



editorial

On the dawn of this new year, a hopefully happy year for all our readers, I would like to announce my hopes for the Assembly of European Regions, of which I have recently been elected President.

Above all, I hope that the Regions of Europe, current and future members, will become more and more involved in our Assembly in this decisive period for the future of Europe.

"The declaration on the future of the Union", adopted in Nice, continues the consideration of the structure and organisation of an enlarged Europe. We, the Regions of Europe, must put forward our vision of Europe in this debate, a Europe where regional competences are recognised, where subsidiarity is rich in meaning and where the citizens feel close to and understood by their political representatives. In short, a Europe where regionalism, as the AER perceives it, can be clearly heard. I sincerely hope that, from now on, the AER – in close cooperation with the other interregional organisations – will be the effective speaker for regional authorities in the debate in preparation for the Intergovernmental Conference in 2004.

I also hope that, under the auspices of the AER, the development of both cross-border and interregional cooperation can assist the enlargement process currently underway and its acceptance. By bringing together the relevant populations we can construct a balanced Europe and achieve the well being of everyone on our continent.

Liese Prokop

Vice-Minister President
of Niederösterreich
AER President

What architecture for tomorrow's Europe? > The Regions of Europe prepare

Chaired by Liese Prokop, Vice-Minister President of Niederösterreich (A) and President of the Assembly of European Regions, the new AER Presidium held its first meeting on 31st January 2001 in Strasbourg. The Presidium was delighted with the "Declaration on the future of the European Union" drawn up in Nice and decided that the preparation of a joint position of the Regions on the future and structure of the enlarged Europe would be the main priority of its mandate (2001-2002).

The new AER Presidium, which was elected in December 2000, decided to hold its first meeting in Strasbourg, the town where the AER has its headquarters. The agenda was mainly focused on the priorities for the coming two years.

A joint position

Bearing in mind the decisions made by the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in Nice in December 2000 and in particular the "Declaration on the future of the EU", the AER Presidium decided that the preparation of a joint position of the Regions on the future and the architecture of the enlarged Union would be the main priority of its mandate.

The AER Institutional Committee, presided over by Willi Stächele, Secretary of State for European affairs in Baden-Württemberg (D), has been asked to prepare a draft position concerning both the "White paper on new forms of governance in Europe" - the European Commission has decided to close the debate on 15 - 16th March 2001 - and the Intergovernmental Conference in 2004. More than 40 European Regions (EU and non-EU) are already prepared to work together on these issues at the AER Committee meeting on 8 - 9th February in Berlin (see article: "Stop press").

Key terms: proximity, subsidiarity, simplicity

"The political representatives of the Regions of the European Union and applicant countries must make their position clear and be considered as a source of proposals for this important debate for the future of Europe" stated Mrs Prokop, AER President. "In order for the enlarged Europe to be governable and governed, whilst remaining at grass roots level, competences must be clearly distributed between the various levels of government and the concept of subsidiarity must be given a more concrete and clear meaning in the European Treaties. The role of the Regions must be better defined in the construction of Europe" she added.

The AER President also intends to include all of the interregional organisations in this project in view of preparations for the IGC 2004 and therefore organise a second edition of the Vienna Conference which met in 1994 and brought together the Presidents and Secretary Generals of these Associations. The President will be assisted by Vice-Presidents Van Nistelrooij (Noord-Brabant - NL) and Waszkiewicz (Dolnoslaskie - PL).

The Presidium discussed the AER Action plan for the upcoming two years as well as those of the other three Committees in particular.

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A busy action plan

The Social affairs Committee, presided over by Mr Kristoffersen, Akershus (N), will focus on "Social welfare in Europe post-enlargement", "EU social and economic policy for the Regions post - 2006" and the problems of "Health, pensioners, equal opportunities" whilst continuing to develop real cooperation projects in its fields of competences.

The Regional policy Committee, presided over by Mr Greenslade, Devon (UK) put several subjects of European current affairs on the agenda for the next meeting (23-24th March, Jämtland - S) such as "Enlargement and future European regional policy", "Report and Forum on cohesion in Europe", "6th European Environmental Action Programme", "Trans-European Networks" and, obviously, considering the current agricultural crisis, "Sustainable Agriculture and consumer protection".

