

Multi-level Governance and Intercultural Dialogue: The Prospects for 2020

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It is a great honour to address you – for the third time in a row – in this renowned «Archivio Antico» of one of the oldest and most innovative universities in Europe. We are gathered here today for the solemn inauguration of the new thematic network of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence of the University of Padua. This network will focus on capacity building and curriculum development in the area of «intercultural dialogue» and «multi-level governance», two themes which are not only particularly important for maintaining internal cohesion within the European Union but which are also a *sine qua non* for the success of the Union's external relations.

After the publication of the Centre of Excellence's academic «Opus Magnus» on Intercultural Dialogue and Citizenship in 2007, it seems almost natural that the University should, once again, break new ground and take the lead by establishing the new thematic network on «Intercultural Dialogue, Human Rights and Multi-level Governance».

As I will argue in my lecture today, all three concepts are crucial to achieving our vision for Europe in 2020. This is not only a vision for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth as enshrined in the Commission's proposal, but, above all, a vision of a political union based on common values, in which human dignity and respect for fundamental rights are central; a Union in which not only goods, capital, services and citizens can move freely, but also a Union in which regions, cities, social partners, and civil society actors can all freely cooperate, engage in dialogue and become equal partners in the pursuit of a European «multi-actor» unity!

A number of speakers will address several thematic topics related to multi-level governance, human rights protection or intercultural dialogue «in action». Today, I intend to provide

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you with a more general framework, advocating that the trends in current EU policy making are ideal to realise the inclusive political Union we want to achieve by the revealing year «2020».

1. EU «2020 Vision»

First of all, public authorities, states, international organisations and their institutions will always have to adapt to their changing environment. This adaptation might be gradual, but eventually they will have to take account of the new ways in which societies, firms, peoples and persons interact.

Secondly, organisations should embrace innovation and technology. They should capitalise on the work done by networks, foster synergies, help to build new platforms for change, and equip themselves with the appropriate tools for detecting in good time what the potential and interests of these «functional groupings» are.

Thirdly, they should be prepared for the future, make a SWOT-analysis of their current situation, and agree upon a shared vision for the future.

Fourthly, organisations should remain as open, transparent, coherent and effective as possible, whilst encouraging participation. You may of course be aware that these very principles were identified in the Commission's 2001 *White Paper on European Governance* as the five core values underpinning «good» governance.

Fifthly, respect for fundamental rights, shared values, human dignity, solidarity, and respect for what Emmanuel Levinas calls «the other», are all «intangible public goods» that are to remain at the core of the organisation's first legal Ccodex.

As the European Union is both a supranational organisation with important federalist features and a common area of freedom, security and justice, I take the view that it is well equipped to make its «2020 Vision» a success. However, European leaders will have to take proper account of each of the five above-mentioned conditions if they want to make the vision a reality.

Moreover, as opposed to the current trend towards more intergovernmentalism, it is essential that the EU's federalist

structure is also strengthened over time. As a process of ongoing change is inherent in the EU, due to the tension that exists between the *unity* and the *diversity* of its constituent parts, federalism is the only system that is dynamic enough to take account of the constantly changing conditions within the Union. Furthermore, the European Union is increasingly affected by external factors too. Today, it is a fact of life that globalisation and internationalisation go hand-in-hand with regionalisation and decentralisation.

Therefore, the EU should not only become a truly federalist union of peoples, but should also be organised as an intelligent system of multi-level governance. Finally, Europe should invest heavily in consolidating and building platforms and new gateways for intercultural dialogue.

2. Building the Intercultural Society

Whilst developing the potential of the new gateways and platforms for intercultural dialogue, the Union itself should further develop into an open intercultural society. The EU's Stockholm Programme precisely envisages the way forward for the European Area of Freedom Security and Justice for the next five years and tackles all areas within this framework: fundamental rights, immigration & asylum, judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters as well as police cooperation.

Citizens and their fundamental rights are at the focus of the implementation of this newly adopted Stockholm Programme and its upcoming Action Plan, expected towards the end of the current Spanish Presidency term. In its recent opinion on the Stockholm Programme, the Committee of the Regions points out that the participation of regional and local authorities is a key element of the process of building a «Citizens Europe». For the Committee of the Regions, the promotion of a system of «multi-level protection» of fundamental rights is precisely at the heart of the EU's Stockholm Programme.

Indeed, along with Europe's regions and cities, the Committee of the Regions encourages citizens' participation in the political and social and democratic life of their community or city. We clearly highlight the role of regional and local authorities in ensuring effective access to justice as a means of guaranteeing a

«Europe of rights». Moreover, regions and cities should be involved in the effective application of community security and police legislation too. Their contribution to the implementation of immigration, integration and asylum policies, as well as their important part in the fight against corruption needs to be stepped up.

