

## **SUMMARY BRUSSELS ACTIVITIES for the NSC**

- Plenary session Committee of the Regions (CoR) 10-11 October
- OPEN DAYS 8-11 October

### **Find below the most important themes discussed at the Committee of the Regions and the Open Days in October in Brussels.**

This year the plenary session of the CoR took place at the same time as the OPEN DAYS European Week of Regions and Cities, the biggest event in the EU regional calendar. Commissioners Dalia GRYBAUSKAITĖ (Financial Programming and Budget), Joe BORG (Fisheries and Maritime Affairs), and Leonard ORBAN (Multilingualism), were the main speakers at the Committee of the Regions' plenary session.

The CoR plenary has been voted on 11 opinions covering topics including migration policy and the management of the European Union's southern borders, climate change, the energy package, extension of trans-European transport routes, the future of European airports, new perspectives for the European Research Area, cooperation between the EU and Ukraine, and better law-making. The three Commissioners attended the plenary on 10 October.

Dalia Grybauskaitė focused on the EU budget reform and called for "radical changes" to the way the budget was structured. The Commission has just launched a major consultation on the 2008/9 Budget Review, aimed at identifying future priority policies and how they should be financed. The CoR's input is seen as key by the Commission, because of the growing financial importance of the local and regional sector.

The Commissioner said that with most of the EU's budget spent on the Common Agricultural Policy and the Cohesion Policy, we are unable "to deal with the challenge of globalisation or carry out further enlargement of the EU." She called for reform of the European budget "to change Europe", because the two policies that swallow up most of the budget is old fashioned.

Now only 15 % is left over for research, education and external relations and this is not enough to meet the challenge of globalisation and competition and carry out further enlargement of the EU. The Commissioner did not hide the fact that the publication of the beneficiaries of European funds, a measure to be introduced in 2009 with the agreement of Member States, was a way of "stepping up pressure for agricultural reform."

Joe Borg unveiled the Commission's 'Blue Paper' action plan for maritime policy. Commissioner Borg will be returning to the CoR in November to take part in the Blue Planet Forum (27-29 November), organised with the Commission's Directorate General for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, to give other stakeholders an opportunity to respond to the 'Blue Paper' proposals.

Leonard Orban discussed his plans to promote multilingualism in the EU. He focused on the benefits for business created by multilingualism, recent progress in language learning capacities in Europe and his plans to consult a wide range of stakeholders in preparation for a strategic communication due in autumn 2008.

Following the interventions by the Commissioners, members discussed and voted on CoR opinions in the following order:

#### Opinions adopted on 10 October

- Annual report of the six European TEN-T coordinators – extension of the major trans-European transport axes. Rapporteur: Bernard SOULAGE (First Vice-President of the Rhône-Alpes Regional Council, FR/ PES)
- The future of European airports. Rapporteur: Gordon KEYMER (Member of Tandridge District Council, UK/EPP)

- Limiting Global Climate Change to 2 degrees Celsius – the inclusion of aviation activities in emissions trading. Rapporteur: Lenie DWARSHUIS-VAN DE BEEK (Member of the Executive Council of the Province of South Holland, NL/ALDE)
- The Energy Package. Rapporteur: Bernd VÖGERLE (Mayor of Gerasdorf bei Wien, AT/PES)

Opinions adopted on 11 October

- European Research Area: New Perspectives. Rapporteur: Michael SCHROEREN (member of the North Rhine-Westphalia Landtag, DE/EPP)
- Success factors to anticipate and accompany restructuring in cities and regions. Rapporteur: Witold KROCHMAL (Mayor of the Town and Local Authority of Wołów PL/UEN-EA)
- Better Lawmaking 2005 and 2006. Rapporteur: Luc VAN DEN BRANDE (First Vice-President of the CoR and member of the Flemish Parliament, BE/EPP)
- A comprehensive European migration policy and reinforcing the management of the European Union's Southern Maritime Borders. Rapporteur: Ian MICALLEF (Gzira Local Council, MT/EPP)
- The situation of migrant women in the European Union. Rapporteur: Sonia MASINI (President of the province of Reggio Emilia, IT/PES)
- Equal opportunities and sport. Rapporteur: Peter MOORE (member of Sheffield City Council, UK/ALDE)
- Local and regional government in Ukraine and the development of cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. Rapporteur: István SERTÖ-RADICS (Mayor of Uszka, HU/ALDE)

#### **Better Lawmaking 2005 and 2006**

First Vice President of the CoR Luc VAN DEN BRANDE said that the EU needs to put more effort into explaining European legislation to the public if it wants to make the decision-making process more open, inclusive and democratic.

The report presented by Luc VAN DEN BRANDE, states that EU legislation should be accompanied by suitable information and communication initiatives to assist those involved in implementing it – especially local and regional authorities, which are responsible for implementing around two-thirds of directives and other measures originating at EU level.

