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The Committee of the Regions: emergence, functions and prospects



Student: Lida Patsianta

Lecturer: George Petrakos

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SUMMARY

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is a political assembly created by the Maastricht Treaty that provides the regional and local levels with a voice in the EU decision-making process and legislation. The CoR has 344 members from the 27 EU member states and its work is organised in six different commissions. The Treaties oblige the Commission, the European Parliament and Council to consult the Committee whenever new proposals are made in areas that affect the regional or local level. The main goal of the current dissertation is to examine in some depth the European institution of the Committee of the Regions. An effort will be made to describe the situation in regional representation before 1994 and the fundamental reasons that led to CoR's emergence. The basic functions will be presented to present its role in European governance. Finally, its future prospects will be discussed to provide a future image of the institution in the context of the EU's institutional architecture.

KEY WORDS: Committee of the Regions, CoR, regional representation, subsidiarity, european integration.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AEBR:** Associations of European Border Regions
- AEM:** Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Areas
- AER:** Assembly of European Regions
- AGM:** Annual General Meeting
- ALDE:** Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
- ARCO:** Arco Latino Association
- AREV:** Assembly of European Wine Regions
- ARGE ALPS-ADRIA:** Alps-Adriatic Working Community
- ARGE ALPS:** Working Community of the Central Alps
- ARGE DONAULÄNDER:** Working Community of the Danube States
- ARLEM:** Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly
- BSSSC:** Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation
- CALRE:** Conference of Presidents of the European Regional Legislatures Assemblies
- CEMR:** Council of European Municipalities and Regions
- CIVEX:** Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs
- CLRAE:** Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe
- CoR:** Committee of the Regions
- COSAC:** Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union
- COTER:** Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy)
- CPMR:** Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe
- CTP:** Working Community of the Pyrenees
- EC:** European Community
- ECB:** European Central Bank
- ECO:** Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion Section
- ECOS:** Commission for Economic and Social Policy
- EDUC:** Commission for Education, Youth and Research
- EEA:** European Economic Area
- EESC:** European Economic and Social Committee
- EGTC:** European Group for Territorial Cooperation
- ENVE:** Commission for Environment, Climate change and Energy

EPP: European People's Party
EU: European Union
EUROPE2020MP: Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform
IGC: Intergovernmental Conference
INT: Single Market, Production and Consumption Section
IPA: Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
LRA: Local and Regional Authorities
MOT: Cross Border Operation Mission
NAT: Commission for Natural Resources
NAT: Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment Section
PES: Party of European Socialists
REGLEG: Conference of Presidents of Regions with Legislative Powers
REVES: European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy
REX: External Relations Section
SEA: Single European Act
SME: Small and Medium Enterprises
SMO: Single Market Observatory
SOC: Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship Section
TEN: Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society Section
WTO: World Trade Organisations
UBC: Union of the Baltic Cities

INTRODUCTION

In 1996 the second President of the regional European institution, Pasqual Maragall I Mira was describing CoR as “*an image that reflects Europe, a rich and varied mosaic*”. He was also clarifying that since the establishment of the Committee, all its members were making efforts to overcome their national, linguistic, cultural and political differences and to work for a common goal: to push forward the cause of the cities and regions of the European Union, to win respect for their autonomy, and to work for a Europe that is close to the people and based on the principle of subsidiarity. This effort is still going strong. The Committee since 1994 is working in close collaboration with the other institutions of the EU to interpret the needs and interests of all European citizens, whether they live in the great cities, the small towns or the most distant outlying regions (Committee of the Regions, 1996).

The Committee of the Regions is the youngest and least examined European institution, hence it will be extremely interesting to study CoR and provide to the reader a crystal image of the institution. Also, the Committee of the Regions is the least known European institutional body, and this could be an additional main reason for studying CoR and examine its history, role and prospects. This dissertation starts by presenting in some depth the fundamental reasons that led to CoR’s emergence. The dissertation is looking at the circumstances in the continent before the creation of the European Union, and additionally the need for regions to obtain a more active role in the policy-making process. Moreover, an effort is made to evidently present the situation in regional representation before and after the establishment of the Committee of the Regions in 1994. Eventually, the important dates in the history of the institution are presented.

The second chapter examines the basic functions of the Committee. Mainly, describes its internal political structure, and presents the mission statement and CoR’s political priorities for 2010. Furthermore, all its networks and activities are described to give plain understanding of the Committee’s work. In addition, CoR’s points of view on major EU’s policies will be presented. Last but not least, a survey on the role and impact of the local and regional authorities within the European Union, requested by the Committee of the Regions will be also presented and examined.

In the subsequent and last chapter of this dissertation an effort will be made to describe the development of the Committee until this time and the changes that will

occur in the future by the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon. At last, some remarks on the prospects of the European institution will be presented in an effort to foresight the future of the Committee of the Regions.

CHAPTER 1-EMERGENCE

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is a political assembly that represents local and regional governments and provides them with a voice at the heart of the European Union. Created by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, also known as the Treaty of the European Union, the Committee of the Regions was established two years later, and its first plenary session took place in Brussels on 9 March 1994. Its a young institution, with the challenging task of representing a wide and diverse community, aiming in providing institutional representation for all the European Union's territorial areas, regions, cities and municipalities and providing them with the opportunity to be involved in shaping Community policies.

1.2 THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY BEFORE CoR's ESTABLISHMENT

The Committee of the Regions was created during a very important period of the European Union's history. It was established at the time the Community was getting prepared for the beginning of a whole new chapter, the passage to the European Union.

During the 1980's an effort was made to promote further European integration aiming at the highest goal: the creation of the European Union and the Single Market. In 1986 the Single European Act (SEA) was signed to promote that goal but before long the member states realized that the SEA was not strong enough to promote effectively the process of integration. Both Community and member-states decision makers made it clear that a further step had to take place. In the late 80's a number of factors enhanced that point of view (Nugent, 2006)

Inside the European Community (EC) there was a common belief that a "new beginning" had to come about that would promote further integration. Firstly, many member states had realized the importance of a Single Market and that participation in an economic and monetary union would bring benefits. Especially, since the single currency would make commercial transactions much more simple. Moreover, there was the need that the EC had to obtain a "social dimension" in order to avoid a potential social dumping as a consequence of the Single Market. Also there was a call for a system to be built in order to deal with problems that would occur after border

control abolition. Lastly, the EC had to manage the fear of the democratic deficit as the Community competences were escalating (Nugent, 2006).

However, external factors existed were also pushing forward a new beginning. After 1989, the European Community had to face the changes that were going on in the continent. First of all, the EC had to confront the collapse of the Soviet Union. After, the fall of “Actually Existing Socialism”, the European Community had to rethink its role outside the Cold War framework. It had to stay strong and united dealing with the new environment. In addition, the EC had to ensure that German unification on October 1990 would not result in an absolute German dominance. (Nugent, 2006). In other words, the Community had to confront the new challenges and get used to a wholly different political environment to the one in which it was established forty years earlier.

Under these conditions, the EC moved forward to the European unification, establishing in 1992 the European Union. The Treaty of the European Union marks the beginning of a new stage in the process of giving the European Community a state structure. At that time, there was clear that the Union had to avoid centralization and give priority to the principle of subsidiarity. Only if subsidiarity was observed and regions were given a role which bound them to the Community, would the concept of the European Union have a chance to succeed.

1.3 REGIONAL REPRESENTATION AT EC LEVEL BEFORE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CoR

The regional representation at EC level until 1994 could only be described as inadequate. The representation of regions was limited to the German Länder and the regions of a number of regionalized or decentralized member states. This representation had two forms: a relatively large number of information offices opened by individuals regions in Brussels, and the formalized “Consultative Council of Regional and Local Authorities”, a 42-member body which was set up by the Commission in 1988 to operate in the run-up to the final decision on regional representation at EC level, though its powers were purely advisory (European Parliament, 1993).

The variety of the above-mentioned European regional infrastructure had until the establishment of CoR offered a rather unsatisfactory outcome for the reason that

until that time the regions were still denied any direct involvement at EC level. Only the Belgian regions and communities, the Italian regions and German Länder, far more successfully, had been able to achieve direct representation in various EC decision-making institutions. But, even this participation had taken the form of accompanying a representative of the central state as part of the national negotiating delegation. Until that point, only informal agreements had enabled regional representatives to participate at the negotiating process (European Parliament, 1993).

However, one step before the unification it was clear that the role of regions and their representation at Community level ought to become functional for the reason that the EC had not only to avoid centralization but had also to try to promote grass-root decision-making processes. The signature of the Treaty on European Union in Maastricht on 7 February 1992 can be regarded, particularly after ten years of debate about the role of the regions in the Europe of the future, as pointing out and preparing the way for an effective role for the regions within the process of European Integration (European Parliament, 1993). Moreover, the inclusion of the principle of subsidiarity in the Treaty as a binding legal norm, and the establishment of the Committee of the Regions, were regarded as a response to the widespread debate on the need for the regions to be better represented in the European decision-making process. Before the signature of the Treaty more voices were raised calling for a clear commitment by the European Community to its regional structure and at the same time for the appropriate institutionalization of this principle at Community level. A task that was extremely difficult as regional structures at European level were too varied and this made them difficult to institutionalise (European Parliament, 1993).

Nevertheless, before the creation of the Committee many fears were expressed that a united Europe would mean the total disappearance of any form of regional administrative structure and the creation of a centralized system which would make no allowance whatever for the existence of a European regional dimension. There were many who predicted a total transfer of powers away from the regions and smaller administrative units to the European Community, meaning that there would no longer be a guarantee that any specific regional problems that would occur could be dealt with at grass-root level (European Parliament, 1993). All these fears were triggered by the impression that the Community's legislative activity was increasingly extending into areas which, under the constitutional systems of certain member states, fell within the jurisdiction of the regions (European Parliament, 1993).

1.4 CREATION OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee of the Regions was established in 1994 as a solution to the unsatisfactory regional representation and as an answer to all those fears fuelled by different impressions. Although, it was created under the Maastricht Treaty its roots can be found many years back.

Its foundations can be traced back to more than 30 years earlier and a proposal by the European Parliamentary Assembly (forerunner of the European Parliament) on 9 May 1960 to set up a consultative committee on regional economies. However, it was not until the 1986 Single European Act that the idea of an advisory body composed of representatives of regional and local authorities really began to take shape. The Single European Act recognised the important role of regional development in achieving a fully functioning single market, underlining the strong link between economic and social cohesion (Articles 130a-130e), and this was a major factor behind the decision of the European Commission to set up the Consultative Council of Regional and Local Authorities on 24 June 1988. Although this consultative council, as it was already mentioned didn't provide a functional regional representation at EC level, nevertheless, it paved the way for the CoR by providing a rudimentary forum on issues regarding regional development (Committee of the Regions, 2009a).

On 21 October 1990, the Commission published an opinion calling for the creation of a representative body of the regions with a consultative role and the European Parliament endorsed the idea. The European Council of Rome on 14-15 December 1990 noted the importance which certain Member States, notably Germany, Belgium and Spain, attached to consulting regional and local authorities as part of the EU decision-making process. Crucially, the Commission was won over to the idea, not least because it saw a "Europe of the regions" as a key pillar in furthering integration. The subsequent Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) negotiations culminated in a decision by the European Council of Maastricht on 9-10 December 1991 to establish the CoR. The heads of state and government envisaged the Committee playing a dual role: to help shape European legislation, and to act as a direct link between Brussels and the citizens of Europe (Committee of the Regions, 2009a).

The Committee was established to remedy the inadequate regional representation and for the first time this attempt gave to the local authorities within

the Community a formal say in the process of consultation and decision. The functions and composition of the Committee of the Regions are laid down in Articles 198a to 198c of the Treaty on European Union. Particularly:

Article 198a

“A Committee consisting of representatives of regional and local bodies, hereinafter referred to as “the Committee of the Regions”, is hereby established with advisory status.

The number of members of the Committee of the Regions shall be as follows:

*Belgium*12
Denmark 9
*Germany*24
*Greece*12
*Spain*21
*France*24
Ireland 9
*Italy*24
Luxembourg 6
*Netherlands*12
*Portugal*12
*United Kingdom*24

“The members of the Committee and an equal number of alternate members shall be appointed for four years by the Council acting unanimously on proposals from the respective Member States. Their term of office shall be renewable”.

“The members of the Committee may not be bound by any mandatory instructions. They shall be completely independent in the performance of their duties, in the general interest of the Community”.

Article 198b

“The Committee of the Regions shall elect its chairman and officers from among its members for a term of two years”.

“It shall adopt its rules of procedure and shall submit them for approval to the Council, acting unanimously”.

