

POSITIVE CONVERSATION

CONCLUSIONS REPORT

NOVEMBER 2021



INTRODUCTION

For more than a year, different members of ORU Fogar have been talking about the governance of the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that regional governments are key to facing the complexity of the globalized world. Here the conclusions of this debate.

As a result of the state of global alarm, Abdessamad Sekkal, as president of ORU Fogar, called on the regional world and especially the members of ORU Fogar to have a great debate on the role of the regions in future governance. The COVID-19 pandemic, as a public health problem, gave a renewed role to the public administration. In all geographies, the central state took control in the face of a situation as serious as the alert. In some cases, this control was done with exquisite coordination with local and regional governments. In others, however, the pandemic facilitated a recentralization that was already latent. Everywhere, the regions played a key role in at least two ways: in the dissemination of recommendations to combat the epidemic and in serving the most vulnerable population.

No one has been able to do without regions. Thus, this crisis has shown some evidence. The world of the 21st century is a world of extraordinary complexity and, in this complex world, centralism is no longer an option. The architecture of the new governance is being put together and the regions must find their space. As a government with a human dimension, the intermediate government must see how it articulates with local governments, with the central government, and how it participates in global dynamics.





The "Positive Conversation" initiative has been a first contribution to this debate. When face-to-face meetings were impossible, the virtual format allowed us an agile and open dialogue. This experience began with a conversation between Abdessamad Sekkal, the president of ORU Fogar and president of the Regional Council of Rabat Salé Kénitra of Morocco, a country in a process of advanced decentralization, and Thierry Cornillet, founding president of AIRF, a convinced regionalist who has been an MEP and a member of the French National Assembly.

After this conversation, others have followed with regional governors and presidents from different continents. In the official languages of ORU Fogar, Spanish, French or English, a Moroccan, a Senegalese and a regional president of Côte d'Ivore, a French, a Belgian and a Finnish, a Chilean, an Argentine, an Ecuadorian, a Colombian, a Peruvian and a Uruguayan. Beyond the singularities of each case, determined by the political situation, common dynamics, situations and problems have been found in all these geographies. This allows to point out some conclusions.



CALENDAR 2020-2021

JULY 9, 2020

FRENCH ABDESSAMAD SEKKAL, PRESIDENT OF ORU FOGAR THIERRY CORNILLET, FOUNDING PRESIDENT AIRF

NOVEMBER 5, 2020

FRENCH YÉBOUÉ-KOUAMÉ PASCAL, PRESIDENT OF BÉLIER, IVORY COAST ADAMA DIOUF, PRESIDENT OF THE ADS,SENEGAL

JANUARY 21, 2021

ENGLISH ANN-SOFI BACKGREN, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF BORDER REGIONS OF EUROPE (ARFE) JEAN-LUC VANRAES, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE ASSEMBLY OF REGIONS OF EUROPE (AER)

APRIL 16, 2021

SPANISH MARCELO CARRASCO, PRESIDENT OF ANCORE MANUEL FERNANDO CALVO, DEPUTY GOVERNOR OF THE PROVINCE OF CÓRDOBA

MAY 14, 2021

SPANISH PABLO JURADO, PRESIDENT OF CONGOPE, ECUADOR CAMILO ERNESTO LLOREDA, MANAGER OF PACIFIC RAP

SEPTEMBER 16, 2021

SPANISH MARIO GARCÍA, INTENDANT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LAVALLEJA, URUGUAY CARLOS RUA, GOVERNOR OF AYACUCHO AND PRESIDENT OF ANGR, PERU







THE ROLE OF REGIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Not because it is obvious, something that President Sekkal affirmed and corroborated by all the participants of the Conversations should not be mentioned: the regions have played an essential role in the management of this health crisis. The dialogues revealed countries in which the central governments relied heavily on the regions, such as Morocco, Senegal or Uruguay, compared to countries where the relationship has been more problematic such as Côte d'Ivore, Chile or Peru.

