

EUROPESE UNIE



Comité van de Regio's

The President

Brussel, 5th of July 2008

Speech of President Luc Van den Brande

Europa-Forum Wachau

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- Alleen de uitgesproken tekst is geldig -

"Neuer Schwung für Europa"

Sehr geehrter Herr Präsident / Vize Pr. Bundesversammlung / LH, 21.12.1998
Ich habe das Gefühl drum herum zu sein

Dear Mr. President, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for your kind invitation at this year's Europa-Forum Wachau. Ein neuer "Schwung" für Europa is what we need indeed. The Committee of the Regions as the spokesman of all regions, cities and local authorities in the EU is well placed to make the 'Schwung' happen.

First of all I'd like to share some thoughts on the way forward after the Irish referendum and the institutional challenges we face today. Secondly let me present to you my personal beliefs on which I'd like to build upon during my Presidency in order to contribute to the realisation of a political European Union in which people have confidence and trust.

I. The Lisbon Treaty and the Irish referendum

After the Irish referendum on the 12th of June there is a moment of uncertainty. At the moment all preparatory works on the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty are officially 'on hold' within the institutions. As a believer and defender of a representative democracy I'm not particularly an advocate of referenda, and certainly not on complex issues as the Lisbon Treaty. But it must be said, that at this very moment the Irish government together with various civil society groups is engaged in a very serious and in depth debate on Ireland's future position in the EU and the future of the EU itself.

It is interesting to analyze the results of the referendum. Having a quick view on the last flash Eurobarometer in Ireland (organised immediately after the vote), it did not dawn on me that 53,4% of all voters turned down the Treaty.

To cite the most striking results:

- 52% of the people that DID NOT vote indicated as a reason "that they did not fully understand the issues raised by the referendum."
- 22% of the NO-voters for the same reason did so because "they didn't know enough about the Treaty"
- Furthermore 12% of the NO-voters felt "the Irish identity was threatened"
- 6% wanted to "safeguard Irish neutrality in security and defence matters"
- Another 6% wanted "to protect the Irish tax system"
- And yet another 6% "did not want to give up the right to an Irish Commissioner in every Commission" (already agreed upon in Nice)
- On the YES-side 32% believes "the Treaty is in the best interest of Ireland"

- 19 % is "grateful for the benefits Ireland got from the EU"
- Yet a mere 2%"believes the Treaty is making the EU more democratic."

Having heard these results I believe you agree with me the EU does not need a stand still after this referendum. On the contrary, it is time now for action. And although I'm confident that at the next European Council in October a way out will be found to overcome the current situation, we should not loose our efforts towards a more democratic and efficient European Union. Given that there is no immediate alternative to a European Union reformed along the lines of the Lisbon Treaty, all EU institutions and politicians of all various levels of governance should be actively engaged in contributing to the realisation of a European Union which can provide for concrete answers to people's day to day problems.

One should respect the outcome of the referendum, not patronize the Irish, or threat them differently then a big state

as France. Therefore both, the merits and the pitfalls, of the new Treaty should be better explained and professionally communicated. In my view also regional and local politicians have a crucial role in this respect as they have not only a local or a regional mandate, but also a European one. Indeed, many competences are shared and interlinked between various levels of governance. Hence members of a regional parliament or city mayors are not only mere local politicians, they are at the very same time also truly "European politicians". ^{We need} ~~They are~~ European politicians at all levels. ~~Yes~~

It is also important to mention what the Irish voters did not put into question. The Lisbon Treaty provides for the instruments to establish closer links between the various levels of governance in the EU and therefore makes a two fold communication possible: top down and bottom up. I believe that the intergovernmental approach met all its limits in Dublin

and regional and local authorities have the duty to propose an alternative approach.

I think that the Committee of the Regions has to keep pushing forward the ideas proposed in the reform Treaty bringing new perspectives and opportunities for local and regional authorities. These are in particular a more streamlined decision making process; more efficient institutions; a stronger voice given to the citizens of Europe – especially through the citizens' initiative -; the improved recognition of the subsidiarity principle; and - last but not least - the enhanced role entrusted to national and regional parliaments with legislative powers. It would not be out of place to say that the lack of these elements in the current Nice Treaty structure have been mostly at the root of the frustration occasionally expressed by parts of European public opinion.

Looking forward, we have to build a "Europe in Partnership" through further integration coupled with enhanced

decentralisation and more involvement of regions, cities and communities, namely a "Multi-Level governed Europe". Concepts as the 'co-operative state', the 'negotiating state', or the 'policy networking state' imply that governing functions are increasingly taken over by negotiating networks encompassing governments of all levels, as well as private actors (interest groups, firms) and representatives of civil society (NGO's etc). Modern welfare states look increasingly less like hierarchical structures of legitimate authority, in which public actors are not obsolete, but can only fulfil their functions by co-operating with private actors and/or groups. This is even true for the quintessential EU nation state, France. Therefore_Centralisation can no longer be the basis for a dynamic and effective Europe. Instead, Multilevel governance will become a crucial tool for managing the European Union and simultaneously guaranteeing continuity for its integration.

It is time to move forward; time to give Europe solid links with its citizens and their democratic forms of governments, at all

levels. The motto of my presidency is: "Let's build Europe in partnership" because I believe that Europe wins, when we all participate in shaping and taking decisions, in implementing its projects, in enjoying the benefits. Regions and cities intensively work in making real ideas launched from Brussels and Strasbourg. It is now time to better integrate them in preparing these projects, for better results and for giving them a stronger identity.

