

**EUROPEAN UNION**

**COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Brussels, 25 February 2003

**RESOLUTION**

**of the Committee of the Regions of 13 February 2003**

**on**

**THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S WORK PROGRAMME**

**AND**

**THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGION'S PRIORITIES FOR 2003**

HAVING REGARD TO the Commission's legislative and Work Programme for 2003 (COM(2002) 590 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the CoR Policy Strategy 2003 adopted by the Bureau on 13 September 2002 (R/CdR 232/2002 item 7);

HAVING REGARD TO the priorities of the Greek Presidency of the European Union;

HAVING REGARD TO the Draft Operational Programme of the Council for 2003 (14944/02);

HAVING REGARD TO the resolution of the European Parliament on the Legislative and Work Programme 2003 adopted in plenary on 5 December 2002 (P5-TA-PROV(2002)592);

HAVING REGARD TO the Protocol governing arrangements for cooperation between the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions (DI CdR 81/2001 rev. 2);

WHEREAS the CoR, when elaborating its political priorities, seeks to take fully into consideration those of the other EU institutions;

WHEREAS local and regional authorities are responsible for an important part of the implementation of the EU policies;

WHEREAS it would greatly enhance the democratic legitimacy of EU policies if local and regional authorities help define the EU priorities.

At its 48th plenary session (meeting of 13 February 2003) the Committee of the Regions adopted the following resolution by a unanimous vote:

*The Committee of the Regions*

1. **welcomes** the new thematic and strategic approach of the Commission in its annual planning of work;
2. **reiterates** its wish to be involved in the inter-institutional dialogue on the annual political strategy and the work programme;
3. **recommends** a reduction from the 580 titles on the Work Programme by further prioritisation, integration and recasting;

3 (a) **encourages** the Commission to implement forthwith the recommendation made by the Convention working group on the subsidiarity principle to attach to every legislative proposal a "subsidiarity assessment" containing details making it possible to assess the extent to which the principle of subsidiarity is respected in it. This part of the document should also include an assessment of its financial impact and, in the case of a directive, of its implications for the rules to be implemented by the Member States and the sub-national authorities.

*Enlargement*

4. **endorses** the Commission's key initiatives in this area; **expresses its concern** however, at the insufficient involvement of local and regional authorities by the Commission and the national authorities, and the lack of awareness of what accession will mean for them;
5. **notes with regret** that the Commission Work Programme does not foresee consultation of the Committee of the regions on most of the enlargement-related issues;
6. **welcomes** the emphasis on the qualitative dimension of enlargement; **stresses** in particular the need to further develop the notion of European citizenship, and the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity;
7. **points out** that public debate regarding this enlargement and possible further enlargement rounds is a pre-condition for public support; **proposes** therefore that information to and involvement of the citizens should be amongst the fundamental objectives for enlargement; **calls for** a joint effort by politicians across Europe in all spheres of governance, to initiate a wide public debate about enlargement and the future outlines of the EU;
8. **urges** the Commission and the governments of the applicant countries to step up considerably consultation of, and information to local and regional authorities during the pre-accession stage and to earmark the necessary means for this process;
9. **underlines** the need for capacity building at local and regional level, as successful accession will depend largely on the degree of preparedness of local and regional authorities; **calls on** the Commission to foresee arrangements for this purpose of local and regional authorities *after* the phasing out of PHARE;

10. **calls for** budget to be made available for cooperation projects with candidate countries, in particular for those projects that are based on the exchange of experience and capacity building; **underlines** moreover the necessity to further develop the cooperation projects with the enlarged European Union's neighbours. In this context, priority must be given to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, and to relations with the Western Balkans, Russia, the Ukraine and Moldova, in particular by assessing the economic and commercial impact of enlargement on these countries.

#### *Stability and security*

11. **agrees** with the Commission that this is a priority theme, and welcomes the wider perspective that the Commission has chosen; **believes** that European integration has proven to be the best possible policy to achieve peace, stability prosperity and freedom for its citizens, and therefore **reiterates** its view that – in addition to the proposed security measures – policies to achieve economic and social cohesion, the spread of education and culture, fair trade and sustainable development, contribute equally to a safe living environment for citizens;
12. **proposes** furthermore, in view of the natural and environmental disasters in recent years and months, to include environmental protection in the key objectives for creating a secure and safe living environment; and **welcomes** the forthcoming integrated strategy on risks which can be seen as a first step in this direction;
13. **points out** that the underlying principles of the European area of freedom, security and justice must apply equally to *all*;
14. **recalls** that local and regional authorities are amongst the primary actors with regard to ensuring stability and security, and that the new emphasis on stability and security will have important consequences for local and regional authorities; **Regrets** therefore the absence of any reference to local and regional authorities both in the Commission Work Programme and the Council Operational Programme; **requests** to be consulted on all relevant subjects in this chapter, for example Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, the communication on General crime prevention, a European system of frontier management, anti-fraud measures, the fight against drugs, relations with the neighbours of the Union, or immigration and asylum policies;
15. **welcomes** any progress made in the area of a common immigration and asylum policy and **considers** it essential that common policies are put in place without delay; **warns** however that the matter should not be seen exclusively in the context of security.