Great consensus that the pandemic has revealed the most diverse deficits. Latent problems have emerged everywhere. The most noted have been the health deficits. The manager of RAP Pacífico, Camilo Lloreda, said, for example, that in this Colombian region the COVID-19 pandemic made visible other types of epidemics that had not been resolved in the country for a long time, such as malaria. The intendente of Lavalleja, Uruguay, Mario García, explained it this way: "No one was prepared for an alert of this dimension. There was a lack of tests, laboratories and beds in the hospitals. In order to obtain all these resources, all the private and public providers had to be coordinated. Only in this way, in Uruguay, it was achieved that the health system did not collapse ". In any case, in Europe, America or Africa, without distinction, the serious pre-existing problems have become evident.

For Yéboué Kouamé Pascal, president of the Ivorian Regional Council of Bélier, the COVID-19 crisis even revealed the deficiencies of decentralization in his country. "We cannot continue as before," he said, "because it has been seen that we have an 'empty decentralization'".

There is also broad consensus on the need to prioritize health and to give a clear role to the regions in this area. Adama Diouf, president of the Association of Departments of Senegal, said that the first lesson of the pandemic "is that we must invest more in health . " Mario García,



intendente of Lavalleja, went further when he said that future governance will be very determined by the idea that "if there is no health, there is no development . "

The vice president of the Assembly of European Regions (AER), Jean-Luc Vanraes, recognized that, in some regions, there is a poor distribution of competences in the health field. He denounced that, in Belgium, part of medical care is still in the hands of the federal state and called for a definitive decentralization.

In several of the conversations, it was also pointed out how the pandemic has shown the importance of the educational field. Various voices also welcomed the regions' commitment to food security. "The pandemic has signaled that we must guarantee food sovereignty, " Diouf said. When it comes to essential food, we can't depend so much on imports . "

There was also talk of the need for the regions to assume more competencies in risk management. In this regard, Ann-Sofi Backgren, vice president of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) of the Ostrobothnia region in Finland, pointed out that risk management called for more horizontal policies in cross-border regions.

In the last of the conversations, Carlos Rúa, governor of Ayacucho and president of the National Assembly of Regional Governments of Peru, and Mario García, intendente of Lavalleja, pointed out the existence of sectors of the population that are reluctant to vaccination. The regions, in his opinion, should play a fundamental role in overcoming these resistance.





THE NEED TO BE EFFICIENT

The COVID-19 crisis and the possible crises that may occur (economic, climatic ...) demand, as never before, a great efficiency of public administrations. Abdessamad Sekkal was very insistent on this idea: "Today, the public funds that we have are limited and must be spent effectively. Intermediate governments are more effective as they are closer to the citizens ."

The interventions of all the participants, in any case, started from the premise that, due to its lack of effectiveness, centralism is no longer an option. It was pointed out that the pandemic set the tone for what will be the problems of the 21st century and that these could not be addressed with institutional instruments of the 19th century.

Faced with a unitary model as centralized as that of his country, Marcelo Carrasco, president of ANCORE, Chile, advocated for regional governments with the capacity to react and that can adapt to changing conditions. The Conversations finally bet on a big change in the distribution of public money and it was said that it was an obsolete idea that central governments continue to control most of the budget.

The conversation between the Finnish Ann-Sofi Backgren and the Belgian Jean-Luc Vanraes brought to the table the need to re-speak the principle of subsidiarity, which means that a matter must be resolved by the authority, be it normative, political or economic that is closer to the issue to be resolved. And, it was said, the pandemic completely altered many of the approaches that had been made in the last 20 years in relation to a division of powers, in which the principle of subsidiarity was taken into account.

This dialogue between two Europeans was concluded with a great invitation to all regional organizations, such as ARE or ORU Fogar, to continue the debate on the principle of subsidiarity. Thus, it opted for a continuous dialogue on what level of government each competence should be in to be more efficient, be it local, regional, central or European level.





WORK WITH THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

General consensus regarding the need for the central state and regions to work in harmony. From his extensive experience, the founding president of the International Association of Francophone Regions, Thierry Cornillet, insisted a lot in this regard: "central state and regions should not confront each other, but work together" . In this sense, he denounced the danger that the central region-state dialectic does not respond to a debate on governance, but is used as a political tool.

Based on this consensus, the issue is to determine which should be the area in which the central state and regions work. It is a general opinion that the power of the central state should be in control, evaluation, planning and redistribution. Central governments must set the general lines and objectives.

