

The Permanent Committee of the CALRE met in Brussels at the office of the Committee of Regions on 25 January 2010, to discuss the following

Agenda:

1. Report of the President;
2. Discussion of the tripartite draft agreement between the Council of Europe, CALRE, and RegLeg in its last version dated 8 December 2009;
3. Discussion of the possibility of offering an operative agreement with RegLeg;
4. Evaluation of the CoR proposal to set up an office in the Committee of the Regions in order to be able to appoint a permanent CALRE functionary in Brussels;
5. Discussion of the possibility of change or add to the Innsbruck Declaration, as requested by the Walloon Parliament;
6. Presentation of operative agendas for 2010 by the Groups;
7. Setting up possible synergies among the Workgroups for 2010;
8. Adoption of the agenda of the Workgroups;
9. Sundry and other.

The meeting was attended by: Giovanni Kessler, President of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Trento, Peter Straub, President of the Regional Parliament of Baden-Württemberg, Hans Penz, President of the Regional Parliament of Lower Austria, Monica Donini, President of the Regional Council of Emilia-Romagna, Françoise Dupuis, President of the Parliament of the Région de Bruxelles, Rosemary Butler, Deputy Vice President of the National Assembly of Wales and Francisco Coelho Cabral, President of the Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region of the Azores. At the morning session the floor was taken by Herwig van Staa, President of the Regional Parliament of the Tyrol.

The meeting was also attended by: Ernest Benach i Pascual, President of the Parliament of Catalonia, for the subsidiarity workgroup, and Arantza Quiroga Cía, President of the Basque Parliament, for the e-democracy workgroup.

The meeting was presided over by President Kessler in his capacity as Rotating President. The Secretary-General of CALRE was assisted by Dr. Giorgia Loss, and the Director for CALRE, Dr. Tommaso Leonardi.

The session began at 10:05 a.m.

After verifying the presence of the majority of the members of the committee, President Kessler welcomed the members. He then introduced item 1 of the agenda.

Item 1 of the agenda:

1. Report of the President;

President Kessler informed the members that he had been working on the first task of his new mandate as President of the CALRE: re-doing the website. He stated that the website had been entirely revised and given a new address. It now comes under the Conference heading and no longer under a private company. Then he gave a brief illustration of the new portal and indicated the changes that were made.

The floor was then taken by Deputy Vice President of the National Assembly of Wales, Rosemary Butler, who requested that the website not be limited to major documents and big news items regarding the activities of the Conference but that it also provide interactive functions.

President Kessler agreed that there was such a need and informed the meeting that the main page will provide a dedicated section reserved to members.

The President of the Regional Parliament of Baden-Württemberg, Peter Straub, emphasized the difficulty of understanding the texts.

President Kessler suggested it should be the responsibility of each Assembly to provide the translations they need for the parts that interest them specifically. He also pointed out that he had represented CALRE at the meetings of the Commission on Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER), one of the six specialized commissions operating as part of the Committee of the Regions. In fact he expressed the belief that directly monitoring the development of these aspects is essential for an organization like CALRE, which sets out to reinforce the role of Regions as part of the European Union. He also pointed out that the notes drawn up on this subject were sent to all the members of the Permanent Committee, along with the convocation of the current meeting. He informed the meeting that these notes are available to everyone in attendance. President Kessler also informed the meeting that he had sent a letter of stern disapproval to the President of the European Commission, Barroso, in which he upholds a different type of recognition of the role of the Regions and their respective Assemblies. He specified that the initiative was in response to the recent report approved by the Commission on European Policies after 2020, from which it transpired that little attention was being given to regional institutions. In this regard he thanked in particular the Parliaments of Wales del Baden-Württemberg and Catalonia for having drawn his attention to the position taken by Commission.

The President of the Parliament of the Région de Bruxelles, Françoise Dupuis, asked to have a copy of the documentation adopted by the Barroso Commission.

President Kessler acknowledged her request and asked for the members to give their e-mail addresses to facilitate contacts.

The President of the Basque Parliament, Arantza Quiroga Cía, said he believed it would be advisable to promote an ongoing lobbying action, especially with regard to the Committee of the Regions.

President Kessler declared himself willing to support such an effort and thought that a meeting with the President of the Committee of the Regions should also involve the participation of other members of the Permanent Committee of the CALRE.

