



502

94 116 74

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe
Chamber of Regions

Congrès des pouvoirs locaux et régionaux de l'Europe
Chambre des régions

Strasbourg, 18 May 1994
s:\delai.slp\session\ACPR1_1.II

CPR (1) 1
Part II



FIRST SESSION

(Strasbourg, 31 May - 3 June 1994)

REPORT

**ON THE RESULTS OF THE CONFERENCE ON
"REGIONALISATION IN EUROPE: EVALUATION AND PERSPECTIVES"**

(Geneva, Switzerland, 3-5 June 1993)

(Rapporteur: Mr Claude HAEGI, Switzerland)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

The regions of Europe are present today on the political stage at both national and European level and are seeking recognition as equal partners in the construction of the European Union. They want to take an active part in their own right in building the Europe of the future, and are accordingly demanding an appropriate place in the institutional structures and decision-making processes of tomorrow's Europe.

With this in mind, they have joined together at European level in associations and in institutions set up by Governments.

For years, their aim has been to obtain an adequate representative framework within the political and technical structures of democratic Europe, in particular at the Council of Europe and the European Community.

In the period since the Geneva conference, a number of important decisions have been taken concerning the links between local and regional authorities and the decision-making structures of both the Council of Europe and the European Union.

It is pleasing to note that the first Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe Member States decided to set up a new structure under which there will be genuine representation of local and regional authorities in two separate chambers.

At the same time, following the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht by the twelve Member States of the European Community, a new phase of participation by local and regional authorities has opened up in the context of the Committee of the Regions.

These developments place the results of the Geneva conference in a new perspective: they can now be seen as having contributed directly to the political and institutional changes, as some of the recommendations have already become political reality.

Consequently, there is no longer any need for this report to go over the various arguments in favour of regionalisation and decentralisation, although the broad range and high quality of the reports and arguments presented at the conference have lost none of their validity, particularly for European countries which are considering institutional reforms and decentralisation.

The texts will remain an important tool for the CLRAE's future activities in the field, details of which were published in the final report. The conference proceedings can also be recommended as reference material for Central and East European countries seeking precise information on the particular problems of West European states with federal, regional or unitary structures.

It is, however, interesting to note one conclusion, namely that trends towards regionalisation in European states as a whole are relatively limited at present and that, with the exception of Belgium, no country has moved significantly in this direction in recent years.

Europe is made up of a veritable mosaic of regions, which have many structural differences in terms both of their powers and of the territories involved. The regions of Europe mirror the socio-economic and cultural diversity of our societies and Europe will not survive if this diversity is ignored.

Regions offer the right framework for responding to a need to defend specific identities in the face of a world that is becoming more and more uniform as the global village expands. The emergence of the regions should not, however, be seen as part of a desire to call nation states into question: on the contrary, the process must combine complementarity and subsidiarity.

The involvement of the regions in the building of Europe helps to ensure greater efficiency and transparency. Its effect is to offset the trends towards centralisation and uniformity that are inherent in European integration. One of the regions' commitments is to overcome the obstacles of national frontiers by means of transfrontier and inter-regional co-operation.

This was the general background against which the CLRAE organised, at the invitation of and in co-operation with the Republic and Canton of Geneva, the Conference on "Regionalisation in Europe: Evaluation and Perspectives" in Geneva from 3 to 5 June 1993.

The conference was not an isolated event, but part of the CLRAE's general policy and on-going commitment to let local and regional authority representatives make their voices heard at national and European levels.

Following the Galway conference (1975), which focused on peripheral regions, and the Bordeaux conference (1978), which concerned the importance of stimulating a process of regionalisation in Europe, the local and regional government representatives came together again in Geneva to discuss all the key topical issues in the field.

It should be remembered that the CLRAE has expressed views on these matters before, in Resolution 67 (1970) on the problems of regionalisation in Europe and in Resolution 117 (1980) on regional institutions in Europe.

The overall objective of the conference was to offer local and regional authorities a platform for comparing the various countries' experiences with the application of the concept of regionalisation and for jointly defining future action, the region being regarded as an irreplaceable element of co-operation, peace, freedom, solidarity and prosperity in Europe.

The conference was attended by some 150 delegates from 17 Council of Europe member states and 6 non-member countries, including a significant delegation from Russia.

The conference covered the following four themes:

- Theme 1 - The political and institutional role of regions in federal and regional states: evaluation and perspectives
- Theme 2 - Regionalisation and decentralisation in other European countries
- Theme 3 - The effects of regionalisation on local autonomy and the principle of subsidiarity
- Theme 4 - The regions of Europe: areas of peace and prosperity.

A Round table involving the Secretary General and the European Community Director-General for Regional Policy was held on 4 June on the specific theme of the participation of regions in the process of European union.

The Round table, which was chaired by the leader of the Flemish Regional Government, was particularly interesting and may have brought about some progress on the thorny issue of the participation of the regions at the Council of Europe and of the way they are represented at the European Community.

A special session was held on 5 June to discuss the problems of, and recent developments in, regionalisation in Russia. This showed that the new Russia is looking for operational structures for the organisation of its future government institutions. The discussions revealed that the proposals then under consideration for the reform of the institutions of state took account of concepts linked to regionalisation and the delegation of decision-making power. However, more recent developments suggest that the trend now seems to be towards a state with centralised structures.

The discussions also showed that the problems involved in governing the country are huge, in particular because of the vastness of its national territory and the complexity of its historical structures and of the players in the economic, political, cultural and social fields.

Four rapporteurs and experts had prepared background studies which served as a basis for discussion at the conference and summarised the present situation in Europe. Much was added to the debates by the active participation of a delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Geneva conference was a watershed: it marked the end of one era and the starting point for new working structures that are opening up for local and regional authorities at the European institutions in 1994. Although the guiding principles of federalism and regionalism have lost none of their dynamism or relevance, it is now up to local and regional authority representatives to exploit the new working structures put in place at European level, to promote general understanding, and to act as a link between the aspirations of the populations of Europe's regions and the demands of the European institutions.