

Cooperation agreement between the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions (20 September 2001)

Caption: On 20 September 2001, the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions signed a cooperation agreement. This agreement aims to improve procedures for consultation of the Committee of the Regions and to involve the Committee more closely in the Community political debate and in information and communication policy.

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Cooperation agreement between the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions signed on 20 September 2001 - Joint declaration and protocol

Joint declaration of the President of the European Commission and the President of the Committee of the Regions

The European Commission and the Committee of the Regions are both concerned to step up cooperation between the two bodies through the implementation of the appended protocol, whose implementing provisions replace those set out in the Commission communication of 18 April 1995 on relations with the Committee of the Regions.

Closer cooperation in this form is to be seen in the context of the respective remits of the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions, viewed in the light of the work of the Intergovernmental Conference concluded in Nice on 10 December 2000. It also takes account of the guidelines set out in the "Declaration on the future of the Union" appended to the Nice Treaty.

The Commission considers that the Committee of the Regions - as the consultative body composed of representatives of the regional and local authorities who either hold an electoral mandate or are politically accountable to an elected assembly - to be in a position, in view of its wide-ranging membership, to make a major contribution to the framing of Community legislation and to be an appropriate channel for information and an instrument for boosting awareness, reflecting the aspirations and expectations of regional and local authorities vis à vis the European institutions. The appended protocol therefore aims to improve procedures for consultation of the Committee of the Regions and to involve the Committee more closely in the Community political debate and in information and communication policy.

In the view of the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions, the appended protocol makes a practical contribution to implementation of the proposals for reform of governance in Europe set out in the Commission's recent White Paper. The Commission undertakes to cooperate with the Committee and with its members, in their capacity as regional and local players, in ensuring that they are able to exercise fully the role of indispensable intermediary between the EU institutions and the regional and local authorities.

Accordingly, the President of the European Commission and the President of the Committee of the Regions therefore agree to step up arrangements for cooperation between the two bodies under the protocol appended to this declaration, so as to serve the Union's general interests more effectively.

Romano Prodi
President of the European Commission

J. Chabert
President of the Committee of the Regions

APPENDIX

Protocol governing arrangements for cooperation between the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions

I. Consultative task of the Committee of the Regions

1. On the basis of the European Commission's annual work programme, the Commissioner responsible for relations with the Committee of the Regions shall forward to the Committee a list of proposals for mandatory consultation, along with proposals for possible optional consultation. This list shall also include documents of a non-legislative nature on which the Commission intends to request the Committee's opinion.

2. Optional consultation shall be motivated by at least one of the following criteria:

- the issue concerned relates to the regulatory or executive remits of the devolved authorities: regional, local or intermediate;
- the projected Community legislation or the national measures that will have to be adopted for the purposes of its implementation are likely to have a direct impact on the operation of the regional or local administration;
- the Community measure concerned is likely to have an impact on economic and social cohesion within the meaning of Treaty Article 159.

3. The European Commission shall encourage the Committee of the Regions to draw up strategic documents reviewing matters which the Commission regards as important; these "outlook reports" shall explore in greater depth problems in areas where the Committee of the Regions has the appropriate local information resources. These reports shall be officially presented to the European Commission following their adoption in plenary.

In the same way the European Commission may request the Committee of the Regions to draw up outlook opinions in key areas where it considers the Committee of the Regions has the relevant competence, knowledge and expertise. The Committee shall be notified of such consultation by the President of the European Commission or by a Member of the Commission.

4. The European Commission and the Committee of the Regions acknowledge the importance of following up the progress of Committee opinions. To enable the Committee to prepare regular impact assessment reports of its work, the European Commission shall provide it twice a year with substantive replies, setting out the reasons why the comments contained in the opinion have or have not been taken into account. More specifically, the suggestions accepted by the Commission shall be incorporated in its amended proposals.

5. To make it easier for the Committee of the Regions to perform its consultative duties, the European Commission shall do its utmost to provide it as speedily as possible with any documentation and information it may require.

6. In order to give its opinions a higher profile, the Committee of the Regions shall endeavour to highlight more clearly the specific changes it wishes to be made in Commission legislative proposals by the adoption of specific amendments to Commission texts.

7. The Committee of the Regions shall notify the Commission's secretariat general as swiftly as possible of any items in CoR commission and plenary session minutes whose content is of specific interest to the Commission.

8. The European Commission officials responsible for work on issues which the Committee of the Regions is examining shall participate as far as possible in meetings to which they are invited so as to set out the Commission's proposals and take note of the positions expressed by the members of the Committee of the Regions.

9. A working meeting shall be organised once a year, at the initiative of the European Commission's secretariat-general, in conjunction with the Committee of the Regions secretariat, in order to review medium-term Commission initiatives on which the Committee could provide a substantial contribution. Representatives from the private offices of the Commissioners concerned may attend these meetings.

II. CoR involvement in the political debate

10. The President of the European Commission or the Commissioner responsible for relations with the Committee of the Regions shall, at the start of each year, present the salient points of the Commission's

annual work programme to the plenary Committee. When organising its own work, the Committee of the Regions shall strive to take account of the Commission's priorities and deadlines.

11. The Members of the European Commission shall be invited by the President of the Committee of the Regions to take part in the Committee's work, particularly plenary sessions, as well as in special activities organised by joint agreement. In their turn, members of the Committee of the Regions may be invited to participate in events of common interest organised by the European Commission at the different territorial levels. For this purpose the Committee of the Regions shall be regularly updated on the timetable for such events.

12. A meeting between the President of the Committee of the Regions and the President of the European Commission, or a Commissioner delegated by the latter, shall be organised once a year, at the European Commission's initiative, to examine the two bodies' respective priorities and subjects of joint interest and to review the application of this cooperation protocol.

13. The European Commission and the Committee of the Regions hereby agree to step up their cooperation with a view to improving the synergetic impact of activities undertaken by their respective services in the context, for instance, of inter-regional and trans-European cooperation and the European programmes related to the cohesion policy.

III. Information and communication policy at grassroots level

14. Bearing in mind the close ties between the members of the Committee of the Regions and the citizens of their constituencies, the Committee of the Regions shall encourage local and regional authority information campaigns and schemes to publicise the Community's work, including the organisation, possibly in conjunction with the Commission, of seminars, hearings and conferences in spheres of particular importance.

15. The European Commission's information services shall seek to highlight the role of the Committee of the Regions.

16. Among other ad hoc forms of support, the European Commission shall do its utmost to ensure appropriate coverage of the Committee of the Regions in the information brochures which it publishes on the EU institutions.

It shall also instruct its representative offices to:

- disseminate the publications provided by the Committee of the Regions,
- designate a liaison officer for CoR work,
- get involved, as far as possible, in events organised by the Committee of the Regions in the country concerned.

For its part, the Committee of the Regions shall make every effort to publicise all regional or local projects instigated by the Community through the channel of its "Info Region" information office.