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#### NOTE

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Partial summary record of the 160th meeting of the Bureau and 112th Plenary session of the <b>European Committee of the Regions</b> , held 2 and 3-4 June 2015 in Brussels.

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**On 2 June 2015, the Bureau of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) held an exchange of views with Mr BUZEK (EPP, PL), Chair of the European Parliament's (EP) Conference of Committee Chairs (CCC) and of the EP Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE). He confirmed the EP's readiness to cooperate closer with the CoR. Satisfaction was expressed by both sides on the development of the cooperation between the EP and the CoR.**

**On 3 June, rapporteurs from the EP's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) exchanged views at the CoR plenary session on improving the functioning of the EU. Mr VERHOSTADT, supported by Ms BRESSO and Mr BROK, felt that a change to the Treaties was needed to remove all executive powers from the Council and give them to the Commission. A two-speed EU with an independent and enhanced fiscal capacity was also needed.**

**On 4 June, President JUNCKER presented his investment plan, which was closely connected with the issue of structural reforms in the Member States and fiscal consolidation, to provide new generations with a more secure future.**

**Concerning migration, the President of the Commission called on Member States to endorse the repartition plan proposed by the Commission. His call was warmly supported by members of the Committee.**

## **MEETING OF THE BUREAU**

The President of the CoR Mr MARKKULA (EPP, FI) referred to the exchange of views he had had with the CCC on 19 May in Strasbourg and said he had been impressed by the Chairs' positive approach concerning the CoR. He recalled the cooperation agreement with the EP and reiterated the CoR's willingness to contribute in a complementary way to the EP's work, including through impact assessments. Mr MARKKULA expressed his satisfaction that practical cooperation between rapporteurs was already established, but said that it should be further developed.

Mr BUZEK focused on three issues: cooperation with the CoR, the ITRE Committee's priorities, and general trends in the European integration process. He very much appreciated the quality of the CoR's work and expressed his conviction that the CoR could make a valuable contribution to the EP's work on account of CoR members' excellent knowledge of local and regional situations.

More generally, Mr BUZEK stressed the EP's wish to contribute in practical terms and to influence the Commission's work programme. He said that the CCC would very soon adopt a list of priorities and would have an exchange of views with First Vice-President TIMMERMANS on 7 July. In September, President JUNCKER would address the EP on the Commission's work programme for 2016.

Mr BUZEK's remarks were very well received by the members of Bureau. Speakers highlighted the need to develop practical cooperation with the EP's committees and rapporteurs.

## **PLENARY SESSION**

### **Item 4. Improving the functioning of the European Union: Lisbon Treaty and beyond**

Three members of the AFCO Committee – Ms BRESSO (S&D, IT), Mr BROK (EPP, DE) (co-rapporteurs for Improving the functioning of the EU, building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty) and Mr VERHOFSTADT (ALDE, BE) (rapporteur for Possible evolutions and adjustments of the current institutional set up of the EU) – spoke at the CoR Plenary on 3 June 2015, where they emphasised the importance of subsidiarity and the community method as a way of overcoming the economic and political crisis faced by the EU.

Mr VERHOFSTADT, emphasising in particular the importance of subsidiarity and of discontinuing the multilateral approach, referred to four priority areas that needed to be addressed by means of a treaty change:

- reform of the Council, to be transformed into a second chamber with all executive powers transferred to the Commission;
- review of the role of the European Council and removal of the need for unanimity in its decision-making processes; enhancing the EFSP and the EFDP, in particular through the creation of an EU army;
- building up an independent fiscal capacity through more own resources, with a Commissioner (read: Minister) in charge of the treasury;
- addressing Europe's 10 different speed configurations by reducing opt-in and opt-out clauses to just two options: full or associate membership.

Mr VERHOFSTADT underlined that the latest EUROBAROMETER results had shown an increase in Europeans' trust in the EU and he felt that euroscepticism rather came from some national political elites which feared to lose status in a more open reality.

Ms BRESSO considered that the election results in the UK and Poland called for a new European narrative based on subsidiarity and democratic control.

