

EUROPEAN UNION

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

RESOLUTION

tabled by the COR Political Groups

on the

ANNUAL STATEMENT ON THE PRIORITIES

OF THE

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

The Committee of the Regions

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Strategic Objectives 2000-2005 - "Shaping the New Europe" (COM(2000) 154) final;

HAVING REGARD TO the European Commission's work programme for 2001 (COM(2001) 28 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the political priorities of the Committee of the Regions;

HAVING REGARD TO the COR resolution on the European Commission's five-year strategic programme and the work programme for 2000 (CdR 125/2000) fin*;

HAVING REGARD TO the European Parliament's resolution on the European Commission's five-year strategic programme (B5-0143, 0144 and 0145/2000);

WHEREAS a closer alignment of the priorities and objectives of all EU bodies will reinforce the impact of the initiatives and actions of the individual institutions;

WHEREAS in most European countries there is a growing trend towards decentralisation and a strengthening of local and regional governments, and as a result those spheres of government are increasingly affected by European policies;

WHEREAS the Committee of the Regions, exercising its responsibility as the voice of local and regional authorities in Europe, wishes to react to the priority actions proposed by the European Commission;

WHEREAS the Committee of the Regions wishes to state its priorities for the coming year, in view of the forthcoming adoption of its work programme for 2001-2002;

WHEREAS the participation of the Committee of the Regions, as the representative of local and regional authorities in the EU institutional framework, will strengthen democratic legitimacy and transparency;

The Committee of the Regions adopted the following resolution at its 37th plenary session of 14 and 15 February 2001 (meeting of Thursday, 15 February)

1. welcomes the European Commission's work programme for 2001; and expresses its satisfaction with the Swedish Presidency objectives and those of the forthcoming Belgian Presidency;
2. regrets that the European Commission has not yet been able to follow its recommendation to produce a well-targeted annual work programme; and therefore reiterates the need for fewer actions focused on key issues;
3. supports the ongoing European Commission's commitment and progress in mainstreaming gender equality and anti-discrimination in EU policies and not simply as self-evident rights;

A. New forms of governance

4. looks forward with interest to the forthcoming Commission **White Paper on European governance** and its primary objective to bring Europe closer to its citizens in order to meet their needs and concerns more effectively;
5. welcomes, in this respect, a new framework for the Union's **communication and information policy**, which corresponds to one of the priority actions started up by the COR, geared to improving the services provided to the public and promoting partnership with local and regional authorities, as an essential element of a progressive Europe;
6. expects that new forms of governance will enable the different spheres to cooperate more efficiently and effectively, in particular in relation to the major issues; and reiterates its opinion that the involvement of local and regional authorities is essential for successful further European integration;
7. agrees that the need for more effective governance in Europe ties in with the need for **an in-depth reform of the EU institutions and their methods of interaction**;
8. stresses the need of a better clarification of political responsibility in EU policies in order to achieve greater accountability; and welcomes in this regard the decisions, to this effect, of the last intergovernmental conference;
9. calls for greater transparency and openness in the proceedings of all EU institutions, including access to documents and information;
10. states firmly that the overall process should be guided by the principle of **subsidiarity** in order to ensure that decisions are taken as close as possible to the citizen;
11. restates therefore its will to strengthen its powers and status in the European decision-making process in the upcoming post-Nice institutional reform and, in the meantime, to take concrete steps to put into practice the current **consultation procedure with the European Parliament** on key issues;

12. stresses the importance of looking for ways to introduce **greater interaction between the Committee and the European Commission**, which could be reflected in a cooperation agreement;

13. reiterates its will to be associated, together with the regions with legislative powers, in the exchange of views with the **informal Councils of Ministers** on matters of regional interest;

14. welcomes the call by the president of the European Commission for "a major **public debate** about the future of Europe involving not just EU governments but the candidate countries and all stakeholders, including regions, local institutions and civil society"; and wishes to be fully involved in this debate;

15. supports the suggestions for setting up a Convention or a similar body (such as the one that was charged to draw up the draft Charter of Fundamental Rights) in the post-Nice process as **a more democratic, open and pluralist method of negotiation in preparation for the next 2004 conference**; and strongly insists on being fully associated as a political institution with the future Convention's discussions from the very beginning;

16. welcomes the reinforced role given to the **European political parties** in the Nice Treaty in both advancing democracy while expressing the will of citizens and bridging the gap between the European institutions and the citizens of Europe;

17. prioritises the **simplification and rationalisation of the Treaties** within a constitutional framework with a view to making them clear and understandable to citizens;

