

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION**

Doctoral School of Administrative Sciences



PhD. THESIS SUMMARY

**THE ROLE OF ADISORY BODIES IN THE EUROPEAN MULTI-LEVEL
ADMINISTRATION**

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR

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I. INTRODUCTION

The doctoral thesis entitled *The role of advisory bodies in the European multi-level administration* is a component part of the field of *Administrative Sciences*. The research paper addresses, both theoretically and in practice, the impact that advisory bodies at European Union level have, referring mainly to the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, the advisory committees assisting the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union, on the process of developing European Union policies and legislation.

This approach has been carried out through a thorough analysis, which has not been done so far, on the extremely laborious and necessary work for the European institutions, carried out by the advisory committees, in accordance with their areas of competence and adopted both after mandatory and voluntary consultation by the three central European institutions, as well as by own initiative of the two committees.

Analysis of documents prepared by committees, whether we refer to opinions adopted, reports, studies, own initiatives or events carried out by the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, was followed for a period of approximately 10 years (2012-2021). Moreover, the research aimed to shed light on the contributions of other instruments and mechanisms, part of the European multi-level administration, used by European institutions to improve decision-making and streamline public policies, complementary tools to the activities of advisory committees, which are the core of research: the comitology procedure and the work of the comitology committees, the agencies of the European Union and their contribution, in the context of the need to reduce the overload of the European Commission's work, but also the evolution of the consultation procedure carried out by the European Commission, in relation to the concepts of participatory democracy, in the context of the current moment (including from the perspective of the Conference on the Future of Europe), characterized by the desire for evolution of the European Union, rebuilding and regaining trust from its citizens.

The feasibility of such a project is supported by the fact that the role of advisory bodies has not been sufficiently outlined by researchers interested in how the European Union works, in the context of the multi-level European administration, despite laborious and highly sought-after work, which characterizes the European Union's advisory committees.

Acting as a link between the decision-making institutions of the European Union and the civil society, the interactions between the European advisory bodies and the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament, through the use of mechanisms specific to multi-level governance, play a key-role in building the European Union, which is constantly evolving and adjusting, in order to meet the proposed objectives and improve the European decision-making process, in accordance with the specific needs of citizens throughout the Union.

Thus, the main purpose of the research paper is outlined, and it is represented by an in-depth analysis, over a period of approximately 10 years (2012-2021), of the activities carried out by the main advisory bodies at European Union level (the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee), both in terms of contributions resulting from their mandatory consultation by the European institutions, but also following voluntary consultation and own-initiative contributions, to illustrate their impact on the European decision-making process, on European Union law, with the constant thought that, finally, all these complex developments and interactions carried out at European level, directly influence the lives of European citizens and their rapprochement with the European Union.

The thesis is an original research, which intervenes in the absence of researchers' studies interested in the functioning of the European Union and the interactions that take shape in the context of the existing multi-level administrative system, from the perspective of the contribution of the advisory committees and the complementary instruments of European governance. The two advisory committees at EU level are real forums for European citizens, as well as real bridges between the European institutions and the direct beneficiaries of European public policies, without which, promoting the values and objectives of the European Union and outlining its future, could not exist.

The performance of this thorough analysis was determined by the *main objective of the research paper, which aims to highlight the role of advisory bodies at European level, mainly the role of the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, the advisory committees assisting the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council, in the development and adoption of European Union legislation and public policies, through the impact of contributions resulting from the activities specific to the committees (elaboration of opinions, reports, studies and other documents relevant to the decision-*

making process), ensuring the representation of the interests of European citizens before the institutions of the European Union, influencing the final form of legislation adopted at European level, improving decision-making and ensuring effective management of the impact of public policies in the Member States of the Union, at all levels.

The thematic area of the thesis includes interdisciplinary notions within management, public administration, European administration, legislation, etc.

The European Union has a single institutional framework, which has evolved continuously since the establishment of the first European institution, at the same time as the decision-making system, at European level. Interinstitutional cooperation within the European Union is not limited to the main decision-making institutions at the heart of the European administration, but is complemented by interventions and contributions from all other institutions and bodies at European level, but also by the participation of social and economic institutions and organizations within the Member States, as well as with the vision of civil society, on its most important needs.

The position of the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, in the constellation formed within the European multi-level administration, has always been controversial, in particular because they remained the rank of advisory bodies at EU level, despite their repeated insistence, in order to obtain the title of *European institutions*. In terms of their status, the advisory role of the committees is strengthened through the Treaty of Lisbon, which offers the same prerogatives to the European institutions at central level (the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission), on committee consultation activities. There are also similarities between advisory committees, including the term of office of committee members, which is 5 years, and their composition may not exceed 350 members. Responsibility for establishing and amending the composition of committees lies with the Council, which takes decisions in this regard. The exercise of the functions of the members of the advisory bodies shall also be carried out in complete independence and, of course, in the general interest of the Union.

Extended research on the role of the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, in the multi-level European administration, is an important project that we considered extremely necessary, in particular because the purpose of these committees, which is characterized by laborious activity and which provides real and

concrete support to the institutions of the European Union, was not outlined through such a complex analysis, despite numerous debates¹ on this topic.

Discussions concerning the work of advisory committees are generally limited to bringing into question the *privileged position*² of committees with regard to access to draft European Union legislation, for which both the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee draw up opinions, either at the request of the European institutions at central level (mandatory/voluntary consultation), or in situations where it deems it appropriate, on their own initiative. From this point of view, despite considerable involvement from the two advisory bodies, in a variety of areas with major impact on European citizens and their lives, it has often been considered that European Union legislators do not take into account the opinions of committees so far as this should happen (*Hönnige, Panke, 2016*), which would lead to the conclusion that there is a rather limited awareness of the influence of the European Committee of the Regions and of the European Economic and Social Committee.

In view of these limiting assessments of the role of advisory bodies, this research is all the more relevant, from the perspective of extending the vision of the activities of the committees, which go beyond the presentation of the opinions drawn up before the European institutions. Relations between the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission have evolved over time, which is mainly highlighted, through cooperation agreements concluded between committees and European institutions and between the two advisory bodies.

The impact of the work of the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, in particular on the final forms of the proposed legislative acts, can be assessed using several instruments, including: *annual activity reports*, prepared by each of the advisory bodies and found on their websites, often together with a summary associated with each report; *European Commission reports* on monitoring the opinions of advisory committees; *the impact assessment sheets* of the opinions adopted by the two bodies, on the European

¹ Hönnige, C., Panke, D., (2016) *Is anybody listening? The Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee and their quest for awareness*, Journal of European Public Policy, 23:4, 624-642, DOI: [10.1080/13501763.2015.1066839](https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2015.1066839).

² Becton, C.L., (2018), "*Exercising advisory functions*" *Interpretations of democracy in the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee*, LUND Univeristy, <https://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordId=8949928&fileId=8949941>.

institutions, as well as through *other documents and legislative acts of the European Union*, which contain references either to the work of the committees or to their opinions (e.g. European Parliament Resolutions).

Synthesizing the work of the two advisory bodies, including opinions drawn up at the express request of the European institutions, in situations where their consultation is mandatory, according to the Treaties, or it has intervened voluntarily, own-initiative opinions, specialist studies and opinions expressed by committees, especially in the last 10 years, is a laborious activity and, at the same time, difficult, especially due to the fact that the usual information resources (books, specialized articles, studies) are somewhat limited, in terms of research.

However, such a challenge did not prevent research into the work of advisory bodies, as the desire to highlight the major role that the two committees play, in the European multi-level administration, despite their status as advisory bodies, and not as institutions of the European Union, prevailed. The role of advisory committees is relevant, including from the perspective of creating a well-structured, inclusive and even innovative framework, adapted to the real needs of citizens and current issues that directly affect them, by using a variety of tools and mechanisms specific to multi-level governance, ensuring, permanently, that the voice of the citizens of the European Union is presented to the European institutions, and the development and implementation of the Union's policies is carried out with the participation of all those interested in the future of Europe and the generations to come.

From this point of view, we can see the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee as two of the catalytic bodies from the perspective of involving citizens from all over the European Union, at all stages of the decision-making process. In this regard, adapting the way European policies are developed, as well as efforts towards unitary implementation in the Member States of the Union, are key-factors in shaping the future of Europe and its citizens. Moreover, we can say that both advisory committees support the involvement of all relevant actors, from the stage preceding the drafting of European Union legislation, demonstrating that streamlining the decision-making process is a complex process, which must go beyond traditional boundaries of action, leaving room for innovation in this area.

Raising awareness of the role of advisory bodies for the prosperity and sustainability of the European Union is essential, and this can only be achieved through a thorough analysis of all the elements that make up the work of the European Committee of the Regions and the

European Economic and Social Committee and the focus on the implementation of the innovative mechanisms used more and more by them. The aim is to achieve the European Union's goal of approaching its citizens and strengthening the trust placed by citizens, in the institutions that are part of the multi-level European administration.

II. OBJECTIVES, QUESTIONS, HYPOTHESES, PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The doctoral thesis aims to analyse popular concepts for researchers interested in how the European Union works and how decisions are developed and implemented at European level. *The main objective of the research* is to highlight the contributions of the advisory committees, from the perspective of the evolution of the European decision-making process, carried out through the analysis of the activity of the advisory bodies of the European Union, mainly the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, and highlighting their role as part of the complex European architecture, in the context of decision-making and policy-making, by the institutions of the European Union (European Commission, European Parliament, Council).