Items 2, 3 and 4 of the agenda:

- **Discussion of the tripartite draft agreement between the Council of Europe, CALRE and the RegLeg in its latest version dated 8 December 2009;**
- **Discussion of the possibility of offering an operative agreement with RegLeg;**
- **Evaluation of the CoR proposal to request an office in the Committee of the Regions to be able to appoint a permanent CALRE functionary in Brussels;**

President Kessler then introduced an examination of items 1) and 3) of the agenda, pointing out that the Council of Europe had received a proposal (not new) to establish a form of collaboration between the Council, the CALRE and Reg.Leg. He deemed it a work hypothesis worthy of consideration, whether it might translate into a tripartite agreement in which the Council of Europe would participate or give rise to a coordination of the works with RegLeg, upon proposal of the latter. In underlining the importance of this opportunity, he believed that every decision concerning it required dialogue and awareness about how to proceed; the subsequent drafting and formalization of the act merely constitutes a technical fulfillment as the consequence of the decision. As regards item 4) of the agenda, he informed the meeting of the informal offer received by CALRE, regarding the availability of an office inside the premises of the Committee of the Regions if the association wanted to have a functionary in Brussels.

The President of the Regional Council of Emilia-Romagna, Monica Donini, expressed her approval of the suggested hypothesis that CALRE have a permanent representative in Brussels, though she pointed out the likelihood that this would lead to a change in the current regulatory arrangement. She noted that the main problem the regional assemblies run into daily is the difficulty in accurately distributing their information and that in this regard opening an office would require a basic proposition to overcome this impasse, at least partially, with the aim to strengthen relations with the Committee of the Regions and give more room to dialogue with the European Parliament.

The President of the Parliament of Catalonia, Ernest Benach i Pascual, expressed the need to take a positive view on signing collaboration agreements. As regards the additional question, he expressed his conviction that opening an office should be supported by an effective determination to ensure the continuity of the work of such an organization because only by doing so would representation actually be successful.

The President of the Basque Parliament, Arantza Quiroga Cía, agreed that CALRE should have its own representative in Brussels. He also suggested that the financial needs should be evaluated and made available.

The Deputy Vice President of the National Assembly of Wales Rosemary Butler observed that, along with an estimation of the costs, a serious consideration should be accompanied by a decision about the tasks the office would have to carry out, and the resulting opportunities for adding more collaborators.

The President of the Regional Parliament of Lower Austria, Hans Penz, recognized the importance of launching a collaboration with RegLeg, even in the absence of a specific agreement. Regarding the opening of an office in Brussels, he pointed out that there would be quite a few problems involved: the costs to sustain, the definition of the mode of financing, and the criteria for determining the competency of the appointee. As regards the stance taken by the European Commission, he said he would be willing to meet with the President himself or, as an alternative, the members of the organization coordinated by the President, to ensure an increase in the efficacy of the actions taken by CALRE.

The President of the Regional Parliament of Baden-Württemberg, Peter Straub, reminded the members that the Lisbon Treaty offers new possibilities for taking action through the Committee of the Regions, and considered it more functional for each Region to have a representative in Brussels as an effective channel for communicating with their respective territorial institutions. He then announced that he was against the idea of a CALRE office in Brussels, for this reason and for the economic reasons.

President Kessler said he believed it would be advisable to involve the Committee as a preliminary step so they could elaborate a joint project as a basis for further development. He pointed out that the availability of an office in Brussels must be kept separate from the issue of the Secretary-General because the functionary chosen would have to work on site: the idea would be to provide CALRE with one person only to carry out ongoing activities independent of the single presidencies, to collect and distribute information on the activities of the European Union.

The President of the Parliament of Catalonia, Ernest Benach i Pascual, pointed out that there would be even greater difficulty in this regard posed by the annual change of presidency which inevitably interferes with projects in progress.

President Kessler specified that in the written proposal to be submitted to the attention of the Committee he would explain not only the costs of but also the duties that the functionary would be called upon to carry out. He also asked for authorization by the Committee members for him to sign the aforesaid agreements, as long as new assessments were not made that would need to be submitted to the attention of the Committee.

The President of the Regional Parliament of Tyrol, Herwig van Staa, maintained that the agreement had already been signed.

