Call for contributions to the debate on European Governance

Dialogue with associations of regional and local authorities

Response from METREX - The Network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas

When it comes to developing and implementing European policies I would like to see close interaction between the Commission and the associations that represent regional and local authorities. Michel Barnier, Member of the Commission responsible for regional policy and institutional reform.

METREX

METREX, the Network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas, was formed in 1996 at the Metropolitan Regions Conference, in Glasgow, on the initiative of local authorities and agencies in the West of Scotland and with the support of the European Commission.

Its purpose is to take forward the metropolitan agenda by promoting the exchange of knowledge between practitioners (politicians, officials and their advisers) and contributing the metropolitan dimension to European affairs.

METREX is a network of practitioners involved in formulating and implementing spatial planning and development strategies, policies, programmes and projects at the metropolitan level. In effect, those involved with the metropolitan dimension. In order to promote and foster networking METREX meets biannually, holds a Conference biennially and its activities include Expert Group working on issues of common interest.

METREX is registered as an Association Internationale Sans But Lucratif (AISBL) with the Belgian Ministry of Justice.

It is in this context that METREX is pleased to respond to the call for contributions to the dialogue by Commissioner Barnier.
Metropolitan dimension

There are some 120 metropolitan regions and areas in the wider Europe of the EU and the accession countries. These are the larger urban areas, with populations of 500,000 or more, and they contain some 280 million, or 60%, of the 470 million people in the wider Europe. *This is a measure of the importance of metropolitan competitiveness and wellbeing to the economic prosperity and social cohesion of Europe.*

The process of urbanization across Europe has resulted in core cities and their hinterlands, or clusters of cities and towns, becoming the primary urban form. Most such areas are now *metropolitan* in character, meaning that they function as one interdependent urban region or area. The Committee of the Regions uses the phrase Functional Urban Region (FUR) to describe them. Many of the key issues that affect the *sustainability* of European urban life can only be addressed *effectively* at the metropolitan level. These include,

- **Balancing** urban redevelopment with urban expansion
- **Integrating** land use, transportation and infrastructure
- **Sustaining** the vitality and viability of city and town centres
- **Enabling** economic competitiveness
- **Promoting** social inclusion
- **Assessing** the environmental impact of development
- **Safeguarding** natural and urban heritage resources

Metropolitan spatial planning will not be *effective* unless the necessary *competencies, capabilities and processes* are in place. Competence means having the authority to adopt, implement and safeguard a metropolitan spatial strategy. Capability means having the knowledge and understanding to take informed decisions. Process means having the means to regularly monitor review and update the strategy. *These are the fundamentals of effective metropolitan spatial planning.*

Porto Convocation 1999

METREX promoted the *Porto Convocation* in 1999, on the initiative of the Aréa Metropolitana do Porto and again with the support of the European Commission, which resulted in 40 signatories to the Metropolitan Magna Carta and its related Practice Benchmark. *These provide the foundation for METREX activities and initiatives.*
The European Spatial Development Strategy (ESDP) 1999

The ESDP, published in 1999, also provides a context for METREX activities and initiatives. It is concerned that, to remain competitive in a global economy, Europe needs to achieve a better urban balance. It foresees the need for polycentric groupings of metropolitan regions and areas beyond the core London/Paris and the Rhine/Ruhr economic area.

METREX is making a metropolitan contribution to the objectives of the ESDP through the InterMETREX and PolyMETREX projects.

InterMETREX

METREX has developed the Porto Practice Benchmark through a pilot project under the Interreg IIC programme of the European Commission. It contains 28 benchmarks of effective metropolitan spatial planning and development practice covering all aspects of competence, capability and process. Its purpose is to assist the function of spatial planning and development to become as effective as possible within metropolitan areas.

METREX has recently received approval of the InterMETREX project, under the Interreg IIIC programme to apply and develop the Practice Benchmark across the wider Europe. It will be led by Glasgow, involve 32 metropolitan partners and run from 2003-2006 with a budget of €1.16m. The project will also add to the existing METREX e-Atlas, which contains planning profiles of European metropolitan regions and areas as an aid to networking.

PolyMETREX

METREX hopes to receive approval to the PolyMETREX project, which has also been submitted to the Interreg IIIC programme. Its purpose is to respond the challenge in the ESDP to develop a better urban balance across Europe through the promotion of polycentric relationships, including social, economic and transportation linkages. It is led by Catalunya with 38 partners with a budget of €1.57m.

Metropolitan Governance

The concept of subsidiarity means that metropolitan areas are now the level at which wider European spatial planning objectives and can be realised most effectively. Without effective metropolitan governance the populations of metropolitan areas are unable to influence some of the key issues affecting their future and its sustainability.
A sustainable approach to European metropolitan strategies will involve compact urban forms and mixed use, public transport orientated development focussed on city and town centres. A polycentric approach of this kind within metropolitan areas will require effective metropolitan governance. A sustainable approach to improving the quality of urban life also requires integrated social, economic, environmental and spatial action. Effective metropolitan governance will also be required to bring about an improvement in the overall wellbeing of wider regions and areas.

Conclusions and Response

The European Spatial Observation Network (ESPON) has been set up under the Interreg IIIC programme, as a network of academic and research bodies, to advise the Ministers responsible for regional planning in the European Union. It is assumed that they will assist in the ongoing process of monitoring, reviewing and updating the ESDP.

- METREX suggests that the Commission might also set up a parallel mechanism of practitioners involved in taking forward and implementing the objectives of the ESDP. METREX itself has this as one of its two main purposes.

- In addition, because the metropolitan dimension to European affairs is so important, METREX also suggests that there should be a metropolitan dimension to the work of the European Commission and that this should be reflected in Cohesion policy and the Structural funds.

- In this context METREX suggests a new EU initiative, METROPOLITAN, aimed specifically at those strategic issues that can only be addressed effectively at the metropolitan level. In effect a programme for the Metropolitan Dimension to European affairs. It could also support the promotion of effective metropolitan governance and would enable metropolitan action in support of the objectives of the ESDP.

METREX would be happy to explore these suggestions further with the Commission and other interested European bodies, agencies and authorities.

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