The Environment Platform of Regional Offices in Brussels (EPRO) response to the Commission working paper “Ongoing and systematic policy dialogue with local-government associations.”

Dear Sir/Madam,

In concordance with EPRO’s response to the Communication COM (2002) 277, July 26, 2002 I send you EPRO’s response to the above mentioned working paper.

EPRO agrees with the Commission’s thinking that there needs to be a stronger interaction with regional and local government and with the civil society and that this could be obtained in the ways presented in the White Paper. EPRO is in itself a result of these ideas.

EPRO welcomes the Commission’s idea of debates as an answer to specify how the sub-national, national and Community levels of decision-making can be associated before decisions are taken, complementary to existing consultation, and a pivotal role for the Committee of the Regions in this dialogue.

EPRO welcomes the Commission’s initiative to widen the external consultation and to make the already existing consultation process more consistent through general principles and minimum standards. Further more, consultations by organisations representing local and regional interests both official organisations i.e. AER, CEMR, Eurocities etc and
informal such as EPRO joining a consultations process with the Committee of the Regions, would be of great interest and value to the consultation process.

However, some questions still need to be clarified.

Should the aim of the Commission be understood as a wish to clearly draw a line between the concept of “consultation” and the concept of “dialogue”?

The members of EPRO strongly believe that both consultation and dialogue should be done as widely as possible to reflect as broadly as possible the opinions of all relevant partners. We support the opinion of the Commission that there should be no contradiction between wide consultations and the concept of representative democracy. We therefore think that both civil society organisations on one hand and local and regional representatives on the other should be consulted.

**Openness** and **accountability** are conditions to any consultation and dialogue and should be underlined in documents like the one at stake and in documents of more fundamental legal status.

**Effectiveness** demands access to information at an early stage. This should be considered and ensured by the Commission.

EPRO agrees with the Commission that there must be mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation from both sides in order to achieve **coherence** in the decision-making procedure.

Yours sincerely,

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