“The Committee shall be convened by its chairman at the request of the Council or of the Commission. It may also meet on its own initiative”..

Article 198c

“The Committee of the Regions shall be consulted by the Council or by the Commission where this Treaty so provides and in all other cases in which one of these two institutions considers it appropriate. The Council or the Commission shall, if it considers it necessary, set the Committee, for the submission of its opinion, a time-limit which may not be less than one month from the date on which the chairman receives notification to this effect. Upon expiry of the time-limit, the absence of an opinion shall not prevent further action”.

“Where the Economic and Social Committee is consulted pursuant to Article 198, the Committee of the Regions shall be informed by the Council or the Commission of the request for an opinion. Where it considers that specific regional interests are involved, the Committee of the Regions may issue an opinion on the matter. It may issue an opinion on its own initiative in cases in which it considers such action appropriate. The opinion of the Committee, together with a record of the proceedings, shall be forwarded to the Council and to the Commission.....”

According to Articles 198a-198c the Committee was intended to advise the European Commission and the Council of Ministers and to incorporate the interests of regional and local authorities into the European law-making process. A remarkable point is that Art. 198a paragraph 1 brought into being a body composed not only by members of regional but also members of local authorities. This point was extremely important as it went beyond a three-tier structure of the European Community and emphasized the importance of local decision-making. This circumstance underlines the importance of local district authorities in those countries where a strongly regional structure already existed but the latter also have other local authorities subordinate to it. Art. 198a paragraph 1 assigns them their due role in implementing the principle of “taking decisions as close to grass roots as possible” which is enshrined at various points in the extensive text of the Treaty of the European Union (European Parliament, 1993).

Article 198a paragraphs 2 and 3 provide the formula for determining the allocation of seats on the Committee and also regulate the arrangements for appointing its members. The number of members in 1994 was 189, distributed among the member states as follows:

TABLE:1

BELGIUM	12	IRELAND	9
DENMARK	9	ITALY	24
GERMANY	24	LUXEMBOURG	6
GREECE	12	NETHERLANDS	12
SPAIN	21	PORTUGAL	12
FRANCE	24	UNITED KINGDOM	24

When these figures are compared with the respective regional structures of the member states, it is clear that the allocation of seats does reflect the regional structure of the state and the existence of local authorities, but also that could be characterized as a political compromise. Because this could only be a possible explanation for the size of the seats given to states like the United Kingdom, Luxembourg and Greece, that at best have administrative units controlled by central government, as it must be taken into account that the Committee came into existence at the instigation of member states with regional structures, especially as a result of the efforts of the German “Länder” (European Parliament, 1993).

Last but not least, Art. 198c regulates in way the powers of the Committee. Particularly, CoR has the right to be heard by the Council and the Commission in the following cases, laid down in the Treaty on European Union: a) defining the objectives, aims and general regulations of the Structural Funds (Art. 130d), b) resolutions on specific action outside the fund (Art. 130e paragraph 3), c) establishment of the cohesion fund (Art. 130d paragraph 2), d) resolutions implementing the regional fund (Art. 130e paragraph 1), e) definition of the guidelines and initiation of other actions in the establishment/expansion of trans-European networks, f) issuing of aid measures in the health service (Art 129d paragraph 1), in the cultural field (Art. 128 paragraph 5), and in the field of general education (Art. 126 paragraph 4) (European Parliament, 1993).

According to Art. 198c paragraph 3 the Committee can decide to issue its own opinion when the Economic and Social Committee is heard. In addition, according to Article 198c paragraph 4, it may be asked by the Council or the Commission for its

opinion in all matters in which they think it's appropriate. Also, the Committee has a right of independent action, meaning that according to Article 198c paragraph 4, it may give opinions on its own initiative if it believes this is expedient. Finally, according to Article 130b paragraph 2, the Commission is required to report every 3 years on progress in economic and social matters, not only to the European Parliament, the Council and the Economic and Social Committee, but also to the Committee of the Regions (European Parliament, 1993).

CoR held its inaugural plenary session in Brussels. Jacques Blanc, leader of the Languedoc-Roussillon regional council, was elected as the first President, with Pasqual Maracall i Mira as First Vice-President. Addressing the meeting, European Commission President Jacques Delors stated that the CoR's calling had to be to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the Union. *"Because of the extraordinary diversity of its make-up, the Committee of the Regions will be a unique piece on the institutional chess board. It will be able to exert a very special power based on expertise and influence."* Delors said the CoR had two key responsibilities: first, to strengthen the feeling of "belonging" among ordinary people and second, to alert the European institutions to the risks of any sort of backsliding (Committee of the Regions, 2009a).

1.5 THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY

The meaning of subsidiarity cannot be explained in a simple way. It has a variety of meanings. For example, in its theological meaning is understood as a structural principle concerning the relationship between the society and the state or the individual and the state (Henkel, 2002). The principle of subsidiarity thereby broadly refers to the limits of the right and the duty of the public authority to intervene in social and economic affairs. It distinguishes between the actions of different levels of authority in a society or state, for that reason the highest or most centralized level cannot achieve the same goal in a better or equally sufficient way. In legal terms, the principle is considered to determine the relationship between different legal provisions (Henkel, 2002).

Taking into account the different meaning we could say that the principle of subsidiarity in the EU law must be interpreted in terms of a structural principle. The aim of a structural principle is a clear regulation of the distribution of powers between

the European Union and the member states (Henkel, 2002). The meaning provided by the EU's perspective is that "subsidiarity is the principle that decisions must be taken as closely as possible to the citizens. This means that in areas of shared competence, action should only be taken at an EU level if the policy aims cannot be achieved at local, regional or national level, and can be better achieved at Union level" (Committee of the Regions, 2009e).

The incorporation of the principle of subsidiarity into the Treaty of Maastricht as a binding legal norm pointed out that the Treaty was of central interest to the regions. Institutionalizing and incorporating the principle of subsidiarity meant both allaying the frequently expressed fears of a continuing increase in European centralization and strengthening the idea of a European Community which was moving closer and closer together, so as to find widespread acceptance within the European population; a widespread acceptance that was vital for further progress in European integration. Especially in this process regions had a very important part to play, mainly due to the significant sociopolitical differences that exist in Europe. Because of its unique historical past Europe needed a broad political consensus in order to achieve such an international vision as the one of a strong and united European Community. The consensus could only be achieved if strict consideration was given to the existing multiplicity of sociopolitical conditions. Regions are a historically developed form of expression of these conditions and for that reason they needed reinforcement as building blocks of a European Community (European Parliament, 1993).

The principle of subsidiarity assigns priority in any action to the respective lower instance rather than the higher instance, provided that the former's powers are sufficient. The application of this principle means that the regions or subordinate local authorities would be assigned all those duties necessary for dealing with the matter at that level. In this way, centralizing tendencies can be countered and decision-making powers of more local institutions strengthened. The European Union will interfere only when the lower levels cannot operate. Particularly, Article 3b of the Treaty formulates the overall statement as follows: *"The Community shall act within the limits of the powers conferred upon it by this Treaty and of the objectives assigned to it therein"*.

"In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community".

"Any action by the Community shall not go beyond what is necessary to achieve the objectives of this Treaty".

To end with, the principle of subsidiarity provided an answer to the long- term discussions on how the EC could avoid centralization and created the needed boundaries between the responsibilities of member states and the European Union.

1.6 INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION OF REGIONS BEFORE AND AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMITTEE

Long before but also after the establishment of the Committee, a number of initiatives took place in Europe in order to provide local and regional government with a voice, giving them at the same time a chance to cooperate and assert benefits. At times, these acts were the result of certain organizations' recognition of the importance of the local and regional level or they were the outcome of certain people's initiatives. All these efforts were made for both local and regional level to be able to discuss and collaborate but also to communicate with the European institutions in a more straightforward and official manner. With the aim of widening its consultative base and encouraging greater participation the Committee of the Regions has been cooperating systematically with the different representatives associations of regional and local authorities since 2002. An effort will be made to present those associations in order to provide an image for the regional and local representation outside of the EU framework.

To begin with there are the Europe-wide organizations. Particularly, the Council of Europe, founded on 5 May 1949 by the Treaty of London, is one the oldest and biggest European organizations, promoting democracy, safety and integration in the European continent. The Council of Europe soon after its creation recognised the crucial importance of democracy at local and regional level, as well; hence, made a commitment to promote a style of local self-government that meets the needs of the citizens wherever they may be. A Conference of Local Authorities of Europe was created within the Council on 7 January 1957, aiming in bringing together the elected

representatives of the local and regional communities. In 1994, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers decides to replace the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) and to create new structures to be made up of two Chambers: the Chamber of Regions and the Chamber of Local Authorities.

The Congress is therefore a political assembly composed of representatives holding an electoral mandate as members of a local or regional authority appointed each by a specific procedure. Its 318 full members and 318 substitute members, representing over 200.000 European municipalities and regions, are grouped by national delegation and by political group. Since its inception, it is a promoter of local and regional democracy. The Congress offers an ideal forum for dialogue where representatives of local and regional authorities discuss common problems, compare notes about their experiences and then put their points of view to the national governments (available at: http://www.coe.int/t/congress/presentation/default_en.asp).

The Congress Bureau comprises the members of the Bureaux of the two chambers and is chaired by the Congress President. It prepares plenary sessions, coordinates the work of the chambers and the statutory committees, draws up the budget, and gives the work of the Congress continuity between Standing Committee and full Congress sessions. The work of the Congress is structured around four statutory committees: the institutional Committee, culture and education Committee, Committee on sustainable development and Committee on social cohesion, in which the number of seats is determined in such a way as to guarantee that each Congress member has the right to a seat on a committee.

(Available at http://www.coe.int/t/congress/presentation/bureau_en.asp)

In 1951, a new organization representing local and regional government was established. The Council of European Municipalities was founded in Geneva by a group of European mayors. Later on, it opened its ranks to the regions and became the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). Nowadays, it is the largest organisation of local and regional government in Europe. Its members are over 50 national associations of towns, municipalities and regions from 38 countries. Together these associations represent some 100.000 local and regional authorities.

CEMR works to promote a united Europe that is based on local and regional self government and democracy. To achieve this goal it endeavours to shape the

future of Europe by enhancing the local and regional contribution, to influence European law and policy, to exchange experience at local and regional level and to cooperate with partners in other parts of the world. CEMR works in many fields of activity such as regional policy, transport, the environment, equal opportunities, and governance. Its committees and working groups seek to influence draft EU legislation to make sure the interests and concerns of local and regional authorities are taken into account from the earliest stages of the EU legislative process. Regarding its political structure CEMR has two governing bodies: the Policy Committee and the Executive Bureau. The Policy Committee meets generally twice per year; it is for most purposes the main governing organ. It is based on national representation, ranging from two places for states with population of less than 5 million, to 6 places for states of more than 60 million. The Executive Bureau is a smaller body; it takes decisions between Policy Committee meetings. It also meets normally twice a year. CEMR's president and other members of its presidency are elected by the Policy Committee for a three year term (available at: http://www.ccre.org/structure_politique_en.htm)

Furthermore, in 1986 a network of major cities was created, called Eurocities. It was founded by the mayors of six large cities: Barcelona, Birmingham, Frankfurt, Lyon, Milan and Rotterdam. This initiative was based on the belief that Europe's cities could benefit from meeting together regularly to discuss common problems, to share knowledge and ideas. Eurocities network could also work as a political platform for European cities that could act as a channel for communicating with the European institutions. The main goal of those six mayor's was to see local government recognised as a crucial partner of the European Community and the Member States, and for the cities' concerns to be taken into account in the European policy-making process. During its first five years, the membership of Eurocities grew from 6 to 42 cities. Now, Eurocities is the network of major European cities that brings together local governments of more than 140 large cities on over 30 European countries. It is widely recognised as the most important network of cities in Europe that represents the interests of major cities towards the EU institutions. The network also serves as a valuable source of expertise on urban policies, and makes positive contributions to both developing and implementing European policies and programmes (available at: <http://www.eurocities.eu/main.php>).

Eurocities is committed to work towards a common vision of a sustainable future in which all citizens can enjoy a good quality of life. In this framework,

Eurocities aims at achieving a European context where cities can be inclusive, prosperous, creative, and sustainable, with democratic and effective governance, and where all citizens can be provided with opportunities for participation in all aspects of urban life - including political, cultural, social and economic aspects. In order to carry out its mission, it has identified certain strategic objectives addressing long-term challenges in relation to five main dimensions of urban policy: the social, economic, environmental cultural and governance dimensions.