As for the Culture, Education and Training Committee, its new President, Mr Hosp, Südtirol-Bolzano-Alto Adige (I), committed himself to continuing the activities undertaken, with success, under the Presidency of Mrs Prokop such as the involvement of young people in public affairs at regional level, adult education and training, regional and minority languages, in particular under the heading of the European year

of languages, and sport in the Regions. The Presidium introduced the idea of organising two Conferences of Ministers and regional representatives in the field of environment and culture in 2002.

Strengthen AER programmes

The Presidium decided to give a more political dimension to the AER training programmes such as Centurio and the Summer School which aim at training regional elected representatives and managers of the CEEC. Vice-President Mr Waszkiewicz has been entrusted with this assignment. The Region of Franche-Comté, which runs the Secretariat of Eurodissey - another AER programme which allows young Europeans to gain experience abroad for the first time - has been invited to participate at Bureau meetings.

Other political initiatives

The two and a half days spent in Strasbourg were particularly busy for Mrs Prokop, the new AER President. Her programme included:

- an interview with the President in Office of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Mr Georges Andrejev, His Excellency Latvian Ambassador, who invited the AER to the next CDLR Conference on "Local democracy at the dawn of the 21st Century" (3-4th May, Riga - LV);

- a meeting with Mr Llibert Cuatrecasas, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe (CLRAE), in order to look at the new activities to be undertaken regarding cooperation between the two organisms. A few of the main decisions: The AER's contribution to the creation of new Local Democracy Agencies in the Balkans (Montenegro and South Serbia-YU), participation in and financial support by the CLRAE for the AER Summer School 2001, which will take place at the end of August in Constanta (RO), participation of Mrs Prokop, AER President, at the next CLRAE meeting (29th May 2001, Strasbourg), drawing up of a joint action plan between the AER and the Chamber of the Regions of the CLRAE concerning the adoption by the Committee of Ministers of the draft European Charter of regional self-governance of the CLRAE,...

- a meeting, with other members of the AER Presidium, with Mr Adrien Zeller, President of the Regional Council of Alsace, which gives special support to the organisation's headquarters in Strasbourg;
- an interview with Mr Ries, Premier Adjoint of the Mayor of Strasbourg, responsible for la Mission interministérielle concerning the European influence of this town. On the Agenda were: bigger premises and increased visibility for the AER in Strasbourg, but also the creation of a coordination unit in the field of regional culture - an idea brought up by the Region of Valencia (E) at the Conference of Regional Ministers of Culture which was organised by the AER (Nyon - CH, October 2000) - and a European Conference "Regions and Environment" for 2002;

- a visit to the AER headquarters and a meeting with Secretariat members.

President Prokop also gave a press conference in the presence of Mr De Belder, AER Secretary General, and Mr Meyer, Director of International Affairs of the Regional Council of Alsace. Several international and regional media representatives were present.

For further information try:

<http://www.are-regions-europe.org/GB/A2/A22.html>.

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>Portrait A woman at the head of the AER!

On 8th December 2000, the General Assembly elected Mrs Liese Prokop, Vice-Minister President of Niederösterreich (A) as AER President for 2001-2003. She is therefore the 5th AER President following Edgar Faure (Franche-Comté - F), Carlo Bernini (Veneto - I), Jordi Pujol (Catalunya - E) and Luc Van den Brande (Vlaanderen - B).

For the last 30 years, Liese Prokop, Austrian, has been a front running political actor in her country. Deputy in the Parliament of Niederösterreich since 1969 and a member of the regional Government since 1981, she is currently Vice-Minister President of this Region (since 1992), and responsible for sport, pensioners and handicapped people, employment, youth, family and women's affairs.

Liese Prokop has been active within the AER since 1986: in Basel she was elected President of the AER Culture Committee, and subsequently she became First Vice-President (1999-2000).

Liese Prokop is also an outstanding performer in the world of sport as a top athlete with over 50 medals. She won a silver medal for the pentathlon at the Olympics in Mexico in 1968; was junior champion in 1967 (Tokyo). She was European champion and broke the world record in 1969, again in the pentathlon. She is currently President of the Austrian Union of Sports Organisations.

