

Speech of Jiří Buriánek, Secretary General of CoR, to staff

2 September 2014

Dear colleagues,

I would like to welcome you back from the Summer break and I am looking forward to starting with you as of now!

On 24 June 2014, I was truly honoured to be elected by the Committee's Bureau as Secretary-General taking over the baton from Gerhard Stahl and the interim Secretary-General Daniel Janssens. Both led the administration with integrity, passion, dedication and professionalism. I have no doubt that we will continue to face new opportunities and challenges together in this decisive moment of a wake of a new EU legislature.

I have worked over the last two decades in the European Commission, the UN context and the Council of the EU, which entailed intensive negotiations with the European Parliament and regular contacts with the Committee of the Regions. Based on this experience, I am positive that we can jointly render a significant added value to the European process.

My way to the Committee of the Regions is at the same time influenced by the fact that I could witness the effectiveness of regional policy as a cross-border tool, both under the still prevailing iron curtain, but also after 1989 in the Czech/Bavarian/Austrian regional triangle.

After the recent EP elections we are restarting our work within a new political setting of the European Union: the citizens of Europe are calling for a shift in respect to their involvement in areas of their real interest. This is a clear mandate to all European institutions and notably the Committee of the Regions.

At such a moment it is also good to take a short look back at the origins of the Committee of the Regions:

The former President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, mentions in his historic retrospective the achievement of the creation of the Committee of the Regions in the same line with the previous introduction of direct elections to the EP.

This has its dedicated logic: with a politically operationally widening and deepening EU, we need also a democratic and emotional deepening of our relation to the citizens. This assumption is also confirmed by the fact that Delors initiated the creation of the Committee of the Regions as a move which needs to be done in parallel with the flagship project of the creation of the Single Market. So cities and regions and their arm of the Committee of the Regions have the mission and the potential to become the highway to hearts and hands of the European citizens.

In order to fulfill this we must even more effectively put in place what innovation experts would call "an effective customer interface" because, in this respect, all leading innovation experts agree: an effective interactive platform with customers and the follow up of their opinions is key for the success of every innovative enterprise. We urgently need to reinforce this principle for our "Enterprise Europe" process.

But let me not be misunderstood: the EU is far more than a political enterprise in the narrow technical sense. Let me share with you the words of my compatriot Vaclav Havel, the former president of the Czechoslovak and later Czech Republic, who compared the EU in his first key speech to the EP to a technically excellently working clockwork, the soul of which is however needing the further strengthening by values and here I am sure he meant also the democratic and participative values to which also the Committee of the Regions is called upon to render an essential

contribution.

Looking now to our future, this call for action is focussed on three key areas:

1. We are starting on the basis of a new inter-institutional framework which needs in the coming weeks and months to be put in action. Excellent work has been done on the last months together with the EP and the respective agreement has to be put now into operation and also used as a reference model towards the other European institutions and here notably the European Commission and the Council of the EU. The Committee of the Regions, and here I mean us all, has the capacity to significantly step up its added value. I perceive from multiple inter-institutional contacts a clear and positive interest and readiness to intensify this inter-institutional cooperation.

2. The key challenge of restarting the growth and job engine of the European Union calls for a new bottom-up alliance for growth with the European regions and cities in the centre of this process.

The quest for stronger regionalisation and decentralisation is on. This concerns not only the cohesion policy but also more specifically in sectoral policies like telecoms, transport, energy and research. Regions and cities have a key role to play along these strategic avenues and the Committee of the Regions will offer effective services in the necessary coordination of these policies.

3. I invite every single one of you to come on board to kick off jointly a new process optimizing the capacity of the Committee of the Region as an enabling platform for our members. Also here important preparatory work has been already conducted and needs to be put in place. I am issuing a boarding call for an inclusive process interlinking all stakeholders, members, political groups, administration and everybody working here in a new team spirit. In this approach we will among others

review our internal working methods and structure as well as the operations of our joint services and look for synergies with other European and International institutions e.g. in the area of communication.

Already during the first phasing-in cooperation in the last months I could witness the high level of professionalism, expertise and commitment in our body.

All these positive experiences make me firmly believe that what needs to be done is a "mission possible": we have the capacity to make this change happen and will succeed when and if every single one of our team is embarking also in-house on a new spirit of partnership.

Let me assure you that I am committed to contribute everything within my power to this aim.

I wish you a good start and count on your contribution in this joint change-over project where the talents, skills and passions of every one of you will be decisive.

Jiří Buriánek