

### **III Conference of the Presidents of the Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe**

**Florence, May 17th- 18th, 1999**

#### **Final Declaration**

The Presidents of the Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe:

Deem that after economic and monetary union, the time has come for a greater commitment in spreading a strong European philosophy amongst the citizenry of Europe, as the premise for the construction of a politically united Europe.

Against this backdrop consider that the contribution which the Regional Legislative Assemblies can make to European unity within the context of the principles of subsidiarity and of proximity to be of utmost importance. A Europe which is close to its citizens is not necessarily the Europe of the member states but rather that of the Laender or of the Regions and their Parliaments.

The document of the first Oviedo Conference (6th and 7th of October, 1997) already evoked the principles of:

1) the Declaration of the Assembly of European Regions (Bale, December 4th, 1996), whereby article 12:10 states that "contact mechanisms between the European Parliament and the Regional Parliaments must be established, in that these are institutions which directly represent the will of the citizenry";

2) the concepts of Stuttgart regarding the role played by the Regional Parliaments and Assemblies in European politics (May 6th, 1997), the first point of which states that "the Regional Parliaments must co-operate in a decisive fashion in the drawing up of European policy";

the declaration by Germany, Austria and Belgium on subsidiarity included in the Treaty of Amsterdam (October 2nd, 1997), whereby "the German, Austrian and Belgian governments deem it self-evident that the actions of the Community in the name of the principle of subsidiarity is of concern not only to Member States but also to their constituent parts, the Laender and the Regions, in that the latter are endowed with their own legislative powers which have been conferred upon them by national constitutional law."

In the declaration of the second conference (Salzburg, October 6th -7th, 1998), explicit mention was made of the principle of subsidiarity, in the light of the upcoming institutional reforms of the European Union, which was acknowledged as a principle for the first time in the Treaty of Maastricht. There were a number of requests put forward:

- 1) that the regions themselves appear directly before the Court of Justice in defence of their legislative powers;
- 2) that it be possible to draw up an explicit list of where Regions had competence in the treaties establishing the European Union;
- 3) that the co-operation between the European Parliament and the Regional Parliaments be strengthened without in any way touching upon the competence of the Committee of the Regions.

### **Having stated the above**

The Presidents of the Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe have adopted the following declaration:

#### ***It is important to maintain relations amongst the Laender or Regions having legislative powers***

It is very important for the Legislative Assemblies of the Regions of Europe to maintain close relations in order to get to know each other better, in order to initiate co-operative efforts, in order to draw up intervention strategies to mobilise public opinion so as to increase European-mindedness and in order to exchange experiences. Thus, it would appear advantageous for each Regional Assembly to establish within its administration a Committee for European affairs and to set up an exchange programme to ensure that all the members of the Conference of Regional Legislative Assemblies in Europe (CRLAE) be notified of the initiatives taken by each Assembly in terms of European policy. Thus, each document which concerns the European Community and which is approved by individual regional legislative assemblies should be sent to the President of the Region or of the Land which is responsible within that time frame for co-ordination; said committee shall send the document off to all the members of the CRLAE. Ideally, information technology should also be used.

#### ***The relations between the regional legislative assemblies of Europe and the European Parliament should be officially recognised and included in Community treaties.***

The CLRAE deems it important that close relations with the European Parliament be established in order to promote the processes of integration of and exchanges between the legislative assemblies and in order to increase the awareness of the main themes of European policy amongst the citizenry. Thus, the Presidents of the Legislative Assemblies of the Regions of Europe deem it of extreme importance to ensure that the Regional Parliaments of the Member States of the European Union be explicitly mentioned in the texts of Community law, the idea being the creation of a text which would define the relations among the regional, national and European Parliaments. This reference should be included within the context of the Treaty or within an annexed declaration, as was the case for the Treaty of Amsterdam, should the former idea not prove possible. To this end, it should be possible to obtain official recognition -- within the internal rules and regulations governing the European Parliament -- that representatives of the CLRAE participate in

the work of the Committee for Regional Policies and in the work of other Committees, whenever issues pertaining to the interests of the Laender or the Regions arise.