Married to Gunnar Prokop (a well known Handball coach) since 1965, she has three children (Karin, Gunnar and Eric).

With the election of Liese Prokop, the AER's efforts to encourage equal opportunities for men and women are given added impetus.

For further information and the curriculum vitae of the AER Vice-Presidents:
<http://www.are-regions-europe.org/commun/A142bis.html>.



The AER and Governance

> *Leading towards a position of the Regions of Europe*

Over 300 participants from 120 European Regions and interregional organisations took part in the debate on the new forms of governance and on the future of Europe organised by the AER at its General Assembly in Seinäjoki (Dec. 2000).

Following the exposés by Mr H De Belder, AER Secretary General, and Mrs S Mezadri of the CPMR, many speakers succeeded them on the podium in order to present their points of view.

The Regions of Europe generally approve of the European Commission's wish to include regional and local actors in European decision-making to a greater extent, in view of bringing the Union closer to its citizens and reinforcing its democratic legitimacy.

They welcome the dialogue which was opened between the European institutions and regional authorities and which led to the creation of the Committee of the regions (CoR), to the inclusion of the principle of subsidiarity in the Treaty of Amsterdam, to the presence of regional representatives in the national delegations of federal States in the Committee of Ministers, to contractualisation and to partnerships in European structural policies, and all this via regional initiatives.

A few reasons for disgruntlement

Despite the progress made, the current European institutional system allows little room for the real participation of local and regional representatives, the roots of democracy in Europe, in European governance.

The CoR – despite being the guardian of the principle of subsidiarity – only has a role as an advisory body within the European institutions and its opinions are not necessarily followed up.

On the other hand the current electoral system does not encourage the representativity of Regional authorities in the European Parliament.

In addition, the increasing complexity and interdependence between the various levels of governance, when it comes to implementing efficient public policies, requires a better distribution of competences and responsibilities.

In view of enlargement, European policies must integrate the concept of territorial cohesion alongside of that of economic and social cohesion in the Union. The growing European area must also take interregional and cross-border aspects better into account, in particular concerning policies with a strong territorial impact.

Enhance democracy "from the bottom up"

Good governance means understanding the citizen's needs, including these needs in the appropriate policies of general interest and including the citizens in the implementation of these policies. At European level the art of governing not only requires the implication of member States in decision-making, but also of local and regional, democratically elected, assemblies, representing the European population with all its diversities.

The Regions of Europe agree: **this new form of governance should be based on the general reinforcement of "bottom up" democracy, i.e. from the citizens and their representative assemblies and up to higher levels and, in addition, based on the respect of shared values and both national and regional diversity, as guaranteed in the European Treaties.**

The following represents a résumé of the opinions given at this debate, with the addition of the ideas explained in the written contributions for the attention of the AER Institutional Committee meeting which recently took place in Berlin.

The AER's ambition is to draw up a joint position of the Regions of Europe both for the current debate on Governance and for the next Inter-governmental Conference in 2004.

Respect for shared values

"If globalisation is an economic process without any element of governance, the construction of Europe involves, for us, the search for new governance, in order to ensure that the evolution of Europe is based on the respect of our values" said C Husson (Limousin-F).

The proclamation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights is the first step towards a more political Union. The inclusion of this Charter in the Treaty must be considered as the synonym of good European governance. Whatever choices are made in the future, *"we must ensure that the Union is able to guarantee a decent lifestyle for all of its citizens. This represents the major difference between Economic and Monetary Union and a Europe of the citizens"* stressed Mr De Belder (AER). *"The high level of social protection which we wish to protect in the Union can be obtained, in particular via the reduction of the charges which apply to employment and via the introduction of taxes on the environment"* considered P Suinen (Wallonie-F). On this matter, Mrs C Palmcrantz (Dalarna-S) suggested increasing Community support for regions particularly involved in the promotion of social cohesion.

The protection of diversity in Europe

"The respect of regional and cultural diversity as well as that of minorities is an integral part of governance" stated Mr Öst Dahl, CPMR President. He also

stressed that, from his point of view "regionalism is the means to involve the population in European activities and to overcome the shortfall in democracy in Europe".

