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# NEWSLETTER

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## Under one flag

**THE OPENING CEREMONY** of the 23rd general assembly of cemr with european anthem and the flag being handed over: a kick-off to the days following that should result in fundamental decisions pointing into the future.



Poznań's Mayor Ryszard Grobelny passes the CEMR-flag to Innsbruck's Mayor Hilde Zach.

Even though this was the 23rd such occasion to date, the opening ceremony yesterday was still special, something truly unique.

The string ensemble of the Innsbruck symphony orchestra played the European anthem and people from 36 nations rose to their feet.

More than 1200 have come here, more than ever before, and hailing from 36 countries, which is a new record, as Wim Deetman, mayor of The Hague, pointed out in his opening speech.

But it is not really the speakers on the stand who officially declare the assembly open. The truly symbolic act is the handing over of the flag, an act of togetherness: A young Tyrolean "Schützen" recruit hands it to Ryszard Grobelny, mayor of Poznań. And finally it is passed on to the mayor of Innsbruck, Hilde Zach, who, flying it proudly, points out achievements already made: "But this will not be enough", she is convinced. For this is what people have come here for, namely to learn from each other and with each other. "Because Europe is being built not from the top down, but from the bottom up", as

is also emphasized by the President of the Austrian National Council, Andreas Khol. There is something in the air. And no one would want to or be able to lay back. "If we do not act, the world will move on without us", José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, remarks in his video message. Economic success is necessary, Tyrol's Provincial Governor, Herwig van Staa, meanwhile points out. "It safeguards peace, and this peace is only possible if social peace is safeguarded as well." Which means a social peace that is based on social justice. In this light the opening ceremony to the 23rd General Assembly of CEMR was not just the starting signal for the days to follow but moreover a renewed promise – on behalf of the present and the future of the European municipalities and regions. ■

## EU, regions and towns

**José Manuel Barroso**, the President of the European Commission spoke to CEMR's general assembly.

I am delighted to address the General Assembly of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions. In the 55 years since the Council was set up, you have effectively and usefully represented the interests of your municipalities and regions in relation to the European institutions.

In doing so, you have helped carry the process of European integration forward. I am very committed to the principle of subsidiarity: I strongly believe that decisions should be taken by the level that

is closest to the citizens who are concerned by them. Therefore, I am convinced that regions and municipalities have a particular role to play. I welcome your choice for the main theme of your general assembly: the future of services of general interest. These services are at the core to our society pact, they are one of the keys of citizens' solidarity, and are a source of employment and investments. Quality and affordable services of general interest are also a key factor to help us improve our competitiveness.

This is not just a European issue. Of course, we intervene to ensure the treaties are respected, and to regulate services that go beyond national borders and therefore require cooperation between Member States.

But on this issue, the principle of subsidiarity plays an important role: most services are the responsibility of local and regional governments. The proximity link between citizens and the authorities that are in charge of these services is a guarantee of efficiency and social usefulness.

We, each of us at our respective levels, share responsibilities: to let the relevant authorities be the guardians of the public interest, and to let operators fulfill their public service mission. ■



"Public services are at the core of our society pact, they are one of the keys of citizens' solidarity, and are a source of employment and investments."

Foto: European Community 2006



**MILAN BENC**  
MAYOR OF PREŠOV (SLOVAKIA)



One of the most attractive parts of the general assembly is the exchange of experiences on managing towns and municipalities. With so many various types of local and regional governments across Europe, CEMR's role is to be the joint that keep together this mosaic. Among the topics that I will follow more closely are the debates on the future of public services, and the charter for equality between men and women in local life.

Foto: Lechewski/Agencia

**ANDERS KNAPE**  
CHAIR OF CEMR'S WORKING GROUP ON TWINNING



Town twinning enable inhabitants of our cities and villages to live Europe and to be involved in it. Therefore it is important that our general assembly include a session to this issue that is the essence and the history of CEMR. In today's session, we will also show how twinning can help build a fairer society that listens to all. Indeed, town twinning is the best way for local and regional governments to cooperate on issues that matter to citizens.

