



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

from: General Secretariat
to: Delegations

Subject: Partial summary record of the 138th meeting of the Bureau and 96th meeting of the Plenary of the **Committee of the Regions** held in Brussels on 17, 18 and 19 July 2012

I. MEETING OF THE BUREAU

The meeting was chaired by Ms BRESSO (PES, IT)

ITEM 3

Statement by the President

Ms BRESSO recalled her meeting with Mr Van ROMPUY before the June European Council and highlighted the reference made by the EUCO conclusions to the local authorities.

ITEM 11

Presentation of the report "Europe can do better - best practices for reducing administrative burdens" by Dr Edmund STOIBER

Ms BRESSO welcomed Mr STOIBER, Chair of the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders on Administrative Burdens (HLG), set up in 2008 in the framework of the European Commission

Action Programme on the Reduction of Administrative Burdens.

Mr STOIBER announced that Mr BARROSO, President of the Commission, had extended the term of the HLG until the end of the Commission mandate, in 2014.

Mr STOIBER drew a direct link between the political crisis of confidence on the part of EU citizens and the widespread opinion amongst them, that Brussels was a bureaucratic monster, and concluded that bureaucracy was the biggest fear for EU citizens.

Mr STOIBER recalled that in its first mandate the HLG had already adopted 30 opinions with a savings potential estimated to exceed EUR 41 billion annually. Mr STOIBER underscored that point by saying that almost a third of the administrative burdens on businesses derived from EU legislation. According to a German study, three quarter of the new legal acts introduced in Germany between 2003 and 2008 concerned transposition of EU law. In Mr STOIBER's view, the main problem was not EU law, but the fact that it was not properly implemented. In this context, he mentioned some of the 74 best practices examples of the HLG 'Europe can do better' report. As for the EU legislation, he praised the Commission approach towards smart regulation, that involved an impact assessment of the collateral damages new legislation could entail. He recalled that the EP had created 30 posts to assess the impact of EU law and that Mr Van Rompuy was also reflecting on such assessments. He called on the Members of the Committee to read the report and draw inspiration from the examples of best practices it contained to propagate them¹.

Mr OSVALD (PSE, CZ) warned against creating new bureaucracy to combat it and stressed the importance of the market in allowing fair competition. He complained that the Commission had not taken up good practices at international level to ease public procurement rules (he referred in particular to the use of ISO standards to fight corruption, which are considered discriminatory by EU law).

¹http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat_general/admin_burden/best_practice_report/docs/bp_report_signature_en.pdf

Mr CARNEIRO (PSE, PT) recalled that the entrepreneurial spirit was stifled by red tape and underlined the efforts made in Portugal to apply electronic procedures to public procurement. Mr TOPE (ALDE, UK), CoR observer at the HLG, recalled the UK example of 1 -for- 1 legislation, meaning that a new legislative act could only be adopted if at least another one was repealed. Mr LAMBERTZ (PSE, BE) considered that the question of red tape should not be looked at at different levels (EU/State/Regions), but needed to be addressed as an issue of multilevel governance. Mr ANDERSEN (ALDE, DK) enquired about the means to reduce red tape and considered that the CoR could set a good example by reducing its costs by 6% every year. Mr PELLA (EPP, IT) insisted on the importance of reducing red tape for SMEs, in particular to allow them a level playing field with third- country competitors. Mr ORAVEC (EPP, SK) raised doubts about the effectiveness of public procurement rules for selecting companies with a good cost/quality ratio. He complained about the heavy burden they represented for smaller local authorities and supported. In his closing remarks, Mr STOIBER considered that bureaucracy was necessary to avoid arbitrary action and to implement law. He recalled that many of the issues that had been raised were already answered in the report and stressed the fact that one of the core findings in the report was that 20% of the implementing rules generated 80% of the costs. He recalled in particular the difficulty in reducing red tape, for instance, in the agriculture and health protection sectors. Nevertheless, the Single Market needed a common regulation, which was also in the interest of the SMEs which otherwise would have to adapt to 27 different legal systems. He concluded by stressing the importance of transparency and independence in assessing the impact of legislation and recalled that only four MS had independent bodies assessing such impact.

II. PLENARY SESSION

ITEM 5

Statement by Mr Mavroyiannis, Cyprus Deputy Minister for European Affairs, on behalf of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union: presentation of the priorities of the Cyprus Presidency

In his welcome address, Ms BRESSO indicated the cohesion policy as key for the local and regional authorities in helping to resolve the crisis and stressed that ongoing negotiations on the MFF were important for the Committee of the Regions.

