



Mr Romano Prodi
President
European Commission
Avenue d'Auderghem 45
B-1040 Brussels

Brussels, 25 June 2004

Reactions from the Platform of European associations representing regional and local authorities following the launch of the Territorial Dialogue on 10 May 2004

Dear Mr President,

We truly appreciate the great efforts of your Commission to enhance European governance over the past four years, especially concerning the involvement of local and regional authorities. The actions undertaken in the spirit of the White Paper on European Governance represent a substantial step forward in the work towards improved accountability and transparency in European decision-making. In particular, we wish to thank you for having taken the initiative to establish a systematic Territorial Dialogue with our European and national associations and for having launched this dialogue with a symbolically very important meeting with the associations on 10 May 2004.

We are concerned, however, that the future dialogue, to become successful, must allow for genuine two-way communication and a real exchange of views. Moreover, we believe that effective follow-up and reporting mechanisms must be foreseen, especially at this particular stage when your Commission will soon be handing over responsibility to a new Commission. In our view, the Commission's Secretariat General is best placed to assume responsibility for the continuation of the Territorial Dialogue, and we appreciate that the Committee of the Regions will also ensure the continuing coordination of the meetings.

We believe it is important that the annual meeting under the Territorial Dialogue with the Commission President takes place at a time of the year which allows it to be the valuable occasion *"for in-depth discussion with the representatives of the regional and local authorities' associations on the planned guidelines of EU actions"* which was foreseen in the Commission's Communication on the Territorial Dialogue. We suggest that the annual meeting take place in November/December each year in view of the forthcoming year.

In addition, we consider that the annual meetings should be complemented, as proposed in the Commission's Communication, by meetings with individual Commissioners in areas which have a substantial impact on local and regional policies. We have jointly identified a number of initial areas in which we see a particular need for improved dialogue between the Commission and the associations representing regional and local authorities:

- European cohesion policy: Only by integrating closely the work of local and regional authorities in its efforts can the European Union reach the targets set in the Lisbon Agenda.
- Competition policy: In the context of territorial cohesion, when dealing with state aids, competition policy must include more territorial differentiation in favour of the less competitive territories. Moreover, in the context of services of general interest, it

must not prevent the efforts of local and regional authorities to ensure access for all to high-quality and affordable services.

- Services of general interest: The interests at stake need to be carefully and openly discussed in order to achieve a better balance between, on the one hand, competition and internal market rules and, on the other hand, social, economic and territorial cohesion and sustainable development, recognizing the principle of local and regional self-government.
- Social integration: Only by creating an inclusive Europe, in which we fight poverty and exclusion together, can we create a competitive Europe and a high quality of life for our citizens.
- Territorial cooperation: Opportunities to promote programmes and projects, and to exchange knowledge and experiences between cities and regions and their citizens across the European continent are more important than ever in the enlarged Union.
- Environment: It is crucial to work together to create a far more sustainable environment in our cities and regions.

We wish to encourage you to pass on to your successor the important work you have undertaken to improve dialogue between the European and regional and local spheres of governance and the achievements you have reached. We are prepared to work together, in close collaboration with the Committee of the Regions, to maintain the systematic dialogue with the Commission and to spread the good practices across all the European institutions.

Further to the systematic Territorial Dialogue initiated by the Commission, we would like to propose that a high-level political meeting be organised in advance of each year's Spring Council between the Council Presidency, the Commission, the Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, and the European associations of regional and local authorities, focusing on the implementation of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies. We believe that such a meeting would help to ensure a wider commitment to these Strategies, and enhance multi-level partnership and co-operation to deliver their objectives.

We thank the outgoing Commission for all its efforts and for fruitful dialogue and we wish the future Commission great success.

Yours sincerely,



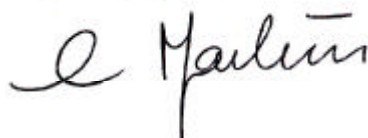
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Peter Straub, President of the CoR; Sir Albert Bore, Vice-President of the CoR
David O'Sullivan, Secretary-General of the European Commission
Gerhard Stahl, Secretary-General of the CoR