B. Enlargement

18. welcomes the European Commission's commitment to intensify its **communication strategy on enlargement**; and restates calls for coordination of activities and cooperation between the COR and the EU institutions, which should be implemented at the local and regional level;

19. calls on the European Commission to attach major importance to the fundamental objective enshrined in the Treaties of **achieving social and economic cohesion** in the candidate countries, where the existing disparities are considerable and could become even wider as a direct consequence of ongoing economic development;

20. states its support for the **process of decentralisation and regionalisation** in the candidate countries and the development of economic and administrative cooperation among the regions;

21. expresses its concerns about insufficient consultation with local and regional authorities, as they are the key to the ability to implement EU policies in the candidate countries; and suggests therefore that the European Commission develop a specific training programme in close consultation with the COR for local and regional authorities in preparation for accession;

22. encourages the European Commission's wish to speed up the relaunch of the Barcelona process and expresses some concerns on the weak results of the 2000 meeting in Marseilles; and in this context, underlines the importance of decentralised cooperation and the role of local and regional authorities in the **Euro-Mediterranean partnership** as a tool of dialogue, peace and democratic growth;

C. Towards a new economic, social and territorial cohesion

23. welcomes the adoption of the **second report on economic and social cohesion** and the European Commission's call for a wide-ranging debate involving all the actors concerned and in

particular the local and regional authorities; considers that the COR should be mentioned in the DG *Regional Policy* 2001 programme; and would like to actively participate in this process;

24. takes the view that the notion of **territorial cohesion** should be taken into consideration as a complementary component of the principle of economic and social cohesion aimed at reducing disparities, as enshrined in the Treaties;

25. recalls that the **implementation of the internal market** shall take into account the EU objective of economic and social cohesion and shall contribute to its achievement; and in this regard, firmly believes that services of general interest will play a major role, as they directly affect local and regional authorities;

26. keeps on recalling the importance of an **urban dimension** in European policy matters given the fact that 80% of European citizens live in urban areas, and that cities are vital to ensure competitive regions and a competitive Europe; and stresses the need to develop urban, rural and peripheral areas in a balanced, coordinated and sustainable way;

27. recalls the primary role of local and regional authorities as regards introduction of the **euro**; urges special consideration to be given to the most vulnerable user groups; and welcomes the proposal of the president of the European Commission to request COR support in this regard;

28. supports the European Commission's commitment to promote a high level of **employment** while focusing on **quality**, combining competitiveness and social cohesion; welcomes in this context the European Commission's recent call for "a more strategic partnership with local and regional authorities and local partnerships"; and therefore reiterates the importance of the campaign "Acting locally and regionally for employment" (e.g. Territorial Pacts for Employment) and the objective of "lifelong learning";

29. agrees on the need to modernise and develop **sustainable social protection and pension systems**;

30. expresses its wish to be associated to the draft of the forthcoming **White Paper on youth**; and insists on the key role played by local and regional authorities in promoting social integration and cohesion through education and training;

31. supports the European Commission's efforts to make Europe an integral part of the **information and knowledge-based society** while underlining the fact that new technologies are also creating new social needs;

32. reiterates the urgent need for a **common migration and asylum policy** for the European Union involving all spheres of government (national, regional and local);

D. Sustainable development

33. welcomes the **overall integrated strategy for development** and real progress towards the sustainability of Europe's transport, energy, research, agriculture and other common policies; and agrees on the imperative need to reconcile economic growth with social cohesion and environmental protection;

34. expresses satisfaction with the ongoing environment-support proposals being conducted at all levels with the aim of integrating economic development compatible with **environmental** protection; underlines however the need to implement existing environmental legislation in the Member States; experience has shown that concrete involvement by local and regional authorities

has been of utmost importance in implementing global action;

35. supports the European Commission's proposal for **greater consultation with the public** in the drafting of certain plans and programmes relating to the environment and in making environmental information more easily accessible to individual citizens with a view to creating a framework which, in a long-term perspective, will not jeopardise the ability of future generations to meet their needs; and also supports the call for integrally sustainable fishery;

36. promotes the call for more **sustainable agriculture** integrating rural development, environmentally-friendly production methods, improved quality, consumer interests and consumer health; such sustainable agriculture would play a key role towards economic, social and territorial cohesion;

37. hopes that the forthcoming **White Paper on future developments in the common transport policy** will contribute to the development of efficient and economically viable transport systems which prioritise safety and environment and reflect the special features of regions;



38. will adopt its annual work programme on the basis of this resolution;

39. instructs its president to forward this resolution to the European Commission, the European Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the European Central Bank.

Brussels, 15 February 2001.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

Jos Chabert

Vincenzo Falcone

* OJ C 226, 8.8.2000, p. 46

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