Preface

This book is the result of the common interest and ‘passion’ that both authors have for a ‘minor’ institution of the European Union: the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). Coming from member states – Italy and Germany – that both have strong sub-national levels of governance and because of our long-term scientific and professional involvement with this level, we felt that there remains an important gap to be filled in the current debate on EU democracy: the specific contribution that subnational authorities and societies make to the construction of a democratic European Union. We feel that the relative neglect with which ‘grass roots democracy’ is treated in the current European debate, or its reduction to basic forms of ‘direct democracy’, is very dangerous as it risks overlooking precisely those ‘levels’ at which EU democracy needs to be grounded. In writing this book, we wanted to draw attention not only to the *potential* contribution that regional and local authorities and societies can make to EU democracy, but also to the very *real* contribution that they already make. This contribution is not limited to the production of the opinions that the CoR has to, or decides to, deliver on proposals for EU legislation, but also examines its continuous and more informal contacts with other institutional and non-institutional actors in the kind of activity that we call ‘shaping policy from below’. This is achieved by developing and promoting ideas and visions that cater to the needs of regional and local societies (what is normally denoted as the articulation of *voice*) and by assisting and correcting the legislative activities of the other institutions directly involved in decision-making (what is normally indicated as the exertion of *control*). We realize that these activities, even more than the sheer production of *will*, are once more at the centre of the political theory debate on democracy and we want to make our contribution to the refinement of the notion of *multilevel democracy*.

While we let the following pages expand on these ideas and demonstrate the extent to which multilevel democracy is already

in the making also thanks to the contribution of the CoR, in these lines we would like to thank a few people that have made this book possible. We would like to begin by thanking Dario Castiglione and Sandra Kröger for inviting us to a very stimulating conference at the University of Exeter in May 2012 at which we met and discovered that we shared the same assessment of this minor EU institution. The original inspiration for how we decided to approach the question of the CoR's contribution to EU multilevel democracy came from another scholar also present at that Exeter conference, Nadia Urbinati, whose work has deeply influenced our views and who has given us the instruments to structure our argument. We obviously remain responsible for the opinions and for all the mistakes contained in this book. Our gratitude for providing information and commenting on different parts of the text goes to many members of the Committee of the Regions as well as their staff and those working in the CoR administration and the Party of European Socialists' Secretariat, in particular to Julien de Ridder, Aliona Fornea, Olga Fotinou, Matthieu Hornung, Chiara Malagodi, Monica Moldovan, Wolfgang Petzold and Gerhard Stahl.

We would also like to thank Alex O'Connell and Alex Pettifer of Edward Elgar who have believed in our project and Erin McVicar and Bob Pickens who have guided us through the production process.

Our final thanks go to Sylvia and Claudia who have cooked many dinners while their mom was working in the office until late and to Sophie for her patience and support throughout this project.

Simona Piattoni, Trento
Justus Schönlaui, Brussels¹

¹ The views expressed in this book are those of the author.