Also, together with the main objective, a series of *secondary objectives* are outlined, regarding the highlighting of the contributions of the advisory bodies, grouped in accordance with the chapters of the research paper:

- *Analysis of the European Union's multi-level administrative system and the interdependence of the European multi-level administration with the main rival of the concept, that of multi-level European governance, and*
- *Analysis of the emergence of the concept of multi-level governance, illustration of the relationship between govern and governance, and analysis of the mechanism from the perspective of the European Committee of the Regions, its implementation being one of the main objectives of the European Committee of the Regions – Chapter 2.*
- *Positioning of advisory bodies (the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee), in the constellation of actors interacting within the European multi-level administration and the impact of advisory committees on the*

development and implementation of European Union legislation (in the period 2012-2021) and

- *Analysis of the evolution of interactions between advisory bodies, as well as between them and the European institutions at central level – European Parliament, European Commission and Council – in particular in terms of cooperation agreements concluded between them, with a view to strengthen cooperation and streamline the European decision-making process – **Chapter 3.***
- *Analysis of the presence of complementary instruments of European governance, in order to improve the decision-making process, through specific mechanisms – comitology procedure, European Commission consultation procedure and its evolution, the impact of European Union agencies – illustrating the processes of cooperation and coordination taking place in the European multi-level administration, carried out both vertically and horizontally and even transversally, and*
- *Analysis of the latest developments in the consultation of citizens and European democracy in the age of modern societies, in particular in terms of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the most recent pan-European democratic exercise, which took place between April and May 2021 – **Chapter 4.***

To this end, a presentation of this constellation of European institutions and the interactions between them is necessary, in order to be able to analyse how the European Union is acting in order to achieve the proposed objectives. The paper also aims to clarify the notions of European multi-level administration and multi-level European governance, interdependent concepts, which can often be confused. ***The hypothesis from which research was started*** is that *the European Union operates on the basis of a multi-level European administration, where there is a complex constellation of state and non-state actors contributing to decision-making at European level, and the better represented are the needs and interests of European citizens to the institutions involved in the development and adoption of European legislation and public policies, the more efficient the decision-making process carried out at the level of the European Union is.*

Along with the main hypothesis, a series of *secondary hypotheses* are outlined:

- The extent by which contributions from the advisory committees, which assist the European institutions at central level (the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council) are consistently integrated into European Union legislation, determines the way that the decision-making process can benefit from adjustments to streamline the development and implementation of European legislation and public policies at all levels;
- The confidence of European citizens and their increasing involvement in European decision-making, is directly linked to the openness capacity of all actors in the European multi-level administration, in relation to its specific mechanisms and European governance, which contributes to promoting the values and objectives of the European Union, but also to bringing the European Union closer to its citizens;
- If the impact of the European Union advisory bodies (in particular the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee) is more present, and the relations between them and the European institutions are stronger, the more the multi-level administrative system of the European Union will evolve in a positive way, in line with emerging challenges and the need to strengthen the European Union's position on the international stage;
- Participatory democracy, sustainable development, innovation, the transitions that the European Union, as a whole, is going through, are dependent on the removal from the classical vision of the functioning of the European Union and its administrative system, allowing the focus on creating synergies with all partners involved in the decision-making process, so that, the real needs of citizens are better represented at European level, while promoting the values of European construction, which is constantly changing and adjusting, in order to create a Union as close as possible to its citizens.

Awareness of interventions by other complementary governance instruments, existing at EU level, is vital, along with the results of recent developments, such as the Conference on the Future of Europe, the double green and digital transition, as well as the other ambitious goals of the European Union for the next 30 years, which lead the European Union to innovate, in order to allow, through new tools and mechanisms, to all citizens, an active involvement in shaping a common future and respecting the principle of leaving no one behind.

These processes are currently materializing, which is an opportunity to discuss how the European Union has developed, how it is currently operating, as well as the changes it takes responsibility for moving through in order to build a sustainable and inclusive future. These two characteristics seem to be key-words for the close perspective of the European Union, and the role of European citizens is more than being observers and researchers, and rather to step intentionally into a future that is ready to offer endless possibilities for development.

From the point of view of the methodology used for the elaboration of the doctoral thesis *The role of the advisory bodies in the European multi-level administration*, the research carried out is a *qualitative* one, seeking to explore and understand in-depth the complexity of the European Union's multi-level administration, the decision-making processes of the Union institutions, with the support of advisory bodies at European level, which have the capacity to influence the final form of public policies and legislation adopted at European Union level.

The research is part of the type of *empirical research*, based on direct observation of reality, using *thematic analysis and comparative analysis*, for the interpretation and processing of information collected through the study of documents relevant to the research objectives (European Union legislation, opinions prepared by advisory committees, reports, studies, documents relevant for the analysis of the administrative system of the European Union and its functioning). Research starts from theoretical concepts and models of European multi-level administration and multi-level European governance, verifies the theory of the implementation of governance mechanisms in European policy-making and contributes to the enrichment of the theory by highlighting the contributions that European advisory bodies (the European Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee European) bring to the legislative process, in terms of influencing the final form of legislative acts adopted by the institutions of the European Union. The approaches used are *inductive*, the theory is generated from the data collected, and the nature of the research is an *exploratory* one, the research philosophy being the *interpretivism*, the reality within the European Union, in terms of how it works, being observed subjectively.

The research methods used are: *historical method* (research and analysis of the European multi-level administration, of the European multi-level governance, the emergence and evolution of concepts, the current state of affairs, the development perspective); *theoretical research method* (observation, content analysis and thematic analysis of text, classification, ordering and systematization of information, data interpretation, etc.); *comparative method*

(analysis of the organization and functioning of the two advisory bodies – European Committee of the Regions and European Economic and Social Committee – to highlight the similarities and differences between them and demonstrate their role in the multi-level European administration, in the context of developing and adopting European policies and legislation, and the evolution of the European Union towards an efficient, sustainable and inclusive administration).

The analysis of the data and information collected is of a *systemic type*, the role of the advisory bodies at European level in the context of developing and adopting decisions/policies/European Union legislation involving the investigation of facts in their entirety and interdependence. In this context, the contribution of advisory bodies and their positioning in the European multi-level administration appear as a whole of elements, which are in an interconnection.

The European multi-level administration is examined as a functioning system that has stability, but at the same time as a constantly changing and evolving system. The time horizon dedicated to research falls into the cross-sectional type (transverse research), representing a study in which data were collected during doctoral research.

The information sources used to develop the research are::

- *Academic literature* (both national and international level);
- *Academic articles published in journals indexed in international databases*;
- *Legislative acts and documents* relevant for research, developed and adopted at European Union level;
- *Studies, publications, research and other documents* relevant for research, carried out by various bodies, institutions at European level;
- *Data, statistics, information* obtained from the online environment, including websites relevant to the achievement of the objectives of the doctoral thesis.

Thus, the research aims at a systematic and critical review of academic literature, but also of relevant documents of European bodies and institutions, in the field of European multi-level administration and, in particular, with regard to the process of drafting European decisions/policies/legislation, in the context of the constellation of state and non-state actors forming at all levels (subnational, national and European), with a focus on the contributions from

the advisory bodies involved in the process – the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

The purpose of the research is to carry out an in-depth analysis, over a period of approximately 10 years (2012-2021) of the activities carried out by the main advisory bodies at European Union level (the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee), both in terms of contributions resulting from their mandatory consultation by the European institutions, but also following voluntary consultation and own-initiative contributions, to illustrate their impact on the European decision-making process, on European Union law, with the constant thought that, finally, all these complex developments and interactions carried out at European level, directly influence the lives of European citizens and their rapprochement with the European Union.

The correlation of information leads to the idea that the European Union is at a defining moment to shape its future, in the context of pursuing the objectives of bringing Europe closer to its citizens and respecting the principle of leaving no one behind.

Streamlining the way the multi-level European administration works, as well as building a future where the focus is on sustainable and inclusive development, efficiency and participatory democracy, will only be possible in the context of capitalizing on the results obtained so far, which means raising awareness of the importance of the contributions made by the advisory bodies of the European Union, which have positioned European citizens and their views since their establishment as a core of concerns about the future of the European Union.

III. MOTIVATION, CHALLENGES AND TIMELINE OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

The doctoral thesis *The role of advisory bodies in the European multi-level administration* is mainly a challenge for a young researcher who, in her professional activity, is in a position to interact daily with the institutions of the European Union. For this reason, the institutional architecture of the European Union is becoming an increasingly interesting topic, along with the functioning of the Union. The current moment, sprinkled with many changes for both the European Union and the world, is a good one for highlighting the issues related to the multi-level European administration, interaction with the concept of multi-level European

governance, the role of all categories of actors (state and non-state) at all levels, and the role of interactions between them, but also of all categories of actors and the European institutions, in the processes of drafting and adopting decisions at European level, with an emphasis on the final form of European legislation.

The complexity of carrying out these mutual influences becomes all the more interesting as we have found, during the research, that there are very few analyses, research and documents reflecting the value of the activities and actions carried out by the two advisory bodies of the European institutions: the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. This is probably the biggest challenge for achieving the main goal of the doctoral thesis, in the alternative being the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has substantially interfered with the development of life, as we knew it until then and created a new normality, globally.

The doctoral thesis is current for the field in which it falls, that of administrative sciences, in terms of analysing how the European Union works and the constellations of actors on the European stage, but all the more so as we are in a context conducive to change, a change which, this time, The European Union seems to really want and sets in motion all existing or newly created mechanisms to achieve this. It is time when, based on awareness of the importance of man for society and, in our case, of European citizens for the sustainable development of the European Union, the European Union will be able to be reborn and, at the same time, to regain the trust of its citizens.

The importance of involving European citizens, from all age groups or areas, including the most vulnerable or disadvantaged, women and young people, in the decision-making process by the European institutions, has been preached for many years. The European Advisory Bodies (the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee) are concerned with bringing the European Union closer to its citizens through all the mechanisms available, thanks to the treaties on which the European Union was founded and operates, as well as through new mechanisms, developed throughout their experience, to support the desire of the European Union: a better future for its citizens and for the generations to come. Awareness of the role that advisory bodies have played since their inception until now is essential for progress.

