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NEWSLETTER

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF CEMR • EUROPÄISCHER GEMEINDETAG • ÉTATS GÉNÉRAUX DU CCRE

Public services concretely

The 2nd day of CEMR's general assembly saw six workshops on public services under two main themes: public services as a source of cohesion, and their financial aspects.



Michel Thiers

Demographic Problems

Our future challenges are known: ageing because of lower fertility and substantial problems concerning social protection. It is chiefly rural areas that suffer the effects of those problems. Risto Parjanne, Director General of the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, predicts the following: "In 2020 there will be only about four or five successful agglomerations in Finland." In order to avoid neglect of the rest of the regions, one point was on top of the agenda: European Co-operation. "Different concepts must be elaborated, tested, assessed and then applied Europe-wide", explained Andrea Fischer, Secretary of State of Saxony.

Full Access

"Public services are well organized, but the access to them is badly provided" this was the opening statement of Mrs Jorritsma, mayor of Almere and former minister in the Netherlands. She very much promotes the idea that the public services are provided to customers and that the staff working in public administrations should work accordingly, because "not all goods are wanted goods", she said; "the citizens need a passport or a building permit, they don't have a choice to get it from a private competitor." She believes that the public sector can learn from the private sector,

by focusing on consumer satisfaction, benchmarking exercises, etc. "Public services should be professionalized". Mrs Roselyne Lefrançois, deputy mayor of Rennes, preferred the term of "users" instead of "client" and stressed the principles of equality and solidarity. She presented the concept of "living in intelligence", which was launched in France and aims to combine competition with solidarity. The mayor of Malmö, Mr Ilmar Reepalu, favored minimum social standards in Europe, because they are vital for the European social model, which is very attractive and a reference model outside Europe. Services should be acceptable throughout the EU and "all citizens should have access to equal public services." At the end of the workshop, Mike Ashley, moderator, asked the participants to answer the question in the title "access to all – dream or reality?" Only few of them said that it was a dream – it seems that the majority shared the opinion that it is reality.

Needs of the most vulnerable

There was also a workshop on how public services can meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Some of the solutions presented include consulting those in need so we can plan for the provision of decent services; making sure that the social sector is not overlooked, particularly in the debates on the future of Europe and the European Social Model, and reforming the way we provide and finance public services. Participants agreed that European national governments tend to play a more active role in setting national quality standards: Does this infringe on local autonomy? Should the national level set standards? They also agreed that vulnerable people also have their expertise to offer, and that disabled people need autonomy and respect.

Oh yes, the money

Of course, local and regional authorities need to have sufficient funding if they want to realize their projects: "But this problem is encountered across Europe,"

as Andrzej Porawski, Executive Director of the Association of Polish Cities, points out. "Particular attention should be paid to an efficient lobbying as well as to an efficient management, while also seeking cooperation with the private sector." The prospect of such cooperation from now on is held out, to the municipalities and regions, by the largest bank in the world: "Up to now we only financed projects up to a total volume of 25 million euros. But now we understand that this tradition is not taking effect on the local level and therefore we now concentrate on multi-sectoral projects," as Brian Field, Senior Economist at the Project Department of the European Investment Bank, explains. "Very good news for our municipalities," Porawski and his colleagues agree.

Improving evaluation

Some 70 persons attended the workshop on "improving and evaluating our public services", moderated by Jon Bloomfield, from the Birmingham University. Jon Bloomfield presented the new study he has compiled for CEMR on central governments' approaches towards local government on performance and cost-effectiveness. José Ernesto D'Oliveira, Mayor of Evora, stressed that local and regional authorities need to develop new management models based on good go-

vernance, democracy, and accountability to citizens to increase the quality of services at the same or lower cost. Halvdan Skard, Vice President of CEMR, presented a networking exercise done by Norwegian local authorities for benchmarking the performance of local public services. Andrzej Pruszkowski, Vice President of CEMR and Mayor of Lublin, explained that delivering public services is a relatively new competence for Polish local and regional authorities, and that they have inherited poor quality infrastructure and organisation from the central government. Huge investments in infrastructure are required. The participants insisted on the need to do performance benchmarking at the national and European level.