Eurocities has a democratic decision-making structure. The most important decisions are made at the Annual General Meeting (AGM), where each member city is represented. The general assembly elects twelve members as the Executive Committee to manage the business of the organisation. Eurocities also operates through a number of thematic forums and working groups in which all Eurocities members can participate. The forums monitor developments in a specific policy area, addressing issues and coordinating activities. They also set up and monitor working groups, and draft Eurocities position papers. Each forum meets two to three times each year and elects its own chair and vice-chair. The Executive Committee also has working groups on cross-cutting themes such as governance, neighbourhood policy and climate change (available at: <http://www.eurocities.eu/main.php>).

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) was established in 1985 and is the largest independent network of regions in the wider Europe. It brings together over 270 regions from 33 countries and 16 interregional organisations. AER's mission is to: promote the principle of subsidiarity and regional democracy; to increase the regions' political influence within European institutions; to support the regions in the process of European enlargement and globalisation and to facilitate interregional cooperation across wider Europe and beyond (<http://www.aer.eu/about-aer/vocation.html>). The General Assembly is made up of the political representatives of the member regions. It decides on the AER's political strategy, votes on the budget, decides on the creation of Committees or specific assignments, ratifies the acceptance of members and decides on exclusions and membership type. It elects the AER President and the members of the Bureau for two years and the Secretary General for five years. The Bureau makes all the decisions necessary for the smooth running of affairs between General Assemblies and coordinates the work of the different Committees. It meets at least twice a year. Its members are elected by the General Assembly, after being nominated by the member regions and it includes at least one regional representative

per State represented within the AER (available at <http://www.aer.eu/about-aer/ruling-bodies.html>).

The Associations of European Border Regions (AEBR) founded in 1971 works on behalf of all European border and cross-border regions: to make their particular problems, opportunities, tasks and projects intelligible; to represent their overall interests to national and international parliaments, organs, authorities and institutions; to initiate, support and coordinate their cooperation throughout Europe (creation of a network); to exchange know-how and information in order to formulate and coordinate common interests on the basis of the various cross-border problems and opportunities, and to offer adequate solutions; to help to solve cross-border problems and to support special activities; to prepare and implement common campaigns within the networks; to support the "Centre for European Border and Cross-Border Regions"; to inform European political bodies and the public about cross-border issues and proposed solutions: to implement programmes and projects, to apply for funds and to receive and dispose of them to organise events that deal with cross-border problems.

The AEBR cooperates at European level with: the European Union (European Parliament, European Commission, and Committee of the Regions and European Economic and Social Committee) and the Council of Europe (Parliamentary Assembly, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Expert Committee on Border Issues). The organs of the AEBR are: the General Assembly, the Executive Committee, and the Secretary General. The General Assembly is the highest-ranking body. It elects the President and the members of the Executive Committee, decides on the admission and expulsion of members, and fixes the membership (available at: <http://www.aebr.eu/en/profile/organisation.php>).

The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) was established in 1973, on the initiative of the region of Brittany. Since then it has been targeting its action towards ensuring the needs and interests of its member regions are taken into account in all policies with a high territorial impact. In particular, the CPMR is striving to ensure a strong EU regional policy targeted at all of Europe's regions and is also working towards the delivery of an integrated maritime policy designed to contribute towards Europe's economic growth (available at: <http://www.crpm.org/index.php?act=1>).

The Organisational Charter sets the rules for application for membership, organisation and operation of the CPMR. All of the CPMR member regions come

together once a year for a General Assembly and they adopt the Conference's policy guidelines and budget. The college of member regions from each country nominates one of their number as a representative to the Political Bureau, as well as a substitute member. They have a two-year term. The Political Bureau meets twice a year. It proposes policy guidelines for the Conference and implements the decisions adopted by the General Assembly. The Geographical Commissions aim to ensure that work is as decentralised and as close to the reality of each sea basin as possible. There are six in all: Atlantic Arc, Balkan and Black Sea, Islands, Intermediterranean, Baltic Sea, North Sea. There is also, the General Secretariat, which ensures the smooth running of the Conference and the Administrative Council which provides the association with legal and administrative support (available at: <http://www.crpm.org/index.php?act=1,3>).

The Conference of Presidents of the European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE) unites seventy-four presidents of European regional legislative assemblies: the parliaments of the Spanish communities, Italian regional councils, the federated states of Germany and Austria, the Portuguese regions of l'Açores and Madeira, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom, Åland Islands in Finland and Belgium community and regional chambers. After years of bilateral and multilateral meetings, CALRE was founded by an act signed on 7 October 1997 in Oviedo, Spain (available at: <http://www.calrenet.eu/history.aspx>). Its aims are: to strengthen and organise parliamentary monitoring of European affairs in each region, set up a subsidiarity network, and exchange information and good practice; to encourage exchange of information and experience between the European regional legislative assemblies and European and national institutions: European Parliament, European Commission, Committee of the Regions, national parliaments and Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC), Council of Europe; to improve the democratic legitimacy of the European decision-making process, and step up dialogue with European regional organisations and Member States; to bring Europe closer to its citizens through legislative assemblies. Its organizational structure is the Standing Committee of 10 members (8 presidents, one per country, plus the current and former presidents).

The Conference of Presidents of Regions with Legislative Powers (REGLEG) is a political network for EU regions with legislative powers. It comprises representatives of regional governments who work together on issues of common

concern. Its aim is to ensure that the special circumstances and interests of the regions with legislative powers are reflected in EU decision-making. REGLEG's activities are: to ensure that the role of the regions with legislative powers is properly recognised in the making of EU policy and law; to press for direct pre-legislative consultation with the regions; to assess the conformity of legislative proposals with the principle of subsidiarity, to offer the expertise of regional administrations to the CoR and looking forward to playing an active part in the CoR. To that end, its Coordination Committee will draw up proposals for cooperation with the Committee of the Regions, especially for the purposes of impact assessments and subsidiarity monitoring. These proposals will be subject to political endorsement by member regions. (available at:

<http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CoRAWorkTemplate.aspx?view=folder&id=24346a7b-342b-44d6-b0b7-6e3cd9bf2382&sm=24346a7b-342b-44d6-b0b7-6e3cd9bf2382>).

Finally, the Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Areas (AEM) founded in 1991 works to bring together local and regional authorities, elected representatives from mountain regions and their representative organisations; to strengthen links and unite the elected representatives of people living in mountain regions in Europe; to defend the specific interests of mountain regions and ensure that they are politically and legally recognised; to promote a horizontal and balanced sustainable development policy for European mountain regions; to coordinate at European level the activities of local authorities in mountain regions; to represent mountain regions and defend the interests of their populations vis-à-vis the European Union and other European institutions or organisations, as well as national governments; to inform its members and the general public about problems and current issues that directly or indirectly affect mountain regions and to carry out any joint studies, activities or events likely to achieve these objectives (available at: <http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CoRAWorkTemplate.aspx?view=folder&id=24346a7b-342b-44d6-b0b7-6e3cd9bf2382&sm=24346a7b-342b-44d6-b0b7-6e3cd9bf2382>).

Apart from the abovementioned Europe-wide organizations there are also Regional Associations. In brief they are the Assembly of European Wine Regions (AREV), the Working Community of the Central Alps (ARGE ALPS), the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC), The Working Community of the Pyrenees (CTP), the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy (REVES), the Alps-Adriatic Working Community (ARGE ALPS-ADRIA), the Cross

Border Operation Mission (MOT i.e MISSION OPÉRATIONNELLE TRANSFRONTALIÈRE), the Arco Latino Association (ARCO), the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) and, last but not least, the Working Community of the Danube States (ARGE DONAULÄNDER).

1.7 KEY DATES

These are some important dates in the history of the Committee of the Regions (Committee of the Regions, 2009a):

- **7 February 1992**: signing of the Maastricht Treaty, which officially establishes the CoR.
- **1 November 1993**: the Maastricht Treaty enters into force after a lengthy ratification process.
- **9-10 March 1994**: the CoR holds its inaugural plenary session in Brussels.
- **9-10 December 1994**: the CoR calls on the EU heads of state and government, meeting at the Essen Summit, to clarify their definition of subsidiarity.
- **1 January 1995**: the number of CoR members increases to 222 following the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden to the European Union.
- **20-21 March 1996**: Pasqual Maragall i Mira, Mayor of Barcelona, is elected President of the CoR. He pledges to focus on building a transparent, legitimate internal organisation and for the CoR to be given institutional status.
- **15-16 May 1997**: the CoR hosts the European Summit of the Regions and Cities in Amsterdam. The Committee presents a report drawn up by Edmund Stoiber, Prime Minister of Bavaria and Fernando Gomes, Mayor of Porto calling for the CoR to be recognised as a fully-fledged institution, with rights to initiate proceedings at the European Court of Justice, and to be given more areas of mandatory consultation. The summit also calls for the European Parliament to be given the right to consult the CoR.

- **2 October 1997**: signing of the Amsterdam Treaty. The Treaty consolidates and extends the CoR's role as an EU consultative body.
- **19-20 November 1997**: European Commission President Jacques Santer and Valéry Giscard D'Estaing, President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and former President of France, address plenary. The CoR Bureau sets up the Committee for Administrative and Financial Affairs, made up of 15 members.
- **18-19 February 1998**: Manfred Dammeyer, Minister for Federal and European Affairs for the German Land of North Rhine Westphalia, is elected President of the CoR.
- **16-17 February 2000**: Jos Chabert, Minister for Public Works and Transport in the Brussels-Capital Region government, is elected President of the CoR.
- **26 February 2001**: signing of the Treaty of Nice. This states that members of the CoR must hold a local or regional electoral mandate or be politically accountable to an elected local or regional assembly. It also lays down that members can now be appointed by qualified majority vote at the Council of Ministers, rather than requiring unanimous backing. Membership of the CoR terminates automatically if members lose the mandate on the basis of which they were appointed. The Treaty sets the maximum number of members of the CoR at 317 for an EU of 25 countries, rising to a maximum of 350 upon the accession of Romania and Bulgaria.
- **6 February 2002**: Sir Albert Bore, leader of Birmingham City Council, is elected President. The CoR adopts a new structure for its commissions. The previous eight commissions are replaced by six new ones.
- **7-9 October 2003**: the CoR holds the first of its open days in Brussels.
- **11 February 2004**: Peter Straub, president of the German regional parliament of Baden-Württemberg, is elected President of the CoR.
- **16 February 2006**: Michel Delebarre, Mayor of Dunkirk (Nord-Pas de Calais region) and member of the French Parliament is elected President of the CoR.

- **1 January 2007:** the number of the members of the Committee rises to 344 following Bulgaria's and Romania's accession to the EU.
- **6 February 2008:** Luc Van den Brande, senator in the Belgian parliament and CoR member since its inception, was elected president of the Committee.
- **5 and 6 March 2009:** for its 15th anniversary in 2009, the Committee invited 500 mayors and presidents of regions to the European Summit of Regions and Cities.
- **10 February 2010:** Mercedes Bresso was elected president of the Committee.

CHAPTER 2-FUNCTIONS

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Committee of the Regions underlines that its functions are based on three key principals: the principle of subsidiarity, proximity and partnership. The first principle, written into the Treaties at the same time as the creation of the CoR, implies that decisions within the European Union should be taken at the closest practical level to the citizen. The European Union, therefore, must not interfere in matters which are better suited to national, regional or local administrations. The second that all levels of government should aim to be 'close to the citizens', in particular by organising their work in a transparent way, so people know who is in charge of what and how to make their views heard. And the last that all four levels of governance (EU, national, regional and local) are indispensable, that they must co-operate and get involved together throughout the decision- making process.

The Treaties oblige the Commission and the Council to consult the Committee of the Regions whenever new legislative proposals are made in areas that have repercussions at regional and local level. The Maastricht Treaty set out five such areas: economic and social cohesion, trans-European infrastructure networks, health, education and culture. In 1997 another five areas were added by the Amsterdam Treaty: employment policy, social policy, the environment, vocational training and transport. In 2001 the Treaty of Nice stipulated that CoR members must either hold a regional or local authority electoral mandate or be politically accountable to an elected authority. The Treaty also provided for CoR members to be appointed by qualified majority by the Council of Ministers, rather than by unanimous decision. Membership terminates automatically if the mandate on which members were appointed comes to an end (Committee of the Regions, 2004). Under the Lisbon Treaty, CoR's role is further enhanced as it will have the right to consult the other European institutions on new policy areas. An effort will now be made to present and describe CoR's main functions and activities in order the reader to obtain a fuller image of how the Committee works.