The originality of the research paper comes primarily through contributions to existing research to this point, on the interactions taking place in the context of the European multi-level administration, in the light of the contributions of the European Union advisory bodies – the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee – to the influence of the final form of public legislation and policies developed and adopted by the European institutions, effectively managing the impact they have on the implementation process within the Member States, at all levels.

From this point of view, the laborious analysis carried out on the work of the advisory committees, over a period of approximately 10 years (2012-2021), can be considered a first for the chosen field of research, given that the impact of opinions and activities carried out by the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, have not been analysed by researchers, but can be observed almost exclusively independently, through the study of impact reports prepared by advisory bodies and available to citizens, for information.

Advisory committees at European level are most often presented in terms of analysing their privileged position, which is mainly characterized by the access of the committees to the draft legislative acts of the European Union. The research work goes beyond these limiting views and illustrates that the intervention of committees in the European decision-making process goes beyond their mandatory consultations by the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council, in accordance with the provisions of the Treaties underlying the functioning of the European Union, focusing on the direct impact of the committees' efforts to improve the legislative process and streamline public policies and European legislation, with a constant thought in mind, the goal of bringing the European Union closer to its citizens.

Capitalizing on the results that these two bodies bring before the European institutions and European citizens, is the only way to make room for the development and innovation and pooling of all society's resources. The desire to innovate and shape a new Europe has been manifested by the European institutions, and to take responsibility for a better, more sustainable and more inclusive future, depends on each of us. The current doctoral thesis, in this context, becomes obvious, especially from the point of view of fulfilling the duty to get involved in the future of the European Union, including through the research carried out, which is a starting point for the forthcoming research in the field of administrative science, focusing on the administration

of the European Union, but also on the implementation of multi-level governance mechanisms to streamline the European administrative system.

IV. THE STRUCTURE OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS, OWN CONTRIBUTION AND STEPS TO FOLLOW, IN ORDER TO CONTINUE THE RESEARCH

The doctoral thesis is structured as follows:

- Introduction;
- Objectives, questions, hypotheses, purpose and methodology of the research;
- Motivation, challenges and timeline of the doctoral thesis;
- The structure of the doctoral thesis, own contribution and steps to be followed in order to continue the research;
- Chapter I – Institutional architecture of the European administration;
- Chapter II – The concepts of European multi-level administration and multi-level European governance;
- Chapter III – The role of advisory bodies at European level;
- Chapter IV – Complementary instruments of European governance;
- Conclusions.

Chapter I has as main objective, the illustration of the specific way in which the European Union operates, from the point of view of its single institutional architecture, of the institutions of the European Union, highlighting the roles of all actors present on the European stage, but also the developments, over time, in this regard. The institutional reforms that have taken place at European level, the roles given to the institutions of the European Union, as a result of the reforms analysed, the way of making the decision-making process, are also analysed, as well as the interinstitutional interactions that occur in this context.

The European Union is currently a political and economic union of 27 sovereign Member States, a single partnership covering a large part of the European continent. The United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union in 2016 through a national referendum. Thus, the United Kingdom has ceased to be a member of the European Union since 2020.

According to art. 13 para. (1) of the Treaty on European Union³ - “*The Union has an institutional framework aimed at promoting its values, pursuing its objectives, supporting its interests, of its citizens and of the Member States, as well as ensuring the coherence, effectiveness and continuity of its policies and actions*”. The European Union is based on the six fundamental values: *respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities*⁴.

Para. (2) of Article 13 (TEU), determines which are the institutions of the European Union. Thus, the 7 institutions of the European Union (European Parliament, European Commission, European Council, Council of the European Union, Court of Justice of the European Union, European Central Bank, The European Court of Auditors) operate on the basis of clearly established principles: *the principle of autonomy of will, the principle of conferral of powers, the principle of institutional balance*⁵. The institutions of the European Union shall function in accordance with the powers expressly conferred by the Treaties, in accordance with the procedures, the conditions and objectives set for them and must work together to achieve the objectives and promote the values of the European Union and of the Member States. In addition to the institutions of the European Union, other specialized bodies are operating, advisory bodies (EESC – European Economic and Social Committee and CoR – European Committee of the Regions), interinstitutional bodies and decentralized agencies⁶.

The institutional reform at EU level, although it has solved only some of the existing problems at European level, has relied on resizing interinstitutional cooperation, redistributing skills, necessary institutional interdependencies, on multi-level collaboration and on amplifying the structured dialogue between the European Union and actors at all levels (local, regional, national, European).

³ *Treaty of the European Union*, (consolidated version, 2016), p.10, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF.

⁴ Calligaro, O., Coman, R., Foret, F., Heinderyckx, F., Kudria, T. & Perez-Seoane, A. (2016). *Values in the EU policies and discourse. A first assessment*. Les Cahiers du Cevipol, 3, 5-52. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-les-cahiers-du-cevipol-2016-3-page-5.htm>.

⁵ Fuerea, A., *The European Union Manual*, The Legal Universe Publishing, 2010, p. 84-85.

⁶ European Union, *Types of institutions and bodies*, [Tipuri de institutii, organisme si agentii UE | Uniunea Europeana \(europa.eu\)](http://Tipuri%20de%20institutii,%20organisme%20si%20agentii%20UE%20|%20Uniunea%20Europeana%20(europa.eu)).

Undoubtedly, it has been and it is necessary to remove traditional normative shortcomings from the institutional space, open up to the citizens of the European Union and involve them in the future of Europe, through an uninterrupted interactive dialogue with all stakeholders and policy beneficiaries, transparency and efficiency of policy-making activities, together with strengthening European structures.

The functionality of the European institutions has been improved, with the institutional reform carried out through the entry into force of the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon, which has allowed the redistribution of competences between the institutions of the European Union, institutional development and modernization, solidarity between European structures and mechanisms, aimed at enhancing cooperation on several levels, development opportunities and, in particular, on achieving the goal of creating a Union closer to its citizens.

The new paradigm of cooperation is based both on institutional transformation, which involves changing, adapting and strengthening the role of the European institutions, structuring agencies at European level and on technical progress, involvement of social actors, delegation of activities and decisions, use of experts and agencies for policy-making, strengthening partnerships in relevant areas of action, in order to achieve the objectives of the European Union and increase the effectiveness of the European decision-making system.

Organizations, institutions and all categories of structures at European level must regularly benefit from adjustments designed to help generate effective responses to current challenges, to develop coherent strategies, solid, all of which are part of a continuous process of improving the European Union⁷.

Chapter II has two main objectives:

- *analysis of the European Union's multi-level administrative system and the interdependence of the European multi-level administration with the main rival of the concept, that of multi-level European governance, as well as*
- *analysis of the emergence of the concept of multi-level governance, illustration of the relationship between govern and governance, as well as analysis of the mechanism from*

⁷ Alexandrescu, G., Popa, V., (2004), Possible European institutional architecture, National Defense University Publishing, ISBN 973-663-141-9, p. 25-43, https://cssas.unap.ro/ro/pdf_studii/posibile_arhitecturi_institutionale.pdf.

the perspective of the European Committee of the Regions, its implementation being one of the main objectives of the European Committee of the Regions.

The concept of European administration is based on the principles evoked in the constitutive treaties of the European Union: *a responsible and transparent administration, based on efficiency and effectiveness*⁸. The architecture of the European administration is particularly complex, being considered by authors such as **Peter Nedergaard** *a political hybrid between a national and international administration*⁹, an atypical concept that generates a lot of controversy, in particular because of the lack of clear and direct provisions on the concept of European administration, in the treaties underlying European construction.

In the absence of clear regulations on the constitutive treaties of the European Union and a European constitution, the European administration remains a concept that does not benefit from an exact definition, a concept still debated, but which goes to two main objectives, which can be drawn from both the constitutive treaties of the European Union and the acts of the institutions at national level of the Member States: *„creation and consolidation of the European institutions and optimization of their functioning, in accordance with the objectives and missions of the European Union and the national reform of the public administration in such a way that, in the absence of a model of the European administration, Member States will support each other in carrying out tasks deriving from the Treaties and will ensure that the obligations arising from the Treaties and acts of the institutions of the European Union are fulfilled*¹⁰”.

The provisions of the constitutive treaties of the European Union represent the legal basis of the European administration. From the Treaty on European Union, as well as from the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, we can extract the EU's administrative values, such as transparency, continuity and specificity, respect for the principles set out in the EU Treaties: *the principle of award, the principle of subsidiarity and the principle of proportionality* (Art.5 para. (1) TEU).

⁸TFEU art. 298, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0001.02/DOC_2&format=PDF.

⁹ Nedergaard, P., *European Union Administration: Legitimacy and Efficiency*, Boston, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2007, pp. 1-201, [European Union Administration: Legitimacy and Efficiency - Peter Nedergaard - Google Cărti](#).

¹⁰ Matei, A. and Matei, L., (2010), *European Administration. Normative Fundamentals and Systemic Models*, Working Paper, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1651782>.

However, the definition of the concept of European administrative law, as well as the concept of European administration, remains an open subject, especially in the absence of a European Constitution, context that would have been favourable to the clarifications on these two issues¹¹.

The European administration is almost as controversial as the European Union, on which there has always been debates about its organization and functioning. *Less than a state and more than an international organization*¹², the European Union is often seen as a *super-state*¹³ or even as the *United States of Europe*, due to the transfer of powers of the Member States to the institutions of the European Union, independent of them.