As a concrete example of multi-level fundamental rights protection, the Committee, in an upcoming opinion, will clearly highlight the indispensable contribution of local and regional authorities in developing preventive approaches aimed at safeguarding the dignity and rights of minors, especially abandoned or unaccompanied minors, often victims of trafficking, and confronted with the risk of poverty and social exclusion. Again, regions and cities have a key role as regards access to education, health care, and social protection and to the job market for young people. In this respect, cooperation and more effective partnership among all levels of governance should be supported.

Children's rights are first and foremost a tool to ensure a safe, comprehensive and beneficial environment for children development, in order for them to become conscious, socially responsible members of respective local communities, member states as well as of our whole intercultural European society. Fundamental rights of the child are therefore to be regarded as a cross-cutting issue, touching upon multiple dimensions, and must therefore be mainstreamed into all relevant European and national policies. This objective can only be met with a comprehensive «multi-level» and «multi-actor» partnership among all actors concerned, but first and foremost Europe's regions and cities, as they are standing in the frontline of upholding children rights.

3. Making the «2020 Vision» a Reality Together

As you know, the Commission's proposal of 3 March 2010 for a «2020 Strategy» consists of a strategy for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth in Europe. Commission President Barroso believes the strategy will deliver more than 2% growth across the EU.

However, when the Heads of State and Government met for

the first time under the presidency of Herman Van Rompuy in the Bibliothèque Solvay in Brussels on 11 February, they were presented with a sobering account of the economic «state of the Union». The presentation was made by that very same Commission President Barroso. I'd like to highlight some key figures in the Commission's analysis:

- GDP growth declined by -4% in 2009, the worst since the 1930s;
- industrial production fell by -20% to 1990s levels;
- 23 million are unemployed, with a rise of 7 million in twenty months. This is expected to reach 10.3% in 2010, again back to 1990s levels. Within this total, youth unemployment is 21% and;
- notwithstanding some early signs of recovery, the economic crisis has halved the EU's long-term growth potential on a no policy change basis.

Only a few weeks after this rather gloomy analysis was made, the Commission presented its «2020 Strategy» for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. To this end, five EU headline targets are proposed:

- 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed;
- 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D;
- the «20/20/20» climate/energy targets should be met;
- the share of early school leavers should be under 10%, and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a higher education qualification;
- 20 million fewer people should be at risk of poverty.

Although the percentages and numbers might still be changed, there is a broad consensus at this stage that the objectives of the proposed headline targets are a move in the right direction. However, what is crucial for the success of making the vision a reality is its potential to engage all the partners involved and thus to provide for an intelligent system of governance and dialogue. It is precisely these issues that are at the core of the delivery of the strategy. And it is precisely these issues that will be discussed the day after tomorrow by the forthcoming European Council.

As I will demonstrate, both multi-level governance and intercultural dialogue are indeed essential for the delivery of each of the five headline goals proposed. New governance and dialogue structures are therefore to become the main catalysts

for pragmatic drives towards growth and cohesion on the ground. Let me now give you some examples according to some of the EU headlines proposed.

3.1. 3% of the EU's GDP Should Be Invested in R&D

Coming back to the current global crisis, we have learnt that regions and cities generate 16% of the EU's overall GDP. That's more than 15 times the current EU budget! Together they stand for more than 2/3rds of public capital investments. Moreover, many regions have major responsibilities in cluster, research or education policies.

Innovation and research clearly start at the local level, and therefore regions and cities play an essential role in implementing the European Economic Recovery Plan and, more particularly, will have to play a major role in delivering the 3% R&D target. An analysis of the much discussed Lisbon Strategy has taught us that we will only achieve the 3% target if we work closely together. I therefore greatly support the intention of Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, EU Commissioner for research and innovation, to develop «European Innovation Partnerships», and to tie the Framework Programme much more closely to the major challenges facing society. Indeed, the challenge will be for the EU to coordinate political action to aid recovery in order to suggest a more balanced alternative of sustainable development and territorial cohesion through the cooperation of various actors, the direct involvement of cities and regions, and recourse to the instrument of public-private partnership.