2.2 POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The President is the head of the Committee. He or she chairs plenary sessions and represents the Committee in its external relations. The President and the First Vice-President are elected by the Committee members for a two-and-a half-year term. There is also one Vice-President per Member State. The current President is Mercedes Bresso, member of the Piedmont Regional Council and the First-Vice President is Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso, President of the Autonomous Community of Murcia.

In addition, the Bureau can be thought of as CoR's political driving force because it draws up the Committee's political programme at the start of each new term, oversees its implementation and generally coordinates the work of the plenary sessions and the commissions. It, too, has a term of two and a half years. As a rule, Bureau meets seven times a year: before each of the five plenary sessions in Brussels and two extraordinary meetings, each of which is held in the member state that takes up the Council presidency. As CoR's political driving force, the Bureau has to reflect the pluralism that exists within the Committee. Consequently, the composition of the Bureau takes the following form: the President, the first Vice-President, 27 other Vice-Presidents (one for each Member State), 27 other members and the chairmen of the political groups. (available at: <http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/PresentationTemplate.aspx?view=folder&id=d0808c8c-0d54-4f66-8fc2-0eed601ddc78&sm=d0808c8c-0d54-4f66-8fc2-0eed601ddc78>)

France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom each have three seats; Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden each have two seats; Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia each have one seat.

The Bureau's work is concentrating on the following tasks: a) establishment of the policy programme at the beginning of each term, monitoring of its implementation and presentation of the annual and end-of-term assessments b) preparation, organisation and coordination of the work of the Plenary Assembly and the commissions. To this end the Bureau may set up working groups of Bureau members or of Committee members to advise it in specific areas; invite other members of the Committee, by virtue of their expertise or mandate, and persons not belonging to the Committee, to attend its meetings; c) has overall responsibility for financial, organisational and administrative matters concerning members and alternates; internal

organisation of the Committee, its Secretariat-General, including the establishment plan, and its constituent bodies; d) engagement of the Secretary-General and the officials and other servants e) submission of the draft estimates of expenditure and revenue to the Plenary Assembly f) authorisation of meetings away from the usual place of work; g) laying down of the implementing arrangements regarding travel and subsistence expenses for members, duly mandated alternates and experts, in compliance with the provisions laid down under the budget procedure. (available at: <http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/PresentationTemplate.aspx?view=folder&id=fafda195-d15e-4e5e-bdd3-0e9a5f20068c&sm=fafda195-d15e-4e5e-bdd3-0e9a5f20068c>).

The Committee has today 344 Members and the same number of alternates from all 27 EU Members States, as shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2

COUNTRIES	MEMBERS
GERMANY, FRANCE, ITALY, UNITED KINGDOM	24
POLAND, SPAIN	21
ROMANIA	15
AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, BULGARIA, CZECH REPUBLIC, GREECE, HUNGARY, NETHERLANDS, PORTUGAL, SWEDEN	12
DENMARK, IRELAND, FINLAND, SLOVAKIA, LITHUANIA	9
ESTONIA, LATVIA, SLOVENIA	7
CYPRUS, LUXEMBOURG	6
MALTA	5

The Members of the Committee, which are holders of a regional or local mandate, sit in four political groups reflecting their political affiliations. The groups are: the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and the European Alliance Group. The groups meet just before the plenary session but they also hold two extraordinary meetings (away from Brussels) each year.

The members of the Committee of the Regions meet five times a year in plenary session in Brussels. Despite the fact that the main purpose of these ordinary sessions is to discuss and adopt opinions, resolutions or declarations, it must not be considered as merely a long series of debates on draft opinions. CoR's plenary sessions are an excellent opportunity for the 344 representatives from all over Europe to discuss, cooperate and exchange useful informations and experiences. Also, one or more guests are allowed to be invited to each plenary session and to take part in the discussions and debates with CoR members. These debates have a great meaning as they enable local and regional authorities to participate in the policy making process and to talk face to face with European leaders about various issues. In general, plenary sessions are preceded by a Bureau meeting and meetings of national delegations and political groups. At the request of one quarter of the members, the President is obliged to convene an extraordinary plenary session. This request must state the subject matter to be discussed and no other matter may be dealt with (Committee of the Regions, 2004b).

Moreover, also certain interregional groups exist in the Committee. In accordance with the rules in force, an interregional group comprises at least ten full members of the Committee of the Regions belonging to either at least four national delegations or a group of regions working together on the basis of an agreement between States to promote trans-border cooperation. Interregional groups carry out their activities autonomously. Each group establishes a secretariat which is external to the Committee's structures and which manages the group's work and organisational aspects. The Committee offers interregional groups a limited number of services, such as making rooms available and providing interpreting for their meetings when financially and logistically possible. Relations with the interregional groups are managed within the Registry Unit. The existing interregional groups in the Committee are the "Saar-Lor-Lux" Group, the "Wine" Group, the "Regions with legislative power" Group (REGLEG/CALRE), the "Baltic Sea Regions" Group, the "Mediterranean" Group, the "Danube" Group, the "North Sea" Group and the Automotive Crisis Group. (available at:

<http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/PresentationTemplate.aspx?view=folder&id=86e7f290-d7b8-4a3c-a549-36191441227d&sm=86e7f290-d7b8-4a3c-a549-36191441227d>).

2.3 MISSION STATEMENT AND POLITICAL PRIORITIES

The Committee of the Regions describes itself as a political assembly of regional and local representatives, who are all holders of a regional or local mandate serving the cause of European integration and providing, through its political legitimacy an institutional representation for all the EU's territorial areas, regions, cities and municipalities. The Committee declares that its main mission is to involve regional and local authorities in the European decision-making process and to encourage greater participation for the European citizens (Committee of the Regions, 2009b).

Its political action is based mainly on the belief that cooperation between European, national regional and local levels is essential if an ever closer Union is going to be built. For that reason, the Committee works closely together with the other European institutions: the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. But, also works closely with the member states with the various tiers of authority, promoting multi-level governance. The Committee's work focuses on voting on political recommendations for European strategies and participating in the preparation of Community legislation. At the early stages, it proposes political lines of approach and action drawn from the experience of the regional and local authorities (Committee of the Regions, 2009b).

It claims that its vision is to see Europe "united in diversity", making the very most of its territorial, cultural and linguistic diversity. It wants to play an important part in promoting European democracy and citizenship, and to contribute towards the anchoring of fundamental rights and the protection of minorities. It describes itself as the guardian of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality; in order for decisions to be taken and applied as close to the citizens as possible and at the most appropriate level.

The Committee claims autonomy for regional and local authorities and their right to secure appropriate financial resources to enable them to carry out their duties. In addition, it encourages cooperation between the regional and local authorities of the member states, but also with those of candidate countries, potential candidate countries, neighboring countries and third countries. Moreover, through its work it sets up platforms and networks, organizes forums so as to facilitate cooperation between all areas of the EU and develops partnerships with their representative organizations. And this is also its main logo: "Let's build Europe in partnership".

Last but not least, the Committee characterizes itself and its members as ambassadors of Europe in the regions, cities and municipalities, speaking for them in the European debate. It claims that it supports a direct dialogue with the citizens on Europe's achievements and future challenges and also that it helps to explain and expound the implementation and territorial impact of Community policies (Committee of the Regions, 2009b).

Apart from the abovementioned mission statement the Committee set certain political priorities for the year 2010. Primarily, the Committee is making some comments on the current EU institutional and political conjuncture. In particular, it notes that: "2010 constitutes an important institutional conjuncture with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the beginning of the European Commission's and the Committee of the Regions' new term of office considers that the current challenges require a longer-term political vision, enhanced cooperation amongst European institutions, increased ownership of European policies at national, regional and local level and recognition of the principles of multilevel governance. Moreover, underlines that the consolidation of the Committee's role in the EU legislative process, not least through the new powers conferred upon it following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, in particular with regard to subsidiarity, aims at contributing to the better governance and efficiency of the EU's legislative activities. Furthermore, reiterates its commitment to working closely with the European Commission with a view to guaranteeing that the local and regional dimension is taken into account during the elaboration of EU legislation, notably by increasing the local and regional sensitivity of impact assessment" (Committee of the Regions, 2010).

"Welcomes the multiannual perspective added to the European Commission Work Programme 2010, which enhances predictability, facilitates cooperation and inter-institutional programming and allows for the effective setting of strategic goals; the Committee is concerned about the rise of extremist parties and believes that one of the crucial ways to tackle this is to provide resources to local and regional authorities to combat poverty; inequality; discrimination; intercultural conflict; lack of appropriate housing and financial resources to communities, social enterprises and SMEs; in order to create sustainable wealth generation. Finally, CoR shares the European Commission's view on the urgency of addressing the social, economic and environmental challenges facing the EU; reaffirms its intention to contribute to the successful implementation of the Commission's priority axes for action: the EU's exit

from the current economic, financial and social crisis and the move towards socially and environmentally sustainable recovery that puts citizens first and confirms the EU as a global player; reiterates its willingness to contribute to the optimisation of the use of existing EU policy instruments, inter alia through simplification and reduction of administrative burden, which constitute a key part of the European Commission's strategic priorities” (Committee of the Regions, 2010).

The Committee of the Regions is setting chiefly the goal of remedying the effects of the crisis in a socially, economically and environmental way, as there are deep concerns about the magnitude and impact of the financial, economic and social crisis on regions and cities. “It points out that, in spite of some early recovery signs, the European economy is still facing weak demand and citizens are confronted with high employment uncertainty. Cities and regions are affected unevenly, which means that territorial disparities increase. This challenges the very idea of social, economic and territorial cohesion within the European Union and thus calls for strong measures to reinforce the role of cohesion policy”. (Committee of the Regions, 2010).

Moreover, it makes certain comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the European’s Commission’s Europe 2020 blueprint. “The CoR welcomes the fact that the European Commission's Europe 2020 blueprint meets some key requests from EU cities, local and regional authorities when it states that (a) cities, local and regional authorities must be permanent partners in the design and implementation of the new strategy, that (b) the Committee of the Regions should be more closely associated, that (c) the economic, social and environmental pillars have to be put at the same level, that (d) the strategy should be flexible enough to adapt to different starting points, and that (e) the benefits of economic growth have to spread to all parts of the Union, thus strengthening territorial cohesion; It regrets, however, that the Commission's proposal does not address some other key issues raised by the Committee of the Regions, namely (a) how to commit member states' governments to deliver on the promises of the new strategy, (b) what role the local and regional authorities should play in the design and implementation of the proposed flagship initiatives, (c) what indicators for assessment of progress should complement GDP and how these should be integrated into the governance of the new strategy; The Committee supports the intention to concentrate the Europe 2020 Strategy on fewer priorities and agrees on the need to link the reporting on the new Strategy with that on the Stability and Growth Pact; the instruments themselves, however, must remain

clearly separate, and the independence of the European Central Bank (ECB) must be safeguarded. Lastly, is determined to raise these points in the debate preparing the final decision on the new EU strategy and expects the European Council meeting in June to duly take into account the proposals by the Committee of the Regions on behalf of the EU's regions and cities" (Committee of the Regions, 2010).

In addition, the Committee claims that it is taking forward the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives on many different areas such as: industrial policy, research and innovation, youth, new skills and jobs, social inclusion and resource efficiency. It also, stresses the need for an agenda that puts citizens first particularly in areas such as cohesion policy, public health and consumer protection, freedom, security and justice, civil protection, biodiversity, culture and sport.

Finally, the Committee is aiming at optimizing the EU instruments. "Emphasizes the importance of strengthening multilevel governance so that all spheres of government are involved in the formulation and implementation of Community policies; reiterates that the respect of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in the legislative process is at the core of effective and democratic multilevel governance. Also, believes that better regulation and the reduction of the administrative burden will boost growth and the creation of jobs; is determined to contribute to the improvement of the regulatory environment and the simplification of the *acquis communautaire*, as well as to enhanced consultation and strengthened impact evaluation methods; will continue to closely follow the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders on Administrative Burden, with a special emphasis on the needs of and impact for local and regional authorities" (Committee of the Regions, 2010).

Lastly, aims in a more communicating Europe by reiterating "its commitment to promoting and encouraging democratic participation in the European process through its members and their activities in their towns, cities and regions. Local and regional politicians have an essential relay role to play in building this European Union for two reasons: firstly, to ensure that the territorial dimension is taken into account across the board when EU legislation is drafted and, secondly, to engage with their citizens in a dialogue about the added value of European integration and reaffirms its key responsibility in effectively communicating this double role. Underlines in this context the importance of the annual "Open Days" as an ideal framework for regions and cities to showcase good practice in the field of

strengthening cohesion, regional competitiveness and territorial cooperation and to impact on the political debates among EU institutions and member states” (Committee of the Regions, 2010).