The European administration is based on key-elements such as the principles applicable to a responsible and transparent administration, consisting of institutions and structures of the European Union that respect the sovereignty of its Member States, the values and objectives of the European Union.

The European administration is composed of both specific European and specific national elements, which are intertwining, which influences both the decision-making process at European level, as well as the evolution of the European Union and its administrative system. The European Union has developed a multi-level political and administrative system, with many features, including:

- ✚ Division of tasks between national and supranational governance levels, which demonstrates the uniqueness of the EU administrative system;
- ✚ Logistics of the decision-making process at supranational level (through the procedure involving the European Commission, the Council and Parliament, acting as initiator and co-legislators);

¹¹ Hofmann, Herwig C.H., Gerard C. Rowe, and Alexander H. Türk, (2011), *General Principles Framing European Union Administrative Law, Administrative Law and Policy of the European Union*, Oxford Academic, pp. 143-221, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199286485.003.0007>.

¹² Hlavac, M., (2010), *Less than a State, More than an International Organization: The Sui Generis Nature of the European Union*, pp.1-16, SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1719308>.

¹³ Sbragia, A.M., (1992), *Euro-Politics, Institutions and Policy Making in the New European Community*, The Brookings Institution, p.2, The Brookings Institution, https://books.google.ro/books?hl=ro&lr=&id=-TOQayIwR1wC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&ots=HkSL_Tl6eP&sig=jAIWDeqXsmVSN4reR2fCiOsQpLg&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.

- ✚ Bureaucratic interactions that take place both vertically and horizontally, between political layers;
- ✚ The single institutional framework of the European Union – structures, bodies, European institutions, national and supranational actors involved in decision-making, are constantly evolving and adapting to the reality within the EU, to reflect unity in diversity, taking into consideration the specificities of all Member States (political, cultural, social, economic, etc.).

The European administrative system has been analysed by researchers, in the context of debates on the understanding of the European Union and the European administration, through two fundamental concepts: *multi-level governance* (Hooghe and Marks, Benz) and the *multi-level administrative system* (Egeberg, Trondal). Peter Nedergard views the EU administration as at the intersection of a national and an international administration, a *political hybrid*¹⁴.

Numerous authors (Wessels 1985, Nedergard 2008, Kassim and Menon 2004, Hoek 2005) dedicated their study to creating possible models of the European administration, in order to conceptualize and operationalize it. In Wessels' conception (1985b), 4 models of the European administration (*supranational bureaucracy, brokerage bureaucracy, secretarial bureaucracy, political bureaucracy*) are identified.

Peters (1997) and Page (1998) analyse the process of Europeanization, European integration and the transition to governance, as well as their impact on public policies. Nedergard (2008) reveals the functions that the European administration must include (*administrative function, technical expertise, programmer function, mediating function, crisis management function, implementation and control function, self-regulatory function*)¹⁵.

Relations between the European administration and national administrations are also described by terms such as *merger* (Wessels and Rometsch, 1995), *convergence* (Claisse and Meininger, 1995), *neo-institutionalism* (Hall and Taylor 1998), the new public administration or the new public management.

¹⁴ Nedergard, P. (2006), *European Union Administration: Legitimacy and Efficiency*, op.cit. pp. 1-15.

¹⁵ Matei A., Matei, L., (2011), *The Administrative System of the European Union – From Concept to Reality*, Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences, No. 33, pp. 170-196, SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1868148>.

Recent studies (2016-2017) have significantly focused on the development of *Europe with several speeds*¹⁶, a controversial topic among analysts and policy makers. The Conference on the Future of Europe (2022) prompted the European Commission to take on the obligation to *propose ways to ensure that citizens are given this greater role in developing EU policies*¹⁷.

According to the literature, researchers have identified two dimensions of the concept of multi-level public administration. The first of these, in the view of authors such as *Knill, Meyer-Sahling, Yesilkagit or Christensen and Laegreid*, is based on the analysis of the multi-level administration as *convergence on a common European model*¹⁸, focusing on the origins, administrative traditions and public management practices, and the second dimension, in the more recent view of authors such as *Hofmann and Turk*, presents the multi-level public administration as a system based on a network in which institutions at different levels of government work together, leading to the emergence of a new administrative order, new models and processes for integrating public administration, in meeting the objectives set by European policies. There are three key-features for the multi-level European administration: *institutional independence, integration and co-optation*¹⁹.

Analysing the doctrine regarding the notion of European administration, as well as the existing processes at the level of the Member States of the European Union, we are increasingly meeting the concept of a multi-level European governance system, a complex phenomenon with which it is in a relationship of interdependence and which is also controversial, according to authors such as *Hofmann and Turk (2006) or Nickel (2008)*.

The latter emphasizes the operations and processes in which both institutions such as the European committees (the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Committee of the Regions) or European agencies are involved, bodies which do not benefit from a clear and rigorous legal framework provided for in the constitutive treaties of the European

¹⁶ Sebe, M., (2019), *Multi-speed Europe/ A view from Romania*, Institute of European Democrats (IED), p.8, https://www.iedonline.eu/download/2019/IED_Article_Multispeed_MIHAI_SEBE_December_2019.pdf.

¹⁷ COM, (2022), *Conference on the Future of Europe, Putting vision into action*, COM 404 final, [communication 1.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/communication_1).

¹⁸ Olsen, J.P. (2003), *Towards a European administrative space?*, *Journal of European Public Policy* 10:, pp. 506–531, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1350176032000101244>.

¹⁹ Trondal, J., Bauer, M.W., (2015), op.cit. pag. 10.

Union, which makes the relationship between *those who control and those who are controlled somewhat confusing, tangled*²⁰.

Governance, concept and new reality, has been a means of salvation for many authors, even if it is in the process of being constituted, defined. *Pierre de Senarcles*, referring to this, appreciated that *governance translates the idea that state governments do not have a monopoly on legitimate power, that there are other institutions and actors that contribute to maintaining order, participating in economic and social regulation*²¹.

The concept of multi-level governance, created and defined by *G. Marks* as a system of *continuous negotiation between the government and various territorial levels*²², is fundamentally different from the intergovernmental approach (supporting the predominance of the national level over the subnational and supranational level), and is customized by some essential characteristics:

- Governance and govern should not be confused; to govern involves the exercise of power at the central level, respecting the hierarchy, so a traditional model, while governance, transcending the boundaries of this classical model, it turns into a new mechanism for exercising power;
- Exercising power through governance mechanisms requires reporting to these specific processes and activities, both from a governmental and civic point of view, of society;
- By overcoming traditional borders, governance introduces new principles and mechanisms specific to the exercise of power, integrating elements such as negotiation, consensus, voting, in the decision-making process and their implementation.
- Institutions at supranational level are not in a superiority ratio with those at national/regional/local level.

²⁰ Nickel, R., (2008), *Law, Democracy and Solidarity in a Post-national Union*, Chapter *Participatory governance and European administrative law: New legal benchmarks for the new European public order*, p. 134, ISBN9780203892558.

²¹ Dușe, D.M., Câmpean, I.M., (2019), *School Governance in the European Cultural Area*, p. 326, <https://sciendo.com/pdf/10.2478/cplbu-2020-0038>.

²² Marks, G., (1993), *Structural Policy and Multi-Level Governance in the EC*, in Alan W. Cafruny and Glenda Rosenthal (Eds.), *The State of the European Community*, vol. 2, The Maastricht Debates and Beyond Bavender, pp. 392-403, <https://garymarks.web.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13018/2016/09/marks-Structural-Policy-and-Multilevel-Governance.pdf>.

- The non-existence of classical hierarchy is a specific feature of the decision-making process, by integrating the mechanisms of negotiation, consensus and vote (majority), in this process.
- The authority is dispersed to all levels of competence, from the highest (supranational level) to the local level, where decisions affecting citizens are truly and directly implemented. This dispersion of government authority (central level) both vertically, to actors located at another territorial level (subnational and supranational), and horizontally, to non-state actors, autonomous or quasi-autonomous agencies, is the essence of multi-level governance.

Chapter III is dedicated to the in-depth analysis of the extremely laborious activity sought by the institutions at central European level – European Parliament, European Commission and Council – activities carried out by the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. Thus, two objectives are outlined:

- *positioning of advisory bodies (the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee), in the constellation of actors interacting within the European multi-level administration and the impact of advisory committees on the development and implementation of European Union legislation (in the period 2012-2021) and*
- *analysis of the evolution of interactions between advisory bodies, as well as between them and the European institutions at central level – European Parliament, The European Commission and the – Council, in particular in terms of cooperation agreements concluded between them, in order to strengthen cooperation and streamline the European decision-making process.*

On the European stage, representing the interests of European citizens, interest groups, as well as European regions and cities, is carried out through the advisory bodies of the European Union – *the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee*, in accordance with the founding treaties of the European Union. They maintain cooperative relations between the European institutions at central level (the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council) and European citizens at all levels, pursuing the

general interest of the Union, as well as increased involvement of citizens in the development and adoption of decisions at EU level.

The European Committee of the Regions, an advisory body, was set up in 1994 out of a desire to promote the bottom-up approach (bottom-up), in the decision-making process at European level, by involving representatives of local and regional authorities, in the European multi-level administration and promoting their interests at European level.

The role of the European Committee of the Regions is mainly to represent European regions and cities, to support cooperation between them and the European institutions, as well as to ensure that the needs and positions of European citizens at local and regional level are heard and contribute directly to the process of drafting EU law. The creation of the European Committee of the Regions promotes the Union's rapprochement with its citizens and full respect for the principle of transparency, with regard to decisions taken at European level.

