

EUROPEAN UNION



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78th MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- 19 March 2004 -

ITEM 13 b

**COOPERATION WITH EUROPEAN REGIONAL AND LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS –
PROGRAMME FOR 2004**

FOR INFORMATION

**MEMO FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE BUREAU OF
THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

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Cooperation with European regional and local associations – programme for 2004

Cooperation with European associations representing regional and local authorities

1. Reasons for stepping up cooperation

1.1 From the Treaty of Maastricht to the White Paper on European Governance

The role of the Committee of the Regions, as a body representing regional and local authorities in the EU, is defined in Articles 263 to 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community. This institutional framework makes provision for the participation of local and regional authorities in the EU decision-making process and enables them to give a formal response to proposals from the Commission or the Council and to be consulted by the European Parliament.

In the course of its first two terms of office (1994-1998 and 1998-2002), the CoR expanded its political and technical capacity to respond to consultations in order effectively to fulfil the dual role of representing the interests of regional and local authorities at EU level, on the one hand, and complying with the requirements of the EU institutional framework, on the other hand.

The standard consultative work of the CoR consists in most cases of giving a political response to a formal position already adopted by the European Commission (mandatory and optional requests for opinions and the drawing-up of own-initiative opinions). Once this standard consultative work was functioning smoothly, the CoR started, at the beginning of 2001, to develop the pro-active side of its political action.

In its White Paper on European Governance of 2001, the European Commission called upon the CoR to step up its collaboration with the Commission in helping to bring the EU closer to the people and urged the CoR to play a more pro-active role when Community action was being considered at the pre-legislative stage of the decision-making process¹. Whilst underlining the pivotal role played by

¹ White Paper on European Governance (COM(2001) 428 final of 27.7.2001)

the CoR in representing regional and local authorities in the EU, the Commission also expresses its support for "ongoing efforts to increase cooperation between associations [of regional and local authorities] and the Committee of the Regions."

In its communication entitled *Towards a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue*, the European Commission once again highlighted the crucial role played by the Committee of the Regions², which it describes as "representative body of regional and local authorities in the EU ... an indispensable intermediary between these authorities and the EU institutions". In addition to exercising its institutional role, the CoR should therefore, in future play a coordinating role in respect of local and regional authorities when the Commission is engaged in wide-ranging pre-legislative consultation.

The European Commission pursues the same approach in its Communication entitled *Dialogue with associations of regional and local authorities on the formulation of European Union policy*,³ adopted on 19 December 2003. In this communication, the Commission confirms the CoR's role as an intermediary between local and regional authorities, on the one hand, and the European institutions, on the other hand, and calls upon the CoR to help the Commission organise the dialogue with associations representing local and regional authorities. (The abovementioned communication, together with the political response of the CoR, are addressed in document number CdR 380/2003-Part II).

1.2 Implementation of the White Paper on European Governance

On the basis of the White Paper, the CoR sought first of all to step up its relations with the European Commission by concluding a **Cooperation Agreement** with this Institution⁴ on 20 September 2001. Under the cooperation agreement, the CoR may "draw up outlook opinions in key areas where [the European Commission] considers that the Committee of the Regions has the relevant competence, knowledge and expertise". The CoR may also participate in the preparatory work of the Commission, to which it will forward analyses and strategic documents (outlook reports and opinions) reviewing subjects specified by the Commission.

In the context of these new institutional arrangements, the CoR decided in May 2002 – on the eve of its third term-of-office – to improve the structure of its relations with regional and local associations⁵. With a view to meeting the new challenges arising from the cooperation agreement, it was deemed advisable for the abovementioned associations and the CoR to improve "coordination of their

² COM(2002) 704 final of 11.12.2002

³ COM(2003) 811 final

⁴ DI CdR 81/2001 rev. 2

⁵ Bureau decision of 14.5.2002 on *Cooperation with European associations representing local and regional authorities*, R/CdR 106/2002 item 11

respective activities as well as [to bring about] greater involvement of the CoR's partners in its institutional and political work". Furthermore, these different types of cooperation could enhance the quality of the CoR's consultative work, whilst, at the same time, making for more effective representation of regional and local interests at EU level.