Aware of the desire to implement a unique regional model within the Union, certain regions have asked for this regional political and institutional diversity to be protected. The AER avoided referring to the concept of a "unique" form of region in its "Declaration on regionalism in Europe" (unanimously adopted by member regions in 1996), preferring to propose a reference model.

"Regional diversity is the strength rather than the weakness of Europe and this diversity must be protected, although a certain amount of standardisation in this field is necessary – as a guide for countries undergoing regionalisation in particular. This is the aim of the Charter of regional Self-Government which we hope to persuade the member States of the Council of Europe to adopt in 2002 and which the AER supports" pointed out Mr Koivisto, President of the Chamber of the Regions of the CLRAE.

Mr De Belder (AER) reminded those present that competences and responsibilities at regional level vary from one country to another and subsidiarity implies the respect of these differences.

A more extensive role for the regions in the construction of Europe

In most EU countries, the regions have reached political maturity and deserve having their place in the construction of Europe reviewed. The regions are, today, more than a third level of power in Europe. They are increasingly federal and managers of a territory. They are not only responsible for achieving economic cohesion, but also cultural diversity and social and territorial cohesion (the wellbeing of the people). Their role as a link with the electorate on European affairs cannot be ignored.

The increased involvement of the regions in European decision-making can be achieved in several ways and discussion must go on within the AER bodies in order to find an agreement. The following is a list of the various proposals having been made:

1) A definition of the principle of subsidiarity within the Treaty

A reference to this principle can be found in Article 5 of the EC Treaty which states that "The Community shall act within the limits of the powers conferred upon it by this Treaty and of the objectives assigned to it therein." and that "In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity." but this action "shall not go beyond what is necessary". The article includes no further clarifications as to what the various interpretations of this principle might authorise. "A legal definition of what this principle and its application means is necessary in order to allow those who govern and the citizens to understand it" pointed out P Johnsson (Värmland-S).

2) Delimitation of competences and clarification of responsibilities

The Treaty must also clearly precise the exclusive competences of the EU and, subsequently, the areas in which the EU is not competent.

This distribution of competences, which the regions have been so loudly calling for for many years, must take national and regional traditions into account. "Certain competences belong where they are anchored: in the regions, and we must ensure that these competences are not replaced by something less efficient. Responsibilities must also be clarified. Currently, there is an obvious problem regarding the responsibilities of political decision-makers: when an important public problem comes up, nobody is responsible and this clarification can only be beneficial for the citizens" said Mr Mittendorfer (Bayern-D).

Mr Kiefer (Salzburg-A) brought people's attention to the difference between the delimitation of competences and the decentralisation of competences: "the decentralisation of public administration implies more administration and individual regional policies are always more efficient than decentralised regional policies".

Mr Willi Stächele (Baden-Württemberg-D and President of the AER Institutional Committee) stressed, on this subject, the importance of the concept of general interests and related public services.

"Member States, their Regions and Municipalities must be able to accept their responsibilities in this field, without restriction. These concepts must cover the main regulations and co-participation in all fields in which regional or municipal authorities are partly or fully responsible due to national constitutional traditions" he pointed out. He also introduced the idea of the creation of an arbitration tribunal responsible for ensuring that the distribution of competences is applied and which could be sued by Regions having their own legislative competences.

3) Recognition of the value of regional Self-Government

Several speakers expressed their fears when faced with the concept of decentralisation of the European Commission. "This concept must be clarified and we request that a preliminary assessment be systematically applied in order to decide if decentralisation is necessary", pronounced S Mezadri (CPMR). "Decentralisation, if the responsibility remains at the top of the pyramid, is no synonym of good governance and necessarily leads to extra administration, slowness and diluted responsibilities" added A Kiefer (Salzburg-A) whilst the proposal of Bayern and Thüringen underlined the incompatibility of this concept with the Treaty.

All of the Regions of Europe are calling for regional Self-Government to be protected if it is already established and encouraged everywhere else, for greater efficiency in the management of both human and financial resources.

4) Extension of the democratic basis of the European Parliament

The issue of introducing regional constituencies in European elections was also brought up in order to strengthen the democratic foundations of the European Parliament via increased regional representativity. It was also proposed to include national and regional Parliaments (those existing in federal countries) in the activities of the European Parliament to a greater extent. This would seem particularly important in the context of the enlargement process.

