THE CPMR AND THE EU’S NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

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I. – BACKGROUND

The member regions of the CPMR, and notably the regions bordering the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean, have been calling for the development of a new policy on both Russia and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership member countries for several years. The regions concerned want the Union to pay special attention to its most immediate neighbours, and they also want regional and local authorities to be involved in the new and more extensive forms of partnership. To this end, they have on several occasions pointed out the difficulties entailed in developing specific cooperation activities, and especially the chronic lack of links between the EU’s internal funding mechanisms (the ERDF) and external mechanisms such as TACIS and MEDA.

For its part, the CPMR has tried to achieve progress in this area by frequently proposing pragmatic solutions aiming to give more recognition to the role of regional authorities in their vast areas of competences on the one hand, and to improve the links between the Union’s funding mechanisms on the other hand (Siracusa declaration, 1999).

The regional issues relating to cooperation between the Union and its neighbours in the eastern Balkans and the Black Sea area have recently become more apparent. The forthcoming accession of Bulgaria and Romania into the EU, the forthcoming start of negotiations with Turkey and Croatia and the attribution of neighbouring country status to Moldavia, Russia, the Ukraine and the Caucasian countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) have opened up new and abundant cooperation opportunities. This is why, at the initiative of its Greek, Romanian and Turkish member regions, the CPMR now has a new geographical commission covering the activities of this part of the European continent. Similarly to what it is doing in the Baltic and the Mediterranean, it has set itself the task of promoting political dialogue, the exchange of experience and the development of interregional and transnational cooperation projects.

It should be acknowledged that the European Commission presided by Romano Prodi displayed a willingness to get out of the impasse. It notably launched a real political debate on the nature of the relations between the Union and its neighbours. The closer links between work carried out by Commissioners Patten and Barnier have notably helped ensure that progress has been made in the right direction:

- The European Commission presented a first communication entitled “Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: a new framework for relations with our eastern and southern neighbours” in March 2003;
- Following the Council’s agreement, the Commission published a new communication entitled “Paving the way for a new neighbourhood instrument” in July 2003;
- After much effort back and forth with the Council and a consultation with the countries covered by neighbourhood policy, it published the “European neighbourhood policy strategy paper” in May 2004;
- The “proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down general provisions establishing a European neighbourhood and partnership instrument (ENPI)” was at last published in September 2004;
- The first action plans between the European Union and the first seven neighbouring countries were already approved by the beginning of December 2004.

The CPMR had an opportunity to give a broad welcome to the first two communications at its Political Bureau meeting in Naples in July 2003. The purpose of this document is now above all:

- to provide broad overall support for the Commissions last two communications, while encouraging the new Commission to pursue the work carried out to date;
- secondly, to provide some insights into the pre-requisites for the success of future cross-border and transnational cooperation in the areas concerned.

The CPMR has also taken note of the Commission’s communications for a strengthened partnership for the outermost regions, in which it sets out a “Wider Neighbourhood” action plan to help these Regions integrate better into their environment. On the whole it supports this plan, which allows for the outermost regions to be eligible under the cross-border and transnational strand of territorial cooperation, and also provides for special customs and trade measures adapted to their particular context.

II. – CONCERNING THE STRATEGY BEHIND THE NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

The CPMR would firstly like to welcome the prospect of a re-launched Barcelona process and the strategic partnership with Russia, which have both been recently confirmed. It also particularly notes the Commission’s desire to consider that European neighbourhood policy (ENP) can act as a long-term springboard for increased market integration and a far broader partnership. This strategy is thoroughly essential for EU regions having land or sea borders with the neighbouring countries concerned. Trade between the European Union and these economies will ultimately open up good prospects for the growth of regional economies.

It is also warmly welcomes the notion that cooperation is of mutual interest. This is something which should be constantly developed through political dialogue and closer links between peoples. The human aspects of the relationship between Europe and its neighbours, notably regarding immigration and cultural links between peoples, should ultimately be a key feature of this policy.

It also greets the pragmatic vision of partnership which has prevailed, recognising the need to combine a multilateral approach with action plans for different countries. On this matter, the member regions of the CPMR would like:

- To point out, generally speaking, the areas of action preferred by States when it comes to foreign policy, namely respect for human rights, foreign and security policy, economic and social development policy, trade and the internal market, justice and home affairs, political dialogue on the major energy decisions to be made and stability of supplies, etc.;
- To also note down the range of areas where the contribution of regional and local authorities can be complementary and even essential to partnership. These include regional and spatial planning, local economic development and dialogue with local production systems, urban management, agriculture, fisheries and rural development, the environment, resources management and civil protection, the sub-regional dimension of transport and energy, SME support policies, employment policies, cultural and sporting initiatives, heritage protection and development policies, social policies at local level, education and training, health and social assistance, management of migration flows, welcoming immigrants and integration policy, housing, security and related measures.

