

Strasbourg 13 September 2007

Forum of the European regional Assemblies
Strasbourg 13th September 2007

Final Declaration

The Presidents, Vice-presidents and the Members of the European regional Assemblies,
gathered in Strasbourg on the 13th September 2007,

- having regards to the process of the "Charter of the Regions" and the Conferences of the Presidents of the regional Assemblies in Florence on the 19th September 2003 and in Arnhem on the 9th July 2004, the international Seminar of the Presidents in Florence on the 30th November 2005 and the preliminary Conference to the Strasbourg Forum on the 15th September 2006;
- considering that the process of European integration, the enlargement of the European Union and the political engagement of the Council of Europe for cooperation on a continental scale deeply changed the European political, economic and social scene, and contributed to a radical improvement of the stability conditions and socio-economic development also at a regional level;
- considering that because of the enlargement also the cooperation between local and regional bodies took a new run-up, and that regions of new EU member States joined the communitarian life, in the European Parliament, in the Committee of the Regions, opening liaison and cooperation offices by the European Institutions;
- considering the contribution of the European institutions in the spread of regionalism and regional democracy – especially the European Commission with the development of regional and across border policies, of active citizenship and a European dimension; the Committee of the Regions with its own initiatives and the Wroclaw Conference of 19th May 2005 – and of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe with the debate about the proposal of a *Charter of regional democracy*;
- considering that the European Integration, within the Union as well as on a continental scale, considerably increased economic exchanges, a direct dialogue between national and regional cultures and produced a movement of a large number of persons, involving all the institutions in a new effort in order to build of common feeling of belonging to Europe, with an active citizenship, dialogue and inclusion, cultural mediation, diversity protection and political representation policies;
- considering that this change is also involving some cases of instability in democratic life, due to a limited involvement in the European integration of every level of political life; and especially of Assemblies democratic representation at a regional level, with a consequent negative impact on an already insufficient citizens' participation;

declare:

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1. the progress in the European integration, especially with the aim of building a sense of common identity, did not sufficiently involve the regional Assemblies and the institutions of regional representative democracy, with a direct consequence on the sense of European citizenship and on the understanding of undergoing historical changes. The efforts of European institutions in European integration and in regional development should better take into account the role of the Assemblies and their role of political representation, information and involvement of citizens' and civil society organisations;
2. the Forum invites the Governments of European States - in the reform process of the European Treaties as well as in the Conventions to be adopted by the Council of Europe - to fully integrate the regional Assemblies in the preparatory and decisional proceedings as well as in the political debate on the future of Europe and to promote the role of regional Assemblies as a cornerstone for representative democracy, in the both frameworks of the European Union and the Council of Europe.
3. the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe are invited to fully integrate the regional Assemblies in the preparation and implementation of the common operational policies aiming at ensuring - through regional Assemblies - the citizens' participation and of civil society organisations, in integration and in policies spread process on a European continental scale. The European Commission is invited to provide a specific role for regional Assemblies in all areas of "Territorial cooperation" and "Neighbour policies", as well as in policies with a regional impact, like environment and climate changes, immigration, territorial development, safety and security etc.;
4. the field for a horizontal cooperation among regional Assemblies should focus on three main areas: territorial cooperation, thematic cooperation, cooperation on the democratic functioning of the Assemblies;
5. European regional Assemblies are therefore invited to launch cooperation initiatives:
 - a. joining the territorial cooperation – cross-border and interregional – also at a regional Assemblies' level, following the example of inter-assembly dialogue in some European pilot areas like the "Grande Région" and the German-Dutch Euroregio. Regional governments are invited to include the dimension of the cooperation among Assemblies in all cross-border and interregional areas.
 - b. cooperating in some thematic issues of common importance, like for instance in decentralisation and institutional reforms, also in some special issues as the fiscal policies; in immigration, development affairs, stability, and sustainable development in the framework of UN Millennium objectives, also with other regional actors on a global scale;
 - c. cooperating for Assemblies functioning, on transparency, efficiency, control and more generally in political representation, diversity promotion and protection, rights and active citizenship, as well as in the use of new technologies in order to strengthen citizens' and associative participation.

During the next months, the participants are invited to promote initiatives and to set up common projects between Assemblies in the three working areas. A *Follow-up Committee* set up by the Forum will monitor and support at the European political level, the general issues arisen in the present Declaration and the common new actions.



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The present Declaration is sent to the President of the European Parliament, the President of the Council, the Presidents of the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions, to the Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly and of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, to the Permanent Representatives of the Governments to the Council of Europe and to the European Union and to the Presidents of the Governments of the Regions represented in the Forum.