She felt that the untapped potential of the Lisbon Treaty could pave the way for the priorities set out by Mr VERHOFSTADT, and in particular:

- allowing for a two-speed Europe, as suggested by the paper of the (4+1) Presidents to be presented at the end of this month;
- the completion of the economic governance, through a 'Juncker plus' plan to enhance EU fiscal capacity through own resources;
- enhancing subsidiarity and the role of national parliaments in the European semester;
- a common policy for immigration.

Mr BROK largely supported this approach. He and Ms BRESSO felt that local authorities should be represented in the second chamber (Council).

Mr GAMALLO (ES), on behalf of the EPP group, considered that treaty change should not be an intergovernmental process. Ms DUDEN (DE) on behalf of the PES asked for the CoR to be included in any future IGC (supported by Mr VAN STAA, EPP-AT). Mr EVANS (UK), on behalf of ECR, considered that greater localism was needed to achieve a better Europe. Strengthening of the EU through local authorities was suggested by Mr SOMERS (ALDE, BE), in particular through a down-top approach (Mr VANLOWE, EA-BE).

Mr LAMBERTZ (PES, BE), Vice President of the Committee, made it clear that the CoR did not intend to enter into competition with the EP (or with the Council); Mr MARKKULA added that it was against creating new institutions, but looked for an evolution of its institutional role in the context of a treaty change.

Concerning the Interinstitutional agreement on better law-making (IIA), Mr MARKKULA regretted that the Commission's proposal did not take enough account of the role of the CoR. Ms BRESSO agreed that the Commission proposal was not satisfactory.

#### **Item 10. Statement by Mr JUNCKER, President of the European Commission - debate on the investment plan**

Mr JUNCKER was welcomed by Mr MARKKULA who called for closer cooperation with the Commission and stated that the IIA should be key to that aim. He also raised the issue of a clear differentiation between regional and local representatives and lobbyists in the transparency register.

Mr JUNCKER apologised for his sleepy appearance, due to a very short night after meeting with PM TSIPRAS about the Greek debt crisis. Talks were to continue later that morning. He then stressed that the Commission planned to concentrate on essential issues. He regretted that the EP had been unable to adopt a resolution on the Commission work programme of 23 new legislative proposals, which the EP considered too few.

Concerning the stability and growth pact, he indicated that some flexibility had been mainstreamed into it, but this did not make it a 'flexibility pact'. He made it clear that fiscal consolidation, structural reforms and the investment plan (known as the 'Juncker plan', probably to find a scapegoat in case it failed, he noted) were three of a kind to relaunch growth in the EU.

He invited regional authorities to present ambitious and high-risk new investment plans. Plans would be selected by European Investment Bank experts. He felt that taking away the selection procedure from the Commission would avoid undue pressure being placed on commissioners. He recalled that a special investment programme worth EUR 35 billion until 2020 had been proposed to the Greek authorities, which proved that the Commission was not just pursuing austerity.

President Juncker told Ms MARINI (PES, IT), who inquired in particular on the social dimension of the Commission programme, that the social dimension of EU policies would be taken into account and recalled that he had decided to have Mr DOMBROVSKIS as Vice President in charge of both the euro and the social dialogue to underline this link. He announced that the Posting of Workers Directive would undergo a refit exercise. Concerning migration, he felt that the effort required from the EU was small compared to the 2 million migrants hosted in Jordan or in a tiny country like Lebanon. This prompted an applause from Members of the CoR. He agreed with Mr SCHNEIDER (EPP, DE) that red tape was hindering free initiative and that this was addressed in the Better Regulation proposal. He agreed with Mr VERKERK (ALDE, NL) that a fully fledged urban policy agenda was still lacking, and felt that an EU strategy should be drawn up, in particular to create a network of the innovation plans that already existed at city level. He told Mr SZWABSKI (EA, PL) that foreign policy issues were mainly for the Council and the High Representative. He underlined the fact that, although no new accessions would occur during the current term of the Commission, negotiations were ongoing with candidate countries. He assured Mr KEYMER (ECR, UK) that the transparency register would not apply to elected representatives of the regional and local authorities.

Mr MARKKULA called for a clarification of paragraph 17 of the Agreement between the European Parliament and the European Commission on the transparency register<sup>1</sup>, which he felt was problematic for local representatives.

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 277, 19.9.2014, p. 11.