



# XXII<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly Poznan, 14 – 16 May 2003



## Poznan 14-16 May 2003 : The First General Assembly in Central Europe

It is 3.15pm on May 14th 2003 in Poznan : more than 700 representatives from towns and regions all over the European continent rise to the first tones of the European Anthem. The Mayor of Poznan, Ryszard Grobelny, receives the General Assembly flag. The ceremony continues with speeches from

representatives of Polish authorities and European institutions: Mr Herwig Van Staa, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe; Michael Haupl, Mayor of Vienna; Lord Tope, President of the Committee of the Regions' Commission for Constitutional affairs and European Governance ...The 22nd CEMR General Assembly is declared open, the first of its kind in an Central European country. For the next two days, some 750 participants will

follow debates on enlargement, structural funds, the integration of immigrants, and twinning.

The General Assembly will close with the adoption of the Poznan Declaration in which local and regional authorities express their vision of tomorrow's Europe.

And in these few pages, the story of this memorable visit to Poznan unfolds.

Jeremy Smith

CEMR Secretary General

## Valéry Giscard d'Estaing : "The Convention doesn't talk much about the European citizen"

**CEMR President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing had to preside a meeting of the European Convention in Brussels the day of the opening of CEMR's general assembly. He spoke to CEMR delegates in a video message.**

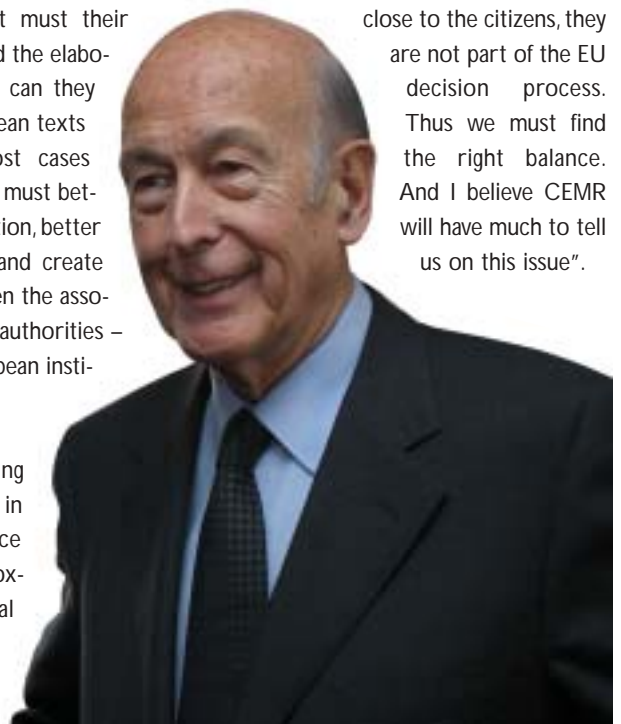
"During the debates at the Convention, he said, I don't hear much talk about the European citizen! The convention talks about institutions, agencies, but the men and women of Europe are not often mentioned. What is important is for Europe to offer them more than successful European integration. The Convention is not there to merely add yet another chapter to history books or to constitutional law. Its aim is to ensure that the men and women of Europe see their problems solved in a more positive and more satisfactory way".

### A much needed balance for Europe local and regional authorities

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing addressed the issue of the local and regional authorities' role in tomorrow's Europe : "What must their role be in the preparation and the elaboration of EU projects? How can they implement themselves European texts and legislation that in most cases directly concerns them ? We must better organise their representation, better organise their consultation, and create much shorter circuits between the associations of local and regional authorities – like CEMR – and all the European institutions."

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing believes that the solution lies in finding the right balance between governance and proximity : "(Local and regional authorities) must be involved in global governance on one hand, but they

must remain close to the citizens on the other. And there lies the difficulty for them : if they get too involved in governance, they lose their proximity with citizens; but if they limit themselves to remaining close to the citizens, they are not part of the EU decision process. Thus we must find the right balance. And I believe CEMR will have much to tell us on this issue".



# What future for Cohesion policy ?

**The Cohesion policy workshop was chaired by French Senator and CEMR vice President Louis Le Pensec. It ended on a massive “No” to re-nationalisation of Cohesion policy and on a call for greater involvement of local authorities.**

Over two hundred delegates heard EC Commission representative, Gabriella Hernandez Martin, plead for direct interventions of local authorities in some programmes : “We could envisage some programmes being conducted by regions and cities since local structures are usually relatively similar in all Member states. We could reinforce the role of local authorities in Objectives 1 and 2 of the Structural Funds”. She added that in future, the Cohesion policy should give the priority to the environment, the development of infrastructure in candidate countries and the development of the capacity of public authorities to manage Structural Funds.



