

## **Speech to European Economic and Social Committee, Brussels 26 February 2003**

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Dear President, Roger

Dear Colleagues, Friends

I am delighted to have this opportunity to be with you today and outline the CoR's priorities both in the context of the close cooperation between our two Committees and in terms of our roles as representative, consultative bodies, at this important time as Europe seeks to bring itself ever closer to our citizens.

### **I. Governance and Convention**

We have come a long way since President Frierichs addressed the CoR plenary session in May last year. Europe is soon to become a Union of 25 member states and the Convention is now in a crucial phase in defining our future European Constitution.

The Commission's White Paper on governance, its consequences, the Lisbon process and the Open Method of Co-ordination have set out a new approach to governance in Europe, bringing Europe closer to the citizen. This represents a real springboard for both our Committees with opportunities to enhance our impact and visibility as interdependent, interconnected spheres of governance and representative institutions that are closest to the citizen, representing the diversity of civil society and the general interests of the towns and regions on the ground where civil society interacts with elected authorities.

When we are able to intervene at an early stage of the European policy shaping process, we are able to ensure that policy corresponds appropriately to the needs of citizens. On the basis of this, there is a strong argument for developing new forms of consultation based on the principle of "no legislation without consultation" and through our respective delegations of observers to the Convention we have been successfully arguing this case.

Article 34 of the initial draft treaty presented by president Giscard D'Estaing refers to participative democracy and is a positive sign that the final Constitutional Treaty will include specific proposals for early consultation with civil society and the local and regional authorities in which they interact.

Elsewhere, in our respective efforts to build new profiles for our Committees we have demonstrated the importance of establishing and strengthening constant dialogue with our institutional and political partners, demonstrating our capacity for sub national, territorial bodies and civil society to deliver added value into the policy shaping process. This affirms our key role as deliverers and implementers of the principle of proximity as outlined in the Laeken declaration as a core value in the process of European integration. I believe this must be fully recognised in the future draft Constitution.

While our respective delegations to the Convention have been successfully defending these principles and we have made significant

advances within the debate, I remain concerned about the first 16 draft articles defined by the Convention. Whilst I recognise that it is still far too early to make an overall judgement, we must remain focussed on delivering a Constitutional Treaty that defends our interests. There should be no misunderstanding: the principle of subsidiarity must be interpreted within the context of an open process of participation and involvement of different partners in European policy shaping. Member states cannot criticise the decision making process in relation to unpopular policies without opening that same process up to more transparency, more co-decision with the European Parliament and more consultation with sub-national bodies, and more participation of social actors.

Strengthening and re-profiling our institutions, procedures and the European process must however go hand in hand with re-launching our policy goals and objectives around a shared project for Europe, as beyond a continent, Europe is also a community of values and experiences.

## **2) Enlargement and the Lisbon Strategy**

As Europe enlarges to 25 member states and others prepare for admission, our Committees have a crucial role to play in safeguarding and steering its success. Within future Member States our experience and creativity is essential for the emergence and organisation of local and regional authorities and civil society actors if they are to be fully engaged in our future Europe. The priority for enlargement is cohesion -

building a successful models for territorial, economic and social cohesion. In May this year the CoR will organise a major European conference of cities and regions in Leipzig on the future of European Cohesion policy and I am pleased that the EESC will be playing an active role in this important event leading a key workshop on employment.

The Lisbon strategy and the objective of making Europe the world's knowledge economy based on clear goals and benchmarks in education, research, employment and development responds clearly to the "Cohesion priority" and requires increased engagement and stronger participation by social partners, civil society and public and private actors in the definition of projects at the local and regional level.

In his speech to the CoR plenary earlier this month, President Prodi delivered a "wake-up" call to all European actors in the Lisbon process, reminding us of the considerable length that we have to go before we meet these objectives. President Prodi called for an acceleration of activity from the spheres of society we represent. I am aware of the considerable number of initiatives the EESC has taken in this regard and I would welcome joint efforts with the Committee of the Regions on horizontal themes which cut across the Lisbon strategy and in which we have a real opportunity to strengthen our individual impact and visibility in moving the Lisbon agenda forward through our capacity to multiply the Commission's initiatives on the ground and filter up best practice and experience from civil society and local and regional government, thus

setting pace and momentum both in and beyond our respective areas of competence and expertise.