2. **Activity report**

Since May 2002, following the decision taken by the Bureau, and with strong support and commitment from the CoR president, a climate of partnership and trust has been established between the associations representing regional and local authorities, on the one hand, and the CoR, on the other hand. Furthermore, the synergies between the CoR and the abovementioned associations have been best exploited by seeking to enable the local and regional authorities to benefit from the new political tools provided by European governance.

The consultative and cooperation measures between the CoR and the associations representing regional and local authorities, developed and implemented since May 2002, are set out below.

Measure 1 – Identifying and getting to know the partner associations

The general secretariat of the CoR is to carry out **research** work to identify the aims, structures and main activities of the largest associations representing regional and local authorities.

The results of this research work (defining the "main characteristics" of the associations) are to be passed on to CoR Bureau members twice a year (at the beginning of the year and at the beginning of the second half of the year) in order to brief them on the work of the various associations. This information will also be a valuable tool for preparing – and even coordinating – and enriching the work of the CoR commissions. The information in question will also make a helpful contribution towards planning the work of the CoR by enabling it to avoid overlaps between the main meetings of these associations, on the one hand, and those of the CoR on the other hand⁶.

Measure 2 – Monitoring the work of the associations

In a response to a request from its president, **Mr Bore**, with a view to improving relations with the European associations concerned, the CoR started in 2002, to monitor the work carried out at the plenary sessions of the principal associations representing local and regional authorities and to take steps to ensure the political representation of the CoR at the annual assemblies and conferences of the associations in question.

⁶ Fact sheets on the activities, representatives and work schedules of European organisations representing local and regional authorities, updated for the first half of 2004, CdR 27/2004

Measure 3 – Regular contacts between the secretaries-general

In accordance with the Bureau decision of 14 May 2002, the secretary-general of the CoR shall arrange regular meetings (generally every three months) with his counterparts in the seven largest associations⁷. These meetings shall facilitate the exchange of information on the work of the various partners and make it possible to coordinate and prepare joint activities. The meetings at secretary-general level shall be backed up by intermediate meetings, organised as and when required for the purposes of reciprocal coordination.

Measure 4 – Outlook reports

When establishing the methodology for drawing up outlook reports and opinions⁸, the Bureau decided to ask regional and local associations to help prepare such reports covering fields in respect of which they had a specific expertise. This provision was applied in the case of several of the outlook reports and opinions adopted to date by the CoR.

All the major European associations⁹ which have a certain expertise in the field were included in the survey carried out by the CoR's COTER commission in connection with the preparation of the CoR's first outlook report on the *Governance and simplification of the Structural Funds after 2006*¹⁰. Furthermore, these associations were also actively involved in drawing up the report by virtue of the written contributions which they forwarded to the rapporteurs and their attendance at the preparatory meetings of the COTER commission.

The COTER commission also worked closely together with the Airport Regions Conference (ARC) in drawing up the outlook opinion on the *Capacity of regional airports*¹¹ adopted on 2 July 2003.

Furthermore, the COTER commission started to cooperate in February 2004 with the Association of European Border Regions with a view to preparing an outlook report on the establishment of a legal instrument for cross-border cooperation, as requested by EC **Commission Barnier** at the CoR's plenary session in February 2004.

⁷ Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the Conference of the European Regional Legislative Parliaments (CALRE), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CCRE), the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CRMR), Eurocities, and the Conference of Presidents of Regions with Legislative Powers (REGLEG)

⁸ Bureau decision of October 2002 on *Outlook reports and impact reports: the priorities of the CoR and its working methodology*, R/CdR 264/2002 item 7 c)

⁹ AER, AEBR, CCRE, CRMR and Eurocities

¹⁰ CdR 389/2002 fin

¹¹ CdR 393/2002 fin

In drawing up its outlook opinion entitled *The Euro-Mediterranean partnership and local and regional authorities: the need for coordination and a specific instrument for decentralised cooperation*¹², the RELEX commission took account of the views expressed on the matter by the CRPR and Eurocities and the outcome of the initiatives taken by these two bodies in the field concerned.