***Participation of Legislative Assemblies in the decisions taken with regard to issues pertaining to cohesion and the enlargement of the European Union.***

The Presidents of the Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe feel that in highly delicate sectors of Community policy where the regional parliaments should play a more concrete role, such as the issue of striking a new balance amongst the Member States of the Union, the Laender and the Regions should be more closely involved in the debate on the major topic of social and regional cohesion. To this end, representatives of the CLRAE should be consulted by the European Parliament when amendments are adopted or when the budgets for allocation of the structural funds are debated.

The CLRAE is pleased to point out in particular the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on the 19th of November, 1998, with regard to the draft Council regulation, by virtue of which general standards are established with regard to structural funds, including compulsory consultation with the Legislative Assemblies.

To this end, the CLRAE is happy to take note of Resolution 1151 (1998) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe which was adopted by the Standing Committee on the 18th of March, whereby the Assembly invites the CLRAE to draw up appropriate instruments in order to establish a political dialogue with those Regions having legislative powers.

***The Florence Conference*** concludes its work in the hope that:

- 1) the intentions expressed in the Treaty of Amsterdam with regard to democracy, to freedom and human rights, to the rule of law, to solidarity and to cohesion be swiftly implemented;
- 2) that progress be made with regard to combating unemployment, with regard to the recognition of basic social rights, with regard to the struggle against social exclusion and, most particularly, with regard to achieving equality of opportunity between men and women;
- 3) that the Regions should reinforce their commitment in favour of the accession of countries in Eastern Europe which have requested to join the European Union.

The Conference furthermore urges most strongly that the entire European Community, as represented by the leaders of individual member states, adopt as one of its main goals peace in Europe and in the world, a peace founded upon democracy, justice, the respect of human rights and freedom and solidarity amongst peoples. The Conference deems that the best way to achieve this is by means of a common foreign policy and by means of co-ordinating diplomatic efforts.

The Florence Conference hopes that in implementing the Treaty of Amsterdam, art. 61 and 63, the European Parliament together with the Committee of the Regions, the Council and the Commission, will promote the establishment of a Committee of experts of the regional, state and Community institutions in order to prepare a joint projects for the solution of problems connected with the

migration of populations coming from third countries and with providing them with hospitality and appropriate integration.

It is not only the CLRAE which aspires to this goal but also the women and men of Europe who harbour faith and hope in the knowledge that the culture of the peoples of Europe has yet much to bestow upon humankind.

The CLRAE welcomes the establishment of the new Parliaments in Scotland and in Wales and hopes that their membership of the CLRAE will be formalised as soon as possible, enabling them to contribute towards strengthening the movement.

A mandate is hereby conferred upon the President who organised the Conference to pass all the documents adopted on to the interested institutions and parties.

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#### DECLARATION n. 1

"Direct elections for the European Parliament shall be held for the fifth time from the 10th to the 13th of June. These elections are being held in a period in which European activities are playing an increasingly important role in all aspects of the lives of the citizens of the European Union, something made abundantly clear by the recent introduction of a common European currency. It is for that very reason that European Union policies require a broad-based democratic legitimacy. First and foremost is the need for a strong European Parliament, founded upon the bedrock of a wholehearted mandate of the voters. A high voter turnout at the European elections, to be held in four weeks, would be an important sign of this.

The parliaments of the Laender and the regional assemblies can play an extremely important role in achieving a high voter turnout by using the means at their disposal to call upon the citizens to vote. In this context, there are a number of possibilities, such as: having the Presidents of parliaments call upon the citizenry to cast their vote, organising debates and conferences on Europe, specific initiatives on European topics aimed at young people, etc.

In the long run, mobilising the electorate to cast their vote in European elections presupposes that the electoral system be a transparent one in the eyes of citizens. They have a right to be more informed than in the past on who they are voting for and why they are voting.

Thus, in order for the European Parliament to be firmly embedded in the minds of citizens, the members of the European Parliament must have grass-roots connections to the voters. The citizens must know their members of Parliament, who in turn represent them in Strasbourg.

In order to awaken in the minds of citizens a closer bond with the European Parliament, the voters must know the European members of parliament very well. For this reason the Conference of the Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe (CLRAE) wholeheartedly supports a draft electoral system which was adopted by the European Parliament on 15th July 1998, whereby art. 2 provides for the creation of electoral constituencies. The CLRAE also views favourably the fact that in the very near future the member states, without losing their own autonomy, will be able to form regional electoral constituencies.