These general objectives, however, can only be adapted to the territory by regional governments. To ensure effective transposition, regional governments must be strong. The central state itself should guarantee this strength so that the regions could fulfill this function, at the same time that it should design measures adapted to the territory to guarantee the effectiveness of the transposition. Thierry Cornillet expressed it very clearly: "The central State should facilitate, promote and guarantee the best management of the regions . " In a very similar sense, the president of CONGOPE and prefect of the Imbabura region, Pablo Jurado, expressed himself when He stated that the best development strategy for central governments."





General agreement also that the management of public services should be in the hands of those who are closest to the territory and citizens, that is, the regions. They also spoke of the need for the budget to be in the hands of those who provide these public services.

Camilo Lloreda placed great emphasis on the need for decentralization processes to be carried out from the territory to the central level, in a multisectoral and multilevel manner. Thus, it showed its distrust in decentralization processes only promoted by central governments.

President Sekkal finally called for joint work between the central state and the regions to "prepare for future crises."





GOVERNMENT CLOSEST TO THE PEOPLE TO IMPROVE DEMOCRACY

Several speakers agreed that governance in which regions count means a revitalization of democracy. Everyone considered that handing over power to the territory was a way to bring it closer to the citizens.

In the first of the conversations, Thierry Cornillet stated that, as well as decentralizing the administration, it was necessary to "decentralize power". Thus, he explained that when public trust in institutions is at a low level, " the adherence and identification of the population to their respective region is very positive . "

Adama Diouf, who, in addition to being president of the Association of Departments of Senegal, is president of the Department of Kaffrine, rightly pointed out that, in his country, if the decentralization process advanced, it was because of the adherence of people to regional and local governments. He revealed that for this reason the decentralization process in Senegal expands, year after year, with reforms and more resources in favor of territorial governments. Thus, he expressed his conviction that regional governments will assume many more responsibilities in Senegal's future.

The president of Bélier raised the need to have regional governments, considering the limitations and distance of the central government from the population. Various participants also expressed their conviction that the regions are the ideal scale for experiences of participatory democracy that come to complete representative democracy. Ann-Sofi Backgren and Jean-Luc Vanraes agreed on the importance of involving citizens in decision-making.





THE NEED TO REACH THE ENTIRE TERRITORY

These Conversations, an exercise in dialogue on future governance, highlighted the difficulties that - with the arrival of COVID-19 - public action reached all corners of the territory. Time and again the paradox was found that COVID-19 had reached the most inhospitable places, while it was very difficult for public health authorities to reach, due to lack of human and financial resources.

In the dialogues, in any case, ORU Fogar's commitment to territorial balance, the defense of the rural world and the need for development to reach all citizens, no matter where they live, was reiterated. In a complex world, with increasing diversity, close institutions are needed, it was said. Adama Diouf stated that, in this sense, the proximity of regional governments brings "quality to governance."

AEBR Vice President Jean-Luc Vanraes raised the need for a new perception of politics, based on giving importance to "place": "We had a very nation-oriented policy, but the pandemic forces us to change. It is necessary to think in more place-based terms, which is where management -basically- is in the hands of local and regional governments".

All the participants defended the need to have good infrastructure to reach all corners of the territory. There was talk of road infrastructure, but also digital. Marcelo Carrasco stressed that only good infrastructure guaranteed "good access to public services . " In this same sense, Camilo Lloreda denounced the lack of connectivity in many areas of RAP Pacífico.





Naturally, all the speakers highlighted that access to primary care and hospitals during the pandemic has been the most evident proof of the difficulties of this connectivity. And, thus, all stressed the need to prioritize in the immediate future the rapid access to health centers.

In the last of the conversations, the governor of Ayacucho, Carlos Rúa, affirmed that the regions were key for the health resources to reach the territory. " Our territory is so extensive," he said, " that reaching rural areas is very difficult. The main challenge of the pandemic has been to get health resources to remote populations. Without the participation of the regions, the central government would have bypassed groups that are sensitive to the virus ". At the time the Conversation was held, their concern was already about the great difficulty in getting vaccines to all territories and social sectors. Carlos Rúa explained how expensive a vaccination process was in a territory as extensive and lacking in good communications, such as Peru. Thus, he demanded an "equitable" distribution of the vaccines.





