

# Declaration of Innsbruck

1 June 2012

## **Decentralisation – Regionalisation – Multi-level governance**

- Decentralisation generally brings about greater effectiveness and efficiency as regional conditions can be taken into account, thereby strengthening among other things the region's economic output. The decentralisation of public tasks must include the transfer of real decision-making powers and the financial means required for them.
- The Charter of Local Self-Government must be observed as a minimum requirement in every decentralisation activity. Furthermore and within the framework of its monitoring activities, the Congress uses the Reference Framework on Regional Democracy as a benchmark for assessing democracy at regional level. The regions represented in Innsbruck declare themselves in favour of giving the Reference Framework more institutional support without wanting to anticipate ongoing reform processes at other levels.
- The regions have to implement and administer a large part of European regulations. If Regional Parliaments with legislative powers make statements within the framework of subsidiarity assessment, these statements should also be sent directly to the EU Commission so that the Commission is aware of Regional Parliaments, takes them into account and can respond to their statements.
- Multi-level governance and the principle of subsidiarity (which is part of the former) not only redefine the relationship of the regions within member states but also within the European Union and the Council of Europe at European level. The cooperation and partnership of all relevant political players will enhance the status of the regions and strengthen decentralisation<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, in keeping with the consistent implementation of the principle of multi-level governance, the regions demand that they are involved in all opinion-forming and decision-making processes as early as possible. In this respect, regions with legislative powers should make use of the existing possibilities of participation in the European policy-making bodies and in the intergovernmental committees that are relevant for regions.

## **Financial and economic crisis**

- The financial crisis is affecting the regions of Europe in various ways. Citizens are keenly aware of the impacts. Regions with legislative powers are on the forefront in the fight against these impacts; they have a high level of responsibility due to their budgetary sovereignty and their closeness to the citizen. The regions are directly confronted with the citizens' concerns and worries. The people depend on the support and provision of public services, which the regions are frequently in charge of.
- On the occasion of the Conference of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Kiev 2011, the regions underlined their readiness to contribute to the measures required to overhaul the national budgets, but here too, they demand that the national states, the European Union and the Council of Europe proceed in a spirit of partnership, in keeping with the principles of subsidiarity and multi-level governance.

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<sup>1</sup> As early as 2001, the European Commission published its White Paper – European Governance. In the Council of Europe, Multi-Level-Governance was embodied in the 'Agenda in common' which was adopted by the Conference of Ministers in Kiev 2011. The Lisbon Treaty also contains important advances in the implementation of this principle such as the explicit recognition of the national identity of the member states including regional and local self-governance, the new definition of the principle of subsidiarity, the new rules concerning public services, the possibility for the CoR or national parliaments to bring violations of the principle of subsidiarity before the court.

- However, the austerity measures needed to overcome the financial and economic crisis must not have a detrimental effect on long-term investment capacity for future-oriented investments in research and development, education and qualification or in infrastructure projects that produce added value in Europe, for they create the prerequisites for intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth.

### **Human rights and rule of law**

- The regions with legislative powers in Europe have specific competencies and consequently key responsibilities to heighten an awareness of and promote human rights at regional level, in particular when deciding on Regulations that affect the living conditions of citizens.
- The fight against corruption (also at regional and municipal level) is indispensable if democracy and the rule of law are to be ensured. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities within the Council of Europe and many regions have shown great commitment to this issue for decades.

### **Regional parliaments and control**

- Regional parliaments have an important role to play as control bodies. In cooperation with regional courts of auditors, ombuds offices or similar institutions, they are guarantors of lawful, economical, efficient and appropriate administration as well as of transparency and closeness to the citizen. They make an essential contribution towards strengthening democracy at regional level.
- The regions represented in Innsbruck call for the establishment of courts of auditors, ombuds offices or similar institutions in all regions to oversee and advise administration.

### **Transfrontier regional cooperation**

- Regions have been cooperating across borders to jointly master common transfrontier challenges for a long time. Legal provisions for transfrontier cooperation have been created both in the Council of Europe<sup>2</sup> and in the European Union<sup>3</sup>. The regions with legislative powers call upon the member states of the Council of Europe to ratify the Madrid outline convention as well as its additional protocols and in particular Protocol No. 3 concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs).
- Whenever regions with legislative powers team up to form a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) or appropriate interstate structures, the experiences gained can be used for further cooperation at regional level. The EGTC regulation of the EU still gives the member states too strong a position. The latest amendments to the EGTC regulation proposed by the European Commission constitute an important step towards facilitating the establishment of an EGTC. The regions with legislative powers call upon the institutions of the European Union to continue to pursue this course whilst involving the European regions and to remove the obstacles that still hinder the establishment of an EGTC.

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<sup>2</sup> In particular by means of the Madrid outline convention and its additional protocols.

<sup>3</sup> In particular by means of the EGTC regulation ('European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation'); the draft Financial Framework 2014- 2020 proposed by the European Commission underlines the importance of territorial cooperation.

- The various forms of cross-border cooperation at regional level are fertile soil for the development of macro-regional strategies. They hold out the possibility to closely integrate non-EU states and their subgovernmental levels into cross-border cooperation. The regions have proven their readiness and ability to contribute towards the development and implementation of macro-regional strategies in the two existing macro-regions of the Baltic Sea and Danube Basin.
- The regions with legislative powers call upon the member states and European Commission to actively support transfrontier cooperation and macro-regions.

### **Boosting cooperation between CoR, Congress, REGLEG and CALRE**

- CALRE and REGLEG look after the interests of the regions with legislative powers in the European Union. All efforts aimed at closer cooperation between CALRE and REGLEG must be supported. In the Committee of the Regions<sup>4</sup> and the Congress of the Council of Europe, the regions with legislative powers have in many ways a pioneering role to play in the European process of regionalisation.
- The regions represented at the Innsbruck Conference must give their support to intensifying cooperation, harmonising content and jointly representing our common interests at European level in regard of the four above-named organisations – but also of all other European regional organisations – in order to advance regionalisation in Europe by strengthening the European regions.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, with the interregional group ‘Regions with legislative powers’.