

Opening address, ERB Board Meeting, Växjö 15. Feb.2024 by outgoing ERB president, Mikael Benzon

Dear friends and colleagues, dear members of the ERB secretariats:

I am very pleased to open this meeting of our ERB Board. Our meeting is taking place in a context of serious change and upheaval - and yet: the activities and results of our collaborative work are the very reason to feel encouraged and hopeful.

At every meeting in our regional forums, I am encouraged by the level of activity, industry and collaboration that we see demonstrated.

On so many levels, we see municipalities, citizens groups, enterprises working methodically and positively on the challenges that confront us. In the fields of climate adaptation, social and geographical cohesion, preparing our workforce for new fields of enterprise, dealing with environmental problems or encouraging our younger generations to participate in political work: these are examples of democratic societies engaging constructively to face the demands that confront us.

In all these fields and more our regions are mobilizing our societies to meet the challenges around us, indeed, making our societies resilient in the very face of unprecedented challenges.

Our forum is an example of this positive spirit of international cooperation, and if I may be allowed: an expression of the aspirations of the founders of the European common project.

European Parliament election 2024

We are now entering a new season. Spring is around the corner.

And our regions will have a unique chance to bring the issues that occupy us to public attention. I am referring, of course, to the coming European elections in June.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to consult with our new president of the ERB, Mr. Rene Jaramillo, and we agreed, that our members need to use this

opportunity, to engage with our respective national candidates, to bring our particular regional concerns and interests to their, and our voters' attention.

Focus areas and ERB Agenda 2030

This political season is also an opportunity to reflect on the aims and contents of our 2030 Agenda.

In addition to our established themes, I would propose 3 additional focus points:

Firstly: the need to work for greater integration and cohesion between urban, metropolitan and rural areas,

And secondly: an attention to the challenges that confront our agricultural producers – particularly the smaller farming enterprises- in their efforts to adapt to the challenges and demands of climate and environmental adaptation, and how to secure a stable generation transition of their businesses.

Thirdly: On an internal level, I would also encourage our forum to reflect on how we can improve our communication with the public, how can we better inform our citizens, our political colleagues and the media, about the work and results that the ERB are demonstrating.

I look forward to all of your contributions towards the renewal of our 2030 Agenda.

In my opinion the ERB is the very example of adaptation and transition that our societies are yearning for and hoping for.

With these words, let us open the board meeting