5) Less EU standardisation

"The principle of subsidiarity states that decisions must be made and applied at

the level closest to the citizen. (...) The authority of action of the EU must be restricted to framework conditions and abandon detailed regulations. This is the only way to maintain the member states' right to decide, the diversity in Europe and competition. These rights must not be threatened by non-binding acts such as communications and White and Green papers either" (Bayern and Thüringen). It was also proposed that European civil servants in charge of drawing up the legislation spend time in the administrations of member States in order to learn the necessary administrative procedures in view of dictating Community Law.

6) Reassertion of the role of the Committee of the Regions

According to the regions of Europe, the enhancing of the democratic legitimacy of the Union also requires the recognition of the CoR in the future European institutional architecture as a fully fledged institutional body. This body must have the right to undertake initiatives in fields with a strong regional impact and its opinions should count in decision-making.

Some suggest that the CoR should, immediately, be given more functional responsibilities in enlargement... "All of the applicant countries need advice and support in the field of regional policy in view of the implementation of structural funds, and this is currently lacking" stressed J Waszkiewicz (Dolnoslaskie-PL and AER Vice-President).

7) Increased cooperation between those who govern ...

A working method based on both vertical and horizontal cooperation is absolutely necessary for the smooth running of the democratic model. This implies legitimacy and transparency at all levels of governance.

Vertical Regions/EU cooperation could improve due to "the emergence of a new type of partnership aimed at, on the one hand, better integration of the regional level in European policies or interregional or cross-border aspects in multi-national framework agreements and, on the other hand, better integration of European aspects in regional management processes" said S Mezadri (CPMR). On this subject P Suinen (Wallonie-B) used the example of the Euro-mediterran-

ean partnership which "could be clearer and more efficient if the regions were involved".

The regions also warned against too much influence coming from private actors in governance and asked for an effort to be made in order to give more power to public actors: "The participation of representatives with private or second (pressure groups) interests could influence the balance of decision-making. Their participation in a consultation process brings no democratic legitimacy to the process...." (Bayern and Thüringen).

... Both vertical and horizontal cooperation

The development of horizontal cooperation between both public and private actors requires indepth research in order to substitute the current culture of competition with that of cooperation, especially in view of EU enlargement which will have an impact on structural policies and on the implementation of the ESDP.

The AER and the CPMR will work in this direction. This idea is strongly supported by the Regions in applicant countries which are in vital need of cooperation and partners to assist them in accession. "We must absolutely avoid competition between the current Objective 1 regions and those which will become Objective 1 regions after accession", Mr Olbrycht gave a warning signal (Slaskie-PL).

With this in mind, the regions of federal countries also insist that cooperation between legislative and administrative bodies, in particular with reference to applying Community acquis to national or even regional laws, must improve (Bayern and Thüringen). Cooperation with peripheral regions must also improve, particularly in view of the importance of the networking of territories and/or partners.

8) Improved communication and exchange

In the opinion of all parties, the simplification of the Treaties, less complicated institutions and more transparent decision-making can only be but a good basis for efficient and effective communication between the various levels of governance.

Several good initiatives already exist (Committees, hearings, consultation procedures, publication of positions...).

These deserve supporting, in particular through new information technologies (internet). These technologies must give greater importance to dialogue (which implies carefully listening to others) and to interactivity. Several regional representatives stressed the importance of communication in enlargement. Mr B Greenslade (Devon-UK and President of the AER Regional policy Committee) called for the development of actions aimed at encouraging the exchange of experience and the transmission of regional expertise between EU regions and those of applicant countries in particular.

How to go forward?

In people's minds the idea of a more political Europe is starting to settle. Some regions, especially in federal states, propose going even further and drawing up a European constitutional Treaty including the Regions (Baden-Württemberg – D). This Treaty would co-sign the EU fundamental political system with its aims and principles, its organisation and decision-making as well as its competences. A lengthy debate concerning this future project will certainly be necessary and the AER will lead this debate in view of the next Intergovernmental Conference in 2004.

