JOINT RESPONSE TO THE COMMISSION WORKING PAPER
“ONGOING AND SYSTEMATIC POLICY DIALOGUE WITH LOCAL-GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATIONS”

Document of the Platform of European associations representing local and regional authorities

AEBR – Association of European Border Regions * CEMR – Council of European Municipalities and Regions * CPMR – Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe * EUROCITIES – Network of major European cities

I. Introduction

1. This document is a response to the recently adopted Commission working paper on ongoing and systematic policy dialogue, from associations that engage in dialogue with the European institutions in order to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of local and regional authorities are taken into account in the development of EU policies and legislation.

As such, we consider that the English title of the Commission working paper should refer to both local and regional government associations in coherence with the title of the French version, stating “collectivités territoriales”.

These associations work as a link between cities and regions and the European institutions and aim at closer cooperation between the various territorial spheres of governance: local, regional, national and European.

2. As associations representing the local and regional authorities of Europe, we have been actively involved in the preparation of and in the debate following the publication of the European Commission’s White Paper on European Governance.

3. Furthermore, we have contributed towards the Convention’s work, calling for a stronger recognition of the role played by democratically elected bodies at local and regional levels and their representative associations at European level. We have presented concrete proposals, including a demand for more systematic and codified consultation procedures.

II. General remarks on the systematic policy dialogue

Associations welcome the systematic territorial dialogue

1. When adopting its communication on a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue on 11 December 2002, the European Commission announced its intention to issue a communication on political dialogue with local and regional government associations. We welcome this initiative as it responds to the need for the creation of a framework for a more systematic dialogue with local and regional governments and their representative associations at European level.
2. We appreciate that a territorial dialogue has emerged through this new consultation process, which will complete and strengthen on one hand the social dialogue engaged in by the Commission with social partners and on the other hand the emerging civil dialogue between the Commission and Civil Society. We are convinced that this territorial dialogue will help deepening European integration and the democratic nature of the enlarged Union.

Towards enhanced democracy exercised closer to the citizens

3. By better structuring their relationship with associations representing local and regional authorities, both the European institutions and national governments could make better use of the knowledge and experiences of the associations, while the associations themselves could make a more effective contribution to the development and implementation of EU policies.

4. Considering that the local and regional spheres of governance are the levels closest to the citizens, cities and regions have an invaluable role to play in relation to the development, implementation and evaluation of European policies, legislation and activities, leading to better policy design, more flexible and effective implementation, as well as greater public understanding and acceptance.

III. Comments and further proposals for the territorial dialogue

Key dialogue partners

1. European associations representing local and regional authorities and the Committee of the Regions should be recognised by the European Commission as key partners and interlocutors in the development and in the implementation of all European policies and programmes with direct and/or indirect consequences for cities and regions.

The territorial dialogue should involve European as well as national associations representing local and regional governments.

2. In case of a common interest in the issues being submitted to consultation, a number of associations could form a platform and present joint contributions. They could be inspired by the cooperation model, which has already been developed between the principal European representative associations in relation to the Convention’s work. However, these joint initiatives should not undermine the legitimacy of the actions realised by each one of the associations according to their own specific focus and priorities.

3. We agree that the Committee of the Regions should be associated with the dialogue, in its capacity as European body representing local and regional government, but it should not constitute the single interlocutor. Consequently, the

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associations and the Committee of the Regions should engage in cooperation, for which the details should be defined in a cooperation agreement.

Selection criteria

4. The selection criteria to identify the associations, which will be invited to participate in the dialogue, should be clear, transparent and the result of consultation between the Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the associations through the setting up of a joint working group. The selection criteria should allow, for each DG and the Committee of the Regions, to record the associations with which they work and to identify other associations that could participate in the dialogue.

The working group should elaborate a set of selection criteria based on the following aspects:
- number of members and countries represented through the members
- nature of the members
- democratic legitimacy
- financial independence and size of budget
- capacity of expertise of its staff
- reputation (publications, events, etc.)

These factors should also permit to evaluate the importance and legitimacy of the presented opinions.

Annual meeting: political territorial dialogue

5. We welcome the Commission’s proposal on the organisation of an annual meeting between the President of the Commission and the European associations representing local and regional governments, in which the Commission’s annual work programme for the coming year and major policy initiatives can be presented and discussed. This should be a high-level political dialogue with the participation of a restricted number of representative leaders of the European associations.

Additional meetings: technical territorial dialogue

6. In our view, this political dialogue is not enough. The dialogue should not only concern the strategy and political agenda of the Commission, but also allow the Commission to better adapt its policies and legislation to citizens’ expectations and needs. We therefore consider that similar consultation meetings need to be organised with each Commissioner in charge of a policy with high territorial impact, at the request of the Commission or the associations. These meetings should be of a more technical nature and focus on:
- the implementation and evaluation of policies
- the reform of policies

We believe that these types of meetings are essential to enter into dialogue with the Directorates-General that have not yet developed any links with the representative associations.
7. However, it is important that the establishment of a more structured dialogue does not replace the less formal direct contacts between the Commission and the associations which take place on an ad hoc basis.

*Organisation: territorial inter-service group and contact group*

8. We would underline a request already made in response to the White Paper on governance that each relevant Commissioner should nominate a member of her or his Cabinet and services to be responsible for the dialogue with local and regional governments. These representatives should constitute an inter-service group on territorial issues within the Commission.

Moreover, the European associations propose to bring together their representatives in a contact group, which would be expected to contribute, in cooperation with the Commission, to the practical organisation of the political and technical meetings for the territorial dialogue.

*Evaluation*

9. The Commission should provide feedback on how the dialogue with the representatives of local and regional actors has been taken into consideration. To ensure transparency of the consultation process the possibility to create a specific web site dedicated to the territorial dialogue could be examined, in line with the model used for the Convention Forum.

*Spring Council*

10. Moreover, we would like to discuss the suggestion of an informal meeting in advance of each Spring Council involving the European associations of local and regional authorities, the Committee of the Regions, the European Commission and the Presidency of the European Council. The involvement of local and regional actors would facilitate the implementation of the Council agenda linked to cohesion and sustainable development.

*Systematic involvement in the Commission’s advisory committees*

11. This new consultation process, at a pre-legislative stage, should not jeopardize the participation of the associations in the Commission’s advisory committees, intervening once the proposals have been elaborated. This type of participation, currently very limited, should instead be extended to all committees concerned by policies with a strong territorial impact.