Finally, is ready to join forces with the European Commission, European Parliament and Council in taking forward the three major communication priorities identified in the European Commission's Work Programme 2010, namely economic recovery and restoring growth, addressing climate change and energy issues, and facilitating the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty (Committee of the Regions, 2010).

2.4 COMMISSIONS

The Committee is organized in six distinctive Commissions that are responsible to support the preparation of opinions based on the proposals of the European Commission. The draft version of opinions and resolutions are submitted to the Plenary Assembly for adoption. The composition of each Commission reflects the political and national composition of the Committee of the Regions.

In 1994, CoR used to have eight Commissions and four sub commissions. In particular:

- **Commission 1:** regional development, economic development and local and regional finances, **sub commission 1:** local and regional finances.
- **Commission 2:** spatial planning, agriculture, hunting, fisheries, forestry, marine environment and upland areas, **sub commission 2:** tourism and rural areas.
- **Commission 3:** transport and communications networks, **sub commission 3:** telecommunications.
- **Commission 4:** urban policies.
- **Commission 5:** land-use planning, environment and energy.
- **Commission 6:** education and training.
- **Commission 7:** citizens' Europe, research, culture, youth and consumers, **sub commission 4:** youth and sport.
- **Commission 8:** economic and social cohesion, social policy and public health.

Nowadays, CoR has adopted a new structure for its commissions. The previous eight commissions are replaced by the current six:

- Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER)
- Commission for Economic and Social Policy (ECOS)
- Commission for Education, Youth and Research (EDUC)
- Commission for Environment, Climate change and Energy (ENVE)
- Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX)
- Commission for Natural Resources (NAT)

The Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER) deals mainly, with regional policy and transport policy as these are two topics that are at the heart of concern for local and regional authorities throughout Europe. COTER enables for representatives from local and regional authorities to discuss the planning and implementation of these policies and to ensure that their concerns are taken up by the other European Institutions. More specifically, its competences are economic, social and territorial cohesion, structural funds, spatial planning, urban policy, housing, transport and trans-European transport networks, macro-regions and territorial cooperation (including EGTC) (available at: http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CommissionDetailTemplate_COTER.aspx?view=folder&id=bdeb2c32-fc98-4c94-9bef-6377c0c655f2&sm=bdeb2c32-fc98-4c94-9bef-6377c0c655f2).

The Commission for Economic and Social Policy (ECOS) focuses on the fact that local and regional authorities should play a central role in both the formulation and implementation of economic and social policy in the European Union. The Commission allows for representatives from local and regional authorities to discuss economic and social policy and exchange best practices in these fields. Its competences are employment, social policy, social protection, equal opportunities, enterprise policy, competition and taxation, innovation, economic and monetary policy, internal market, World Trade Organisation (WTO) issues. (available at: http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CommissionDetailTemplate_ECOS.aspx?view=folder&id=836544e3-2e0f-4818-88f2-0249d2858df7&sm=836544e3-2e0f-4818-88f2-0249d2858df7).

To move forward, the Commission for Education, Youth, Culture and Research (EDUC) considers that throughout the European Union local and regional levels have key responsibilities for policies and activities related to education, culture, youth and sports. They are also key players in developing regional research and innovation strategies, and in harnessing the full potential of information and communication technologies to the benefit of society. The EDUC Commission provides a forum for representatives from local and regional authorities to provide input to other European Institutions and also exchange good practices in these fields. Its competences are youth, sports, education, information and communication strategy of the EU, life-long learning, culture and cultural diversity, multilingualism and promotion of minority languages, research and technology, information society and trans-European telecommunication networks and communications, audiovisual industry and media. (available at: http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CommissionDetailTemplate_EDUC.aspx?view=folder&id=0764b56a-f6d3-437c-b773-f246507da18b&sm=0764b56a-f6d3-437c-b773-f246507da18b).

The Commission for Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE) claims that Local and regional authorities play a central role in the implementation of EU environment, climate change and energy policy. The ENVE Commission allows for representatives from local and regional authorities to discuss the formulation of these policies and to promote best practices in these areas. In particular, its competences are: environment policy, climate change adaptation and mitigation, renewable energy, trans-European networks in the energy sector and new energy policies and space policy (Galileo, GMES/Kopernikus and related issues). (available at: http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CommissionDetailTemplate_ENVE.aspx?view=folder&id=41b0daf3-31ac-4718-a565-95b67d888e0e&sm=41b0daf3-31ac-4718-a565-95b67d888e0e).

The fifth one is the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional Affairs and External Relations (CIVEX). It is responsible for coordinating the Committee of the Regions' work on issues which include justice and home affairs, fundamental rights and freedoms, smart regulation and the reduction of administrative burdens, citizenship and broader institutional issues such as governance and devolution. The Commission also intensively deals with the Union's external

dimension, focusing on neighbourhood and enlargement countries, and decentralised cooperation for development. The opinions discussed and adopted in the CIVEX Commission form the basis of the CoR's position on local and regional responses to the issues mentioned above, through which the Committee seeks to influence the wider EU institutional debate as well as the legislative and policy agenda in order to make sure that the challenges faced at local and regional level are understood and taken on board. On the whole, the Commission's competences are: freedom, security and justice, immigration policy, asylum and visas, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, active citizenship, devolution, governance, better law making (including the reduction of administrative burdens), implementation of the EU Treaty, neighbourhood policy, eastern partnership and EU Mediterranean policy, decentralised cooperation for development, enlargement (dealing with global issues not covered by the working groups of the Bureau). (available at: http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CommissionDetailTemplate_CIVEX.aspx?view=folder&id=cb606d20-0fee-41d7-95a8-5c03134dc7a5&sm=cb606d20-0fee-41d7-95a8-5c03134dc7a5).

Last but not least is the Commission for Natural Resources (NAT) that regards local and regional authorities as a cornerstone in the implementation of agricultural, health and maritime policy in the EU. Within the NAT Commission, their representatives deliberate on these issues provide a local and regional input to EU decision-making, and exchange best practices. NAT's competences are: common agricultural policy, rural development, public health common fisheries policy, maritime policy, food production, consumer protection, forestry, civil protection and tourism.

(available at: http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CommissionDetailTemplate_NAT.aspx?view=folder&id=24417a3c-4b30-4683-b8c4-2af6ce1ad09b&sm=24417a3c-4b30-4683-b8c4-2af6ce1ad09b).

2.5 NETWORKS AND ACTIVITIES

The CoR has created certain networks to promote the involvement of regions and local authorities in the process of building Europe and to give them a stronger voice within European institutions. These networks are: the Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform (former Lisbon monitoring Platform), the Subsidiarity Monitoring Network and the European Group for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

To begin with, the Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform (EUROPE2020MP) is a network of regions and cities that contributes to the EU debate on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and monitors the implementation of Europe 2020. The Europe 2020 strategy, proposed by the European Commission in March 2010 as the successor to the Lisbon Strategy will focus on knowledge and innovation, a more sustainable economy, high employment and social inclusion. It contributes to fulfilling the CoR mission "*...to involve regional and local authorities in the European decision-making process and thus to encourage greater participation from our fellow citizens.*" (CoR's Mission Statement, 21 April 2009). This network aims particularly to: involve local and regional authorities in order to ensure the better implementation of policies linked to the Europe 2020 goals, to examine the evolving relationship between the Europe 2020 strategy and cohesion policy, to monitor the involvement of the local and regional level in the strategy's governance process, to identify the obstacles encountered by local and regional authorities in implementing the Europe 2020 strategy and to stimulate exchange of information, experiences and best practices.

(available at:
<http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CoRAtWorkTemplate.aspx?view=folder&id=f2899625-1cfd-41b9-87bb-7d1bb97d2de5&sm=f2899625-1cfd-41b9-87bb-7d1bb97d2de5>)

Secondly, the Subsidiarity Monitoring Network is a tool for improving democratic accountability and wider participation of local and regional authorities in the EU legislative process. As the subsidiarity principle is a key issue for the Committee of the Regions due to the fact that it was declared as the “guardian” of the principle back in 1994 by the Maastricht Treaty, CoR aims through this particular network to facilitate the exchange of information between local and regional authorities in the European Union and the EU institutions on European Commission documents and legislative proposals which have a direct impact on regional and local authorities. The network enables the political participation of local and regional authorities in monitoring the implementation of the subsidiarity and proportionality

principles, raises awareness of the practical application of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles, it keeps CoR rapporteurs and members abreast of input from local and regional players, it helps to identify better law making and increasing the awareness and acceptance of EU policies by citizens. The purpose of the network is to serve as an access point allowing local and regional authorities to obtain information, have their say and put across their points of view on EU policies and legislative proposals. The Subsidiarity Monitoring Network has a political coordinator, drawn from the members of the CoR, who gives impetus to the Platform's agenda and reports back on its work to the Bureau and other institutions. The current holder of this role is Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso (ES/EPP, President of the Autonomous Community of Murcia).

(available at:
<http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CoRAAtWorkTemplate.aspx?view=folder&id=edb25d95-d57d-416c-bf4c-df9427c75255&sm=edb25d95-d57d-416c-bf4c-df9427c75255>)

Moreover, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is a new tool which has been presented in 2006 by the European Commission on the basis of a long term political action and proposals coming, among others from the Committee of the Regions. EGTC enables regional and local authorities from different member states to cooperate more effectively, for example by allowing them to directly apply for and manage European funds. The role of EGTC is to organise and manage cross-border, trans-national or interregional cooperation measures with or without EU financial support. For example, EGTCs can run cross-border transport or health services, could manage cross-border or inter-regional sustainable development projects (innovation and technology, environmental protection, etc.) or strengthen economic and social cohesion across borders. The role of the Committee in this project is consultative in the area of cross-border cooperation, provides political support for EGTCs and their activities, it can assess the progress of EGTCs and facilitate exchange of best practice through an expert group, and finally it can collect information on EGTC statutes and conventions. (available at: <http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CoRAAtWorkTemplate.aspx?view=folder&id=1ae87373-d198-4bf5-b26c-7e9930fb813e&sm=1ae87373-d198-4bf5-b26c-7e9930fb813e>).

There is also, the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) that is a consultative assembly which aims at bringing a regional and local dimension to the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. It gathers 84 members from the EU

and its 16 Mediterranean partners who are representatives of regions and local bodies holding a regional or local authority mandate. The aim of ARLEM is: to give the Union for the Mediterranean a territorial dimension, to involve local and regional authorities in its further development, to demonstrate cooperation between local and regional authorities despite major political or institutional barriers, to set up projects that contribute to make Euro-Mediterranean relations concrete and tangible for the citizens.

(available at:

<http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/CoRAAtWorkTemplate.aspx?view=folder&id=38133fb1-2263-415e-9a23-90b831a7e3cc&sm=38133fb1-2263-415e-9a23-90b831a7e3cc>).

Through these networks the Committee is making an effort to be as close to the European citizens, as this is one of its major goals providing them with the chance to directly interact with the Committee itself and the rest of the European institutions.

Additionally, with a new cycle of governance in Europe on the horizon, the Committee of the Regions adopted its very first White Paper on multilevel governance on 16 June 2009. By publishing that political document, the Committee of the Regions took the initiative to submit its vision of an inclusive European making process and political debate, based on a mode of governance which involves local and regional authorities in the formulation and implementation of European policies. In order to gather the opinions of the authorities, associations and interested parties, the Committee of the Regions has conducted a public consultation on the proposals put forward in the White Paper. The main proposals put forward by the Committee to draw up a European Union Charter for multi-level governance set up coordinated territorial action plans between the Commission and the CoR for each major EU reform, consolidate the practice of partnership, design integrated policies, organise political cooperation, set up tools to support participatory democracy, to make the machinery for assessing the territorial impact more systematic, simplify and rationalize administrative procedures so as to have more desentralisation in the management of the Structural Funds, beef up the administrative capacities of local authorities, allocate extra resources to the three stages of territorial cooperation and develop the potential of the EGTC, and, finally, to develop tripartite instruments and set up European territorial pacts (Committee of the Regions, 2009c).

The Committee puts multi-level governance into practice in the EU by promoting and developing certain achievements and practices. Examples of those are

the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), the Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform (EUROPE2020MP), the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), the Covenant of Mayors and the Strategy for the Baltic Sea is also a typical example of the implementation of multi-sectoral policies (Committee of the Regions, 2009c).

Apart from the abovementioned projects it must be noted that CoR also participates in many activities and events. Some examples are: the European Year of Volunteering 2011 Forum, the Single Market Act Forum, the 1st European Conference on Public Communications, the Poverty and Social Exclusion forum, the Eastern Partnership Forum, the Communicating Europe-Going Local Forum, Europe's macro-regions Forum etc.

