

ENLARGE DELIBERATIVE EVENT – MILAN 16 OCTOBER

Ladies and gentlemen,

Distinguished speakers,

It is really a pleasure to be here today and it is an honor to give this opening speech right after Mrs Patrizia Toia. As you may know, I am city councilor of Vittorio Veneto (a very nice city in the North East of Italy, which I suggest you to visit) but I'm also a member of the Committee of the Regions, a consultative European body which brings together the political representatives of Regional and Local Authorities of the European Union. The Committee of the Regions is the European Institution that gives voice to European regions and municipalities, drafting opinions on the main legislative proposals (and other relevant topics) from the local perspective, helping the European legislators to consider the local point of view.

I have to say that when Mrs Melloni invited me to take part to this event, I didn't know what the ENLARGE project was about... But now I'm glad to say that thanks to her invitation I had the chance to learn that this project *"aims to generate and disseminate shared, structured and constructive knowledge on participatory governance"*. In a certain way, we could say that this objective is also one of the goals of the Committee of the Regions, and that's why I'm really glad to be here today.

Indeed, if we want to avoid the risks carried on by a certain part of today's politics, we have to incentive a wide participation to our democratic life, creating an effective participatory governance. That's of the utmost importance in this difficult period, because the democracy can't survive without the participation of individuals and we're at a cross-road: either we will be able to better involve the citizens or they will disaffect. Today we have always new IT instruments to involve more and more the citizens, making them more responsible and we have to take advantage of these new possibilities without being afraid of experimenting new ways of participatory governance.

I'm also glad that the ENLARGE project focused on the field of sustainable energy, one of the main challenges of our times, which is also one of my personal commitments, as my work at the Committee of the Regions can attest. As some of you may know, I've recently been rapporteur for the Committee of the Regions for an Opinion on Climate Finance, approved by the plenary session of the CoR just last week. The Opinion includes a list of policy recommendations at international, European and national level. Among these recommendations I would like to highlight that we asked to Member States to reduce as

soon as possible the financial flows, subsidies and economic incentives to fossil fuels use and carbon intensive infrastructures and economic activities, because we strongly believe that we need a more sustainable energy. And I believe also that to reach this goal a participatory governance is needed. In fact, participatory governance may bring several benefits:

1. **The engagement.** In my experience, political commitment is key to ensure long term engagement on sustainable energy and climate actions. The presence of a strong political commitment towards a given initiative by local, regional and national institutions usually allows easier access to the available public funds. Such commitment also allows to establish cooperation practices between public sector actors and to give other stakeholders the opportunity to dialogue with institutional counterparts. This turns into a bottom-up approach to the project decision-making. In my experience the most successful approaches are those where the civil society and all the relevant actors are engaged from the onset and that's a clear example that the participatory governance works and works well.
2. **The flexibility.** Apply a participatory governance to a sustainable energy project could also help in terms of flexibility in order to respond to unexpected changes. In fact, changes in policy, legislation, resources, partners and timelines may undermine the implementation of sustainable energy initiatives. Therefore, the ability of an initiative to adapt its work to new internal and external conditions is an important factor for accomplishment. However, this is by no means a discharge of responsibility for policy-makers, who should provide predictability and security for investments.
3. **The public awareness.** Public awareness is recognised as one of the main tools for community involvement which, in turn, acts as a success factor for projects by improving their acceptance and ownership by the target groups. Engaging citizens and local communities through public consultations at different project stages helps clarifying the initiative's objectives and expected benefits. This is particularly important when projects involving changes in people's habits and behaviours are concerned. However, participatory governance is not just made by mere consultations: it is a true bottom-up approach which requires an enabling framework for local actors to take the initiatives into their own hands.

Of course there are some problems to face in order to reach a participatory governance of a project. First of all education is essential and should aim to sensitize citizens, stakeholders and potential project target groups about the challenges and opportunities. Partnerships between public and private actors should be established where possible to devise communication and awareness raising strategies that are tailored to the local

problems and conditions and that emphasise practical approaches to local challenges. At the same time, project partners should incentivise and motivate citizens and local businesses to take action, for instance through regulatory measures or by providing information about climate action and the available funding options.

Concluding, I would like to stress that the Opinion I wrote for the Committee of the Regions has taken into account the suggestions of several organizations and NGOs and I think that this was an effective example of participatory process, in which the CoR involved several stakeholders, mostly coming from the civil society. Drafting the opinion I've learnt once more that NGOs and even single citizens can really make the difference in the definition of public policies and that we, as politicians, should never be ashamed to listen carefully to them. Our decision making process can't be just top-down, but it must be inclusive as much as possible. That's a win/win strategy.

To improve also my knowledge on this subject I can't wait to listen to the results of the ENLARGE project so far.

Thank you very much for your attention.