3.2. The «20/20/20» Climate/Energy Targets Should Be Met

Regarding the challenge of addressing climate change, we can cite the «Covenant of Mayors», which has already been signed by more than 1,000 cities in Europe, as a new horizontal instrument for cooperation and concrete results on the ground. The signatories signed a commitment to take steps that are within the powers of local authorities in order to mitigate climate change. Cities will be able to deliver because they can invest in energy saving and the organisation of transport, or make it more difficult to use cars within their territory. One

can measure the effectiveness of their delivery as well, because clear objectives and evaluation and monitoring machinery are in place, as provided for in the Covenant.

Last December, in Copenhagen, the CoR, together with the US Conference of Mayors, clearly demonstrated this new horizontal «contract» for local delivery in the field of climate change as a good practice. Following the COP-15 UN Copenhagen Summit, cooperation with the US Conference of Mayors will be deepened. So, this level of authority – if organised and monitored in a coordinated way – can deliver results and push the signatories of the UN Climate Convention to go beyond their lowest common denominator.

The Committee of the Regions will now analyse whether it will be possible to develop new covenants in other policy areas – e.g. those related to the migration/integration of newcomers or the pursuit of very concrete «EU 2020 Strategy» headline goals. Also, we should study whether this form of «contractualisation» can be extended, for example so as to bind the regional level too at the highest political level.

3.3. 20 Million Fewer People Should Be at Risk of Poverty

Given current developments, it will not surprise you that the European Commission intends to set up a genuine «European Platform against Poverty». The aim is to ensure economic, social and territorial cohesion, building on the current European year for combating poverty and social exclusion so as to raise awareness and recognise the fundamental rights of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, enabling them to live in dignity and take an active part in society.

Therefore, the open method of coordination on social exclusion and social protection will be transformed into a «platform for cooperation», peer review and exchange of good practice, and into an instrument to foster commitment by all public and private players to reduce social exclusion, including through targeted support from the structural funds. It is essential that the benefits of economic growth are spread to all parts of the EU, including its outermost regions, thus strengthening territorial cohesion. It is all about ensuring access and opportunities for all. Europe needs to make full use of its labour potential to face the challenges of an ageing

population and rising global competition. Again, action needs to be taken at all levels of governance.

Also, intercultural dialogue platforms need to be strengthened in this respect, not least with the partner countries in which the – often poor – newcomers to Europe have their origins. Only recently, I launched the Social Inclusion Regional Grouping whose precise aim is to become a frontrunner in Europe, uniting eight regions on this issue.

Moreover, the CoR, together with the European Movement, will organise a conference in May on Territorial Strategies for Social Inclusion. Later on in the year, as part of the University Open Days in Brussels, the most innovative strategies against poverty developed at regional level will be analysed by academic experts in order to create greater synergies and spill-over effects between regions that are leading the combat against poverty. All this will help other regions to act more efficiently on poverty, which we hope will result in a better life for poor people and their families.

4. Three Key Platforms for Fostering Intercultural Dialogue

Having provided you with some important developments in the field of multi-level governance in the EU headline targets of the proposed «EU 2020 Strategy», it is important to underline that these developments go hand-in-hand with the development of new platforms for intercultural dialogue. Let me give you three examples: the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation, the new emerging «macro-regions» in Europe, and the Assembly for Regional and Local Politicians of the Mediterranean.

4.1. The European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation

Policies must be adapted to new developments at all levels of government. One example is territorial cooperation, where national borders lose their function in some areas. The new EU Regulation for a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) makes it possible to establish an authority with its own budget and staff originating from

different member states. A European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation constitutes an authority based on the nature of the problem and its geographic location, instead of following a way of thinking that sees national borders as institutional boundaries. Seven EGTCs have been set up to date, with a further fifteen in the pipeline.

These EGTCs represent a new governance model for partnership and dialogue within the European Union. They thus pool their members' qualities together with a long-term sustainable legal framework for consolidating mainstream policies in a new functional geographical area. Indeed, the challenges linked to globalisation are increasingly taking shape with little regard for national borders, hence the need for «area-based» policies.

In this context, the EGTC has a great deal to offer:

- It gives legal stability to cooperation and allows a variety of forms of multi-level institutional formatting and dialogue;
- It incorporates the genetics of «soft cooperation» and has the capacity to deliver structural development projects;
- For the first time, we have an instrument which is European in nature, and has a strong territorial basis.

As highlighted in my lecture last year, the CoR will contribute to the process of establishing the EGTCs of the second generation. Following these «European» Groupings for Territorial Cooperation, we should envisage «international» groupings for territorial cooperation, allowing the establishment of new functional areas beyond European frontiers. Within the framework provided by the groupings of the second generation it should also be possible to cooperate on non-material matters. Hence, partner-regions could, for example, work closely together in the field of fundamental rights protection. Last but not least, I believe the European Commission should be fully committed and taken on board in a bid to monitor and facilitate delivery of the EGTCs. This is a time to bring «European territorial pacts» to life, based on new forms of «contractualisation», respect for the principle of subsidiarity, the smart integration of policies, territorial cooperation and intercultural dialogue.