Mr MAVROYIANNIS expressed the commitment of the Cyprus Presidency to fully playing its role of honest broker during the six- month Presidency and considered that small countries could also provide a good Presidency. He added that the issue of Cyprus would not interfere with action taken by Cyprus as holder of the EU Presidency. In his view, the main target was to achieve visible and concrete results, through a bottom -up approach, which made the role of the CoR key. He then focused on the four priorities of the Cyprus Presidency and recalled that a more efficient and sustainable Europe was central to overcoming the economic and the growth crisis: in this context the MFF should help to achieve the goals of the EU 2020 strategy. He added that the MFF also needed to be consistent with other reform dossiers, such as the CAP reform, Horizon 2020, Trans-European Networks (TEN) and the Connecting Europe Facility. As for the second priority, concerning a better performing and growth-based economy, he indicated that the fiscal consolidation dossier had to be balanced with provisions for a sustainable growth and mentioned the conclusions of the June 2012 European Council calling for job creation, in particular for young people. He stated that the forthcoming months would be crucial for the European Monetary Union and mentioned the new economic governance dossier and the reform of the financial service sector for the completion of the Single Market. Concerning the priority of a Europe more relevant to its citizens, Mr MAVROYIANNIS mentioned the EU 2020 strategy as key for growth and employment, in particular for the younger generation and recalled the importance of quality of spending and simplification of procedures. Since no magic solution was at hand for growth, the only way was to go through existing programmes and extract all their potential for growth, and he expressed the view that the Community method should be used to address all the legislative files. He also referred to the active ageing dossier to enhance solidarity between generations and to the need to finalise the Common European Asylum system by the end of 2012. As for the external dimension, he highlighted the importance of the neighbourhood policy, in particular in the South East region, to address the aftermath of the Arab Spring. He gave assurance that the enlargement agenda would continue to be based on a strong conditionality. Finally, he stated that food security around the world would be strengthened and that the external trade policy would be reinforced.

In the debate that followed, Mr MAVROYIANNIS agreed with Mr SCHNEIDER (EPP, DE) that the structural funds were the best tool to foster growth and jobs. He recalled that the June European Council had made it clear that fiscal consolidation had to be reconciled with growth and in this context stressed the importance of the MFF negotiations. He recalled that the Cyprus Presidency had already held several bilateral meetings on MFF and that this would be discussed next week at the General Affairs Council and in an informal meeting of ministers in Cyprus at the end of August. He confirmed that work on cohesion was progressing well, as were the contacts with Ms HUBNER, REGI Committee chair. Mr MAVROYIANNIS told Mr LAMBERTZ (PES, BE), who had referred to the political situation in Romania, that the EU protected the rule of law and that the separation of powers was an essential part of it. He added that the results of the Commission report would be scrutinised to ensure that the situation was compatible with the EU treaties. He then turned to Mr VERKERK (ALDE, NL), who had stated that Cyprus reunification was not just an internal issue, and insisted that it would not be fair to address internal problems under the cover of the EU Presidency. As Mr SILBERG (EA, EE) had indicated that youth unemployment, green growth and food security were amongst the issues that affected citizens most, Mr MAVROYIANNIS explained that most of these issues were the subject of two exploratory opinions that the Cyprus Presidency had submitted to the CoR.

ITEM 6

Statement by Ms MALMSTRÖM, Commissioner for Home Affairs

Ms MALMSTRÖM addressed issues such as the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, the Asylum package and in particular the enhanced intra-EU Solidarity in the Field of Asylum. Concerning the EU financial instruments in Home Affairs, she stressed that the reform would make it easier for the local authorities to deal both with security and protection of people's fundamental rights. She also underlined the fact that migration issues could better be managed at local level than from Brussels. In particular, she insisted that one -size -fits- all responses would be ineffective. The Commissioner told Mr KALOGEROPOULOS (EPP, EL), who had raised a question on Schengen, that the European Council had asked the Commission for a strengthened, EU -based Schengen evaluation system. Since the peer review by MS had proven inefficient, the Commission had therefore chosen a legal basis that allowed both an enhanced role for the Commission (a 'binding' Recommendation from the Commission), and a democratic role for the EP, and therefore had opted for co-decision as the legal basis. Ms MALMSTRÖM told Mr VENDOLA (PSE, IT)

that a quick test needed to be introduced for asylum seekers, in order to distinguish between legal and illegal migrants. She agreed with Ms ANSARI (ALDE, UK) that gender equality was key and that it could have a strong impact on economic growth. Concerning the cases of immigrants in Greece, Malta and Italy, she told Mr MUSOTTO (EA, IT) that Frontex had been given an extended mandate and that a satellite control system had been put in place both to secure boundaries and to avoid tragedies. In this context, contacts with third countries had been taken to reinforce the possibility of returns. As for internal relocation of migrants, Ms MALMSTRÖM recalled that it depended on the willingness of individual MS.

ITEM 13

Statement by Mr HOYER, President of the European Investment Bank (EIB)

Mr HOYER delivered the speech in annex 1.

