



AER Position on the Commission's Contribution to the Period of Reflection and Beyond: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate

The Assembly of European Regions (AER), representing 255 regions from across Europe and 13 interregional associations,

having regard to the:

Proposal for the Commission's Contribution to the Period of Reflection and Beyond: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate COM(2005)494

Draft Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Commission's Contribution to the Period of Reflection and Beyond: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (CONST IV-002)

The Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe signed by Heads of State and Government on 29 October 2004 (IGC 87/04)

and taking into consideration:

- the outcomes of the referenda on the European Constitutional Treaty held in France and the Netherlands in 2005
- the fact that 14 EU Member States have now ratified the European Constitutional Treaty, some through the form of popular referenda
- the fact that the remaining 9 Member States have not yet been given the opportunity to legally deliver their opinion on the Constitutional Treaty

adopted the following position at its plenary session held in Debrecen, Hajdú-Bihar (HU) on 17th May 2006:

Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate

- Welcomes the Commission's Plan D, as an attempt to stimulate debate on European issues amongst citizens, in order to engage them more fully in European affairs and to gain feedback on how the European Union can better respond to their needs.
- Is, however, disappointed that the period of reflection has, to date, led to very little debate and dialogue on Europe amongst the citizens, and moreover, that there has been a lack of concrete measures undertaken at the European level to encourage this dialogue
- Is encouraged to see the fact that Plan D highlights the important role that regions play in engaging citizens in European integration and underlines the fact that regions have a key role in re-connecting Europe with the citizens. This results from the proximity of the regions to the citizens, their democratic legitimacy and the key role that they play in EU policy-making and policy implementation
- Welcomes the fact that the Commission recognises that, in seeking to provide a common framework, each debate will have its own local, regional and national characteristics, and emphasises that it is only by communicating European issues in terms that relate to the daily lives of the citizens, that the European institutions will manage to successfully engage the citizens.
- Welcomes the importance that the Communication places upon involving young people in the debate on the future of Europe, and recommends to the Commission, as an example of good practice, the AER's European Youth Ambassador scheme, through which young people from

regions throughout Europe will be provided with training and materials in order to enable them to organise debates in their regions on the role of young people in the future of Europe

- Ask the Commission to consider the inclusion of regional representatives in the European Round Table for Democracy which it intends to establish and requests the swift release of further information concerning the tasks and operation of this round table
- Expresses its support for the Europe Direct Centres and the Commission's intention to involve these centres in its work at the regional and local level; as many of the Europe Direct centres are actually located within regional administrations, the regions should be encouraged to work closely with them
- Underlines, as an example of best practice, the concept of the AER Citizens' Forum, which bring together representatives of the European institutions with key stakeholders at the regional level and citizens to discuss how Europe affects the daily lives of the citizens
- Welcomes the concept of the European Goodwill Ambassadors and undertakes to identify suitable well-known figures at a regional level to participate in this scheme, organising meetings, workshops and talks on a range of European policies and programmes
- Welcomes the Commission's suggestion that MEPs co-operate with regional and local authorities in engaging citizens in Europe and proposes that the AER facilitates this engagement
- Fully supports the call by the Committee of the Regions for a "fourth dimension" to Plan D, namely that of decentralisation; only a debate based upon subsidiarity, rooted in the real needs of the citizens, can be successful in bringing the citizens closer to Europe
- Recognises that there is a need for a common ownership of the European project, without which no further attempts at deeper European integration will be feasible, and calls upon the Commission to provide the discussion platforms, the financial resources and the access to decision-making processes that will allow the regions to play their full role in realising this vision.
- Assures the European institutions that the AER and its 255 member regions are ready and willing to play a full role in reconnecting Europe with the citizens. They are prepared to commit time and resources to this effort as they believe that a strong European Union, rooted in the principles of subsidiarity and proximity, is vital for ensuring a stable and prosperous future for Europe.

JB, March 2006