Representing an institutional forum dedicated to promoting a European Union closer to its citizens, through participatory democracy and strengthening the role of civil society organizations, *the European Economic and Social Committee* plays a particularly important role in the decision-making process at European level. Its opinions, binding or issued on its own initiative, shall be addressed to the European institutions, in order to corroborate the policies and legislation of the European Union with the economic, social and civic circumstances at Member State level²³.

The European Economic and Social Committee is also designed as a forum for consultation, based on the idea that, in general, civil society organizations and networks act as intermediaries between the European institutions with a decision-making role and the citizens of the Member States. Through consultations, dialogue and consensus, all relevant sectors at organized civil society level have the opportunity to become actively and effectively involved in the process of developing EU policies and legislation, which must reflect the needs of EU citizens and promote their visibility.

The impact that the opinions of the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee have on the final form of legislative acts adopted by the institutions of the European Union, can be assessed through various instruments such as: *the*

²³ European Economic and Social Committee, *About*, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/about>.

annual impact reports of the advisory committees, published on their websites, the European Commission's reports on the monitoring of the opinions of the advisory committees, fact sheets assessing the impact of opinions on documents of the European institutions, etc.. Thus, there is a need to raise awareness of the key-role of advisory bodies in the European decision-making process, in particular in the context of the European Union's desire to move closer to its citizens and provide them with as many tools as possible to be directly involved in the development and implementation of Union policies.

The impact of the opinions of the Committee of the Regions cannot be measured from the period immediately following their adoption, but over a longer period of time, allowing the legislative process to move sufficiently forward, in order to be able to draw the necessary conclusions in relation to the actions and activities of the institutions of the European Union, which reflect, more or less, the influence of the Committee of the Regions on the legislative process.

During this period, *impact reports* are prepared, using resources such as²⁴:

- ✚ European Commission reports on monitoring CoR opinions;
- ✚ Fact sheets assessing the impact of CoR opinions on EU institutions' documents;
- ✚ Monitoring the impact of the media on CoR opinions;
- ✚ An annual average of the events organized by the CoR, in relation to areas that are the topics of opinions, which contribute to increasing the impact of CoR opinions and resolutions on the decision-making process.

Thus, we note that the impact of the Committee of the Regions on the decision-making process cannot be measured exclusively by integrating its recommendations and opinions on legislative proposals. Equally important is the ability of the advisory committee to represent the interests of local and regional authorities before the institutions of the European Union, the ways in which the Committee succeeds in presenting the needs of regions and cities in different parts of Europe, characterized by the most diverse specificities, in order to integrate the conclusions contributing to the drafting of opinions, in the final form of European legislation²⁵.

²⁴ European Committee of the Regions, *Opinions*, <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Pages/Opinions.aspx>.

²⁵ Wassenberg, B., (2020), *op.cit.*, p. 168.

The work of the Committee of the Regions, whether we refer to opinions drawn up following mandatory consultations by the European institutions or on their own initiative, has been constantly growing, the working methods of the committee being adapted, during its existence and in accordance with the competences acquired in more and more areas. Thus, since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the opinions of the Committee of the Regions have been introduced in the form of amendments, the advantage being their direct incorporation by co-legislators²⁶.

The Committee of the Regions shall provide, for consultation, to all citizens interested in the work and impact of the opinions of the advisory body, a number of documents on its website (available for the period 2010-2021²⁷). Thus, through infographics, the annual impact reports prepared by the Committee of the Regions, executive summaries of the Committee's impact reports and documents on the European Commission's monitoring of the Committee of the Regions' opinions, we can observe and conclude on the impact that the Committee has on decision-making, at European level and on European Union law.

According to art. 69 of the *Rules of Procedure of the Committee of the Regions*²⁸, the Secretary-General is responsible for submitting a report to the Plenary Assembly, which summarizes the impact of the opinions of the Committee of the Regions, annually, in the main areas of his political activity.

Criteria on which the reports are made:

- ✚ *The specific proposals of the CoR adopted in the final legislation;*
- ✚ *CoR policy recommendations considered in proposed legislation or legislative procedures;*
- ✚ *CoR positions with major contribution to political debates;*
- ✚ *References to CoR positions in other EU documents (e.g. European Parliament resolutions).*

²⁶ Pazos-Vidal, S., (2019). *Subsidiarity and EU Multilevel Governance: Actors, Networks and Agendas*. DOI:10.4324/9780429453373.

²⁷ European Committee of the Regions, Opinions, <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Pages/Opinions.aspx>.

²⁸ CoR, (2021), *Regulament de Procedură*, art. 69 – Secretarul General, p. 21, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021Q1230\(01\)&from=RO](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021Q1230(01)&from=RO).

During the period covered by this research, namely 2012-2021, the European Committee of the Regions has drawn up a variety of opinions, including numerous opinions on legislative proposals.

The CoR's work is highlighted through the annual reports and summaries prepared by the advisory body, including resolutions on annual priorities, based on the work program presented annually, by the European Commission and whose significant impact is highlighted by the Commission's reports on the monitoring of the Committee's opinions, as well as through planning sheets, structuring and monitoring the CoR's political activities in relation to the opinions, which analyse their political impact in relation to European Union documents and institutions (referring to the European Parliament, Council and European Commission), in constant contact with the European Committee of the Regions.

Thus, during the period under review (2012-2021), the executive summaries of the impact reports, prepared annually by the European Committee of the Regions analyse a total of *over 500 opinions, recommendations and resolutions with significant impact*, as follows:

- ✚ *Year 2012 – 48 opinions;***
- ✚ *Year 2013 – 48 opinions and 7 resolutions with significant impact;***
- ✚ *Year 2014 – 53 opinions;***
- ✚ *Year 2015 – 44 opinions;***
- ✚ *Year 2016 – 45 opinions;***
- ✚ *Year 2017 – 71 opinions;***
- ✚ *Year 2018 – 78 opinions;***
- ✚ *Year 2019 – 49 opinions;***
- ✚ *Year 2020 – 48 opinions, 9 resolutions;***
- ✚ *Year 2021 – 69 documents (13 recommendations, 36 opinions based on EU documents, 11 own-initiative opinions, 9 resolutions)*²⁹.**

²⁹ CoR, (2012), *Annual Impact Report*, <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/pages/opinions.aspx#0>.

The idea that it was necessary to set up a representative body for economic and social operators, including both employers and workers themselves, has been debated several times, including in the period before the signing of the Treaties of Rome (1957). The development of the idea of a body representing these categories of citizens was thus based on the model of France (1920-1930), as well as on the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), created on 16 April 1948, following the Marshall Plan and the Conference on European Economic Cooperation.

The Committee set up is a practical response to the desire for European cooperation and integration, as well as a step forward for relevant stakeholders, who called for the involvement of civil society in European decision-making. The Economic and Social Committee was set up, despite opposition from Germany, for example, which believed that such a body was not necessary and could not prove effective³⁰.

The Treaty of Rome therefore contains a number of provisions dedicated to the establishment of the Economic and Social Committee. Chapter 3 dedicates *Art. 193-198* to the advisory body, which, according to the Treaty, is composed of representatives of the various categories of economic and social activities, which mainly involves representatives of: producers, farmers, carriers, workers, dealers, craftsmen, professional occupations, as well as representatives of the general public.

The EESC issues between *160-190 opinions*, annually, 70% of which are drawn up annually following requests from the European institutions, 21% are own-initiative opinions/information reports, 9% are exploratory opinions³¹.

The work of the Economic and Social Committee plays a particularly important role in the decision-making process at European level, with the advisory body carrying out its activities as an institutional forum, a formal framework for socio-occupational interest groups, in order to formulate their opinions and vision, on important areas and topics on the agenda of the European Union.

³⁰ EESC, 1950 *The birth of the Economic and Social Committee*, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/CivilSocietyActionForTomorrowsEurope/history>.

³¹ EESC, (2023), *About the EESC*, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/CivilSocietyActionForTomorrowsEurope/about>.

The opinions drawn up and presented by the EESC are forwarded to all European institutions at central level (European Commission, European Parliament and Council) and are published in the Official Journal of the European Union. The Economic and Social Committee issues approximately *170 advisory opinions and opinions, of which approximately 15% are own-initiative opinions or opinions*. The Committee has also extended its tasks in recent years, becoming a forum for the internal market and real support for achieving the European Union's objectives of moving closer to its citizens, by fulfilling the role of event organizer to contribute to this goal.

During the period under review (2013-2021), the annual impact reports prepared annually by the European Economic and Social Committee shall examine a total of *more than 700 opinions, reports, recommendations and resolutions with significant impact*, as follows:

- ✚ ***Year 2013 – 200 opinions and reports;***
- ✚ ***Year 2014 – 159 opinions and reports;***
- ✚ ***Year 2015 – 117 opinions and reports;***
- ✚ ***Year 2016 – 151 opinions and reports;***
- ✚ ***Year 2017 – 155 opinions and reports;***
- ✚ ***Year 2018 – 215 opinions and reports;***
- ✚ ***Year 2019 – 127 opinions and reports;***
- ✚ ***Year 2020 – 131 opinions and reports;***
- ✚ ***Year 2021 – 200 opinions and reports.***

Chapter IV has as main objectives:

- *analysis of the presence of complementary instruments of European governance, in order to improve the decision-making process, through specific mechanisms – comitology procedure, European Commission consultation procedure and their evolution, the impact of European Union agencies – illustrating the processes of cooperation and coordination taking place in the European multi-level administration, carried out both vertically and horizontally and even transversally, and*
- *analysis of the latest developments in the consultation of citizens and European democracy in the age of modern societies, in particular in terms of the Conference on the Future of*

Europe, the most recent pan-European democratic exercise, which took place between April and May 2021.

Also, in view of the current moment, the results of the *Conference on the Future of Europe* are being discussed, to emphasize the importance of involving citizens in the process of drafting European Union legislation and policies, from the citizen's perspective as engine of evolution, sustainable development and innovation for a better future for them and for future generations.

