

# Report

## Reclaim Europe Conference



On 22 and 23 May, the “Reclaim Europe” conference organized by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung took place in Covilha, Portugal in order to discuss the future of European democracy. Over the two-day conference, our project colleague at REGIOPARL Martín Rodríguez Alberdi participated in two seminars to provide an overview of the work at the European Democracy Lab and our research project.

The future of the European Union (EU) is at stake. The rise of nationalist parties aiming to regain national sovereignty and the enduring aftermath of the economic crisis has left the Union wobbling. Accepting this premise, we Europeans have to look forward and find solutions to our challenges. On May 22, in a panel composed of Vítor Lima (Democracia e Dívida), Susana Coroado (Transparency International Portugal) and Martín Rodríguez Alberdi (REGIOPARL), possible solutions to Europe’s most pressing problems were discussed. Solving the structural flaws of Europe’s institutions could be a good first step. The complex legislative procedure, in which the European Parliament shares legislative power with the Council of the European Union, slows down the efficiency of the decision-making process. Therefore, finding a new institutional design that allows implementing ambitious policies at a European level should be at the forefront of any project willing to counteract nationalist tendencies. Moreover, according to Susana Coroado, citizens should have the possibility to oversee the decision-making processes that today are undertaken behind closed doors, impeding the recognition of agency-driven policies.

On 23 May, the thematic focus was placed on the present and future interaction of regions and European institutions. In a workshop with local civil organisations, two short inputs by Jorge Brandao (Regional Coordination and Development Commission of the Centro Region) and Martín Rodríguez Alberdi set the stage of the ensuing discussion. According to the discussants, too often the EU reaches peripheral regions only through the allocation of centrally determined development funds. The incomprehension of local territories and the bureaucratic difficulty for civic organisations to obtain European financing, calls for an urgent rethink of how the EU operates in the Centro region. At a local level, improvements should be based on having an on the ground interlocutor to bridge the gap between local actors and European institutions. The top-down fund allocation model should be substituted by a bottom-up model, whereby resources are designated according to specific needs and civil organisations themselves identify where these are needed most. At a pan-European level, the institutional role of regions should be rethought. If we are to ameliorate the representation deficit of the EU, regional political actors should have instruments to implement policies directly. Being able to tailor political demands to the specificity of a territory could help distribute funds more efficiently and increase the visibility of the EU at the local level. In any case, the workshop served to pin down the importance of including peripheral regions in the construction of a protective Europe.