**Louis Le Pensec : non à la renationalisation !**

Several speakers from current Member states expressed their fears of seeing regions get out of Objective 1 after the arrival of new Member states. Jan Olbrycht, from Silesia regional Parliament gave them a frank answer : “The key is for existing and future Objective 1 regions to meet, to talk together, frankly, openly, in order

to present one common front. Rivalry between regions or between cities and towns would only reinforce the national level”.

Holger Tschense, speaking on behalf of the Association of European towns, added that there is no blanket definition of the concept of region : “What is a region? He asked, is it a county, a Land, a province, a department? We must first and foremost define this notion. But also : who would be entitled to define this term of “region”? Would it be the national states or the European Union?”

There was also an overall consensus on urban policies to be mainstreamed within regional policy, and for a greater role for local and regional authorities in the development and implementation of the concept of territorial cohesion in the EU Treaty.

## The “last” call from towns and regions to the Convention

“Concise and rational”. This is how the CEMR First Vice President, Heinrich Hoffschulte, described the CEMR Call to the Convention on the Future of Europe.

“We have had to negotiate amongst ourselves before and during the General Assembly”, explained Heinrich Hoffschulte, “but we have been able to draft a text which satisfies everyone. In the text, we express our belief that the democratic life of the Union requires that local and regional authorities are fully taken into consideration in the future European Constitution, and that the Constitution expressly recognises the application of the principle of subsidiarity for local and regional authorities”.

In the text, the CEMR urges the Constitution to expressly refer to the necessary consultation of local and regional authorities, and that the Constitution makes a reference to local self-government as well as to cross-border co-operation and twinning.

## Policy Committee meeting: Innsbruck, Macedonia and Serbia

**The meeting of the Policy Committee took place immediately before the General Assembly opening ceremony. The CEMR First Vice President, Heinrich Hoffschulte, chaired the meeting and several important decisions were taken.**

The location for the next General Assembly in 2006 needed to be chosen. Four cities had submitted their candidature (Århus, Turin, Innsbruck and Malmö) and made excellent presentations. A majority of the Policy Committee members voted for the Austrian candidate, and therefore Innsbruck will organise the next CEMR General Assembly in three years.

The Policy Committee unanimously accepted the Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of Macedonia (ZELS) as a new member of CEMR; the Standing Conference of Towns and



**Jeremy Smith, Heinrich Hoffschulte, Ryszard Grobelny**

Municipalities of Serbia and Montenegro gained associate member status.

The Policy Committee members also discussed two documents to be adopted during the General Assembly: the final Declaration (the Poznan Declaration), on the role of local and regional authorities in tomorrow's Europe, and a call, on the same subject, to the Convention on the Future of Europe.

# “Twinning” session: reflection on the role of twinning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

**Over the last fifteen years, twinning has developed, and its scope of activity has widened. A positive assessment, but what is the role and function of partnerships between towns today and in the future? This was the theme of the session that took place on May 15th in Poznan.**

“At the start of the 21st century, and on the eve of European enlargement, twinning retains its original objective which is to unite populations”. This was the declaration of the session's chair and Mayor of the City of Karlstadt, Anders Knappe.

The representative of the European Commission's D-G for Education and Culture, Director, Joao Vale de Almeida, spoke along the same lines: “Twinning projects are a part of the

citizen's Europe. Twinning is an instrument that enables stronger links between nations to be forged; twinning can contribute considerably to the construction of the new European identity. The main principle of cooperation in the framework of twinning is to unite the populations, so that they know each other better and understand each other”.

The session made it possible for numerous representatives from local authorities to present their twinning projects in order to share their experiences with their counterparts from other European countries. Several examples presented involved partners from the Balkans countries, which confirmed the importance of twinings in the reconstruction and democratisation of these countries. The City of Düren launched a support programme for around two hundred Bosnian refugees. The Initiative aimed at helping the refugees to

return to their hometown, Gadacac.

The participants particularly stressed the use of twinning today and in the future. Today, partnerships between EU member States and applicant countries allow them to better prepare local authorities for enlargement. This brings citizens who are already members of the Union closer to the future EU member citizens. In the future, in a Europe of 25 and more, twinings with towns that are not EU member States will help to avoid the building of a new wall, further to the East between the European Union and its new neighbours.