The abundance of initiatives developed by regional and local authorities should be noted concerning cultural and social support for immigrants, notably at the European Union’s borders, should be noted in particular. Indeed, it should not be forgotten that regional and local authorities can make a big contribution when it comes to developing closer links between peoples at their level of government (the
Middle East conflict, relations with Kaliningrad, multilateral cooperation in the Balkans, etc.). On these two areas of work, it is notably necessary to provide regional and local authorities with a right to experiment.

Further to the publication of the financial perspectives, the CPMR would lastly like to congratulate the European Commission on the extent of its budgetary ambitions, while hoping that they will not be held back by the Member States in the near future.

III. – CONCERNING THE TYPE OF GOVERNANCE REQUIRED FOR MAKING THE CROSS-BORDER AND TRANSNATIONAL STRAND OF NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY A SUCCESS

Firstly, the CPMR would like to warmly congratulate the European Commission on all of its proposals on the technical aspects of cross-border and transnational cooperation (especially those concerning eligibility and management principles). It would particularly like to stress how important it is that the maritime NUTS-2 levels has been recognised for partnership, although it urges the Commission to give more emphasis to and greater confirmation of the role of the regional level.

To contribute to this policy’s success, the CPMR would like to share the lessons it has learned about cooperation. Regarding the innovative character of the actions proposed in the new funding mechanism, collective efforts should be made to bring about the optimal conditions for making this policy a success.

To this end, a rough outline of a “chart for efficient sub-state neighbourhood action” could be divided into six points:

1. The partners should be able to conclusively agree on the joint political interest of the new cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes, so that they can rapidly move on to a more operational phase. The Commission’s proposals on this matter still have to be definitively confirmed, and the whole set of action plans with the countries concerned is yet to be concluded. It would notably be desirable for them to systematically include a reference to what is expected with regard to the regional and local dimension of the partnership. The European Commission could include this issue in the systematic dialogue with regional and local authorities and when it comes to applying the articles on consultation in the draft Constitutional Treaty.

2. Joint programme management structures in the three cross-border and transnational cooperation areas concerned (Baltic – Balkans/Black Sea – Mediterranean) should be formally be set in hand on an ongoing basis, thereby ensuring that there a single and simplified management structure exists for the future programmes. A single structure, which already exists in the Baltic, should also be created in both the Balkans/Black Sea area and the Mediterranean area.

3. The partnership between neighbouring States should be given a real, ongoing and formal multilateral status, so that it can come to act as a real stakeholder in all of the main strategic fields of interest as far as cooperation is concerned. This is the case with the Council of Baltic Sea States and its various ministerial manifestations across various sectoral policies, such as the environment (Helcom) and transport, for example. It is also the case with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation (BSEC), but remains to be developed for the Mediterranean, where initiatives for developing structured cooperation between States are still too disorganised and lack formal status.

4. States should do more to provide formal recognition of the added value provided by regional and local authorities. This is increasingly the case in the Baltic Sea area, where organisations representing regional and local authorities are progressively being included in the various intergovernmental structures. It is still at a very early stage of development in the whole Balkans/Black Sea area, although it should rapidly become more formal bearing in mind the progressive development of sub-state levels in several of the neighbouring countries. It is still marginal in the Mediterranean, which explains why European Mediterranean regions want their role to be recognised more (proposal for the creation of a committee of the regions for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership).

5. The regions themselves should do more to ensure that they have greater collective capacity for setting up cooperation projects, in both political and technical terms. This can notably be achieved by:

a. strengthening the multilateral nature of cooperation;
b. strengthening the technical, human and financial resources deployed either collectively or within each of the regions;

c. improving coordination between professional networks capable of setting up operational projects;

d. ongoing development of their cooperation in partnership with States, partnerships and networks of sub-regional networks and other networks of stakeholders in the various areas listed in part II of this document.

The CPMR’s geographical commissions directly concerned by the ENP (Baltic Sea Commission, the Balkans/Black Sea Commission and the Inter-Mediterranean Commission) take this opportunity to express their determined commitment to achieving this.

6. The trial neighbourhood programmes for the 2004-2006 period should at very least mobilise one initial network of regional authorities in each of the maritime geographical areas concerned, so that benefits can be exploited when it comes to implementing the programme between 2007-2013 (this will ensure that experimentation takes place).

In conclusion, the CPMR and its geographical commissions would like to confirm their availability for implementing the new neighbourhood policy, in close partnership with the States concerned and the European Commission.