Prot. 79-03 PC.MB

To the President of the Commission
Prof. Romano Prodi

To the Commissioner Michel Barnier

To the President of the Committee of the Regions, Mr Albert Bore

To the Head of the Italian Delegation of the Committee of the Regions, Mr Isidoro Gottardo

Object: First reactions to the Working Paper of the European Commission on a permanent and systematic dialogue with European and national local government Associations.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Associations of the Italian Local Authorities ANCI, UPI and UNCEM have already been following, for some time with great interest, the reform process of the European Institutions, which the European Commission has been working on since the White Paper on Governance of July 2001 and afterwards through the work of the Convention.

Some months after the publication of the White Paper, they participated in the debate by publishing a contribution in 2001 containing the first reactions to the proposals of the Commission and by participating in a conference in 2002 on the topic 'The participation of the local authorities in the definition and the application of Community legislation'.

The next Communication from the Commission will give a more concrete meaning to the content of the White Paper, as it will fulfil the requirement of democratising the decision-making procedures of the EU, as well as to the preliminary working paper which envisages new methods to bring the choices closer to the real problems of the citizens and territories.

ANCI, UPI and UNCEM would like to express their satisfaction with the approach adopted by the Commission and are convinced that the method of a permanent and systematic dialogue can provide important results on the two levels of interaction: the one of the representatives of the territorial institutions and the one of the European institutions and bodies.
Through the organisation of regular and not occasional debates the territorial actors can, on the one side, increase their knowledge about the orientations of the EU as well as their participation in the definition of the policies. On the other side, the European Institutions will be more strongly orientated towards a bottom-up approach in the definition of the policies and take the consequences of the policies implementation at territorial level into consideration.

THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Through this contribution, ANCI and the other Associations would also like to express their first considerations regarding the specific role of the national Associations and the role of the Committee of the Regions.

Evidently, the increased number of regional and national Associations of local Authorities, especially in view of enlargement, worries the Commission. The Commission has underlined the importance of the representativity of the national Associations to which to address the permanent and systematic dialogue, as well as the capacity of their opinions to express the general interests of their Associates. ANCI, UPI and UNCEM certainly share this concerns and insist on the necessity to agree upon the criteria which ensure that these conditions are taken into consideration.

The criterion of the representativity has drawn the Italian Government to focus on the selection of the three national Associations which are part of the permanent conferences of confrontation on the questions concerning the territorial authorities. These are our Associations - ANCI, for the Municipalities, UPI, for the administrative level of the Provinces and UNCEM, for the Mountain Communities and, of course, the Conference of the Presidents of the Regions.

The document of the Commission has also given the Committee of the Regions an additional role: that of promoting and facilitating the consultation activity of the Associations and identifying each time the Associations to be consulted.

ANCI, UPI and UNCEM believe that the capacity of political animation and mobilisation of the regions and the local authorities to the policies of the Union represents a necessary step towards better characterising and qualifying the action of the Committee. The Committee could then more effectively represent the interests of the local authorities and the Regions in the new institutional set-up of the EU.

Regarding the specific role of the Committee of the Regions indicating to the Commission those Associations, which each time it advises to consult, ANCI as well as the other national Associations believe that first of all it is necessary to establish common criteria for the selection of the Associations which will participate in the dialogue. In this context, the national Associations can make a fundamental contribution to the definition of these criteria.
ESSENTIAL POINTS CONCERNING THE MODALITIES AND THE CONTENT OF THE DIALOGUE

In conclusion, ANCI and the other Italian Associations consider that:

- The document from the Commission represents a major step towards the recognition of the local authorities, not only as the recipients of the policies but as actually institutional actors for the economic and social development of the Union;
- The permanent and preliminary dialogue of the Commission with national Associations of the local authorities will provide for a specific and positive contribution, both in terms of feasibility of the European policies, and of the local authorities awareness of being part of the EU. Therefore, they consider it useful to foresee appropriate modalities ensuring a follow-up of the meetings;
- The role of the Committee of the Regions has to be reinforced so that the Committee fully plays an essential function in bringing the European Institutions closer to the local authorities through the organisation of regular and institutionalised encounters with the national Associations;
- The national Associations have to support the Committee of the Region in the promotion of the consultation and the involvement of the Associations themselves during the whole definition process of the European policies, in order to better represent the interests of the regions and the local entities in this regard;
- The rules, the criteria and the modalities for the functioning of the consultation activity of the Associations, led by the Committee of the Regions, have to be established in accordance and in cooperation with the national Associations of the local authorities and with the European Commission;

Finally, the Associations of Italian local authorities demand:

> That the new constitutional Treaty includes an article foreseeing the establishment, through a decision of the Parliament and the Council, of rules for future developments of the consultation activity and the involvement of the national Associations of local authorities by the Committee of the Regions.

Sincerely,

Leonardo Domenici  Lorenzo Ria  Enrico Borghi