President Kessler acknowledged the declaration of the Vice President, and said he would inform them on the definition of the subsequent phases.

Item 5 of the agenda:

- **Discussion of the possibility to change or supplement the Declaration of Innsbruck, as requested by the Walloon Parliament;**

President Kessler illustrated the issue by specifying that the protest letter he received concerns a simple note to add to the Declaration of Innsbruck; the note specifies that the term "Regions and Regional Parliaments" should also include "provinces and other territorial structures with legislative powers"; this letter sheds light on the fact that the addition was formally improper because added later and substantially improper because an extraneous concept was being introduced to the Belgian legal system.

The President of the Regional Parliament of Tyrol, Herwig Van Staa, maintained that there had been a misunderstanding.

The President of the Parliament of Région de Bruxelles, Françoise Dupuis, requested that the note be removed, or that the term "include" be replaced with the following phrase "may include".

President Kessler declared he was not contrary to removing the note but he even believed it would be counterproductive to add the suggested modification because it would potentially create confusion; the Autonomous Provinces are already an integral part of CALRE without needing specific provisions. He therefore proposed to suppress the aforementioned note; he acknowledged the consent of the attending members in this regard and declared the morning work finished. He adjourned the meeting until 2:30 p.m.

After resuming the session at 2:30 p.m., President Kessler introduced the following items of the agenda.

Items 6, 7 and 8 of the agenda:

- **Presentation of the operative agendas for 2010 by the Groups;**
- **Setting up possible synergies among the Workgroups for 2010;**
- **Adoption of the agenda of the Workgroups;**

President Kessler mentioned the general need for more flexibility in the activities of the workgroups. He pointed out that of the four existing groups, two can still be considered operative: the one that deals with the principle of subsidiarity, a transversal and particularly topical theme, managed by the Parliament of Catalonia, and the group working on the subject of e-democracy, under the supervision of Basque Parliament; the other two groups, competent on federalism and regional democracy, require further thought. He finally pointed out an issue of shared interest: the forms of cooperation of the legislative assemblies that could be studied more extensively in a workgroup.

The President of the Basque Parliament, Arantza Quiroga Cía, brought to the attention of the Committee members an operative proposal of the workgroup that she coordinates, specifying that in the meeting scheduled for Tuesday 26 January a questionnaire would be presented for the purpose of recapitulating the existing situation of the various Regional entities in this regard. She informed the meeting that the questionnaire would then be sent to all the members. She expressed hope that there would be a good response to the initiative. The intention – with the underlying aim to attract young people to the institutions, because they are closer to the world of technology than anyone else – is to exchange ideas, on the basis of the information gathered, at the session of the Permanent Committee scheduled for 8 July 2010.

The President of the Parliament of Catalonia, Ernest Benach i Pascual, presented a summary of the program for the year in progress, already sent to the members of the workgroup on the principle of subsidiarity, with reference to the Parliament of Catalonia.

President Kessler thanked the two presidents for their contribution and emphasized how important it is that the workgroups receive the maximum number of

suggestions from Committee Members to guarantee a real synergy. He then asked the meeting to look into the possibility that one of the Italian Regions take charge of another workgroup.

The President of the Regional Council of Emilia-Romagna, Monica Donini, thought it would be advisable to do further research regarding the Italian legal system, through the Conference of Legislative Assemblies of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

The President of the Parliament of Catalonia, Ernest Benach i Pascual, specified that the Regions belonging to the workgroup he presides over are Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Aragon.

The President of the Basque Parliament, Arantza Quiroga Cía, provided a similar clarification, listing the following regions: Andalusia, Flanders, Scotland, Madrid and Madeira.

The President acknowledged the clarifications expressed by the President of the Parliament of Catalonia and the President of the Basque Parliament, and urged all of them to make their own contributions to the work of the workgroups. He then asked for the collaboration of the attendees in sending to the President's office documents or information of shared interest. He reminded the attendees of the dates of the next meetings of the Permanent Committee, 17 April in Madeira and 8 July in San Sebastian, and informed them that he would communicate the date of the plenary session as soon as possible, presumably to be held on the first few days of October. He closed the session and thanked everyone for their participation and collaboration in the meeting.

The meeting was ended at 4 p.m.

Rotating President of CALRE

Giovanni Kessler

(President of the Council of the Province of Trento)

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