



**COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS
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CEMR

Message to the 7th High-Level Meeting on Local Governance in the EU

Brussels, September 2010

7th High-Level Meeting on Local Governance in the EU

Introduction

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the 7th High Level Meeting on Local Governance organised by the federated entities of Belgium within the framework of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union. Indeed, thanks to the Belgian Presidency, this is the first time a representative association of Europe's local and regional authorities has been invited to this high-level event, which directly concerns sub-national public authorities.

CEMR also notes that in the past, and during this particular meeting, several national delegations included representatives of local governments and their associations. We welcome this good practice and urge all member states to follow suit and to include sub-national government representatives in future inter-governmental meetings dealing with local governments.

CEMR believes that the central theme "*Efficiency and good governance*" is especially relevant in view of the beginning of the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. The emerging European model of multi-level governance needs to be strong, effective and democratic and has to fully recognise the key role played by local and regional governments. This includes the need for a close and ongoing partnership between all spheres of government so as to tackle the major issues faced by our citizens and societies.

Therefore CEMR calls for the member states to maintain the continuity of this debate process on local governance and to build on the momentum gained during annual meetings by establishing a joint inter-governmental working group, including representatives of the Member States, EU institutions and European local and regional government representative. This would follow the recommendation in the EIPA report¹ to establish "dossier teams" and in that way establish dialogue and cooperation between levels of government throughout the policy formulation and implementation process, which is a good example and practical way to establish multilevel governance in relevant matters.

This group would monitor the proceedings of the High Level Meeting, co-ordinate follow-up activities, provide recommendations, advise on their practical implementation, facilitate the exchange of best practice and information as well as provide guidance, expert opinions, suggestions and input for upcoming high-level meetings.

Implementation of the Lisbon Treaty

The Lisbon Treaty strengthens the role of local and regional government within the EU, as it explicitly recognises, for the first time in any EU treaty, the principle of local and regional self-government. CEMR asserts that the provisions relevant for local and regional government are not a mere symbolic reference, but have real meaning and legal consequences, including on issues regarding the role and management of public services. However, these provisions need to be translated into concrete actions by the European Commission and member states.

¹ *The Institutional Impacts of EU Legislation on Local and Regional Governments*, EIPA-ECR 2009

CEMR calls upon the European Commission to bring forward concrete proposals on the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty provisions which concern local and regional authorities, such as early and effective pre-legislative consultation with the authorities and their associations as well as an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations.

CEMR also calls upon member states and their governments to enhance co-operation with their local and regional authorities, as well as with their national representative associations, in the domestic implementation of the relevant provisions of the Treaty, such as the subsidiarity monitoring and of all the steps of the harmonisation of EU legislation and national law.

Balance and prospects, strengths and weaknesses of the EGTC

CEMR welcomed the creation of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as a legal and organisational instrument for the institutionalisation of cross-border cooperation. It however believes that this tool is still recent and should be tested and strengthened, financially and politically. Moreover, in order to fulfil its potential, it is crucial that regions wanting to establish an EGTC get the full support of their national governments, including the adoption of necessary legislation.

Execution of European policies at the local level

With the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union has adopted the objective to promote economic, social and territorial cohesion among its member states and to develop and pursue its actions leading to its the strengthening of this objective. CEMR believes that this objective applies horizontally to most EU policies and legislation, a substantial proportion of which are implemented at the local and regional levels. The Commission should thus play a stronger role in ensuring that national governments respect the opinions and positions of local and regional authorities during the designing and developing of policies and programmes.

New approaches for a new governance after the economic and financial crisis

Whereas many international bodies and experts believed that 2010 would see an economic and financial improvement in Europe, our local and regional authorities still face the deferred and long-term impacts of recession. CEMR believes that a comprehensive economic recovery cannot be accomplished without the involvement of Europe's towns and regions and that their potential contribution in combating the impact of the crisis has not been fully harnessed by the EU or most states. That is why CEMR's "*Athens communiqué*" called on national governments to empower local and regional governments in this role and proposed a "*local and regional new deal*" aimed at achieving shared objectives to strengthen Europe's economy, environment and society.

Good local governance is a key prerequisite to a bottom-up approach towards the achievement of these objectives. Local and regional authorities should have the possibility to build local and regional partnerships in an appropriate way to ensure the participation of all relevant actors when designing and implementing economic, social and territorial development strategies. In financial terms, it is crucial that the future cohesion policy be sufficiently supplied with adequate funding and that any tendencies to re-nationalise cohesion policy or structural funds be dismissed.

Cities for good governance

In order to effectively include Europe's local and regional authorities as well as their associations into this process, CEMR welcomes the "*Cities and regions, partners for good governance*" initiative of the Association of the City and the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region to establish a wide European network for good governance at the local level. CEMR thus calls upon all relevant actors to support this initiative.

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