Measure 5 – Hearings and attendance at meetings of the CoR commissions

Since May 2002, the CoR has, on several occasions, invited the associations to participate in hearings and discussions held on the occasion of plenary sessions and commission meetings in order to enable the views of these associations to be included in CoR opinions and reports.

The subjects of the hearings organised in connection with plenary sessions and commission meetings since 2002 have been as follows:

- the work of the European Convention on the future of the EU (hearing held in connection with the plenary session of 3 July 2002),
- the work of the Inter-Governmental Conference (hearing organised in connection with the meeting of the CONST commission on 24 November 2003),
- preparations for the enlargement of the EU (hearings/discussions held in connection with the plenary sessions on 3 July 2002 and 13 February 2003),
- reform of the European cohesion policy (hearing organised by the COTER commission on 18 February 2004).

Furthermore, the associations have also been officially invited to attend a number of CoR commission debates and proceedings and the work of the CoR's IGC Monitoring Group; the largest of the associations were represented at the meetings in question by observers.

Measure 6 – Organisation of conferences/forums

The CoR commissions have started systematically to include principal speakers and other speakers from the partner associations when organising seminars and conferences.

This joint approach has helped to improve the organisation of the conferences and seminars in question in a number of ways, e.g. by interlinking the human and administrative resources of the partners; improving the coordination of substantive work in connection with the subjects to be

¹² CdR 327/2003 rev. 1

discussed at the conferences; and by improving the dissemination of information relating to these events.

The benefits of this form of cooperation became apparent on the occasion of the organisation of the Leipzig Conference on 5 and 6 May 2003; at this conference each of the five associations involved – AER, AEBR, CCRE, CRMR and Eurocities – was responsible for the joint organisation of a workshop on a subject linked to their main fields of expertise.

Measure 7 – Studies

The CoR worked closely with the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) when preparing its opinion entitled *Strategies for promoting cross-border and inter-regional cooperation in an enlarged EU – a basic document setting out guidelines for the future*¹³, adopted in March 2002. The AEBR also drew up a study for the CoR on the same subject. This strategic, targeted cooperation was extended to cover promotional activity on behalf of the opinion directed at the European Commission and the European Parliament and it led, in February 2004, to the CoR being asked to issue an outlook report on a legal instrument for cross-border cooperation.

Measure 8 – Enhanced political coordination

European Convention

In connection with its work on the European Convention in 2002, the CoR naturally entered into cooperation with the largest regional and local associations¹⁴. Working meetings were held on several occasions to exchange the latest information and to coordinate the forthcoming measures to be taken by the various partners.

More especially, the CoR and the various associations have regularly coordinated their views before the meetings of the Local and Regional Authorities Contact Group of the Praesidium of the European Convention. The CoR and the associations pursued a joint strategy with a view to convincing the European Parliament of their common priorities on the occasion of the drawing-up of the Napolitano Report on the *Role played by regional and local authorities in the construction of Europe*¹⁵

Cooperation in respect of the work of the European Convention was well structured and continuous; it undoubtedly promoted the creation of a climate of confidence between the associations representing regional and local authorities on the one hand, and the Committee of the Regions, on the other hand.

¹³ CdR 181/2000 fin, adopted at the plenary session on 13 March 2002

¹⁴ AER, AEBR, CALRE, CCRE, CRMR, Eurocities, REGLEG

¹⁵ Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 14 January 2003, 2002/2141 (INI)

European cohesion policy

Coordination of the work of the CoR and the European associations representing regional and local authorities is very close and effective in the field of the reform of the European cohesion policy. Immediately after it decided to improve the structure of its relations with these associations in 2002, the CoR set in train a regular exchange of information and views with these associations in order to ensure harmonised representation of the interests of regional and local authorities at EU level.