During his speech in Seinäjoki, P Suinen (Wallonie-B) invited the regions to consider their own capabilities to meet their citizens concerns. "We must ask ourselves the question, if we, ourselves, in a political debate, are sufficiently decentralised and close to our citizens?" he advised. This could represent the second branch of discussions to be undertaken within the AER alongside of exchanges of experience in the field of the development of participative democracy at regional level.

L Van den Brande, (Vlaanderen-B, former AER President and rapporteur on governance) concluded the debate by asking the AER and the other interregional organisations to ensure that the debate on good governance be sufficiently powerful to face globalisation whilst protecting the European Regions from the possible risks of (re)-centralisation.

The Editor

Stop press

> Outcome of the AER Institutional Committee

Willi Stächele: "In the future, We, the Regions, will play a even greater role in discussions within Europe"

The Regions of Europe request a delimitation of competences based on the principle of subsidiarity within the European Union which does not affect the foundations of the autonomy of member States and Regions, declared Willi Stächele, Secretary of State, President of Committee A "Policies and Institutional Affairs" of the Assembly of European Regions (AER) on Friday 9th February 2001 in Berlin.

With the "Declaration on the future of the Union", the European Council in Nice opened the debate on the European Constitution. 70 representatives from the regions of Europe explained, when speaking during the meeting, how the European constitutional system should meet the future demands of regional autonomy.

At the centre of the regions' calls can be heard the desire for the Committee of the Regions to be strengthened as a fully fledged institution representing the interests of the regions.

These are the main points brought up by the Institutional Committee for an AER position on the Intergovernmental Conference in 2004.

The Committee also presented other draft resolutions which must be adopted in March by the AER Bureau. The Committee dealt with the European Commission's draft "White paper on governance in Europe": the approach to the concept of governance, according to which new forms of cooperation between the various levels of activity and decision within the EU must be found, was well received.

The danger of networking decision-making was also stressed, as this would allow European bodies to be influential outside of their areas of competences. The concept of governance could be in contradiction with the objective of Nice, i.e. to strictly specify the competences within the EU. The representatives of the regions in Berlin proposed, in this light, to reduce the complexity of the regulations.

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White paper on governance in Europe

In view of preparing the White paper on governance in Europe (due to be published in July 2001), the European Commission is organising two public hearings in Brussels on March 2001 where the AER will be represented:

- 13 – 14th March, a hearing on decentralisation to national, regional and local levels; one of the issues to be discussed will be contractualisation between the Commission and the other levels of governance.

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- 16th March, a hearing on "Governance, subsidiarity and proportionality"

in the EU which aims to look at the role of public actors at various levels, the understanding of responsibilities and the promotion of better interaction between those who govern.

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In addition, a group in charge of activities concerning better interactivity on the various levels has launched a questionnaire aimed at local and regional authorities and at interregional organisations on "Multi-level governance and balanced and sustainable development for the EU".

This questionnaire is available on the AER extranet (for members only) under Committee A and EU General information or on: http://europa.eu.int/comm/governance/index_en.htm.
The deadline is for the: 15th March 2001.



diary

MARCH

Friday 2nd
AER Bureau - Oberkirch (D)

Wednesday 7th to Thursday 8th
AER Committee B Presidium
Västerås (S)

Monday 19th to Tuesday 20th
AER Committee D Presidium
Bolzano (I)

Thursday 22nd to Saturday 24th
AER Committee C - Jämtland (S)

Friday 23rd to Saturday 24th
European Council - Stockholm (S)

Thursday 29th
RETI Bureau - Budapest (H)

Thursday 29th to Friday 30th
CEMR Steering Committee
Noordwijk (NL)

APRIL

Monday 2nd to Tuesday 3rd
EU Swedish Presidency
Conference "Municipalities and Regions in a growing EU" - Ronneby (S)

Tuesday 3rd to Thursday 5th
COR Bureau + Plenary session
Brussels (B)

Thursday 19th to Friday 20th
AER caravan "Youth, culture and regionalism" - Baranya (H)

MAY

Thursday 3rd to Friday 4th
AER Committee D - Batumi (GEO)

Friday 4th
COR Bureau - Kalmar (S)

Thursday 17th to Friday 18th
AER Committee B - Milano (I)

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