



Strategic Forum Bled **Speech of Christophe Rouillon**

1er septembre 2021 18h30-20h00

Bled, Slovénie

Panel entitled 'Future of Europe – Diversity and Consensus'.

In partnership with Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies. #BSF2021

Speakers:

Mr François Decoster, President, Renew Europe Group, European Committee of the Regions

Mr Olgierd Geblewicz, President, European People's Party Group, European Committee of the Regions

Ms Giorgia Meloni, President of the European Conservatives and Reformists Party

Mr Christophe Rouillon, President, Party of European Socialist Group, European Committee of the Regions

Ms Christa Schweng, President, European Economic and Social Committee

Mr Apostolos Tzitzikostas, President, European Committee of the Regions **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

Mr Marco Zanni, President, Identity and Democracy Group

Moderated by Mr Federico Ottavio Reho, Strategic Coordinator and Senior Research Officer, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies

Watch here: <https://youtu.be/yV9zwwj9CMg>

Dear colleagues,

Dear Mr Reho,

Many thanks for your question and for inviting me to take part in this debate as President of the Socialist Group in the European Committee of the Region.

I see that our institution is very well represented here and I do think that this reflects the interest and high expectations of regional and local authorities concerning the conference on the future of Europe.

This exercise was launched after a long, maybe too long, period of reflexion about its purpose, its composition and its methodology.

Let's be honest amongst ourselves: it did not start very well and this is not only due to the covid-19 pandemic. The long discussions between the main institutions organising the conference on the issue of governance reflects the difficulties the European Union is facing on daily basis.

The citizens do not know who is behind the wheel: The European Commission? The European Parliament? The Member States?

Of course, for those familiar with the European "bubble", the permanent need to conciliate the point of view of the various institutions is obvious, but the average European citizen does not understand all this.

That is the reason why our former socialist President of the European Committee of the Regions, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, and his counterpart in the Economic and Social Committee have called for a **permanent and structured dialogue with the citizens through the local and regional authorities**. Mayors and regional representatives are European actors and they are well placed to create this link between the citizens and the European Union.

The conference on the future of Europe is a great opportunity to reduce the gap between citizens and the European level, but it is also a great challenge. Indeed, if the hopes are high, the disappointment can be even bigger if citizens' legitimate demands for another, more effective and more empowering Europe, are not taken into account at the end of the process.

This is the reason why we should not exclude at the start of the process the idea of treaty change. Let's do this exercise without any taboos.

Allow me now to refer to some key aspects of a Europe that would be better than the one we have.

We need a Europe with stronger competences when it comes to social rights across borders to create a level playing field for Europeans, regardless of their nationality. Minimum wages, access to housing, to education or to training still vary dramatically in the European Union.

We need a Europe that has the power to take key decisions in public health emergencies: the management of the pandemic has learned us many lessons in this regard.

We need a Europe with strong competencies in connectivity in order to ensure that no person and no territory is left behind because of the lack of investment in critical digital infrastructure.

We need a Europe with a strong stance on climate change and collective action to address it. The Green Deal is a tool that will prove effective only if we see collectively the bigger picture.

We need a Europe with respectable own resources to be able to face the multiple challenges ahead.

Last but not least, we need a Europe of true solidarity to address yet another looming migration crisis.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A Europe à la carte is bound to be a weak Europe.

The Conference on the Future of Europe must be a true opportunity to make our Union better. For everyone's sake.