REGIONS AND THE GLOBAL AGENDA

In the seven Conversations held, there were various references to the Global Agenda, with special mention to the SDGs and the Paris Agreement to combat Climate Change. President Sekkal was very conclusive in this regard when he argued that "global agendas will only advance if the regions are in place."

African participants, concerned about Climate Change, argued that the regions are the ones in the best position to promote territorial plans that address this challenge. The president of Bélier, for example, called for an expansion of decentralization, which allows addressing climate change with a better allocation of resources for the regions.

With a more generic approach, Ann-Sofi Backgren invited the regions to star in a great social reboot and in which more sustainable ways of life prevail. He argued that the pandemic had turned people's values around, opening up the possibility of a more environmentally friendly development.

One of the most obvious conclusions was, in any case, that the best way to ward off the dangers of globalization is to have very strong local and regional powers.





THE REGIONS AND THE ECONOMIC REACTIVATION

In all the conversations there was great concern about the economic consequences of the pandemic. All the participants agreed that in the post-COVID-19 scenario, the regions will play a fundamental role, especially in serving the most vulnerable populations.

Great agreement among many of the Latin American participants to defend the need, in the post-pandemic scenario, of public-private collaboration. In the conversation between the counselor Marcelo Carrasco of Chile and the Argentine deputy governor of the Province of Córdoba there was a great agreement on the "prevailing" need , it was said, to create collaboration agreements with private agents and the establishment of strategic alliances between the sector public and private. "In the end, " said Calvo , "what it is about is to provide effective solutions to citizens."

Who was even clearer in this regard was Pablo Jurado from CONGOPE who said that if the priority was to create jobs, private companies should be counted unequivocally, since it is the latter that can produce more opportunities. "The good ruler - he stressed - is not the one who has the most workers in the State, but the one who promotes the most initiatives to generate wealth and opportunities."



MORE POWER TO THE REGIONS

After the most general considerations, all the participants in the Conversations supported the need to strengthen the power of the regions. They defended a real decentralization, in which there are transfers of competences and economic resources.

As has become customary in all ORU Fogar meetings, the greatest impact was made, however, in relation to the allocation of financial resources to the regions. In one way or another, many of the speakers pointed out that regional governments need more means, because they are the ones that face the problems most directly.

The president of Bélier, for example, pointed out the paradox that implies that the regions do not have sufficient means, but that, during the pandemic, the State reminded them that " hospitals are the responsibility of the regions . " He was not the only one who denounced the under-financing of regional governments.

The deputy governor of Córdoba, Manuel Calvo, beyond showing himself in favor of delegating more powers to the regions and provinces, pointed out that the regional world should demand better financing because "it is to us who reach the greatest requirements of citizens . " Thus, he defended the need for a great redistribution of public spending. " The decentralization process - he said - can only be carried out with the allocation of the corresponding resources, which allow the efficient application of public policies in intermediate and local governments."





Marcelo Carrasco from ANCORE agreed on the importance of fiscal and administrative decentralization. "In Chile, until a real decentralization process is reached, the situation is going to be complex," he pointed out, referring to the country's cyclical crises .

The diagnosis of Camilo Lloreda from Colombia and the president of CONGOPE, Pablo Jurado, was similar. Lloreda explained that, in his case, many functions had been transferred to the territorial level, but with limited resources. The president of CONGOPE stressed that "in order to decentralize a competition, it must be accompanied by economic resources ." Many pointed out the danger of frustration and discredit of decentralization when powers are transferred, but not resources, something that was found to be happening in different geographies.

THE 20 STRENGTH IDEAS

REGIONS HAVE PLAYED AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN MANAGING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

THE PANDEMIC HAS RAISED LATENT DEFICITS, THE MOST OBVIOUS, THE HEALTH, THE MOST SERIOUS, THE SOCIAL.

THIS CRISIS SHOWS US THAT PRIORITY MUST BE GIVEN TO: THE HEALTH AND EDUCATIONAL FIELDS AND PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO FOOD SAFETY.

FACED WITH THE COMPLEXITY OF THE GLOBAL WORLD, IN WHICH CENTRALISM IS NO LONGER AN OPTION, WE NEED REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS WITH THE CAPACITY TO REACT AND THAT CAN ADAPT TO CHANGING CONDITIONS.