Delivering services

The city of Valladolid puts a lot of emphasis on high environmental and social standards of its services, according to its mayor, Mr Francisco Javier León de la Riva. He gave the example of the public transport, which comprises 83 busses, 85% of them run with gas and are equipped for the needs of people with special needs. In the current debate on how services should be delivered, for Keith Whitmore, Member of Manchester City Council, "there is no single optimum service delivery strategy but rather a mix involving the appropriate use of in house provision, outsourcing, public, and public private partnerships, and sometimes outright sale or transfer of the service to another provider." Jens Lattmann from the German association of cities shared this view and showed some willingness to discuss a potential European framework directive on public services. This message was welcomed by Gilles Savary, member of the European Parliament and a strong supporter of a legislative measure. He strongly stressed the need for CEMR to engage in the political debate. In general, participants were in favour that CEMR played an active role in the debate to defend the interests of local public services.



Hans Joachim Pagels



One of the key decisions taken in Innsbruck was to unite CEMR and its member associations under one roof in Brussels. That is what we had been talking about for 10 years! I have also enjoyed the workshops about public services and about adapting to the demographic challenge, especially Saxony-Anhalt's contribution. I have learnt much from their practical approach to problems.

Foto: Lechner



It is quite impressive that the fact of demographic change has led to a wide-spread problem awareness. A few years ago this was not the case. Now the problem is recognized, even though there is no single way as yet to solve it. The solution lies, much rather, with a whole bundle of different approaches. And this is exactly where such get-togethers are such an unbeatable opportunity, as by way of this networking we can observe which of the various solutions have been tried and tested. Each of the municipalities and regions can thus profit from these experiences.

Foto: Lechner



The General Assembly is important to us, because normally we always deal with particularities. Here we get the opportunity to present our work, to speak to others and to understand what other municipalities are dealing with, and then to come up with new ideas. On this occasion we personally meet the people we have been in contact with only by mail or by telephone – so that future contacts will also be different and better.

Foto: Altabadano

Regions of the future

Local and regional authorities in South-East Europe. Problems and challenges, but above all the chances were the focus of discussions.



Mykola Fedoruk and Yavuz Mildon discussed about the region of South-East-Europe

Foto: Lechner

It is neither the problem child of Europe, nor is it the instant paradise – in fact, the South-East European region, including the Ukraine, is an exciting and promising component of the European continent. Which fact accounts for the great interest awarded this topic during this year's general assembly. "All of us at CEMR have long since realized that we have to go on actively supporting the local and regional authorities in South-East Europe.

We have to do so, above all, in order to win strong partners for the future," as Georgios Giannopoulos, CEMR Vice-President and Mayor of Rhodes, made clear at the beginning of the debate. And this applies all the more as a special situation has emerged on the Balkans in the wake of the wars in the 1990s that still persists. Further efforts can therefore contribute to a strengthening of the whole region and thus to a strengthening of Europe.

An assessment that Yavuz Mildon, President of the Chamber of the Regions at CLRAE, unreservedly agrees with: "We can already look back on a very good cooperation with CEMR in the context of democratisation efforts in South-East Europe, and we have to continue working toward a permanent establishment of stability and security in the region." Tasks that Mildon illustrates by way of a number of particular projects: "Additional incentives for young people in the democratic process in local and regional authorities, as well as the peaceful coexistence with minorities, these things have to be given further attention to." Mykola Fedoruk, Vice-President of the Union of Ukrai-

nian Cities and Communities, speaks at first-hand when she says: "We are involved in building a new Europe and we want to become an integral part of this Europe. To do so the Ukraine will have to overcome the existing barriers with Europe, realize economic and social goals, and create a civil, democratic society." This homework, however, cannot be done without the help of Europe. How such help could look like, is outlined by Ginka Tchavdarova, Executive Director of NALAS. This network of regional authorities in South-East Europe comprises twelve member states that look to emulate the work of CEMR: "We have established something of a small CEMR and are working hard on integrating the wealth of information, the expertise, and also the respective needs so as to learn from each other." The partners can only profit from each other, as is also confirmed by Erich Pramböck, Secretary General of the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns: "We have built a network in which we concentrate our knowledge and our expertise and which the regions in South-East Europe can at all times fall back on."

"Friends for life"

Town twinnings. Partnerships between municipalities not only serve interchange, they also entail mutual support – examples of cooperation.