## Golden Stars over Poznan

**The session devoted to twinning was followed by the Golden Stars for town twinning awards ceremony, a prize awarded by the European Commission's Education and Culture DG, which recognises the best twinning projects.**



The Golden Stars for town twinning have been awarded each year since 1993. Ten local and regional authorities were rewarded, in Poznan, for their twinning initiative. The international jury chose the winners according to several criteria such as the educational value of the twinning project, its visibility, the active participation of the population, and also the concrete results achieved.

The winners were :

**Bradford** (*Great Britain*), which launched an initiative with the City of Hamm, in Germany, in the framework of the European year of people with disabilities.

**Bremen** (*Germany*), which organised a three-day conference in Gdansk concentrating on Europe and young people.

**Cormon** (*Italy*) organised a conference on musical traditions with towns from six other countries.

**Keszthely** (*Hungary*) invited four European towns to a four-day conference on the future of Europe.

**Nuremberg** (*Germany*), for having organised an exchange between two primary schools with the city of Prague.

**Pouzauges** (*France*) which invited Romanian partners to meet the towns' inhabitants.

**Riga** (*Latvia*), which organised an international conference on “the City of the Future”.

**Samuel** (*Portugal*) for the debate aimed at sharing the experiences of several towns on the subject of immigration.

**Santa Maria da Feira** (*Portugal*) for its twinning with the towns of Targovishte, in Bulgaria.

**Szolnok Country** (*Hungary*), which organised a training seminar bringing together 39 towns, on the theme of the European management of town twinning relations.

# Enlargement, transport, environment and education...

**The General Assembly in Poznan was also an opportunity for an exchange of view on issues ranging from the enlargement to e-governance.**

The session on **enlargement** (16 May) proved to be extremely popular. There was an overall consensus on the fact that enlargement will have consequences on various aspects of life in all local and regional authorities and that it will also lead to a reform of the Structural Funds. New criteria for obtaining Structural Funds will certainly be drawn up. Regional unemployment rates might well become one of its new criteria. Similarly, delegates agreed to call for all actors involved (CEMR, CoR, ESC...) to join forces in order to facilitate the enlargement process.

On the same day, delegates participating in the **sustainable development** workshop stressed the importance of an urban dimension in this field. They also regretted that such an urban dimension is often neglected. Several speakers called for all levels of governance and all related parties to work together to create the tools that could assess the cost of protecting the environment.

The **public transport** workshop also took place on 16 May. It was chaired by the Mayor of La Roche-sur-Yon and the CEMR Transport Commission chairman, Jacques Auxiette.

"The title of the EC Commission regulation relating to this issue speaks about the obligations of public services," he said. "This proves beyond doubt that the rules of the market alone are not enough to ensure sustainable mobility". Several speakers have spoken against the EC Commission's proposal to make calls for tender compulsory for all regional and local public transport services. Many towns, cities and regions feel that they are better placed than the Commission to manage all aspects of public transport.

There was also a full house for the **immigration** workshop, on 15 May. Committee of the Regions' rapporteur, Ruth Bagnall, said that "the biggest obstacle for immigrants is the labour market. Once this hurdle is overcome, integration becomes easier". Ruth Bagnall added that "Immigrants and asylum seekers wish to keep their mother tongue, their reli-



gion and their culture, but at the same time, they want to learn the language and the culture of their host country. We must help them conciliate these wishes to make integration a success." Many delegates stressed the fact that as the European population is growing older; providing support to young immigrants helps prepare the future of Europe.

On the same day, there was an **EMAS** workshop (Eco-management and Audit scheme). EMAS offers local and regional authorities a structured method to manage and improve their efforts to protect the environment. The aim of the workshop was to introduce EMAS to future EU Member States.

Delegates to the **Education and local authorities in the XXI<sup>st</sup> century** workshop called for more harmonisation in the level of education in Europe, e.g. through unified diplomas. They also called for better cooperation between all levels of government, schools and other educational establishments. Several speakers expressed the need to establish a better relationship between pre-school and school systems as well as the need for equal opportunities for immigrants and for a greater emphasis to be placed on adult education.

Editorial :  
**Patrizio Fiorilli**

Pictures :  
**Poznan Press office,  
Thierry Monasse**

Graphics and printing :  
**www.studiogoffin.be**

Council of European Municipalities  
and Regions (CCRE)

**Rue d'Arlon, 22  
B - 1050 Bruxelles  
Tel : + 32 2 511 74 77  
Fax : + 32.2.511.09.49  
cemr@ccre.org  
www.ccre.org**

"Thanks to the European  
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The Council of European Municipalities and Regions brings together some 50 associations of local and regional governments from over 30 European states. Among its objectives are the promotion of local and regional self-government, the involvement of towns, cities and regions in the EU legislative process, and the exchange of experience between local and regional governments in Europe and in the world.