

Highlight: CoR president Luc Van den Brande in Salzburg 25 and 26/8/2008

CoR president Van den Brande calls for a bottom-up growth strategy: "Cities and regions are the engines of economic development in Europe"



"Europe's cities and regions must play a bigger role in implementing the Lisbon strategy" said the president of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), Luc Van den Brande, at the fourth conference of European regions and cities, which was held in Salzburg (Austria) from 24 to 26 August 2008. Regions and cities were key factors in the innovation, research and educational policy that was essential for achieving the Lisbon goals of innovation, growth and jobs. Their voice must therefore be heard more clearly, concluded the CoR president. In March 2008 the CoR had already submitted a report to the European

Council calling for regional and local authorities to be consulted at each stage of the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs.

In Salzburg Van den Brande expressly recognised the successes of the European cohesion policy, which was geared to the Lisbon strategy in the current programme period. A key to this success was the partnership approach, where all levels of government, especially the regional and local levels, were involved in developing and implementing programmes as part of the European cohesion and structural policy. "The Committee of the Regions is constantly working to improve this partnership" said Van den Brande.

At previous conferences, municipalities had shown strong interest in contact with economic representatives, according to Dr Franz Schausberger, president of the Institute of the Regions of Europe (IRE), which organised the conference. For this reason more than 200 participants from regional and local government had met this year with representatives of business and investors, experts and representatives of the European Commission under the slogan "the growing economic importance of Europe's regions and cities". Altogether more than 200 participants from 25 European countries had attended the IRE conference in 2008, among them guests from Moldavia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia

On 25 August working groups had discussed the financing of infrastructure projects, tourism, energy, water, waste, regional research and innovation. On 26 August the IRE had held a scientific symposium on "Regionalisation and Decentralisation in East and South-East Europe". President Van den Brande took part in the discussion on the importance of regionalisation and decentralisation for the new EU Member States and the candidates for accession.

"How do we manage globalisation?" Participants at the conference spent two days considering this question in Van den Brande's inaugural address. In the end, despite all efforts to the contrary, not all regions benefited equally from the positive effects of globalisation. Already, regions that were particularly well developed and competitive made more use of it than areas with structural problems and high unemployment. "The challenge for the EU, the Member States and regional and local authorities is to manage the necessary structural changes in a positive manner and limit the costs of adjustment". A European strategy should be applied from the bottom up and take account of the special circumstances in each region, said the CoR president. Economic modernisation had to take place at

company level, and regional and local authorities were in a position to promote competitiveness by supporting partnerships between educational institutions, companies and employees or by implementing suitable spatial planning policies.

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