Also, since 2003 CoR organises the European Week of Regions and Cities (Open Days), that I had the honor to attend this year (2010). Open Days is an extremely interesting experience for those who are interested in regional studies but also for local and regional stakeholders. This year's event focused on Europe 2020: Competiveness, Co-operation and Cohesion for All Regions.

2.6 SURVEY

In 2008, a survey was conducted on the role and impact of local and regional authorities within the European Union. This survey was requested by the Committee of the Regions and coordinated by Directorate-General for Communication. Its aim was to obtain a better knowledge of the importance the public gives to the various levels of public authorities and to measure public awareness of the CoR. Its results were included into two of the Committee's major political initiatives for 2009: the presentation of a White Paper on Multi-level Governance and the adoption of the CoR Mission Statement on the occasion of its 15th anniversary. The respondents gave their answers in a number of questions on the impact of public authorities in people's living conditions, on the trust in the different levels of public authorities, the position of regional and local authorities and they evaluate various political representatives within the EU. But, in particular the last two questions, concerning the awareness of the Committee of the Regions and people's desire for more information about the Committee are extremely interesting for the current dissertation. This survey will provide a fuller image of the people's beliefs on CoR and help us make some remarks regarding CoR's prospects.

“Prior to the survey, less than a quarter of respondents were aware of the role of the CoR (24%). These findings are very much in line with previous Eurobarometer results which show that the CoR is the least well-known of the European institutions and bodies. In fact, this current survey shows that only 4% of respondents feel very familiar with the CoR, whereas 20% are not really familiar with it. Over half of the respondents indicate that they do not know the role of the CoR (52%) and a further 18% spontaneously indicated that they had never heard of the CoR prior to the survey. To the group of ‘unaware’ respondents it is added the 6% that answered “don’t know” to the question. This overall situation at the EU level is reflected in the country results: in no single Member State is more than one respondent in ten very familiar with the CoR with the highest score noted in Luxembourg (9%)” (Special Eurobarometer 307, 2009).

“If we look at the total proportion of ‘aware’ respondents (i.e. those who knew the role of the CoR prior to the survey and are very familiar with it and those who knew the role of the CoR but who are not very familiar with it), we find that ‘awareness’ levels are highest in Austria (38%), Luxembourg, Slovakia (36% each), Malta (35%) and Ireland (31%). Conversely, in France (13%), Cyprus (15%), the UK, Sweden, Denmark and Bulgaria (19% each) less than one out of five respondents know the role of the CoR. ‘Unaware’ respondents can be divided into three groups: those who did not know the role of the CoR prior to the survey, those who had never heard of the CoR and those who were unable to answer the question. The first group of respondents is most widely present in France (80%), followed by the Netherlands (72%), Estonia (67%), Denmark (64%) and Latvia (61%). The highest proportions of respondents who had never heard of the CoR are noted in Sweden (40%), Spain (35%) and Hungary (32%). Finally, the ‘non-response’ rate is highest in Romania (17%), followed by Bulgaria, Ireland and Italy (13% each). It is interesting to note that Europeans who feel that the regional or local level has the most impact on living conditions are not more aware of the CoR than other Europeans. In fact, awareness levels are considerably higher among Europeans who believe the EU level has the most impact” (Special Eurobarometer 307, 2009).

On the other hand, over half of Europeans would like to receive more information about their CoR representatives (54%) and about the exact role of the CoR (52%). Around a quarter (24%) is not really interested and around one European in six is not at all interested (15%). From the respondents only 7% lack an opinion. “The country

results indicate that the desire for more information is most widely expressed by citizens in Greece (75%) and Slovakia (and 75%). They are the only two countries where over seven out of ten respondents desire more information about both aspects of the CoR. Conversely, citizens in the United Kingdom least express a desire for more information (29% and 32%), followed by citizens in Ireland (42% and 43%) and Spain (45% each)” (Special Eurobarometer 307, 2009).

“The survey shows that those citizens who are most likely to be aware of the CoR in the first place are also most widely interested in receiving more information about it. The desire for more information is lower among citizens who arguably would be most ‘in need’ of knowing more information about the CoR. Less than one-third of citizens who feel they know very little about the EU would like more information (27% and 29%). In fact, further analyses show that respondents who feel very familiar with the CoR are nearly four times as likely to strongly desire more information about it than are respondents who had never heard of the CoR. Over four out of ten respondents who are very familiar with the CoR are very interested in receiving more information about it (42% for each aspect) while this applies to just over one respondent in ten who had never heard of the CoR prior to the survey (11% and 12%, respectively for each aspect)” (Special Eurobarometer 307, 2009).

The concluding data on these two aspects of the survey show that the Committee of the Regions, despite being founded relatively recently is finding its feet. It nevertheless still needs to raise its profile and inform citizens about its role, membership and powers. Almost one quarter of the respondents is aware of the CoR. However, the survey confirms that the CoR is still the least well-known of the European institutions and bodies, in line with earlier Eurobarometer studies: only 4% of respondents claim to be very familiar with the CoR, whereas 20% are not really familiar with it. Europeans who are most aware of the CoR in the first place are also most widely interested in receiving more information about it, whilst the desire for more information is lower among citizens who arguably are most ‘in need’ of learning more about the CoR (Special Eurobarometer 307, 2009).

2.7 CoR ‘S POINT OF VIEW ON MAJOR EU POLICIES

In 2009 the Committee of the Regions, on the occasion of the new Commission nomination and the beginning of the mandate of the new elected European Parliament felt the need to express its own opinion and future expectations

for the five-year new mandate of the two European institutions. Its points of view concern major policy areas such as: economic and social policy, cohesion policy and transport, climate change, environment, energy, public health, agriculture and maritime affairs, culture, education and research, European governance, fundamental rights, immigration, asylum and subsidiarity monitoring and finally the process of enlargement, neighborhood policy and decentralized cooperation. It is clear from CoR's point of view that all decisions in those areas will not achieve lasting political progress without the genuine involvement of the regional and local authorities, ie the lowest levels of governance in the EU that are closest to European citizens.

To begin with, regarding economic and social policy CoR sets its future aspirations on the Lisbon strategy, claiming that it has not been a success as it could have been due to the lack of active involvement of Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Also, respondents of the CoR consultation of European cities and regions on the future of the Lisbon Strategy criticized the excessive focus on competitiveness leaving social and environmental dimensions out of the plan. For those reasons "CoR will contribute to a new strategy focused on promoting economic growth in a sustainable and environmentally-sound manner, ensuring the quality of jobs, taking into account the need to reach territorial cohesion across the EU, including effective governance and the involvement of crucial stakeholders to promote coordinated and integrated policymaking – possibly using multi-level governance agreements. It is critical that the new strategy and its relevance be clearly communicated to all EU citizens" (Committee of the Regions, 2009d).

In order to face the current economic crisis the CoR will urge LRAs to improve information about the skills needed both now and in the future on their local markets as well as to promote the exchange of vacancy information both among regions and at the European level. The use of the European Social Fund and other relevant EU financing instruments will be analysed and possible improvements will be communicated to the Commission according to the findings. The CoR will follow up the use of the amended European Globalisation Fund and may propose recommendations regarding the restructuring of industries. Moreover, CoR promotes small businesses and the spirit of entrepreneurship and claims it will continue to monitor the implementation of the Small Business Act at regional and local level and push for better regulation that will help SMEs to flourish. Possible recommendations

may relate to clustering, access to R&D and innovation as well as LRAs facilitating cooperation between SMEs and universities (Committee of the Regions, 2009d). Also, the Committee declares its future aspirations on two other topics regarding social policy: the problem of ageing society and poverty and social exclusion. In particular, “CoR will continue to stress the urgent need to consider demographic trends at the level of regions, cities and municipalities instead of focusing exclusively on the national level. It will also support the European Commission’s efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of social spending in the fields of pensions, health care and long-term care at national level, notably in the context of the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy. And it will underline the opportunities to improve the quality of life of the elderly by means of new products and services in fields such as tourism, culture, domestic help, mobility services or financial services”. Also, “CoR will continue to encourage the European Commission to undertake social policy initiatives to mitigate the effects of the economic recession. The European Year 2010 for combating poverty and social exclusion should provide in this respect a unique momentum to launch new measures, but the CoR will give special attention to their lasting effect” (Committee of the Regions, 2009d).

To move forward the Committee sets its future aspirations in the areas of cohesion policy and transport. “The CoR continues to support an EU cohesion policy strongly focused on territorial cohesion and based on the principles of solidarity and fairness. The CoR opposes any attempt to “renationalise” cohesion policy. In the view of the CoR, territorial cohesion should not only be an integral part of all community policies but also a goal in its own right. It also calls for a fully-fledged objective dedicated to territorial cooperation to be maintained within the post-2013 cohesion policy. Moreover, the CoR will continue to closely monitor the steps taken at the national level with regard to the implementation of the EGTC Regulation, and to push for closer cooperation between regions. The CoR will also be involved in the evaluation and revision of the EGTC Regulation 1082/2006 in 2011, and will draw on the findings of its high-level group of experts on the EGTC before proposing possible improvements and modifications”. Lastly, concerning transport the Committee will continue to work towards developing ever closer cooperation between the local and regional level and the community on all transport initiatives, whether legislative or not, that have an impact on LRAs. In particular, in order to achieve full efficiency and integration of the European transport network, better coordination between major EU

projects and smaller regional projects will be vital (Committee of the Regions, 2009d).

The Committee sets its opinions on climate change saying that it will continue to stress the urgency of local and regional action to prevent climate change; emphasising that the revision of the EU budget needs to take account of the changing parameters that climate change will bring at local and regional level. The CoR will continue to push for more consistent support from the EU for local and regional authorities' efforts in the field of energy efficiency and CO₂ reduction. The shift from non-renewable to renewable energy sources implies an increase in relatively small scale, local energy production, involving local and regional authorities. The Committee notes that it will pay particular attention to the further development of the EU sustainable development strategy and the potential setting up of the 7th Environmental Action Programme. It will continue to push for closer cooperation with local and regional authorities in the implementation, revision and development of EU environmental legislation, including the future work on the EU directives related to impact assessments, environmental noise and electronic waste or eventual new bio waste legislation (Committee of the Regions, 2009d). On agriculture and rural development the Committee will continue to participate in the debate on the future of the CAP after 2013 and will underline the need to match its new structure with the needs of European territories, including the allocation of sufficient resources for investing in new challenges for rural development. On maritime planning and fisheries policy the committee declares that: "the CoR feels that although it has no explicit competences in the maritime area, the EU has many legally valid grounds for acting as a driver and coordinator, a role which might lead to legislative proposals on the method and principles. As regards maritime transport, the CoR argues that social and environmental issues should be better catered for. As regards the highways of the sea, the CoR suggests that ships built or purchased by a maritime operator and intended to ply these highways should, by means of a waiver, be included among infrastructure, despite the fact that they are mobile. These ships could thus be subsidised as road and rail investments. As regards fisheries, the CoR stresses the importance of ensuring that the future Common Fisheries Policy focuses on sustainable fish stocks while at the same time taking into account the needs of the EU's coastal regions and small-scale fisheries. In this context, particular attention needs to be devoted to the ecology of maritime areas, in particular with relation to

climate change”. On the public health sector, “CoR will continue to push for closer cooperation with and among local and regional authorities across Europe to reduce health inequalities. In particular, the CoR considers exchange of best practice, cross-border health care and information as critical elements in the reduction of health inequalities” (Committee of the Regions, 2009d).

Always aiming at improving the quality of life of all European citizens the Committee considers the so-called “softer” functions of culture as valuable elements in the LRAs’ efforts to create fertile ground for wider socio-economic development. The CoR insists on the fact that closer cooperation at the cultural level between LRAs can also contribute to territorial cohesion and help bring European regions and societies closer together. Moreover, CoR claims that the EU must ensure that education and training are improved in such a way that truly allows people to reach their full potential, contributions from local and regional authorities can no longer be overlooked (Committee of the Regions, 2009d).

According to CoR nearly, 95.000 local and Regional Authorities have a key role in the field of everyday life and for that reason it will continue to push for greater multilevel governance, coordinated by the European Union; securing greater involvement of local and regional authorities in the EU decision-making process. ‘The CoR strongly believes that the administrative burdens on public authorities (especially local and regional administrations, who are called to implement almost 70% of EU legislation), should constitute the next objective. The CoR also considers that a more effective use of impact assessments would improve lawmaking. Such assessments allow the institutions to explore and evaluate the possible consequences of proposed policies, thus contributing to clearer, more effective and equitable legislation. The European Commission and the CoR have agreed to cooperate on the assessment of the impact certain proposals on local and regional authorities” (Committee of the Regions, 2009d). The Committee also sets its future aspirations in many other areas: fundamental rights, asylum and visa policy, migration and integration, communication and active citizenship.