Streamlining the European decision-making process as a whole, from the development of European Union policies to their implementation, including negotiation and compromise processes, is a permanent concern for the European institutions. The extension of the European Union's powers, the need to develop new policies in specific, complex, rapidly evolving areas, have led to the overburdening of the European institutions, in particular the European Commission.

In this regard, it is necessary to use all the tools available to improve the response to the current problems of European citizens:

- the controversial comitology committees, recognized in terms of their legality, 10 years after the establishment of the first committees, which are still operating today, the comitology procedure being used for the development of secondary legislation for implementation, in a unitary way, on the territory of the European Union;
- EU agencies, which are equally controversial because of discussions about their legitimacy, but which have developed significantly in recent decades, providing expertise and technical analysis relevant to specific issues, supporting the European Commission and helping to maintain relations with national authorities. The EU Agency Network (EUAN) focuses on strengthening interinstitutional cooperation, at all levels and pooling all available resources, with a view to building a modern and sustainable Europe.

According to the *latest European Commission Report (2021)*³², from 1 January to 31 December 2021:

- a total of 353 *comitology committees operated*;
- a total of 646 *meetings and 1476 written procedures* took place;
- 1782 *opinions* were issued by the comitology committees;
- 1592 *implementing acts* were adopted following a comitology committee procedure.
- Following the exercise of the European Parliament's and the Council's right of scrutiny, *the EP adopted 10 resolutions*³³ *and the Council opposed a draft Commission implementing act*.
- The Board of Appeal held 6 *meetings* in 2021 to discuss 12 *draft implementing acts, adopting all 12 projects*, following the closure of the proceedings.
- 68 *measures* have been taken in accordance with the regulatory procedure with scrutiny, with the European Parliament opposing the adoption of draft measures 4 times.

The total number of committees³⁴ ***as well as the number of opinions issued increased compared to previous years***. The COVID-19 pandemic influenced the work of the committees, in terms of limiting the organization of physical meetings, most of them being organized at a distance, but functioning normally, in terms of the specific process of the committees.

The phenomenon of the European Union's agency has developed a lot in recent decades, ***despite the lack of their explicit regulation in the treaties underlying the European Union***, which does not prevent the increase in the number of agencies and the powers they display. There are currently many gaps and debates on the legitimacy of European Union agencies, their competences, and how European governance is influenced by the work of Community agencies, in many policy areas.

³² COM, (2022), *Raport al Comisiei către Parlamentul European și Consiliu privind activitatea comitetelor în anul 2021*, (COM/2022/443 final).

³³ The list does not include the European Parliament's Resolution on the adequate protection of personal data by the United Kingdom (2021/2594 (RSP)), by which it „, opposed the two draft implementing acts in question, but without explicitly substantiating its decision, on Article 11 of the Committee Procedure Regulation.

³⁴ 346 committees, according to the Comitology Register, <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/comitology-register/screen/committees?lang=en>.

The agencies of the European Union can be defined in terms of *specific characteristics*:

- ✓ EU agencies are bodies governed by European public law;
- ✓ The agencies operate throughout the European Union;
- ✓ The agencies have their own legal personality, being distinct from the EU institutions;
- ✓ The agencies perform specific tasks in many EU policy areas;
- ✓ The agencies may adopt acts of / without binding legal character;
- ✓ The agencies enjoy a certain degree of administrative and even financial autonomy (there are agencies that have become financially autonomous since 2021 - ELA, EPPO³⁵).

Consultation of various experts from outside the European institutions, as well as several relevant interest groups and actors, in order to gain a broader view of the European Union's areas of competence and to improve the European Commission's legislative initiatives, is an old tradition in the European Union.

The European Commission's strategies for consulting different categories of actors, from outside decision-making institutions at European level, have undergone different developments in terms of the terminology used, during the various stages of European integration and considering the evolution and changes in the field of the policy objectives pursued. Thus, according to academic literature³⁶, three names used by the European Commission to illustrate the role offered by the institution as legislative initiator are known, categories of actors relevant to the decision-making process: *period 1960-1970 – Terminology used by the European Commission – Consultation*; *period 1980-1990 – Terminology used by the European Commission - Partnership*; *period 1990-2000 – Terminology used by the European Commission – Participation*.

Relations between the European Union and civil society can now be analysed in line with the priorities promoted through *the new Strategic Agenda for the European Union*³⁷ (2019-2024), including the *protection of European citizens and their freedoms*. Closely related to this is

³⁵ European Court of Auditors, (2021), *Annual Report on EU agencies for the financial year 2021*, https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/AGENCIES_2021/AGENCIES_2021_EN.pdf.

³⁶ Quittkat, C., & Finke, B. (2008). *The EU Commission consultation regime*. In B. Kohler-Koch, D. d. Bièvre, & W. Maloney (Eds.), *Opening EU-governance to civil society: gains and challenges* (pp. 183-222). Mannheim: Universität Mannheim, Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung (MZES), p. 184, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-195380>.

³⁷ Consiliul European, (2019), *O nouă agenda strategică 2019-2024*, <https://www.consiliium.europa.eu/media/39921/a-new-strategic-agenda-2019-2024-ro.pdf>.

the promotion of European interests and the values of the European Union, globally. The European Commission's priorities for the same period relate, inter alia, to focusing efforts on a European Union with a strengthened economy, in order to support the evolution of its citizens, a stronger European Union, on the international stage, with the promotion and observance of principles such as *equality, tolerance and social fairness, transparency and integrity*.

European democracy and the strengthening of democratic processes are also the European Commission's priorities for the future period, a complex process which requires both improved cooperation with the European Parliament, as well as with the national institutions (national parliaments, mainly), and at the end, the emphasis is on strengthening relations with the citizens of the European Union, in order to shape the future of the European Union³⁸.

*The Conference on the Future of Europe*³⁹, which ended on 9 May 2022, is one of the latest mechanisms for consulting the citizens of the European Union, an innovation in the category of debates available to citizens and aimed at rebuilding a Europe as close as possible to its citizens, an inclusive Europe and oriented to the remodel of the common future. The voice of citizens can reach the European institutions through various democratic mechanisms such as initiatives by the institutions of the European Union, including advisory bodies (CoR and EESC), through European agencies and bodies, through debates, the organization of thematic conferences, opinion polls, focus groups, dialogue with civil society organizations at all levels, as well as with interest groups and networks of actors forming in the constellation of the European Union. Of course, innovations in the field of consultation will always be researched, as the relationship between civil society and the European Union must be seen as any relationship between two people, which must be both maintained and improved, from both perspectives, to evolve, be more efficient and lead to increasingly tangible results for citizens.

A European democracy, which is largely based on the vision and initiatives of opinion leaders and elite personalities in specific areas of competence of the European Union, cannot bring Europe closer to its citizens. European democracy must be based on governance mechanisms that reflect the inclusion and basic principles of traditional democracy, namely *governance by people*,

³⁸ European Union, *European Union priorities 2019-2024*, https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities_en.

³⁹ COM, (2023), *Conference on the Future of Europe*, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/conference-future-europe_en.

not for people, which would deviate considerably from the objectives of the European Union for its future and that of its citizens, making efforts not to leave anyone behind.

The European Union itself is in a process of raising awareness of the importance of its citizens for the future it wants. Thus, wanting to become an important partner, globally, the European Union has an urgent need to bring European citizens closer together and regain confidence, in order to evolve in the proposed direction. Being in a vulnerable period, in which it faced far too rapid challenges even for an economic and political union of 27 states (the COVID-19 pandemic, the war between Ukraine and Russia, the digital and green transition), the European Union is trying to recover from all points of view and assure its citizens that it occupies the first place in the hierarchy of this family.

In view of these issues, and mainly the Conference on the Future of Europe, future research could follow the actions that the European institutions (mainly the European Commission, The European Parliament and the Council) will undertake them, following the results presented in the Final Report of the Conference on the Future of Europe⁴⁰ and the commitments made by the European Commission, depending on the topics defined on the European multilingual platform, for the future of the European Union. Also, given that the two European Advisory Committees (the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee) were directly involved, In organizing the Conference, research could follow the evolution of the implementation of contributions from European citizens, by the European institutions at central level, with the support and interventions of the advisory bodies in the European multi-level administration.

⁴⁰ Conferința privind Viitorul Europei, (2022), *Platforma digitală multilingvă a Conferinței privind viitorul Europei Raport final*, Kantar Public, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/conference-on-the-future-of-europe/#Report>.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The research paper focused on highlighting the role of advisory bodies at EU level and raising awareness of the impact that both the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee have on, in terms of the valuable contributions they make to the European Union Law, in the context of the European decision-making process, as well as on the functioning of the European multi-level administration but also in the context of using multi-level governance mechanisms.

The analysis of the institutional architecture of the European Union was a starting point in discovering how the European Union currently works. The institutions of the European Union, as regulated by the constituent treaties (*the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*), reveal a single structure of the administration of the European Union, a multi-level European administration, as appointed by most researchers.

The European Union administration is fascinating, combining both European and national elements, a variety of state and non-state actors, interacting at all levels, to respond as quickly and, at the same time, as effectively as possible to the problems facing the European Union and its citizens throughout its territory. The complex links and networks that are formed between the European Union, through the European institutions and specialized bodies and other actors involved in decision-making, either at European, national and even subnational level, highlight a single constellation responsible for achieving the European Union's goal of getting as close as possible to its citizens and, at the same time, not to leave anyone behind.