Yet there is, in this era of globalisation, a growing awareness of the importance and dynamism of smaller entities and regions. The more global the problems become, the more people look for security and solutions at levels of government they recognise, can access and are able to contact. In this globalised world – and in this information society that is becoming ever more decentralised and flexible – we need a political structure that is different from the one that took shape in industrial society and that is marked by centralisation and uniformity. People today identify first and foremost with their local

neighbourhood, their town, their region. Thus, local and regional realities must also become a substantive element in the EU and must also be placed on a firm institutional footing. Most preferable via a legal base in the Treaties if it is possible, otherwise via the tool of inter-institutional agreements if it must.

The principles of local and regional autonomy, the establishment of stronger mechanisms to implement and monitor the principle of subsidiarity, the CoR's right to seize the Court of Justice in order to defend its own prerogatives and in order to request the annulment of legislative acts on the ground of an infringement of the principle of subsidiarity, will, in the long term, require a different form of European governance. This applies as well to the systematic consultation of local and regional authorities in the pre-legislative phase - before Community decisions are taken.

I have always been stressing that the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality are the levers for multi-level governance, which means responsibility for their application must be shared, and a genuine culture of subsidiarity must be established in the European Union. Therefore I will push for the establishment of a consultation and 'subsidiarity culture' shared by all the EU institutions and the other actors involved in the European legislative process. I intend to make use of the CoR's Subsidiarity Monitoring Network in order to organise Early Warning Consultations on specific legislative proposals, where *prima facie* concerns of subsidiarity compliance arise. The Network is part of the CoR's strategy to broaden its consultation base. It will help to access administrative and political structures in Europe's regions and cities and will thus be an additional tool put at the disposal of the CoR's members and national parliaments.

Alongside the institutional debate, I would also like to see greater attention paid to the concepts of 'regionalism' and

'localism'. This is essentially a question of political conviction and a particular mindset that favours a bottom-up approach to policymaking. Both the "state of localism" in Europe and the "Multi-Level Governance concept", as a 21st century citizens' right to 'good governance' and the right reaction to the current institutional crisis, are concrete proposals I would like to address to the 27 Head of State before the October European Council.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe is not just about its institutions. As can be learnt from the results of the Eurobarometer on the Irish Referendum professional communication is also very important. Good communication is the fuel of every functioning democracy. Without it, the engine of democracy will come to a halt. It is therefore important to inform European citizens about Europe and to involve them in Europe.

To be efficient, Brussels' communication has to follow the same path of subsidiarity; being the most possible closed to citizens. The local and regional authorities have to be more daring and more proactive on the European scene. We are working hard to reinforce our communication strategy, to "go local", to simplify its language and to strengthen our contacts with regional and local media with a view to making citizens "feel like Europe is their home".

Next year new EU elections will take place. We are all involved in making the European elections a common political event and exercise of democracy. Ensuring a strong turn-out for the 2009 European elections represents a goal we share with the European Parliament in particular: by virtue of our electoral mandate and visibility at local level, CoR members are ideally placed to help Europe in communicating its message. Our daily contact with local media could make it possible to tackle Europe in the pages dedicated to 'domestic' affairs, where

Europe should be. We shall bring the political debate about Europe to the heart of European cities and regions, whenever possible. We will strive to establish a positive cultural identity for Europe within regional and local institutions.

II My beliefs on the future European Union: a Europe of values

Ladies and gentlemen,

I'll conclude by sharing my believe in a European Union as a value-based community. Our European collaboration is essentially underpinned by values such as the centrality of the human being, freedom, equality, respect for human rights, the acceptance of diversity as an asset, tolerance, justice and solidarity. These per se European values are part and parcel of our common humanist and ^{J/GT.} Christian (democratic) heritage. Together with the local and regional authorities, we must strive

at European level too to help flesh out/ this value-based community.

We want a Europe that is united by shared values. A Europe that is not turned in on itself but that is open to further development. A political Europe that is concerned about people's quality of life, that involves all tiers of government as partners in decision-making, and that is ever mindful of local and regional realities. As I often repeat, even the strongest cars with powerful engines need wheels to keep running, to keep contact with the ground, the people. There you have the Committee of the Regions, a young European institution which is devoted to keep the link between Brussels and 'deep Europe'. *That's why we are not trying to create a 'Europe of the regions' but a 'Europe with the regions, towns and local authorities'.*"

My vision of a better Europe is a vision of a common space of shared values on which we can all together build up a safe,

sustainable, competitive, open and solidarity-based community.

- Where decisions are taken the closest possible to citizens and therefore tailored on real needs and hopes, insofar based on the subsidiarity and proportionality principles;
- where the European level represents a real added value because shared, never imposed;
- where citizens' voice is taken into account because a strong European Parliament represent them;
- where integration and cultural and interfaith dialogue become routine, because our cities in particular have tools to pave the way for mutual understanding;
- where governance is *good governance* and law-making is *better law-making*, when built on a multi-level governance culture, allowing each power to contribute on equal foot and according to its prerogatives to the achievement of common goals;
- wherever you chose to live and work, you will not isolated or forgotten;

- where you can talk your national or regional language, otherwise Europe is silent.

That is the Europe of and for the next generation and it is that Europe that we shall continue to work for. And in this context the Lisbon Treaty is only a tool to better achieve our objectives.

"let's make Europe real"

Thank you.

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