From 2011, he worked in the Information and Promotion Section of the Regional Policy Department at the Marshal Office, first as director, then as head officer. He participated in developing the Wielkopolska Region Operational Programme 2014-2020. In addition, in 2015, he served as deputy director at the Department of Implementation of Regional Operating Programmes and he coordinated and monitored the investment in terms of strengthening the competitiveness of enterprises in the area of health, transport, and educational infrastructure. Then, from 2016, he held the position of Director of the Department of Health and he was responsible for directing the work of the Department and formulating its general policy.

Furthermore, he boosted the *Świąteczna Paczka od Sąsiada* (Neighbourly Christmas Package) social action in the Pobiedziska Commune. Before Christmas, food is collected for those who are going through difficult moments. For this, among others, he was awarded the title *Volunteer of the Year* by Jan Grabkowski, the Starost of Poznań.



> GERARD VIVES

DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR THE REPRESENTATION OF THE GOVERNMENT ABROAD AND THE EUROPEAN UNION OF THE MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN ACTION AND OPEN GOVERNMENT OF CATALONIA

Barcelona, 1979. He holds an undergraduate degree in Political Science and Administration (specialisation in International Relations, UAB, 2001) and a master's degree in Diplomacy and International Relations (specialisation in EU Affairs, Diplomatic School, 2007).

Since July 2021, he has served as Director General for the Representation of the Government Abroad and the European Union of the Ministry for Foreign Action and Open Government of Catalonia.

Before that, in 2015 he began his work as advisor for strategic and prospective analysis in the Directorate General for Multilateral and European Affairs, in the Secretariat for Foreign and European Affairs and in the Minister's Office of the Ministries of the Presidency (2015) and of Foreign Affairs, Institutional Relations and Transparency (2016 to 2021).

Between 2011 and 2015 he also worked in Brussels in the field of design and implementation of advocacy strategies involving EU institutions and Member States as an officer at the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD) and as European Regional Coordinator for Beyond 2015, a campaign created in 2010 to influence the negotiation process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

> RUTH GUMBAU

Journalist

Ruth Gumbau, a journalist, is an editor at TV3: she currently presents the sports block of Telenotícies Vespre. He has also hosted and edited broadcasts on Televisió de Catalunya on channel 3/24.

He had previously directed and presented news programs and spaces on La Xarxa de Televisions Locals and Andorra Televisió. She is the co-author of the fiction book "Football is like this".

She is also an associate professor in the UOC's Master's in Digital Journalism, has taught at Ramon Llull University, collaborated with the UIC and trained as a spokesperson for business executives.

She has a degree in Communication Sciences from Ramon Llull University and KU Leuven (Belgium), where she studied subjects related to international conflicts and political anthropology.



The member entities of DIPLOCAT

» Public institutions and municipal entities

- Government of Catalonia
- Barcelona City Council
- Tarragona City Council
- Girona City Council
- Lleida City Council
- Vielha e Mijaran City Council
- Barcelona Provincial Council
- Tarragona Provincial Council
- Girona Provincial Council
- Lleida Provincial Council
- Conselh Generau d'Aran
- Catalan Association of Municipalities and Counties
- Federation of Municipalities of Catalonia

» Entities of the business sector

- General Council of the Official Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Navigation of Catalonia
- Entrepreneurs association Foment del Treball Nacional
- Association of Micro-, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises of Catalonia (PIMEC)
- Confederation of Cooperatives of Catalonia
- Multi-Sector Business Association (AMEC)
- Private Foundation of Entrepreneurs (FemCAT)

» Entities of the social, trade union and sports sector

- The Group of Entities of the Voluntary Sector of Catalonia
- Trade union Unió General de Treballadors de Catalunya (UGT)
- Trade union Comissions Obreres de Catalunya (CCOO)
- Football Club Barcelona

» Universities, business schools and academic institutions

- University of Barcelona (UB)
- Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)
- Technical University of Catalonia (UPC)
- Pompeu Fabra University (UPF)
- University of Lleida (UdL)
- University of Girona (UdG)
- Rovira i Virgili University (URV)
- Ramon Llull University (URL)
- Open University of Catalonia (UOC)
- University of Vic - Central University of Catalonia (UVic-UCC)
- International University of Catalonia (UIC)
- Abat Oliba CEU University (UAO CEU)
- Barcelona Institute of International Studies (IBEI)
- EADA Business School
- Barcelona School of Economics (BSE)