Finally, CoR is making certain comments on the enlargement process, neighborhood policy and decentralized cooperation. The Committee supports the process of enlargement as a driver of peace and stability in Europe. In its opinions CoR has claimed that local and regional authorities in candidate and potential candidate countries remain often excluded without getting benefits from the

enlargement and it has highlighted the importance of decentralization in those countries and the need for cooperation between the central state and local and regional authorities in the decision-making process relating to the implementation of the EU acquis. This aspect is further underlined in the debates within CoR's working groups with Turkey, Croatia and the Western Balkans countries and the joint consultative committee with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. For the future CoR "would like the European Commission's enlargement reports to include more information on reforms with an impact at local and regional level. At the same time, the CoR is calling for a genuine inclusion of LRAs in the enlargement process. Decentralisation in accordance with European standards and the progress made by local authorities from the acceding countries deserves more attention in these country reports. The CoR would like assure its added value to the European Commission by taking part in the annual IPA funds monitoring exercise and in particular could work towards increasing the effective use of funding of the new IPA by further supporting capacity building at local level in partner countries, and by stepping up support for associations of local municipalities and regions" (Committee of the Regions, 2009d).

Furthermore, "the Council and the European Commission have recognised that LRAs allocate substantial resources to development cooperation and play a leading role in fostering democratic governance at the local and regional level with developing countries. They have proposed and supported, among other initiatives, the establishment of a dialogue on development policy with LRAs, under the aegis of the CoR, (the Assizes of Decentralised Cooperation), and an atlas of decentralized cooperation, mapping the projects and aid contributions of local and regional authorities in the EU and their counterparts in developing countries, as well as a 'stock exchange' for sharing information between EU and partner country LRAs. The ultimate aim of these tools is to reinforce aid effectiveness and coordination of all actors in this policy area". For the future, CoR "stresses that dialogue between the European Commission and LRAs should be enhanced beyond the organisation of the Assizes on a yearly basis. In particular, the CoR wants to ensure that the views and needs of LRAs are taken into account during the inter-institutional dialogue when defining and discussing development cooperation strategies with partner countries" (Committee of the Regions, 2009d).

Finally, the support and development of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) will be a milestone in the involvement of LRAs in EU

neighbourhood policy. The CoR will be active in the further development of the Eastern Partnership, engaging in the Comprehensive Institution Building Programme and fostering the use of decentralised cooperation as an effective tool for cooperation between the EU and partner countries.

2.8 THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS AND THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

Besides the Committee of the Regions the European Union has an additional consultative body the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). In contrast to CoR the European Economic and Social Committee was set up in 1957 by the Treaty of Rome at the beginning of the creation of EC concept. Moreover, it is made up of representatives of the various economic and social players in civil society. It gives representatives of Europe's socio-occupational interest groups, and others, a formal platform to express their points of views on EU issues. The Committee's main task is to advise the EU's three major institutions: Commission, Council and Parliament. This it does primarily through delivering formal opinions on the European Commission's legislative proposals and on EU policy in general as it affects the economy and society. The EESC has three complementary tasks: first, to increase the involvement of civil society organisations in the European venture, at both national and European level; second, to help bridge the gap, through its activities and its members, between the European Union and citizens; and, third, to boost the role of civil society organisations in non-EU countries, and country groupings (European Economic and Social Committee, 2009).

The Committee organises its work in six individual commissions/sections. These sections are: Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT), Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO), Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC), External Relations (REX), the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT), Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN).

The Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment Section is responsible for the EESC's work on policies related to agriculture and environment. This includes large future-oriented issues such as the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, the review of the Sustainable Development Strategy and climate change policies. Additionally, the section works on more specific and technical issues

such as waste, air quality, biodiversity, forestry, fisheries management and control, food safety, civil protection and animal health and welfare (<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.nat-section>).

In the field of economic and monetary union (EMU), the Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion Section covers coordination of economic and monetary policy, broad economic policy guidelines, stability and growth pact, enlargement of the euro zone and other issues relating to economic governance. The remit of the ECO Section covers the financial perspectives, own resources and the budget of the European Union and statistical questions. In the field of taxation, the ECO Section is responsible for dealing with problems relating to tax harmonisation and the approximation of laws in this field. It also addresses issues relating to the financial markets and the integration of these markets. In the field of economic and social cohesion, the remit of the ECO Section embraces regional and structural policy and cohesion policy. The ECO Section is also responsible for spatial planning, urban policy and metropolitan areas.

(<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.eco-section>)

The principal activities of the Section for External Relations (REX) include monitoring relations between the European Union and the majority of countries in the world, in particular the countries and regions with which the European Union has structured relations. The Section also seeks to encourage contacts with civil society organisations from these countries and regions. Moreover, the Section addresses issues relating to trade and to development. The REX section mainly draws up own-initiative opinions but it is also, and to an increasing extent, preparing exploratory opinions, in response to requests from the European Institutions. In drawing up these opinions, the section works closely with the European Institutions and representatives of both EU civil society organisations not represented within the section and civil society organisations in non-EU states. Close relations have been established with economic and social partners in non-EU states with a view, mainly, to discussing economic and social issues and helping to strengthen civil society. With this aim in view, joint declarations, addressed to the political authorities, are adopted. Relations with the EESC's counterparts in other states are conducted via follow-up committees, joint consultative committees and contact groups. Civil Society Follow-up Committees or Joint consultative committees have been set up with countries covered by an association agreement and with European Economic Area (EEA) states, whilst

contact groups have been established for western Balkan states and the EU's eastern neighbours. Follow-up committees work together with their counterparts in the fields of relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific states and Latin America and within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The EESC is moreover fully involved in monitoring international trade negotiations and in particular in civil society consultations within the framework of the World Trade Organisations (WTO) negotiations. (<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.rex-section>)

The main task of the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT) is to prepare opinions for the European Economic and Social Committee: a) at the request of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers b) at the request of EU Presidencies in office c) on its own initiative. A key area of the section's responsibilities is the completion and smooth operation of the Single Market. This area includes: industrial policy (both general and sectoral), market policies, competition policy, services, including banking, commerce, insurance and tourism (but excluding services of general interest), Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the social economy (co-operatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations), the professions, company law, research, intellectual property, consumer protection and finally customs union. The Section also has a Single Market Observatory (SMO), which is a specific unit that monitors how the Single Market is operating and proposes ways of eliminating obstacles or making improvements. The SMO was set up in 1994 with the backing of the EU institutions. (<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.int-section>).

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN) covers the full range of issues relating to the various transport modes, the different forms of energy production, major infrastructure networks, the information society and services of general interest. With a view to the preparation of its opinions, the section establishes close contacts with the various EU institutions and all the representative civil society organisations concerned. These contacts are established through meetings of the section and its study groups. The TEN section has played an active role in the in-depth analysis of important new policy areas by adopting several own-initiative opinions. It also organises hearings on key issues and sends representatives to attend the various events held throughout the EU and in neighbouring states. In addition, two permanent study groups have been set up at the this section to identify and promote the expectations of European organised civil

society, as well as monitoring and providing ongoing support for the ongoing debate at European level and working with the Commission and other European institutions. In particular, the section has long been involved in the promotion of structured dialogue with regard to the Trans-European networks.

(<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.ten-section>).

Last but not least, the SOC section covers a broad range of policy formulation including employment, working conditions, occupational health, social protection, social security, social inclusion, gender equality, combating discrimination, improving free movement, immigration/integration and asylum, education and training, citizens' rights, and participatory democracy in the EU.

(<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.sections-commission>)

Both consultative bodies have a complementary role in the European decision-making process. The Committee of the Regions through its six commissions covers a wide variety of policies mainly from the perspective of regional and local authorities. CoR's competences focus on regional and territorial dimension; aiming at involving the regional and local level at the policy process. On the other hand, EESC's commissions have more economic, fiscal and social competences. Primarily, aiming at involving civil society and economic actors in decision-making processes, as EESC's members are not directly elected regional or local representatives but they are representatives of economic and social interest groups. In particular employers, trade unions, farmers, consumers and the other interest groups that collectively make up organised civil society.

They are sharing common policy areas as both Committees have sector on the environment, energy, external affairs or relations. In contrast, they also have commissions for entirely individual areas of policy such as youth, education governance, taxation, single market etc. In that way, CoR and EESC provide a complementary role as they cover the majority of areas in the European political process.

CHAPTER 3-PROSPECTS

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3.1 INITIAL EXPECTATIONS AND CURRENT SITUATION

During the years before the transition to the EU it was clear that the regional structures within the EC needed a way out to improve their participation in the European decision-making process. There was a gradually increasing awareness of the “time bomb” ticking away under the regional structure of the Community that was threatening the entire process of European integration (European Parliament, 1993). Only if the regions were incorporated in the process of integration, would it have been possible to defuse this “bomb” and use the regions as an additional driving force in the process of unification. The establishment of the Committee of the Regions and the incorporation of the principle of subsidiarity as a binding norm into the Maastricht Treaty gave a solution to the inadequate regional representation and constituted the culmination of efforts by regional and local authorities to be taken more seriously in the EC policy process.

Initially, many utopian scenarios and optimistic expectations based mainly on the belief that the future of the European Union lay in its regional diversity were speculating that the Committee would be vested with more extensive functions and powers and would eventually be transformed into a new legislative chamber, next to the European Parliament and the Council (Christiansen, Lintner, 2005). However, the actual progress and development of the CoR has been rather modest and didn’t fulfill the pompous speculations. Nowadays, despite the additional changes in its competences provided by the Treaties, the Committee is pretty much still the same institution that was established by the Maastricht Treaty. But despite the modest development it has in any case managed to establish itself as a fixture in the institutional setting of the EU and as such has made its mark on the European political process (Christiansen, Lintner, 2005).

3.2 CoR’s RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OTHER EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS AND THE LISBON TREATY

The European Commission has continuously a fruitful collaboration with the Committee of the Regions. The Commission could be characterized as a long-standing ally of regions and localities and it was always present in CoR plenary

sessions. Based on a cooperation protocol between the CoR and the Commission, the Committee has emphasised its desire to further promote dialogue between its own high-level representatives and those of the Commission, and to actively involve and invite Commission members to CoR meetings. On the other hand, the Commission's interest in regional and local representatives arose from its desire to achieve better application of its policies, to gain first-hand information and to spread its ideas. Thus apart from the existing opinions and statements, the Commission persistently encouraged the Committee to come up with proposals, reports and policy advice (Christiansen, Lintner, 2005).

In contrast, CoR's relationship with the European Parliament could be characterized as ambiguous. They have been potential allies and rivals at the same time (Christiansen, Lintner, 2005). It was not until 2002 that the European Parliament made use of its right to consult the Committee, although it was a right provided by the Treaty of Amsterdam! Lastly, the Committee has the weakest relationship with the Council, as being an advisory body the CoR already gives its opinion on the Commission's proposals and therefore seems to be little purpose in the Council to consult CoR again (Christiansen, Lintner, 2005).

The Committee's relationship with the other partner European institutions is about to change with the help of the new Treaty. The Lisbon Treaty which entered into force on 1 December 2009 is making a step forward in enabling all levels of government across Europe to work together, fulfilling in that way one of the main goals of the Committee. The Treaty acknowledges explicitly, for the first time the principle of regional and local self-governance within member states. It also attributes further importance to the local and regional levels in the subsidiarity principle. The Treaty ensures that the drawing up of new EU laws starts with consideration of the local and regional impacts of all proposals. It also gives the Committee of the Regions more powers to follow the draft bill through all stages of the legislative process. The Treaty gives the EU Assembly of regional and local representatives more political and legal tool. (Committee of the Regions, 2009e).

The Treaty is bringing important changes for the Committee and its relationship with the other European institutions. Firstly, the Committee will have new responsibilities in the EU legislative process. It gains a greater presence in all stages of the creation of EU laws, in the preparation, amendment and monitoring of legislation which affects regional and local authorities. The European Parliament, the

Commission and the Council will now have to consult the Committee when they are making laws in any area with regional impact. In addition, the Committee's opinions will cover several new policy areas, including energy and climate change. The Committee is in a position now to back up its consultation rights at the European Court of Justice and protect its prerogatives if they are not respected by other EU institutions. The Treaty gives the right to CoR to challenge EU law in the European Court of Justice if it believes regional or local aspects have not been adequately addressed. Having this legal back up re-enforces the Committee's stronger consultation rights and greater powers in the decision-making process. It should encourage increased consultation earlier on in the legislative process. The right to legal action will also help to ensure that the Committee is re-consulted when the Commission, the European Parliament or the Council substantially change the nature of a proposal during the legislative process. In cases where the Commission has in effect tabled a new proposal, the Committee will be able to state that the proposal is not the same as the one on which it gave its initial opinion (Committee of the Regions, 2009e).

