Dear Sirs,

on behalf of REG LEG, a network representing 73 regions with legislative powers from 8 Member states of the European Union, I have the pleasure to submit the following comments to the Commission working paper "Ongoing and systematic policy dialogue with local-government associations".

REG LEG welcomes the fact that the Commission recognises that enhanced involvement of regions and local authorities can improve the quality of the European decision-making process. Closer co-operation with regional and local authorities in conceiving and implementing policy will undoubtedly bring the European Union closer to the citizens. It is therefore necessary to draw in the views of all those political levels who might be affected by a legislative or policy-proposal. Therefore the English title of the working document should also reflect the regional dimension as it is the case in the German and French versions.

In order to make this dialogue genuine and effective it has to take place from an early stage to identify particular regional and/or local circumstances relevant to European measures. It should be granted that this consultation, as proposed, takes place on a high political level without creating new formalised working structures. Like other associations REG LEG is willing to participate in an informal "contact group" preparing the annual conferences.
However, we emphasise the need that the proposed political dialogue does not supplant working level contacts.

If the Commission wants to get relevant information on the implication of measures, e.g. to avoid unintended or undesirable impact, the regional and local experiences on national level are indispensable. We welcome that this is reflected in 4.1. and 4.2. of the working document. European associations, by nature, will only be able to represent compromises on the smallest common denominator. This is even more the case for the Committee of the Regions.

The Commission should ensure, that regions in Member States without "national associations" have the opportunity to participate in a representative way in the annual conferences.

With regard to the specific legal and democratic responsibility of regions with legislative powers for transposition, application and implementation of EU-law and EU-policies we stress the need for the Commission to engage directly with regional authorities. The proposals put forward by REG LEG aim at leaving it to the Member States to determine how to ensure the participation of their regions in the European policy. The consultation scheme of the Commission as well as the new European Constitution shall allow the Member States the opportunity and the freedom to let regions play their part, respecting the internal division of competencies and the territorial organisation of each Member State. We propose to reconsider and further develop the idea of "partner regions of the Union" as introduced by Mr. Lamassoure.

Finally we would like to express our appreciation for the preparatory meeting with the European Associations held on 9 April 2003 in this matter and affirm our willingness for further co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

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