FROM A POLICY THAT MOVED ONLY WITHIN THE PARAMETERS OF THE 'NATION' WE MUST MOVE TO A POLICY IN WHICH THE "PLACE" COUNTS. IN THIS CHANGE, REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS PLAY A FUNDAMENTAL ROLE.

CENTRAL STATE AND REGIONS SHOULD NOT CONFRONT EACH OTHER, BUT WORK TOGETHER.

THE CENTRAL STATE SHOULD FACILITATE, PROMOTE AND GUARANTEE THE BEST MANAGEMENT OF THE REGIONS. THE BEST DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IS ONE IN WHICH CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS CREATE ALLIANCES WITH THEIR TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENTS.



IT IS AN OUTDATED APPROACH THAT CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS CONTINUE TO CONTROL MOST OF THE PUBLIC BUDGET. THOSE WHO MUST CONTROL THE LARGEST PART OF THE BUDGET ARE THOSE WHO PROVIDE THE SERVICES AND THOSE WHO ARE CLOSEST TO THE CITIZENS.

THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY MUST BE PUT BACK ON THE TABLE, WHICH MEANS THAT A MATTER MUST BE RESOLVED BY THE AUTHORITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO THE ISSUE TO BE RESOLVED.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS MUST SET THE GENERAL LINES AND OBJECTIVES. THESE GENERAL OBJECTIVES SHOULD BE ADAPTED TO THE TERRITORY BY REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS. TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE TRANSPOSITION, REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS MUST BE STRONG.

DECENTRALIZATION PROCESSES MUST HAVE THE IMPULSE OF THE TERRITORY AND CANNOT ONLY BE PROCESSES PROMOTED BY CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS.

A GOVERNANCE IN WHICH THE REGIONS COUNT SUPPOSES A REVITALIZATION OF DEMOCRACY, BECAUSE HANDING OVER POWER TO THE TERRITORY IS A WAY OF BRINGING IT CLOSER TO THE CITIZENS. THE REGIONS, AS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, ARE THE APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENT TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY.

GLOBAL AGENDAS WILL ONLY ADVANCE IF THE REGIONS ARE IN PLACE. THESE ARE THE ONES IN THE BEST POSITION TO PROMOTE TERRITORIAL PLANS THAT ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE.

THE BEST WAY TO WARD OFF THE DANGERS OF GLOBALIZATION IS TO HAVE VERY STRONG LOCAL AND REGIONAL POWERS.

IN THE POST-COVID-19 SCENARIO, THE REGIONS WILL PLAY A FUNDAMENTAL ROLE IN SERVING THE MOST VULNERABLE POPULATIONS.

PUBLIC-PRIVATECOLLABORATIONISESSENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY AFTERTHE PANDEMIC.

REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS MUST PROMOTE COMMUNICATION AND DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURES, SO THAT ALL TERRITORIES AND ALL CITIZENS HAVE ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES.

DECENTRALIZATION IS ONLY REAL WHEN THERE IS AN ADEQUATE TRANSFER OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES.

THE TRANSFER OF POWERS WITHOUT RESOURCES GENERATES FRUSTRATION AND THE DISCREDIT OF DECENTRALIZATION.

RECORDINGS OF CONVERSATIONS



PUBLISHED NEWS

http://www.regionsunies-fogar.org/en/oru-in-action/projects/550-positive-conversation

July 14, 2021 The "Positive Conversations" arrive to Latin America

http://www.regionsunies-fogar.org/en/media-files/news/633-the-positive-conversations-arrive-to-latinamerica)

February 12, 2021 Conversations to rethink the principle of subsidiarity

http://www.regionsunies-fogar.org/en/media-files/news/598-conversations-to-rethink-the-principle-of-subsidiarity

November 16, 2020

According to the Regional Presidents of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, Decentralization is Essential

http://www.regionsunies-fogar.org/en/media-files/news/576-according-to-the-regional-presidents-of-senegal-andcote-d-ivoire-decentralization-is-essential

July 17, 2020 "Positive Conversations" Governance Post-COVID-19

http://www.regionsunies-fogar.org/en/media-files/news/553-positive-conversations-governance-post-covid-19







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