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18 FEBRUARY 2006

CPMR POLICY POSITION

OPINION OF THE POLITICAL BUREAU

(Approved by the CPMR Political Bureau – 18 February 2006 – Brest (F))

FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE INSTITUTIONAL FUTURE OF THE UNION

A. The CPMR Political Bureau takes note of the close of talks within the Council over the financial perspectives for 2007-2013. It points out that this agreement marks an all-time low amounting to 0.99% of the Community GNI in payment appropriations¹, which is below that of the current 2000-2006 period. The Political Bureau lends its support to the European Parliament in its drive to secure a bigger budget under the inter-institutional agreement. It also wishes to underline the altogether regrettable nature of the 'bargaining' to which these negotiations traditionally give rise, which offers a pitiful image of European governance, even if the worse has been avoided. It calls for more modern forms of collectively raising EU money to be introduced for the period after 2013, that could include the use of clearly identified own resources.

In this context, the Political Bureau also wishes to highlight the drop in funding for economic and social cohesion. This budget - rural development excluded - has fallen from 0.41% of Community GNI in EU15 to 0.37% in EU25. Such a cut would only have been understandable if the new member countries had been much wealthier than the European average, which is obviously not the case.

Despite this, the Political Bureau can nonetheless congratulate its members on their action to safeguard a regional policy for all, although the agreement has been watered down in respect of territorial cohesion and regional involvement in the decision-making process (cf. CPMR document "Impact of the Council's Budget Agreement on 2007-2013 Regional Policy and its post-2013 future").

For this reason, the CPMR Political Bureau, together with all the member regions, will be keeping a close eye throughout 2006 on European and national arrangements for delivering regional policy, particularly in respect of the two areas described below.

- 1) **Final version of the Community Strategic Guidelines.** The Political Bureau strongly regrets that, further to pressure from a majority of member states, these guidelines have not been closely coordinated with national strategies as initially planned. It may also be noted that this text fails to give a satisfactory definition of what is covered by the concept of territorial cohesion, abandoning in particular the concept of territorial equity. The first version of the CSG published by the European Commission seems to have brushed aside over 10 years of academic and political studies on this issue, including the work led under the Convention on the Future of Europe. The CPMR is relying on the European Parliament to deeply influence this text, following on from the action initiated by the CPMR and Committee of the Regions. It urges the European Commission to show greater fairness and consistency in its interpretations.

¹ The budget agreement of 1.045% of EU GNI refers to commitment appropriations which may be compared to the 1.24% ceiling proposed by the European Commission. In terms of payment appropriations, the EU budget will fall as low as 0.94% in 2013.

2) Regional involvement and territorial cohesion criteria employed in each of the member states. The CPMR regrets the failure to introduce more binding arrangements at EU level for involving regions in the preparation of national strategies. Similarly, it has long regretted the inappropriateness of criteria identified by the Council to calculate indicative regional envelopes for the 'regional competitiveness and employment' objective. Fortunately, it appears that this is about to change. The Commission has set out new indicative criteria for calculating regional envelopes:

- removing territorially non-discriminating criteria (employment rate and educational attainment)
- and introducing the notion of a safety net (minimum and maximum) in relation to the current period.

The Political Bureau wishes to underline its satisfaction in this regard and very much hopes that genuinely fair solutions may be found in each member state. For obvious reasons of good governance, the Political Bureau calls for all regions concerned be notified of these indicative allocations. It requests the General Secretariat to organise a benchmarking seminar to examine arrangements introduced in each member state, so that it can start preparing as of now for the future negotiations.

The Political Bureau henceforth urges the CPMR to prepare for the discussions scheduled in 2008 and 2009 on how the EU agenda should be taken forward and how resources should be allocated. It is essential over the next decade to pursue and flesh out a policy for cohesion and competitiveness that allows for regional involvement to attain the goals set out in Lisbon and Gothenburg.

B. A great many of these U-turns regarding regional involvement in the preparation process and delivery of EU policies would have been impossible within the framework of the draft constitutional treaty, which offers:

- systematic acknowledgement of the role of the regions within the scope of their remit;
- adoption of the principle of territorial cohesion.

For this reason, the CPMR will be actively participating in the "discussion phase" initiated by the Austrian, Finnish and German Presidencies of the Union, to ensure that the dimensions of proximity and territorial equity continue to be taken into account when preparing future institutional texts designed to organise the way the people of the continent live together.

In the immediate term, the CPMR congratulates the European Commission on its active participation in taking forward the structured dialogue with European organisations representing the regions. It will continue to assume its full role in this regard in the context of the coordination organised by the Committee of the Regions.