Moreover, through the Lisbon Treaty an even closer working relationship is created with the European Commission. "In implementing the Lisbon Treaty, the Committee will intensify its discussions with the Commission from the beginning to the end of a legislative procedure. Its input, tabled in consultations and opinions, will concretely improve the efficiency of legislation and lead to more coherent EU laws that are less of a burden for local and regional authorities. Under the new process, the Committee takes a pro-active role before the Commission tables a proposal for new legislation. At this stage, the Committee is an intermediary between regional and local authorities and the Commission in assessing social, economic and regional impacts. The framework for this is set by the provisions on enhanced consultation enshrined in the Treaty and an existing cooperation agreement between the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions. The Committee will work with national, regional and local authorities and with associations of regions and cities in analysing the local and regional impacts of EU laws, as well as ensuring that member states apply them correctly. Once the Commission has made a formal legislative proposal, the Committee's opinions will put more emphasis on determining the proposal's compatibility with the subsidiarity principle. The CoR will cooperate with national and regional parliaments and use its subsidiarity monitoring platform to channel input

from regions and local authorities throughout Europe into its opinions. The CoR will also ask the Commission to respect its right to be re-consulted should the nature of proposals be significantly changed during the legislative process. The Committee's ability to challenge legislation in the European courts will further influence the Commission to ensure that the Committee's opinions are built into proposals before they become law" (Committee of the Regions, 2009e).

The Treaty of Lisbon creates also a more political relationship with the European Parliament. It can be said that the relationship between the two institutions that increase the democratic legitimacy of the EU, as they have elected representatives of European citizens is going to alter. The biggest change under the Treaty is that the Parliament is obliged to consult the Committee on proposals in any policy area where only the European Commission and the Council had to do so previously. "With the possibility to revise its opinions after changes made by the EU institutions, the Committee will be able to follow political discussions in the Parliament, advise its rapporteurs and react promptly to political developments. Through this process, the relationship between the Committee and the Parliament will become more concrete and political. Under a new 'early warning' procedure, the European Parliament can stop legislative proposals by a simple majority vote if a majority of national parliaments have raised objections over subsidiarity. When the Committee shares the concerns of the national parliaments, it will ensure that they are followed through in the European Parliament. The Council has a similar power to reject proposals" (Committee of the Regions, 2009e).

The Treaty also gives the national parliaments a say in EU legislation. This could be considered as a step that brings the EU closer to the citizen, a principal value for the Committee of the Regions. "Under the new early warning subsidiarity monitoring mechanism, the EU Commission submits proposed legislation to national parliaments for scrutiny before the legislative process can move on. Seven out of thirteen "second chambers" represent regional and local authorities. In member states with regional parliaments that have legislative powers, national parliaments will have to consult these bodies. During the eight weeks of the early warning system, the Committee of the Regions will work in close partnership with the national and regional parliaments to enhance mutual information exchange and to analyse the territorial impact of Commission proposals and whether they would be better addressed at a national, regional or local level. The CoR's subsidiarity monitoring

network, to which many regional and several national parliaments belong, will be the focus for this political activity. In its opinions, the CoR will be able to oppose or to support the concerns of national parliaments and, equally, be able to ask that the Commission continues or reconsiders its proposals. The Committee will also be able to redraft its initial opinion based on the outcome of the early warning phase. If the Committee shares the opinion that the Commission's proposal infringes on subsidiarity, it can ask the European Parliament and/or the Council to stop the ongoing legislative procedure. The Committee of the Regions can join an action brought to the Court of Justice by any national parliament or one of their chambers, seeking to annul an EU law on the basis of subsidiarity" (Committee of the Regions, 2009e).

3.3 FUTURE PROSPECTS

To begin with, the Committee of the Regions has managed to establish its mark and has made a long-standing presence in the European Union's political process. However, up to now, it has failed to make a long-term progress in order to earn equivalent status to that of the EU's major institutions such as the Parliament, the Council and the Commission. It has remained merely a body with consultative status alongside the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). In order for CoR to fulfill initial expectations and become equivalent to the major institutions it needed to change its own character. Through the years, all the Treaties were reinforcing its competences but did not manage to change its nature. Moreover, the European Parliament played a key role in the development of the Committee. Mostly considering CoR as a rival, it played a dominant role as a representative institutional body, preventing in that way CoR from becoming an upper Chamber. It wanted to retain the unicameral system. However, the Committee of the Regions could only become a third legislative Chamber, assuming the post-Lisbon Treaty as the second chamber, if a radical change in the constitutional co-existence with the European Parliament had occurred. In addition, the Committee could only have achieved that goal if its members had been directly elected by the local and regional representatives.

Although by entering into force the Treaty of Lisbon provides to the Committee a chance to enhance its formal status, it still it remains a body with advisory capacity. Nevertheless important changes are brought by the new Treaty. Firstly, an important step is that CoR now has legal teeth to challenge EU law in the

European Court of Justice. The Committee can initiate legal action, firstly, if an EU law does not respect the subsidiarity principle and violates regional and local competences and secondly, if during the legislative procedure the European institutions bypass the Committee and neglect its institutional rights (Committee of the Regions, 2009e). Moreover, it is important to note that a closer working and political relationship will be established both with the European Commission and the European Parliament. The Committee will also develop an even closer relation with the national parliaments, fulfilling one of its main goals to bring Europe closer to its “fellow citizens”.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
CoR's members are directly elected to serve on local and regional councils in their respective countries	Members change quickly as when regional or local mandate expires they stop being CoR's members
Focuses on areas of policy that affect every day life of European citizens	CoR does not deal with high policy areas
CoR provides an open public forum for regional and local authorities	CoR has only advisory capacity
Enhances cooperation among regional and local assemblies at European level	It is the least known European institution
Lisbon Treaty gives CoR the legal teeth to challenge EU laws if it believes regional and local aspects have not been adequately addressed	

CoR can be described as the guardian of the subsidiarity principle	
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OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
If the role of regions is enhanced, CoR will have the chance eventually to transform into a legislative body	Co-decision process could restrict the role of CoR and lead to a dominant existence of the European Parliament
The concept of territorial cohesion can help CoR's role and status	If the concept of territorial cohesion is neglected, CoR's role will be limited
CoR's role could be improved by the process of enlargement	A potential role of a legislative upper chamber could be covered by the Council leaving CoR behind
CoR can provide an "internal approval" in the context of a further enlarged EU	A potential dominance of national states could lead to the weakening of the regional and local level

Nevertheless, even if it still remains an advisory body it doesn't mean that it cannot continue to play an essential role in the European Union. Based on the strong and weak aspects of the Committee three future scenarios are proposed. In my opinion, the Committee of the regions can help the EU to break the "Brussels bubble". From my personal experience by participating in the European Week of Regions and Cities (Open Days), on October 2010, I believe that CoR can help in breaking the belief that the EU and the European institutions are distant from the EU's citizens. Although some of its main goals are to improve the quality of life for citizens and to be as close to them as possible; this has yet to be achieved. From the survey presented in the previous chapter, it is obvious that the European citizens are not familiar with CoR's work or even with CoR itself (18% of the respondents), (Special Eurobarometer, 2009). CoR must reinforce its profile by becoming an even stronger channel and by seeking to enhance its direct contact with citizens and civil society. An excellent idea will be to organise every year the European Week of Regions and Cities (Open Days) in a different capital city of the 27 Member States. By organizing

this event and several others in the heart of each member state it will bring the EU closer to people and change the image of a Brussels based body. An effort must be made to realize the concept of “*Europe in my city*” (Mercedes Bresso¹, Opening session of Open Days, 2010). Hence, European citizens will then truly have the chance to participate and scrutinize CoR’s and EU’s policy making.

Moreover, “CoR through its opinions provides an open public forum for deliberation among a variety of actors. Such regular debates and discussions can have long-term benefits in terms of the search for better understanding among these different actors, the development of common perspectives on policy issues and the search for solutions to problems, whether these are on the agenda or not” (Christiansen, Lintner, 2005). The prospect of a further enhanced open public forum is the strongest scenario for CoR’s future role as the Committee is a field that EU could use to concrete words. The European Union could use CoR as a messenger of ideas for regional policy; as that policy must be an outcome of regional discussion rather than deliberation at national level. “The Committee is not the only such forum in the EU, but there are also not that many forums in which elected politicians from the domestic domain are forced to confront the different cultures, traditions and perspectives of other member states. The long-term effect to be expected from this regular interaction is a shared perspective on EU matters, which might help to find solutions to policy problems in the future” (Christiansen, Lintner, 2005). The Committee can play a more actual role in the construction of the EU’s regional policy. Especially, as Europe continues to expand, CoR can provide a field of discussion of how the future can be shaped. It can be an excellent opportunity to discuss all together in a formal level the future of European regional policy (Rodi-kratsa-Tsagaropoulou², Opening Session of Open Days, 2010)

Finally, the Committee can play an important role in the process of enlargement. As the European Union is getting larger the need for deeper foundations will be getting stronger as it will be seeking “internal legitimacy and approval”. This approval can only come from the regional and local assemblies. On the other hand, the process of enlargement can also challenge the Committee as the greater and more diverse membership is likely to make it more difficult for members to reach an

¹ Mercedes Bresso: President of the Committee of the Regions, Member of the Piedmont Regional Council.

² Rodi-Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou: Vice-President of the European Parliament.

agreement. An even bigger Europe also means that the CoR itself has to adapt to greater membership with the associated logistical and political problems (Christiansen, Lintner, 2005).

CONCLUSION

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is a political assembly that represents local and regional governments and provides them with a voice at the heart of the European Union. Created by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, also known as the Treaty of the European Union, the Committee of the Regions was established two years later. CoR was established at a time when the European Community was getting prepared for the beginning of a whole new chapter, the passage to the European Union. As the regional representation at EC level until 1994 could only be described as inadequate, the creation of the Committee was the answer to the long-term discussions about the role of the regions in the Europe of the future, pointing out and preparing the way for an effective role for the regions within the process of European. Moreover, alongside with the Committee the principle of subsidiarity made its appearance. The incorporation of the principle of subsidiarity into the Treaty of Maastricht as a binding legal norm pointed out that the Treaty was of central interest to the regions. Institutionalizing and incorporating the principle of subsidiarity meant both allaying the frequently expressed fears of a continuing increase in European centralization and strengthening the idea of a European Community which was moving closer and closer together, so as to find widespread acceptance within the European population; a widespread acceptance that was vital for further progress in European integration.

The Committee has today 344 Members and the same number of alternates from all 27 EU Members States. The head of the Committee is the President that he or she chairs plenary sessions and represents the Committee in relations towards the outside. The President and the First Vice-President are elected by the Committee members for a two-year term. The Bureau is CoR's political driving force that it draws up the Committee political programme at the start of each new term, oversees its implementation and generally coordinates the work of the plenary sessions and the commissions. The Committee's work is organised in six different Commissions that deal with issues that cover CoR's competences. The main mission of the Committee is to involve regional and local authorities in the European decision-making process and to encourage greater participation for the European citizens. Having this mission in mind CoR has created certain networks and activities to promote the involvement of regions and local authorities in the process of building Europe and to give them a stronger voice within the European institutions.

Although initially certain utopian scenarios and optimistic expectations based mainly on the belief that the future of the European Union lied in its regional diversity were speculating that the Committee would be vested with more extensive functions and powers and would eventually be transformed into a new legislative chamber, next to the European Parliament and the Council, the development of the Committee was rather modest. Mainly restricted to monitor and deal with issues that are directly related with daily life areas of European citizens. It still remains the youngest but least known European institutional body.

In order for CoR to become an equivalent body its own character and nature needs to be changed and to elevate its formal status beyond its consultative role. Nevertheless, even if it still remains an advisory body that doesn't mean that it cannot continue to play an essential role inside the Union. Its contribution to the relation of the European Union and the European citizens is vital providing a strong channel that enhances direct contact and moreover a open public forum for deliberation and discussion among a variety of actors.

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APPENDIX



Open Days-Opening Session 4/10/2010





EGTC-Towards the revision of the legislative framework, 6/10/2010



Mercedes Bresso: President of the Committee of the Regions, Member of the Piedmont Regional Council.