Foto: CCE

**HELIODORO GALLEGOS CUESTA**  
PRESIDENT OF THE FEMP



This is my first experience at European level since I have recently been elected president of the Spanish federation of municipalities and provinces. CEMR's general assembly will help me take the pulse of Europe's municipalities. The opening ceremony gave us all the feeling that we are all together in the same place with a common goal: To meet and know each others. I strongly believe in debates, and that is what the Innsbruck general assembly gives us all.

Foto: Lechewski/Agencia

# CEMR Policy Committee: the decisions

The CEMR Policy Committee met in Innsbruck on 10 May. Some 100 local and regional politicians took various decisions linked to the general assembly and to CEMR in general.

The Policy Committee unanimously adopted CEMR's draft charter for equality between women and men in local life. The charter will be officially launched on Friday, 12 May. It sets out measures that can be taken at the local level to achieve true gender equality in our towns and regions. CEMR will encourage local politicians to sign it and thus commit themselves to implement these measures in their respective towns. Even before the 2006 general assembly opened, the Policy Committee took a decision concerning the next general assembly: it agreed that the host city for the next general assembly will be chosen at its meeting in Seville, next October. The three candidate cities are Derby, Groningen and Malmö. It was also an important meeting for CEMR itself since the Policy Committee accepted the membership application from the associations of Romanian regions and communes. CEMR has now members in 35 European countries.



Foto: Lechner

The charter for equality, Romania, and a new office in Brussels – only some of the issues discussed.

Ake Hillman, from the municipality of Västerås, in Sweden, was elected chair of CEMR's Employers' Platform. The Platform represents the employers' side of the European social dialogue committee for local administrations, where employers and trade unions discuss relevant employment policies and trends. Mr. Hillman said that one of his priorities will be to reinforce the dialogue with the European federation

of public services unions. Lastly, the policy committee unanimously agreed to authorize CEMR's secretary general, Jeremy Smith, to sign the lease for CEMR's new Brussels headquarters. In early 2007, CEMR should move to new premises shared with its member associations running an office in Brussels, thus facilitating cooperation between CEMR and its members and between its members themselves. ■

## Closer to the people

Opening session, The role of municipalities and regions in Europe, the constitution and the proper perspective were the topics discussed during the kick-off event.



Foto: Lechner

"We have come much closer to the citizen", CEMR President Michael Häupl observes.

The European Constitution must not be dead, we have to give it a future in Europe", Michael Häupl, Mayor of Vienna and President of CEMR, underlines. For many reasons, but mainly because the Constitution is

the solution to many problems European citizens currently associate with the European Union. It is a solution not least because in the Constitutional draft the municipalities and regions for the first time in EU history were given a direct say in European decision making. This participation, Häupl says, is a crucial cornerstone of the Union's future success: "Around 70 per cent of EU decisions are put into practice by the municipalities and regions. By those very institutions who are close to the citizen and learn at first hand what the biggest problems are." An important job for the municipalities and regions – but also a great opportunity: "Europe is a success story. But there is also some distrust among the people, a distrust that we could reduce by doing our work openly and close to the citizen", says Bärbel Dieckmann, Mayor of Bonn. But it is also geographical advantages that play a significant role

in connection with the important function municipalities and regions fulfil in Europe: "Also from the personal perspective regional governments are a lot closer and more tangible than the so-called bureaucrats in Brussels", Kalliopi A. Bordara, Vice-Mayor of Athens, observes.

Jan Olbrycht, Member of the European Parliament for Poland and former vice-president of CEMR, draws parallels between the daily business in Brussels and the work in the municipalities: parliament needs local and regional decision-makers. Feed us with information, with arguments. Only in this way can we take an influence on the laws that are being prepared." Moreover Olbrycht calls on participants to adopt new perspectives: "Let us not look at ourselves from the perspective of the municipalities and regions but through the eyes of the others." ■



# Impressions of a colourful opening day



Foto: Schmidt/Baricco