These associations have gradually been involved in the most important measures taken by the CoR in order to prepare its position and its recommendations with regard to the abovementioned reform (the Leipzig Conference, the drawing-up of the outlook report on the simplification of the Structural Funds and the CoR opinion on the third report on European cohesion, presented by the European Commission on 18 February 2004). The CoR has, at the same time, been kept informed of and involved in the various activities organised by the abovementioned associations.

These associations will also be involved in the second edition of the annual OPEN DAYS, which the CoR will this year be organising on 27 to 30 September, in partnership with DG Regio, on the theme of "Regional policy-practice and reform". Some 12 representation offices, covering over 70 regions and cities, will host conferences, workshop-debates and other thematic exhibitions in Brussels, some of which will be jointly managed by the associations.

Decentralisation and enlargement

On 26 November 2003, the CoR, CALRE, CCRE and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe (CPLRE) jointly organised a conference on decentralisation in Europe. The conference highlighted the situation of local and regional authorities in the ten new Member States and the problems which they face. This joint event, designed to draw attention to the difficult situation with which regions and cities in the new Member States have to contend, will be followed in 2004 by the organisation of a forum on fiscal decentralisation in Brussels on 17 June, in the margins of the CoR plenary session, and by the organisation, jointly with the CPLRE, of a meeting in Prague on 21 September in which Eurocities, CALRE and CCRE will also participate.

Measure 9 - Programmes of annual action

In accordance with the Bureau decision of 14 May 2002, the CoR is offering to establish, with regional and local associations dealing with EU issues and having specialised expertise, a form of ongoing, strategic collaboration in areas of joint interest. This collaboration would take the form of a programme of annual joint action, which would be signed by the secretary-general of the CoR and the secretary-general of the partner association.

So far, the CoR secretary-general has concluded four such programmes of annual action with the following associations (see also Appendices 1-4):

- CCRE, in respect of the second half of 2003 (an appraisal and re-negotiation in respect of 2004 are currently taking place),
- CALRE, in respect of 2003 and 2004,
- Eurocities, in respect of 2004,
- AEBR, in respect of 2004.

Negotiations with the Conference of Presidents of Regions with Legislative Powers (REGLEG) are being finalised.

The cooperation which these programmes of annual actions seek to achieve revolves around two key approaches:

- involving the partners in the consultative work carried out by the CoR commissions,
- joint action (including the organisation of joint events) with a view to the targeted promotion of CoR opinions and reports relating to joint priorities set out in the programme of annual action.

Cooperation is carried out in the following ways:

Preparation of CoR opinions and reports

In the case of opinions and reports relating to the joint priorities set out in the programme of annual action, the CoR administration will include, in the preliminary analysis passed on to rapporteurs, any information or views received from a partner association. For their part, rapporteurs may, when preparing a draft opinion, pose specific questions to the partner association and ask the association to make use of its specialised networks to provide additional, more detailed information or analyses.

The partner association shall be invited to participate in all CoR meetings dealing with issues having a hearing on the joint priorities. In certain cases - specified by common agreement - and particularly in the case of the drawing-up of outlook reports, the partner association may be invited to participate in preparatory meetings of the CoR, in addition to being actively involved in the meetings of working parties.

Follow-up measures

All joint activities (preparation of CoR opinions and reports, organisation of conferences, drawing up of studies, etc.) shall give rise to specific follow-up action at the level of inter-institutional relations (e.g. monitoring of the action taken on CoR opinions by the European Parliament) and at the communication level, in order to ensure that the results of this cooperation are capitalised on by the other EU bodies and by the public at large.

PROPOSAL

Members of the Bureau are asked to take note of the above document and the appendices to the document.
