The Role of the Regions in the European Union -
The Future of the Committee of the Regions

Arild Saether, Nicola Schmidt-Nissen, Kerstin Lorenz
European Institute of Public Administration
O.L. Vrouweplein 22
NL - BE Maastricht

1 Abstract

It is the purpose of this discussion paper to make a small contribution to the on-
going debate on the future of the regional level in the decision making process of
the European Union.

The paper traces the evolution of the regional policy in what has today become the
European Union. This brings us from the Treaty of Paris where no need for
regional policies was recognized, through the establishment of the European
Investment Bank in the Treaty of Rome, the development of regional tensions
because of the Common Market, to the explicit recognition of the need for re-
gional policies as part of the accomplishment of the Internal Market.

Thereafter it outlines the regional policy of what today is the European Union, the
beginning, its objectives and instruments, the dramatic increases in its budgets,
and discusses how the development of the regional policy of the Community has
contributed to the creation of an identity of the regions.

The difference between a regional policy and a policy of the regions is then poin-
ted out. The first is a development policy for the disadvantaged regions of the
Member States. The second is a policy vis-a-vis the regions in which it tries to
integrate the regional level of the Member States into the decision making process
of the European Union.

Next the paper discusses the establishment of the Committee of the Regions, its
role as an advisory committee, the composition of the Committee and its constitu-
ent bodies. In this section are also mentioned some of the opinions issued by the
Committee.

The paper thereafter elaborates on other forms of regional participation in Brus-
sels and discusses the possibilities of regional representation in the Council.
The Committee of the Regions and the Intergovernmental Conference of 1996 is the next issue discussed. Here emphasize is put on the Committee's own requests for an increase in status and power. However, the real power of the Committee will still be weak even if all its requests are granted.

Last but not least the paper addresses the future role of the regions in the European Union. The shift in relative power between the federal and regional level will create a demand for a stronger role of the regional level in the decision making process. If the European Union develops into a federal state it proposes the Council as a future Chamber of the States and Regions, sharing its power with the Commission and the European Parliament. The Committee of the Regions will then be a committee for advice and contact between the institutions of the European Union and the local authorities. If the Union do not develop into a federal state it supports the idea of promoting the Committee of the Regions as a second chamber.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and cannot in any way be interpreted as the views of the European Institute of Public Administration.

2 Introduction

It is the purpose of this paper to make a small contribution to the on-going debate on the future of the regional level in the decision making process of the European Union.

The term region has been defined in many different ways, used in many connections and for many purposes. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the role of the regions in the governmental structure of the European Union and its Member States. This governmental structure can for most purposes be divided into five levels. The Union level, the Member State level, the regional level, the provincial or county level, and the city or local municipality level. Some of the Member States do not have a regional level. This is the case of not only small Member States, as Finland, Ireland and Luxembourg, but also of a large Member State as the United Kingdom. These states have today a unitary system. For the smaller states there is and will probably never be a need for a regional level, as we have defined it. However, for the larger states with a unitary system there is today a clear tendency for a stronger regional role. This is the case not only in Spain, where the power of the regional level has increased dramatically in the last years, but also in France where the regional level in the last years has gained considerable power. In the United Kingdom it is yet not clear if there is a move to towards more power for a regional level. Examples of Member States which today have a clear power-