

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

Speech

"The Key Role of Local Partnerships in
the Promotion of Social Cohesion"

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**European Conference "A Key Factor of
Success in Promoting Social Cohesion",
European Network of Cities and Regions
for the Social Economy (REVES)
Brussels, 16 May 2008**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Committee of the Regions I would like to thank REVES, the European Network of Cities and Regions for Social Economy, for organising this important conference. I also would like to thank all participants.

This event comes at an interesting time. It is organised in the same week as the European Parliament's "4 days for social economy". "Social economy" is the "buzz word" of these days. It is my hope that there will be an inspiring co-relation between these two events.

REVES is the main European network that brings together local and regional authorities and social economy actors. It plays a crucial role in the exchange of best practices and in the dissemination of new ideas related to how the cooperation between local and regional authorities and social economy actors can be improved.

Partnership approach

The Committee of the Regions has stressed many times the importance of establishing stable partnerships, long term cooperation and planning of local development policies between local and regional authorities and representatives of the Social Economy.

More specifically, in its opinion on Partnerships between local and regional authorities and social economy organisations, the Committee of the Regions underlined why partnerships between local and regional authorities and local and regional partners can be an important tool for bringing about effective socio-economic development in towns, cities or local and regional areas. I truly believe in partnership, it has become the theme of my presidency.

- Partnerships involve both vertical links between authorities at various levels (national, provincial, regional and urban levels) and horizontal links (between towns and cities and their local partners). This form of urban administration is more wide-ranging than the usual form of local authority, which is confined to democratically-elected administrations.
- Partnerships represent a form of urban administration which exploits all the various sources of assistance and potential of the respective areas. This involves local and regional authorities calling upon all relevant local and regional bodies.
- A partnership approach, this form of administrative cooperation ties in with the present-day reality that governments operate against the background of a "network society".

"Territorial Social Responsibility" (TSR)

Let me say a few words on the idea of "Territorial Social Responsibility" (TSR) as the concept of Territorial Social Responsibility for local policy planning and evaluation has been developed by the REVES network: REVES suggests to apply the concept of "Corporate Social Responsibility" to local

and regional authorities: The REVES network has transferred an idea created for enterprises to a wider concept involving all key public actors on a given territory. This is an interesting approach, relevant from the perspective of local and regional authorities. I would like to highlight the following:

- Even though "Territorial Social Responsibility" should be based on voluntary participation by local and regional authorities there could be a role for the European Union in providing a framework for raising awareness, promoting TSR principles, assisting business and public authorities to incorporate TSR practices and highlighting best practice.
- It is important that "Territorial Social Responsibility" is presented as an investment rather than a cost, as both businesses and local and regional authorities need to be convinced and made aware of the sense of developing a TSR approach. It is time to determine the public acceptance - whether Europeans support and understand TSR and also assess the long term benefits for business and local and regional authorities in investing in TSR.
- REVES should look into the possibility of providing a "tool box" for business and public authorities who see the need for and benefit of TSR and who want to implement TSR principles using the best available practice
- It is essential that local and regional authorities and business proactively engage with employees in relation to their on-going training and development. For this the benefits from increased employee ownership, from the increase in workforce skills and the quicker adaptation to changing conditions need to be made clear to local and regional authorities and business.

EGTC – a model for partnership

Europe is living through a time of challenges. We need new tools and models of partnerships, including new of Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP) models. Short term and “marginal” cooperation cannot be a solution forever. We need, instead, to consolidate mainstream policies through new models of multi-level and cross-border governance.

Two weeks ago, I witnessed one of the first signings of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation – EGTC – I was proud to be at the ceremony in Hungary/Slovakia as the President of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union – an institution which has been very active in building and promoting this new European legal instrument enabling regional and local authorities from different Member States to set up cooperation groupings with a legal personality.

The Committee of the Regions, which represents the interests of local and regional authorities –in the legislative process of the European Union, was the first to conceive this new legislative instrument. After focusing since 2001 on trans-European cooperation between territorial authorities, in 2002 the CoR adopted an own-initiative opinion on strategies to promote cross-border cooperation at local level, which called for more legal stability. This voice from the regions and cities was heard by the European Commission which in 2004, proposed the first draft of the current EGTC regulation, which

was finally adopted by the European Parliament and Council in July 2006, and is now being transposed into national law. So far, only 9 out of 27 Member States have adopted national provisions on EGTC. The CoR will therefore continue urging other Member States to take this essential step.

The Committee of the Regions will continue to promote this instrument amongst our partners and institutions and is ready to monitor and study its impact on the cohesion of our regions.

Volunteering

Let me touch upon an important practical aspect for the establishment of local partnerships in the promotion of social cohesion which has been recently highlighted by the Committee of the Regions: Volunteering. Even though voluntary activities are not a prerequisite for successful cooperation between local and regional authorities and organisations of general interest they contribute considerably to local, regional, national and the EU economies: through the extra human resources that it adds to social and economic activity and the creation of social capital and a better "quality of life" which can be an influential factor in investment and job creation. For this reason the Committee of the Regions stressed that there is an important EU-dimension to volunteering and requested that European policy towards volunteering shall be improved by:

- Gaining a better understanding of volunteering through more research and better quality statistics at the EU level
- Recognition of the economic contribution of volunteering and a wider acceptance of its monetary equivalent as match funding in EU funded programmes
- A broader focus on volunteering at EU level beyond the citizenship and youth affairs arenas
- An examination of new initiatives to encourage exchange of experience and mobility of volunteers through a European Voluntary programme for all ages

Ladies and gentlemen, it was a pleasure to address you and to share with you some ideas.