The essence of achieving this major goal is both to streamline cooperation between all relevant actors, but also to use and adapt all existing mechanisms at all levels. The single institutional framework of the European Union, which has emerged since the establishment of the first European institution (the European Parliament), constantly evolving and adjusting the instruments at its disposal, provides a favorable framework for innovation and the creation of synergies between all partners involved in the decision-making process, so as to promote the further development of the European multi-level administration, constantly at the heart of the concerns, the real needs of the citizens, along with the promotion of the values and objectives of the European Union.

The European Union has generated a lot of controversy and debate that have gone from the ambiguity of the concept of a single European project and developed through the analysis carried out on the background of the multi-political and administrative system existing at European level, as well as in terms of its intertwining with the political and administrative systems of the Member States of the European Union and the increasing involvement of the various categories of actors (organizations and specialized bodies, national and subnational authorities, the network of European Union agencies and civil society itself) in the process of drafting European legislation.

Throughout this constellation of powers, which we currently find at EU level, there are also two bodies with advisory functions, *The European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee*, which assist the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council, using mechanisms specific to multi-level governance and directly influencing European Union Law. *Highlighting the role of advisory committees was the main objective of the research*, with a focus on the in-depth analysis of the opinions prepared by them, in the most important areas of interest to citizens, especially over the last decade, as well as on the activities carried out by the two indispensable discussion forums for European citizens.

Both the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, which are composed of representatives of the regional and local authorities, respectively from representatives of civil society and economic organizations, offer European citizens the opportunity *to get directly involved in the European decision-making process and to contribute to its efficiency* and to *strengthen the cooperation* of the European institutions with relevant actors, at all levels.

Carrying out this extensive research on the impact of the two advisory committees on the decision-making process, with a significant influence on European legislation, is extremely necessary, especially in the context in which, the discussions on the work of the committees are mainly aimed at drawing up opinions by them, in accordance with the provisions of the Treaties underlying the functioning of the European Union and presenting the opinions of the committees, following the mandatory consultations in the areas provided for in the Treaties before the European institutions. These actions, referring to the drafting of opinions, at the request of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council, in areas where consultation of the European Committee of the Regions or the European Economic and Social Committee is

mandatory, shall give rise to restrictive positions and assessments in terms of the activities of the committees.

Advisory bodies are constantly involved in the process of drawing up European policies, including by adopting own-initiative opinions, in situations where they consider that they are taking a position is relevant, the presentation of the visions of European citizens being likely to directly influence the legislative process of the European Union.

The European Committee of the Regions carries out many activities and actions, intervening in several stages of the European Union's legislative process. In particular, the committees organized at the level of the European Committee of the Regions draw up opinions on European legislative proposals, which are voted on and adopted by the members of the Committee. This research examines, over a period of approximately 10 years (2012-2021), the most important contributions that the committee's opinions have made, the most important areas for the European Union and its citizens (e.g. areas where consultation of the committee by the European institutions is mandatory – *economic, social, territorial cohesion, structural funds, European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, Employment, Social Affairs, Education, Youth, Vocational Training, Culture and Sport, Environment, Energy and Climate Change, Transport, trans-European networks and public health*).

During this period, we note that the advisory body has drawn up *more than 500 opinions, recommendations and resolutions with a significant impact on European decision-making*, according to the executive summaries of the impact reports prepared annually, by the European Committee of the Regions. Also, according to the data analysed, it is found that on average *around 200 opinions are drawn up and adopted during a term of office of the Committee of the Regions, developed both in the context of mandatory consultation of the Committee and on its own initiative*. Going further, in view of the role of the advisory committee, its role in working as closely and efficiently as possible with the European institutions (European Parliament, European Commission and Council) is highlighted, with the European Economic and Social Committee, as well as with national, local and regional self-employed persons, these activities being likely to promote political debates outside their premises as well, in the regions and cities of the European Union, as close as possible to the citizens.

Moreover, in the event that the European Committee of the Regions finds that the principle of subsidiarity has been infringed, it may even refer the matter to the Court of Justice of the European Union by virtue of acquiring that right, following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon (art. 8, Protocol no. 2, annexed to the Treaty⁴¹). In the context of the research, this situation is described, in the context of the Committee adopting the *Resolution on the Proposal to amend the Regulation on common provisions to support structural reforms*, rejecting the Commission's position on changing the rules of the regional funds and supporting Member States' structural reforms, through resources from EU cohesion policy – ***is the first time the CoR has threatened to bring a case before the Court of Justice of the European Union, if the legislation is adopted in breach of the principle of subsidiarity.***

Consultation of the European Economic and Social Committee takes place, as in the case of the European Committee of the Regions, both compulsory, in the cases provided for in the Treaty and voluntary, where deemed necessary. The Committee is to be consulted by the Commission and the Council in areas clearly specified in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the decision of the European institutions being taken exclusively after consultation of the body in areas such as: *agriculture; free movement of persons and services; transport; harmonization of indirect taxation; approximation of internal market legislation; employment; social policy, education, training, youth; public health; consumer protection; trans-European networks; industry; economic, social and territorial cohesion; research and technological and spatial development; environment.*

In addition to these areas, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council have the opportunity to consult the Committee on any matter, when they consider it appropriate. On average, we find that the advisory body issues *more than 150 documents and advisory opinions annually, and about 15% of opinions are adopted on its own initiative.*

Over time, the position of the advisory committees, which, despite their insistence, have not benefited from the status of European institutions, has been considered to be somewhat privileged, but only from the perspective of access to draft legislative acts of the European Union. However, the major impact that the two advisory bodies have on European citizens and on their

⁴¹ TFEU, (2008), – *Protocols – Protocol (no. 2) regarding the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality*, art. 8, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:12008M/PRO/02:RO:HTML>.

lives has ultimately not been promoted to the same extent, leading to the idea that there is a very limited degree of awareness of the influence of the work of the committees, in the context of the European multi-level administration and the conduct of the European decision-making process.

In order to highlight the particularly important role that both the European Committee of the Regions, and the European Economic and Social Committee play in the European administration multi-level and on the final form of European Union law, we considered it necessary to move away from the overview of the committees, outlined on the mandatory provisions of the European Union Treaties.

The relationship between the two committees, which perform advisory functions and the European institutions at central level, which they assist, has constantly evolved, as we have illustrated during the research. Intensified relations are based on the conclusion of bilateral cooperation agreements with all institutions whose work is supported by the advisory bodies (European Parliament, European Commission, Council), but also between the two committees.

These cooperation agreements have always been based on strengthening existing interactions, streamlining the decision-making process, promoting the objectives, values and interests of the European Union, but also on the increasing involvement of local and regional authorities, civil society and their organizations in the development of European legislation. The inclusion of the territorial dimension in the decision-making process has been a major objective for the committees, which has been achieved mainly through their concentrated efforts over time.

Also, from the perspective of multi-level governance, the role of the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee is equally important, as all their work is constantly aimed at the use and adjustment of multi-level governance mechanisms in the context of the development and implementation of European policies. Multi-level governance is a relevant concept in terms of the functioning of the European Union, the distribution of power and involves several levels of government at all stages of the European decision-making process.

Through the analysis of the concepts of European multi-level administration and multi-level governance, research aims to shed light on the fact that the two notions are not excluded, but represent two complex and complementary phenomena. Moreover, I considered it useful to point out that governance is one of the main objectives of the European Committee of the Regions, and according to the Committee's White Paper, on multi-level governance, this is a key-element for

European integration. It can also be described as a dynamic process, characterized by respect for the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and proximity, cooperation and loyalty, both between different levels of government, but also between the different categories of actors involved in the development and implementation of European policies.

The way the European Union, the European administration and the development of European governance work continues to fascinate us. Moreover, at these crucial times for its future, the European Union, together with its Member States, demonstrates the courage needed for reform and development. The appetite for change must not be seen exclusively in terms of amending the constituent treaties, but rather by pooling existing resources, of all actors who can have an important say in the decisions of the European institutions, from the highest level to citizens who truly feel the effects of implementing policies designed to solve society's problems.

By analyzing the specialized works, the research in the field of European public administration, of the studies and specialized articles, as well as European Union and other documents underlying the research work, it was desired to find out the answers to the role that advisory bodies (the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee) play in the European Union's policy-making process.

Analyzing the existing information, we found that there is not much research dedicated to these two advisory bodies, which, in our opinion, have demonstrated a huge added value in the evolution of the European administration. Thus, we wanted an in-depth analysis of the work of the two advisory bodies, going even to specific examples of the contributions of the various areas in which they had a say.

We believe that the work and desire to involve the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, together with the comitology committees and more recently, of the agencies that have developed at European level, are fundamental for the development of the European multi-level administration and European governance. Of course, without wishing to exacerbate the position of advisory bodies in general, or to reduce, diminish the role of other institutions at European level, in particular co-legislators (European Parliament, Council) and the institution acting as a legislative initiative (European Commission), relations between committees can be considerably improved.

This is vital, especially in the context of currently witnessing rapid technological developments, which promote the use of innovative, digital mechanisms that are accessible to all, so that cooperation and co-optation can be streamlined. Both the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee are formed by European citizens, citizens of the Member States.

The Committee of the Regions is a strong voice of the subnational authorities (local and regional) from all over the European Union, who are most entitled to formulate opinions and their vision on legislation that directly impacts them. The mission of the Committee of the Regions is also in the spirit of bringing the European Union and its institutions closer to the citizens. The actions of the Committee of the Regions reflect the values and interests of the European Union, as well as the use of multi-level governance mechanisms.

On the other hand, the European Economic and Social Committee, also having advisory functions, assisting the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council, bring together European citizens, representatives of civil society organizations (cultural, social, economic, professional), as well as trade unionists and employers from various fields of society, being their voice on the European stage. The mission of the European Economic and Social Committee is to strengthen European democracy, playing a key role in the effectiveness of European decision-making.