#### **Limiting Global Climate Change to 2 degrees Celsius**

The CoR has urged the European Commission to increase its efforts to boost the international coalition against climate change, underlining the importance of contributions from all major EU Member States. In a report unanimously adopted by the Brussels-based political assembly at its plenary session, the CoR calls on the Commission to submit a road map for relevant climate-change initiatives and a clear strategy for local and regional authority involvement, to be implemented in the run-up to the UN climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009.

The opinion, presented by rapporteur Lenie DWARSHUIS-VAN DE BEEK, calls for the provision of further resources and measures, in addition to the use of European Structural Funds, in order to assist regional authorities in implementing climate change policies, such as energy saving and renewable energy strategies, aimed towards reducing the emission of greenhouse gases.

Regarding the targets of climate policy, Ms. Dwarshuis-van de Beek, a Member of the Executive Council of the Province of South Holland, welcomed the proposal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the EU, independent of policies in other regions, by at least 20% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels.

However, Ms. Dwarshuis-van de Beek requested the Commission to set the target for energy efficiency on an aggregate level (i.e. energy intensity of the whole economy), taking into account differences in the sector structure of regions. This would provide Member States and regions with sufficient flexibility to achieve the target, using a wider range of measures aimed at the energy consumption of apparatuses and the industrial structure of the regional economy.

## **OPEN DAYS 2007**

Also Committee of the Regions (CoR) President Michel DELEBARRE has challenged national governments to give local and regional authorities a much bigger role to play in the implementation of the EU's strategy for growth.

When he spoke at the launch of the 2007 OPEN DAYS European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels and jobs, he warned that local and regional administrations were getting "a little impatient at the inaction" of governments and other public bodies which had so far failed to involve them properly in one of the Union's cornerstone policies.

"It concerns me that the Lisbon Strategy is still presented as if it were a matter just for national European administrations. The European Union cannot allow itself to be so neglectful of what is happening at local and regional level: the Committee of the Regions will continue to make this point loudly and clearly in the run-up to the next spring summit," said M. Delebarre, MP and Mayor of Dunkerque (France).

His fellow keynote speakers, Francisco NUNES CORREIA, Portugal's Minister for Regional Development, representing the EU Presidency, and Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta HÜBNER were clearly of the same opinion on this point.

Mr Nunes Correia said that cohesion policy "is one of the policies that can most contribute to growth and jobs, particularly when it is associated with competitiveness policies". He hinted that this would be his message at the informal meeting of EU Regional Ministers in the Azores on 23-24 November, which will discuss the future of cohesion policy and evaluate the way resources are allocated in the years to come.

OPEN DAYS closing session: EU regional policy stakeholders debated global economic challenges.

At the closing session several topics were shortly discussed: regional policy responses to the challenges of globalisation, climate change and population ageing.

### **EU regional policy and global competitiveness**

The free movement of goods, people, capital and services is vital to boosting competitiveness within Europe and worldwide, said Professor A. Michael Spence, winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize for economics. But whilst the migration of people and jobs across Europe is necessary for its growth and integration into the global economy, it does lead to inequalities that governments and international bodies must manage.

Regional policy can help, by building equality of opportunity through transfers of resources and governance know-how to less well-off regions. "People accept that some inequality of outcomes will exist, provided that there is reasonable equality of opportunity", he said.

### **Infrastructure investment or unmanageable migration?**

"Public investment in infrastructure increases both the return on private investment and job creation", he continued, adding that regional investments are also needed to boost local economic productivity, failing which migration could become unmanageable, and urbanization excessively rapid.

### **Climate change**

"Global warming is a major challenge to global governance" said Professor Spence, adding that from the point of view of greenhouse gas mitigation in the next 25 years, the key players are the EU, North America, Japan, China and Russia.

### **Population ageing**

Provided pension systems are "lined up with reality", population ageing "need not impair growth", he said, adding that in his view advocating migration is a "bad solution" to this problem.

**Knowledge is a global public good**

"Governance really matters" said Professor Spence, noting that investing in education as a driver for growth "makes sense in Europe" and adding that EU know-how in the fields of governance, incentives and conditionality could prove useful in India and China.

**Solidarity**

European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering stressed the need for EU-wide solidarity - "funding is one thing, but what is decisive is what people do with it", he said.

Regional policy funding must be as well spent in newer Member States as it had been in Spain and Portugal, even if this entailed admitting that some regions do not need so much money now as they did in the past, he said.

Mr Pöttering also noted the need for solidarity in other fields, e.g. with Poland on energy policy, and stressed that the fate of solidarity depends on all Member States signing up to the Reform Treaty, which would make the EP a full partner in framing co-decision legislation with the Council.

**The next OPEN DAYS (6-9 October 2009) also will be dealing with energy and healthcare.**