To get together, yet still to preserve one's own roots – this is an important aspect when it comes to the building of a common Europe that can also be pushed forward by town twinnings. With these words Anders Knappe, Mayor of Karlstad and chair of the CEMR working group on twinning, kicked off the special session on twinning. Links between municipalities, that can help advance cohesion and social inclusion, were presented at a round table. One case in question being the integration and inclusion of immigrants, as practiced, for example, by the Sicilian municipality of Mazara del Vallo and by Mahida in Tunisia. The Italian town is developing concepts that are supposed to make living together easier for immigrants and natives, and also to make for stable jobs and to promote integration, as a participant reported.

One goal of the partnership, by now lasting some 16 years, between the Bel-

gian municipality of Geel and Slatina in Romania is to set up medical and social support structures for the latter – a project that both sides profit from in equal measure. "We have learned how important it is to do voluntary work. Through this partnership the citizens of Geel have realized that what matters is not just to solve problems but to create chances," as a second participant observed about the partnership that has made it possible to create sustainable structures in Slatina.

Another project, emerging from the European Year of Sport 2004, was taken up – among others – by the partnership, existing since 1999, between Gattatico (Italy) and Zierenberg (Germany). Young people from both municipalities took the motto "say yes to sport – say no to drugs, violence, and racism" as a starting point for discussion. And they could put the results into practice right away in their home-



"Say yes to sport – say no to drugs, violence, and racism", presented by Giulia Denti

towns. In order to build a successful partnership, what is needed above all is mutual trust – people with whom a long-term cooperation is possible and who understand the goals and the needs of their partners, as the overall tenor among the speakers could be summed up.

Foto: Lechner

Impressions of the second day: workshops and discussions



A charter for equality of women and men in local life

Vicenta Bosch Palanca. Chair of CEMR Committee of women elected representatives of local and regional authorities presents the charter that is to be launched on May 12 in Innsbruck



Vicenta Bosch Palanca and Jeremy Smith

This charter is the brainchild of CEMR. Why and how was it created? This charter is the fruit of a long commitment on the side of our organization for equality of men and women. However, in spite of the progress made, equality between women and men is far from having been achieved. We thought we had to take far-reaching measures. The first step was to put into practice a methodology for equality in local life, which has been very successful. The charter is the next step, to wit: a means of encoura-

ging municipalities, towns, provinces and regions represented by CEMR, to politically commit themselves to fostering equality.

Who was involved in its drafting, and how did you cope with cultural differences from one country to another?

This charter is the result of a process of reflection and elaboration towards which women elected representatives of local and regional governments in almost all those countries from

which our members originate, that is, more than thirty. We met on the occasion of seminars, in Lisbon and in Limassol, Cyprus; as well as during a large conference in Brussels last February, during which the charter project was discussed. We joined the forces of several experts of international acclaim, such as Françoise Gaspard – who advises the United Nations –, Diane Bunyan – who advises the Council of Europe – and Eliane Vogel-Polsky – a lawyer well known all over Europe.

I would like to emphasise that this project received a lot of support from the European Commission within the framework of the fifth community action programme, which was vital to the success of our project, as well as financial support from numerous partners.

What would you say are the most important measures the charter sets out, and why?

As a woman elected representative, I think that there can be no progress in equality without there being more female decision-makers, but the charter as a whole is very important. I am well aware that it cannot be put into practice from one day to the next, but it can become reality by applying these different measures one by one.

It is a very demanding document, but you have to ask for a lot to get a little. The national associations that are members of CEMR have a key role to play, since they will have to launch the charter in their countries.

What part did the European Parliament play in this process?

The charter obtained a lot of acclaim during the conference attended by Anna Zaborska, chairwoman of committee on women rights and gender equality of the European Parliament. Obviously, the support of the EP is essential if this charter is to become reality.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF CEMR 2006 – PROGRAMME:

Friday May 12th

9 h 30 – 11 h 00	SPECIAL SESSION ON INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES: the European contribution to the millennium development goals campaign (Saal Tirol)
11 h 00 – 12 h 00	Launch of the European Charter for equality of women and men in local life (Saal Tirol)
12 h 00 – 13 h 00	CLOSING CEREMONY (Saal Tirol)
13 h 15	Lunch



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