#### *Sustainable and inclusive economy*

16. **recommends** for the chapter on "A Sustainable and Inclusive Economy" in the Work Programme and Priorities of the Commission for 2003 to already take account of the accession of ten new countries in 2004;
17. **underlines** the crucial importance of getting ahead with the Lisbon process, in the face of economic slow-down on the one hand and the accession of new Member States on the other;

17 (a) **welcomes** the new coordinated approach of the European employment strategy and the

economic policy guidelines; believes that the Lisbon strategy should be significantly reinforced in order to meet the objectives set for 2010; feels, however, that the requisite structural reforms must not be detrimental to social cohesion, and must therefore be accompanied by major economic and social investment, and in education; in this context the Committee of the Regions endorses the need for the Stability and Growth Pact to include more specific criteria to take account of public investment, in particular in infrastructure and schemes for social and employment integration;

18. **points out** that local and regional authorities are affected by the Lisbon Strategy, and are at the same time responsible for the practical implementation of many of the proposed measures, in some cases even as the main actor; **recommends** therefore that the Committee of the Regions be closely involved in policy making in this area;
19. **is of the view** that in the European Monetary Union the relation between monetary policy and budgetary policy and the application of the Stability and Growth Pact deserves more attention, and that this subject should be studied from the sub-national perspective as well, given that local and regional authorities are responsible for a large part of public spending (in some countries even the largest part);
20. **asks** the EU, the Member States, the local and regional authorities and the social partners to launch territorial employment pacts, to improve the legal framework for private enterprise, especially for SME, and to introduce the necessary reforms of the social security systems in order to create the right conditions for social stability, a sound economy and public welfare;
21. welcomes the inclusion in the Commission's Work Programme and Council Operational Programme of environmental and social concerns as integral elements of the economy, rather than a mere cost factor or a separate policy issue;
22. **highlights** the importance of equal access to services of general interest for the day-to-day lives of citizens, and awaits with interest the forthcoming proposals of the Commission regarding Services of General Interest; **recalls** that local and regional authorities in particular need clarification of state aid rules and the definition of commercial and non-commercial services (the latter not being subject for negotiation within the GATS).

*Further CoR priorities:*

*Constitutional affairs and the debate on the future of the Union*

23. **welcomes** the prominent place granted in the Operational Programme of the Council to the debate on the future of the European Union; **emphasises** once more the necessity to discuss the role of local and regional authorities in the EU and is therefore pleased that the Convention has put it on its agenda;
24. **is pleased** that the issue of local and regional authorities in the EU is now firmly on the political agenda, and **considers** that methods need to be developed for adequate involvement of local and regional authorities in EU policy making, in particular in view of the relatively young and developing structures of local and regional government in the applicant countries;
25. **highlights** the need for further reinforcement of the institutional role of the Committee of the Regions, in line with its natural place as guardian of subsidiarity, proportionality and proximity.

*Communication and information strategy*

26. **is convinced** that a true integration of people cannot succeed if the citizens do not have "ownership" of the process; **believes** that it is time for a comprehensive EU information and communication strategy when awareness *of*, and public support *for* the EU seem to diminish, and **calls upon** politicians in all spheres of governance to take responsibility for the debate on European matters;
27. **points out** that CoR, representing local and regional government, is well placed to communicate with the citizens, and **wishes** to be closely involved in the implementation of the Communication and Information Strategy.

*Regional policies*

28. **awaits** with interest the debate on defining a new cohesion policy and setting the priorities for the future, and **expects** to play a leading role in that debate, with all its political, administrative and technical expertise, and the profound knowledge of local and regional government of its members;
29. **stresses** the need for simplification, higher effectiveness and decentralisation of the Structural Funds, a matter which is at the heart of the concerns of the general public and of the CoR;
30. **considers** that the concept of territorial cohesion should be taken into account in the Treaty, as it complements the principle of economic and social cohesion;
31. **attaches** great importance to the need to develop **urban, rural, island, mountain and peripheral areas** in a balanced, coordinated and sustainable way; underlines that for those areas of the European Union whose specific territorial characteristics constitute an additional fragility factor, the task of developing an **integrated territorial strategy** within the framework of the future structural policy is all the more difficult and demanding;
32. **is of the view** that the European Spatial Development Perspective should be the political and legislative reference framework for coordinating regional planning policies at Community level;
33. **considers** that **regional cooperation** represents an integration factor and genuine Community value added to regional policy;
34. **instructs** its President to forward this resolution to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council, the Greek and Italian Presidencies and the governments and parliaments of the applicant countries.

Brussels, 13 February 2003.

The President

The Secretary General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

**Albert Bore**

**Vincenzo Falcone**

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