I will provide three brief examples of possible initiatives

### **3) Territorial Competitiveness**

A good example of future co-operation of this nature between our Committees is undoubtedly territorial competitiveness. The interaction and capacity for interaction between economic and social actors such as SME's, trade unions, universities, cultural, religious and community groups and NGOs both within and beyond the territorial boundaries in which they operate are factors in the competitiveness issue.

To give you a personal example: economic and educational progress within my region of the West Midlands have been facilitated by combinations of partnerships between local government and private enterprise. The extent to which this responds to the open participation model of active governance that we are working towards at a European level and how examples of initiatives like these, multiplied within a European context, suggests not only a way to accelerate the Lisbon process but also a means of making the a new European governance model a reality.

### **4) Globalisation and External Relations**

An institutionalised culture of dialogue is appropriate today more than ever as the cities and regions of Europe need an active and engaged

civil society to defend the principles of an open society and cope with differences, conflicts and fears that are imposed by changes in the global sphere. There is no mistaking today just how interconnected the local and global dimensions actually are. And I know the EESC is aware of this through your structured dialogue over the course of the last few years with civil society in other regional groupings, including Mercosur and the Afro Caribbean Pacific (or ACP) group of states.

Through the course of a recent discussion, I am also aware of President Briesch's own personal interest in exchanging experiences of government with other continents including Latin America. I particularly welcome this initiative since I believe that communicating and sharing examples of best practice and knowledge of such co-operation schemes and successful projects are fundamental to improving not only the success of the enlargement of Europe but also our own approach to the way we think about governance and globalisation. It is not only about expressing solidarity. It is about being aware of the challenges for our Continent, in dialogue with other Continents.

The EESC and the CoR could co-operate positively in this field of external relations, addressing initiatives such as those aimed at consolidating democracy and capacity building in the "geographic circles of friendly countries" at our eastern and southern borders to whom President Prodi attached considerable importance in his recent speech to the CoR plenary. I would very much welcome, for example, the close involvement of the EESC in the CoR's work on EuroMed that will feature a major conference in the autumn in Livorno as part of the Italian

Presidency. I would also welcome your participation in our joint consultative committees with candidate states. As you may be aware, the CoR has to date established three JCCs but these will be phased out, to be replaced with full observers from all future member states from July. JCCs will however continue to be set up by the CoR with remaining candidate states and I welcome the engagement with the EESC in this regard.

The CoR lays considerable importance on this spirit of mutual co-operation, exchange of information the participation of our respective members and administrators at each others commissions. I feel strongly that this contact should and must be maximised and more coordination given to joining up contacts between our respective networks, such as the regional representation offices and forum for civil society.

Finally, I therefore also feel that there is quite considerable advantage for both Committees in focussing on the way in which we administer European legislation.

#### **5). Common Evaluation Methods for Major European Proposals**

This, in the short term responds to a proposition by our respective administrations to organise in co-operation with the European Commission a seminar that will look at ways of developing common evaluation methods for major European proposals. This relates directly to our wider objective of bringing European policies closer to the citizen, offering scope to examine how major policies are administered, their

costs and benefits, and the scope for improvement and further development.

## **6) Logistics / Joint Services**

The range of these three, brief examples indicates the capacity for cooperation between our Committees. Our institutions share common services. Recently we have traversed a difficult, and somewhat disruptive period in regard to both our buildings and personnel situations. Progress on these matters is often not visible and is slow. This is normal. We are trying to tug super-tankers! I do feel though that we are making progress and we must now respond to progress by reinforcing our commitment to the co-operation agreement between ourselves that can carry us both forward, through the Convention and Enlargement processes.

## **IV) The Future**

The present Europe ideal was built around the heritage that older generations, who had suffered World War Two and the inhumanity of that war wanted to leave to their sons and daughters: peace, welfare and European integration. Today, we need to build up a stronger consensus for Europe around an ideal that is embraced by younger generations: a Europe built up on peace, dialogue, economic, social and territorial cohesion – and unity on the world stage. We will not be able to do it if we do not listen to what our society, in its different organisational and participative forms have to say.

Our cities, our regions, as well as our economy and society, do not take sufficient account of the specific needs and concerns of the younger and older generations. There is a need here to look for real examples of best practice in this field and to that end I would wholeheartedly welcome an initiative on youth in all its diversity during the course of the coming year which will lead us to seriously consider the real expectations and ambitions for the EU in 2020 and beyond.