In the debate that followed, Mr HOYER told Mr VAN DEN BRANDE (EPP, BE) that EIB remained a bank, although its mission was set out by the EU Treaties. In this sense reconsidered, it still needed to raise funds on the market and therefore had to preserve its triple A rating. According to Mr HOYER, it would not be possible to withdraw from such countries to concentrate on the EU internal activities because of the crisis. He explained to Mr LAMBERTZ that the bank could reach out to the SMEs through regional banks, as the EIB had not enough staff to manage smaller projects. Therefore, such projects needed to be financed through the cohesion funds (to Mr KROCHMAL, EA-PL). He also considered that more flexibility should be introduced into the programming of the Structural Funds. In his reply to Mr O'DONOGHUE (ALDE-EI) on the subject of project bonds, he expressed the view that the latter were not a panacea and that he thought it wise that the Commission had started with a pilot project.

ITEMS 8 to 11

Elections

The CoR plenary elected the following:

Mr VALCARCEL SISO (EPP, ES) as President;
Ms BRESSO (PES, IT) as first Vice-President;

Mr SCHNEIDER (EPP, DE), Mr LAMBERTZ (PES, BE), Mr VERKERK (ALDE, NL) and Mr SILBERG (EA, EE) as political group chairs; and the list of names of members of the Bureau in annex 2.

This elections will cover the second half of the current term of office and will take effect on 11 August 2012.

ITEM 34

Date of the next meeting

The next meeting will take place on 8 October 2012 (bureau) and on 9-10 October (plenary).

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address a plenary session of the Committee of the Regions for the first time.

Allow me, first of all, to congratulate Mr. Ramon Luis Valcárcel Siso on being elected the new President of this institution. Mr. Valcárcel, I'm looking forward to our future cooperation.

A balanced development of the European Union, including its less-developed regions, is the oldest operational priority of the European Investment Bank.

This session is a fitting opportunity for me to outline to you not only the regional dimension of our activities but also a wider role of the "EU Bank" in bringing about economic recovery.

I.

Europe is diverse. Europe is multi-layered. The challenges it faces might be global, but the answers often originate at the local level. After all, this is what the EU principle of subsidiarity is based on - the idea that decisions must be taken as closely as possible to the citizen.

Sustainable solutions can only be achieved when all levels of government are involved – and this is something all of you here can relate to.

When an economic crisis like the one we're in now lasts too long, it may, after a while, come across as a mere statistic – this many more unemployed, that much of a GDP contraction.

But behind every job loss is a human story; every business closure has wider repercussions for the community.

You, the elected regional representatives, are the closest to these communities; you know the stories. And the EIB understands, because it was created with regional cohesion in mind.

Local and regional authorities are important partners in our activities and we support them. This is our contribution to strengthening the fabric of Europe, to promoting the development and competitiveness across the EU.

Social and economic cohesion has been among the principal objectives of the EIB since 1958 when, under the terms of the Treaty of Rome, it was tasked with supporting projects stimulating economic growth in the less developed regions of the European Union.

Back then, EU regional policy had not yet been defined. A decade later, the founding strategy - a European Commission document called "A Regional Policy for the Community" - stressed the need to coordinate available financial resources to promote regional integration, and underlined the role of the European Investment Bank in the process.

The expansion of the EIB's size and activities over the years has in no way eclipsed this priority.

And there's still a lot of work to be done to narrow the differences between various corners of Europe: nearly one in four EU citizens lives in a region where GDP is still less than 75% of the EU average; 17 regions have an unemployment rate of double the EU average or higher - and this may actually get worse.

Just last week, the International Labour Organization warned the eurozone was at risk of losing 4.5 million jobs over the coming four years unless there's a major policy shift in favour of job creation.

II.

The "EU Bank," whose shareholders are the 27 Member States, assists the Union's regional policy in three principal ways corresponding to the three pillars of its activity:

by lending to priority projects;

by blending its loans with EU budgetary means, mainly the EU Structural Funds;

and by advising or technical assistance.

The focus in convergence lending has been mainly on the following aspects:

providing support to innovative firms and SMEs

developing information and communication networks

helping to improve the urban environment;

and accelerating the integration of outlying regions by building trans-European networks.

In 2011, the EIB lent 20.2 billion euro to the convergence regions hit hardest by the crisis - some 38% of total lending in the EU.

EIB loans are an important complement to grants. In the current programming period we have substantially increased our co-financing of EU Structural Funds to help the Member States to absorb Community funding.

Structural Programme Loans are a popular instrument supporting investment programmes managed by public authorities. In 2011 they amounted to 1.6 billion euro and actually helped to ensure continued public investments in transport, education, healthcare, Information and Communication Technologies, rural development and renewable energy in many corners of the EU.

In fact, cooperation is the name of the game for the EIB. We know that in the current difficult budgetary situation other sources of financing need to be raised on top of our loans to cover our shareholders' investment needs.