In light of the missions of the two advisory bodies, we conclude that they have been offering, since their establishment (*European Economic and Social Committee – 1957, the European Committee of the Regions – 1994*), the opportunity for citizens of the European Union, from all levels of the Member States, as well as from different sectors of society, to be actively, consciously, consistently involved in the decision-making process, at the level of the European Union.

The Conference on the Future of Europe (2022), the most recent pan-European democratic exercise carried out, through the conclusions presented in the Final Report of the Conference, it has eased the desire of citizens to be more present in the processes carried out for drafting legislation and documents that will have consequences for improving their lives. At present, the idea of the Union closer to its citizens can be seen from another perspective: *the desire of citizens to come closer to the European Union*.

Thus, I consider that, at present, with the results of the activities of the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, as the main advisory bodies, with a direct impact on the decision-making process and European Union law, it is time to capitalize on their efforts and move towards pooling all the resources that both institutions, organizations, networks of actors, as well as the citizens themselves, can achieve it, having in mind the common good and a better future for the generations to come.

The results of the research, in view of illustrating the contributions of the advisory committees in all their areas of competence, according to the treaties of the European Union, confirm the hypothesis from which the research was started: that *the European Union operates on the basis of a multi-level European administration, in which there is a complex constellation of state and non-state actors contributing to decision-making at European level, and the better represented the needs and interests of European citizens to the institutions involved in the development and adoption of European legislation and public policies, the more efficient the decision-making process carried out at the level of the European Union. Secondary hypotheses were also validated through the research paper.*

The main objective of the research paper, which was to highlight the role of advisory bodies at European level, mainly the role of the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, Advisory Committees assisting the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council in drawing up and adopting European Union and public policy legislation, through the impact of contributions resulting from the activities specific to the committees (drafting opinions, opinions, reports, studies and other documents relevant to the decision-making process), ensuring the representation of the interests of European citizens before the institutions of the European Union, influencing the final form of legislation adopted at European level, improving the decision-making process and ensuring effective management of the impact of public policies in the Member States of the Union, at all levels, has been carried out in the context of research.

The secondary objectives were met during the research, through the chapters dedicated to these objectives, grouped according to the scenario provided in the section dedicated to the research objectives.

The way the European Union works is unique, complex and evolving, which is both an extraordinary advantage for the European Union to stand out globally as a force, in a world

dominated by uncertainties and challenges that are advancing rapidly that cannot always be predicted. Global power exchanges are likely to generate geopolitical tensions that will lead the European Union to demonstrate both its unity and strength in order to counterbalance emerging tensions. Also, in the context of technological developments, the European Union will have to demonstrate that it can keep up with this process, becoming a leader in the field, having the necessary resources to evolve.

The European Union is once again at a crossroads, close to celebrating more than 70 years of existence, thanks to the founding father, Robert Schumann, who, in its 1950 declaration, it proposed the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community. The European Union is not perfect, neither its Member States nor its citizens throughout its territory.

Researchers are analyzing the European Union from multiple perspectives. This paper summarized some of the most well-known expressions they identified to describe the EU and how it works, which remain subject to controversy even today: *political and economic union of its Member States, a supranational political and economic community, a super-state, close to an international organization, which includes elements specific to intergovernmentalism, but also to the federal model, a multi-level administrative political system* and other such visions of those interested in discovering what the European Union really represents and what the model of successful organization and functioning is.

First of all, in our opinion, the European Union is a large family, which encompasses all the citizens of its Member States, a home of all. A home for young people, for the elderly, for migrants, for the disadvantaged, for men, women and children, for vulnerable people, for any category in which their people were divided. Like a child, the European Union has learned to walk, talk, act on its own and be aware.

In recent years, along with existing challenges such as climate change, the need to protect the environment, the transitions in the midst of which are (digitization, climate neutrality, energy transition), the circular economy, actions to ensure sustainability, emerging challenges have been added, such as BREXIT, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war between Ukraine and Russia or China's desire to assert itself. They affect not only the European Union, but the whole world, of which it is part. The 6 founding states have become 27 more united states than ever to defend their values and ideals that underpin the European Union, as well as the rights and freedoms of citizens, with the aim of rebuilding a peaceful, inclusive Europe that gives confidence to its citizens to

become actively involved in the future of the European Union, and that this involvement should not be echoed.

The European Union cannot exist in the absence of its citizens. The members of this family are more eager and prepared than ever to pool all the resources and expertise needed to innovate, to demonstrate that only through cooperation, coordination and an integrated approach, future generations will benefit from a better life. Multi-level European governance offers endless opportunities for the revitalization of European democracy, through the increased involvement of all relevant state and non-state actors at national, subnational and supranational levels, with a view to developing policies and actions for the benefit of European citizens, with the help of European citizens.

Today, all actors on the great stage of the European Union are vital for its functioning and for the future of Europe. European Union institutions, advisory bodies, European Union agencies, comitology committees, European citizens and their networks, need the European Union to support and provide infrastructure for participation, an effective common strategy, to reflect the importance that cooperation between actors has in the constellation formed by them.

In order for these goals to be achieved, citizens need to be informed about how they can participate in decision-making in the European Union. An important first step in increasing the visibility of the tools that can be used for participation and involvement was the Conference on the Future of Europe. Thanks to the positive results that stood out through the Final Report of the Conference, new tools have emerged, such as the development of a *permanent digital platform*, an online hub to host citizens' debates about their needs and policies to support accountability for these needs, reaching all citizens of the Union, regardless of where they come from, their age and the degree of involvement they have had so far.

The future prospects of the European Union have now brought back the reform of the European Union's treaties, which aims, inter alia, at, granting the right of legislative initiative to the European Parliament (change requested by the European Parliament itself), extending the powers of the European Union or renouncing the vote unanimously, in certain key areas. From this point of view and with the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe presented, we believe that, if this appetite for change materializes, the future of advisory bodies can be significantly influenced. Thus, one of the topics we consider relevant on the agenda of treaty reform is the granting of the state of institutions, the two European advisory committees – the European

Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. The contributions of these advisory bodies, through the laborious and highly sought-after activities of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council, are arguments in favour of this change. The position of the advisory committees in the European Multi-Level Administration was one of the objectives of the committees, which constantly campaigned for the status of European Union institutions, despite the fact that this has not been considered so far.

In order for this ambitious goal to materialize, the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee will continue their efforts to strengthen their relations with the European institutions, what could be achieved, including by adjusting cooperation agreements between them, enabling better interaction and more present committee intervention on the European stage and in the process of drafting European public legislation and policies, and finally, a greater impact on the European multi-level administrative system. The involvement of committees in the topics on the European Commission's annual agenda is currently insufficient, although through research, I have noticed that it has evolved, the procedure for informing committees about the institution's agenda, which has a monopoly on legislative initiatives and executive powers in certain areas, is currently more effective. Given the European Parliament's desire to propose legislative initiatives, this may be an option that can be considered even for advisory committees, according to their areas of competence, which would bring additional and necessary recognition to the bodies which, at the moment, have only the role of assisting the three European institutions.

In addition, in order to promote the objectives and results achieved by the advisory committees, they could turn their attention even more to young people in the European Union. Currently, the committees offer the possibility to young graduates of university study programs, to carry out internships, remunerated, for a period of several months. In the context in which the work of the committees is important for European decision-making both together and separately, we consider that it would be useful for them to offer internships or volunteers, together, held for a period of 1 year (6 months in the CoR, 6 months in the EESC), so that young people have a clearer view of the tasks of the committees, the specific activities and the resulting contributions. Moreover, in the context in which the European institutions, for example the European Parliament, currently offer the same facilities for traineeships, cooperation agreements between committees and it, could also include an internship period in the two advisory bodies, having regard to their

proximity and close cooperation between the European institutions and the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

In addition, taking the example of the Conference on the Future of Europe, which created, for the first time, an online platform open to all citizens of the European Union, in order to present their views on the specific needs and actions they wish to be integrated into the European Union agenda, this exercise demonstrating real success, advisory committees could cooperate to ensure the continuity of such a platform, in particular due to the involvement of committees in the organization of the Conference, having, at this time, the necessary expertise for such a hub for citizens.

The relationship between the European Union and its citizens will evolve towards a healthier, more present relationship, under certain essential conditions, such as a reformed democratic infrastructure, with a view to integrating representative deliberative processes into the institutional constellation of the European Union, in order to overcome obstacles that have jeopardized the dialogue between the European Union and its citizens: lack of confidence in the European institutional architecture, limited access for citizens to decision-making processes, and limited results in terms of the effectiveness of policies implemented by Member States. The recent challenges, the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe, open a new path for the European Union to reinvent itself, both through cooperation between its institutions, as well as between its institutions and European citizens.

The transfer of power that needs to be made to relevant actors, at all levels, must not pose a danger to the functioning of the Union, but rather a new model of governance, to address the complex problems of society and bring together innovative visions for the future of the European Union.

We believe that the future of the European Union must contain integrated, inclusive actions and approaches that promote the interests and values that underpin the European Union, globally, so that the European Union strengthens its position as a leader and vital partner for the international community. The main priorities of the European Union must focus on respecting human rights and freedoms, protecting its citizens and the environment in which they live, moving forward, with commitment and responsibility on a greener, fairer, more inclusive, safer path for its citizens and the generations that will follow them.

During the journey to which the European Union embarks, together with its inhabitants, through the research carried out, we wanted to remember that only through cooperation, by strengthening relations between the European Union and those who have contributed to its creation, people across the Union, become its citizens, the European Union will be able to achieve its ambitious goals.

The European Union, in the vision of a young researcher, is a union of its citizens. A family, a home for all those who choose to live every day on its territory and get involved, along with the beautiful constellation at European level, to build a better world for all its citizens and for those who will follow them.

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