The ongoing task of the parliaments of the Laender and of the regional assemblies is also to make clear to the people, most particularly to young people, just how important the European Union is in maintaining peace and prosperity in Europe. The parliaments of the Laender and the regional assemblies of the European Union are therefore in a position, given their public role and their role as intermediaries, to make an important contribution to the spread of European-mindedness. They shall develop and strengthen initiatives aimed at achieving this goal.

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ANNEX TO THE FINAL DECLARATION

*The Conference of the Presidents of the Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe:*

1. In view of the need to inform the citizenry and the European Regional Parliaments about the regional parliamentary movement;
2. Whereas there are no publications about the actions of the European parliament, in particular about the regional parliaments;

**RECOMMENDS**

- a) The establishment of a working group to monitor the legislative competences, statutes, voting procedures, etc. adopted by the Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe;
- b) That all the parliaments which are members of the CLRAE be responsible for this work;
- c) That the President of the Tuscan Regional Government should chair the working group and appoint the members who will make up the said group;

**RECOMMENDS**

That the European Parliament together with the respective Regional Legislative Assemblies, should periodically produce publications about Europe and the European Parliament in all the regions which are members of the CLRAE.

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#### **CLRAE INTERNAL REGULATIONS**

The CLRAE is the conference of the Presidents of the Regional Legislative Assemblies of the European Union.

1. The presidents of the Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe may attend CLRAE meetings as members with full rights.

2. The Conference shall meet at least once a year.

3. The venue and topics up for discussion at the next Conference are to be established during the course of the previous Conference, by means of a general document which shall be adopted by the Presidents.

4. In order to prepare the conference, not more than three months after the last conference the organising President shall summon a working group which will have the task of deciding the conference agenda and drawing up the draft final document.

Apart from the organising president, the working group shall comprise:

a) The presidents responsible for organising the last conference;

b) One president of the Legislative Assembly for each individual state.

5. The organising President shall send the agenda and the draft final document to all the Presidents of the Assemblies at least forty-five days before the conference.

6. The President who was responsible for organising the last conference (hereinafter called the Co-ordinator) has the following tasks:

a) to transmit all documents approved by the conference which he or she organised to all interested parties or bodies;

b) attend to relations with the European Community in the name of and on behalf of the CLRAE and to press for the implementation of the ideas expressed in the documents which have been adopted;

c) receive and transmit to all Presidents of the CLRAE all documents of mutual interest.

7. Should the mandate of the Co-ordinator expire as President of the Legislative Assembly, he or she shall be replaced by the appointed successor.

8. Logistics and technical services, including interpretation in the working languages, shall be provided by the body organising the conference. The languages used shall be: Spanish, German, English, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Finnish.

Should the Conference be held in a region with a specific regional language, it will be the Co-ordinator's responsibility to provide for translation into that language.

9. The Co-ordinator may invite observers to the conference, having first consulted the working group. The observers shall have the right to speak but not to vote.

The Co-ordinator is free to decide whether to make further invitations.

10. Travel and lodging expenses shall be borne by the participants.

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1. Thirteen years ago the Chernobyl disaster with all its terrible and tragic consequences brought to the world's attention the incalculable risk potential posed by nuclear power stations.
2. Owing to the potential dangers inherent in nuclear power stations, decisions about building nuclear power stations and bringing them into service must always be taken on the basis of complete and objective documentation, according to guidelines which cannot be purely based on business management principles. The long-term impact on the national economy and a cost/benefit analysis must be also be considered when making such decisions.
3. These indications are not being observed in the Czech Republic where the nuclear power station of Temelin is at present under construction. Not only are western safety standards being ignored, but on the basis of a cost/benefit analysis it is not even useful for the national economy.
4. The Conference of Presidents of the Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe appeals to the Czech government to reconsider its decision with regard to building the Temelin nuclear power station and putting it into operation, asking that construction work be halted.
5. It is essential to be able to provide financial aid and incentives if the construction work is stopped and the Temelin nuclear power station is not put into operation. To this end the Conference of the Presidents of the Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe appeals to the institutions of the European Union and in particular the European Commission to support and promote any programmes for abandoning nuclear energy, and to provide alternative solutions such as the exploitation of renewable energy sources.