This is why the EIB and its subsidiary, the European Investment Fund, have worked closely with the European Commission and other providers of funds to set up a range of instruments providing technical assistance and helping to improve access to finance. Let me mention the prominent ones:

JASPERS, which helps new Member States to better prepare projects supported from Structural and Cohesion Funds;

JESSICA, helping authorities in regions receiving structural funds to support investments in sustainable urban development more effectively;

JEREMIE, allowing the Member States to use part of structural funds to finance SMEs by means of equity, loans or guarantees, through a revolving holding fund;

And ELENA (European Local Energy Assistance), aimed at preparing quality projects in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.

Ideally, we would like to see some changes to the current rules for using Structural and Cohesion Funds to assure their best possible utilization.

For example, we think it would be beneficial if unallocated funds originally earmarked for projects included in an operational plan could be used to finance other projects linked to the objectives of Europe 2020 to foster growth and job creation. This flexibility is most needed given that the Operational Programmes were approved well before the current crisis.

III.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The economic turmoil of the past few years has highlighted the key role of public financing institutions such as the European Investment Bank in providing credit for vital investments. The continued availability of long-term finance through public policy lenders has been an important component of Europe's crisis response.

Investment plays a central role in the transition from a crisis to a growth path, and in staying on that growth path. Investment is needed, in a very abstract sense, in European unity, cohesion, institution and policies – in brief, in creating more Europe. But investment is also needed in people, in knowledge and in physical assets, to foster growth in European regions.

Long-term investment finance is what the EIB does best. Over the years it has grown into the biggest multinational bank of its kind; much bigger than the World Bank or any other regional development bank, in terms of lending, funding, and debt.

The EIB's response to the crisis started very early on, in September 2008, as part of the European Economic Recovery Plan. Last year, the Bank signed financing contracts for 61 billion euro. This marked a gradual return to pre-2008 lending levels after having made an exceptional additional lending effort over three years.

Let me underline that the EIB is not – and never has been - an alternative to budget discipline or the

necessary structural reforms. It is, nevertheless, one of the tools the EU has at its disposal in its efforts to restore jobs, stimulate innovation and boost competitiveness.

The Bank is being called upon to keep up high lending volumes to finance viable projects which, due to the credit crunch, would otherwise have little chance of attracting financing.

To allow us to do that, EU Heads of States and government shareholders decided at a summit last month to increase our capital by 10 billion euro by the end of this year.

This money, when paid in, will preserve the risk-bearing capacity of the Bank exhausted by its contribution to the real economy during the three and a half years of continuous crisis.

Conservative risk management is the alpha and omega of our success. It underpins our top credit standing. This, in turn, enables us to fund ourselves on the finest terms available and pass this advantage on to our own long-term borrowers.

For clients, our conditions – interest rates, but also the maturity of the loans – are generally more favourable than what they would obtain elsewhere.

Against the 10-billion cash contribution to our capital – a buffer if you will - we could be able to lend an additional 60 billion euro over three years (from 2013-2015), on top of the average 48 billion a year envisaged by our current business plan.

Let me stress that the EIB does not actually lend taxpayers' money. On the contrary, as I've already highlighted, we fund ourselves on the capital markets and extend those borrowed funds to the EU economy [The EIB is the world's largest supranational bond issuer, raising 76 billion euro last year – almost as much as the consolidated funding of all other multilateral financial institutions combined].

The 60 billion of additional lending will focus squarely on Europe and on sectors with a direct impact on long-term growth potential where the EIB has significant experience and can 'hit the ground running,' so to say.

The European SME sector is one of them. Between 2002 and 2010, 85% of total employment growth in the EU was attributable to SMEs.

It is also important to support sustainable energy and to increase investment in research, development, innovation and education – the main drivers of productivity, competitiveness, long-term economic growth and employment in advanced economies.

Investment in this sector is critical for Europe if it does not want to be side-lined by new players in the global game. This is a top priority for me and, I know, for many of our shareholders.

Importantly for this Committee, I also want to stress that we are, and will remain, the Bank of all Member States, not just a bank of the South, East, North or West. We are concerned with the cohesion and prosperity of the entire EU. We consider it very important to operate in all markets, to finance projects contributing to the Europe 2020 strategy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A decisive push is underway to get the European Union back on a path of sustainable growth – in parallel, of course, with indispensable fiscal consolidation.

It is my personal belief that we find ourselves at a crossroads of the European construction. We must act with resolve and determination to preserve the EU's position in the world, to help it punch its real weight on the global stage.

Coming back to my opening remarks, I believe that the continuous development of regions and cities – many of which have been severely affected by the social and industrial impact of the economic crisis – must remain one of the building blocks of our economic strategy, one that will ultimately determine our success.

Thank you for your attention

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