

*Address given by Mr Gizard at the European Parliament Hearing on
Territorial Cohesion 2 December 2008*

Thank you Mr Chairman. I would first of all like to thank you for inviting me here today. The CPMR's Political Bureau will, on behalf of all its members, make known on 23 January its response to the Green Paper proposed by the Commission. We have invited your rapporteur and the rapporteur of the Committee of the Regions to take part in that discussion. I would like to say straight away that we subscribe very closely to the view presented in the draft report prepared by Mr Lambert Van Nistelrooij, and given what has been said by Mr Faludi and Mr Mehlbye, I would like simply to underline a few points concerning the debate on cohesion.

Firstly with regard to the definition: we certainly need one, but it should not be too precise. A French historian, Fernand Braudel, said of the concept of a world-economy (*économie-monde*): "it is sufficiently elastic that one can live in it and make something of it." I would not wish to see territorial cohesion imprisoned in a definition that subsequently made it very difficult to invent action. As far as we are concerned, at least, what is certain is that it represents a dynamic of equity, of solidarity between territories, and that there are legislative, budgetary as well as fiscal mechanisms that support this solidarity at the different scales - European, national, regional and local. So it is something quite unique. Secondly, I believe that what we need to take the measure of - assuming that the Lisbon Treaty is adopted - is the impact which the addition of the requirement for territorial cohesion will have on the primary legislation of the Union. This impact will be considerable, for European policies and for the policies of Member States, because if we want to be faithful to the requirement for territorial cohesion, this will call for a screening of policies that have a territorial impact. I am thinking of agriculture, research, transport, maritime policy, national regional aid, employment and training policy, etc.

This principle should of course also be reflected in arrangements for working across sectors. Territorial cohesion is not just a matter for DG Regio alone, or merely for ministries responsible for regional development. If we look at the way in which the integrated European maritime policy came into being, this got off to a good start because it became a matter for the whole college of Commissioners, with the result that the different Commissioners had to tailor their own sectoral approach to fit in to the framework of an overarching conception of the sea. If territorial cohesion is part of the Union's primary legislation, a similar approach should be adopted.

Third point: it necessarily implies a multi-level governance; I said this earlier, from Europe to the local level. And this implies, I would say, moving into a new phase in terms of governance mechanisms.

The Green Paper also speaks of “the need for an integrated approach [...] which may require local, regional and even national authorities to cooperate”. Why “may” – in a context of such importance for public territorial responsibilities at the different scales? Why not go so far as having Parliament propose a charter for multi-level governance? This would be a somewhat more decisive step forward in relation to what has been established over the last twenty years in regional policy.

These are the necessary prerequisites if we are to specify how the Structural Funds, regional policy, cohesion policy, territorial cooperation, neighbourhood policy, the specific characteristics of territories with geographical handicaps, all these elements will be able to make a genuine and significant contribution to a shared political ambition for territorial cohesion, and not be an instrument for patching up policies that fail to take it into account and that would subsequently have to be corrected.

Obviously, this ambition refers to the unique nature of the organisational model of the States of the Union from a historical point of view. What characterises the construction of Europe, in contrast to other continents, and what made it successful in its first phase, are the pacts agreed between the central rulers of the emerging nation states and their local authorities. Even if it was just to raise tax revenue and finance their foreign adventures and ambitions. We face the same challenge today, at the European level. If we want to go as far as operational implementation, we need – it seems to us and this is what we are proposing – to go as far as a territorial pact that associates the community institutions, Member States, the regional and local authorities, and this on the basis of the good practice initiated twenty years ago by regional policy: this European contract, inserting all regional territorial strategies between European and global priorities on the one hand, and the capacity to produce a strategic project at the level of the territory on the other, and thus crossing a bottom-up approach with a top-down approach in order to come up with the best solutions to the challenges of globalisation. I must admit I was surprised when I heard the Commissioner in charge of the budget, on 12 November at the seminar on the future of the budget, place this achievement among the outdated policies which should be got rid of in order to make way for new policies. I understand that the Chicago school has encountered some difficulties in recent months with the current crisis; perhaps we could not only embrace liberal macro-economic theories, but also take account of an approach based on the territories’ capacities for invention and creativity.

I would like to end, if you will allow me, by underlining once again this new phase in governance. The Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion is sub-titled “Turning territorial diversity into strength” and I wonder whether we really have the choice, in view of the nature of this extreme diversity, be it geographical, demographic, institutional, political, or human. And from this point of view, indisputably, one of the great weaknesses of the Green Paper as it stands is that it fails to take into account or to analyse the variety of institutional systems dependent on our States, which could take

charge of a policy of territorial cohesion, or to look at which mechanisms of territorial governance could do this in the context of such a variety. Since the Delors package, in order to implement economic and social policy, we have succeeded in inventing what I would call a “makeshift institutional solution” by means of a contract between the European Union and its territories, and this is what must obviously be used tomorrow as a basis for a policy of territorial cohesion in a more ambitious phase. We dream of two things: firstly that we can pursue what the American economist Jeremy Rifkin five years ago called “the European Dream”, saying that through these innovations in governance Europe had set in motion a post-national model that fully corresponds to the needs of the twenty-first century, and secondly that we can turn this diversity into strength, probably one of the strengths best suited to respond to globalisation and perhaps even in these times of crisis.

Thank you.