4.2. Macro-regions

Secondly, the establishment of the new «macro-regions» is also a pragmatic answer to real problems on the ground that goes way beyond mere cross-border cooperation. For example, the Baltic Sea is an area with a common history and a common identity. For centuries there has always been commercial and cultural activities covering the entire region. Today, it is possible for this region to build itself a new role in the EU based on this common history. The only problem is that public structures are mainly national.

The EU's new Baltic Sea Strategy therefore is a new architecture for pragmatic cooperation comprising 27 action programmes (e.g. tourism, education, environmental protection...). Within this framework, the member states have to address the regions and cities and their social partners if they want to participate in this programme. Currently the new macro-region for the Danube River is under discussion too. At least twelve other potential «macro-regions» could be identified. The development of «macro-regions» in Europe will therefore strengthen both regional identity and intercultural dialogue.

4.3. ARLEM

Europe also needs to export this new partnership logic abroad, through its external policy. The recent establishment of the «Union for the Mediterranean», for example, provides for yet another innovative structure through which regional and local politicians, from all states bordering the Mediterranean, can meet and engage in an intercultural dialogue. It will be in this Assembly for Regional and Local Politicians of the Mediterranean (ARLEM) that representatives from the EU member states and non-member states alike will translate the EU's objectives at local level so as to make joint actions happen, for example in the field of university cooperation, protection of the cultural heritage, tourism or the maritime environment of the Mediterranean.

We have to ensure that this partnership approach is enshrined in any future external policy of the EU with our partners in the north, in the south, and from the east to the West – be it via

the Antarctic Dimension Initiative, the renewed partnership agreement with Russia, or the EU's prospective «Eastern Partnership». Only with the involvement of public authorities at all levels on the one hand, and civil society on the other, will the EU's external policy be successful.

5. The «2020 Strategy»: Bringing MLG into Practice

Just two years ago, the world was brutally shaken by a systemic crisis. Its shock waves are still being felt today. The imbalances in the economic and financial system are being exposed, as is the vulnerability of many of our fellow-citizens. In order to foster economic change on the ground, there is a need for new forms of governance and dialogue.

As outlined in the Commission's proposal for an «EU 2020 Strategy» the «interdependence» between member states, regional and local authorities, and socio-economic partners at all levels of governance favours a «multi-level» approach in the follow-up of the Lisbon Strategy. The recognition of this fact is a very positive starting point, as the priority that will be given in the 2020 Strategy to policy measures in the fields of education, training, research, innovation, entrepreneurship, a green and sustainable transformation of society, socio-economic recovery and sound budgets at all levels, etc. will have major implications for powers that are often decentralised.

Last year, I had the opportunity to present the rationale and the key recommendations of the Committee of the Regions' *White Paper on Multi-level Governance*. This year I can tell you that the results of the consultation on the White Paper only confirmed our view that there is broad support for our proposal to reform the EU governance model in order to adopt a more inclusive approach towards regional and local authorities, for example by adding a territorial dimension.

This idea of multi-level governance is intrinsically linked to participatory democracy, as society is becoming more pluralistic. People want to participate, decision-making is scattered, and top-down or unilateral decisions are simply no longer acceptable in our democracy. Multi-level governance offers a participatory answer in providing tools for

participation and dialogue to regions, cities and, ultimately, the citizen. Moreover, it favours cooperation and eventually democratisation itself as it multiplies the opportunities for citizens to influence government. The alternative to multi-level democracy is not simple democracy, but ineffective democracy. Multi-level governance structures are thus a highly valid way to strengthen the democratic debate within the Union. The respondents to our consultation also consider that there is still significant scope for applying multi-level governance principles to the new «EU 2020 Strategy» too, particularly in the drawing-up and implementation of the so-called «National Reform Programmes», which they feel have to be primarily based on regional and local programmes, with the inclusion of civil and socio-economic partners. The «2020 Vision» therefore needs to cultivate partnership, a cross-sector integrated approach and a smarter mix of regulatory reform, whilst providing an overarching framework to deliver better targeted solutions on the ground.

Over the last decade numerous new networks and platforms have been established at various levels of governance. Many of these functional groupings go beyond the mere exchange of best practices, and constitute a launch pad for action, both politically and in concrete tangible operations on the ground. New e-techniques and social websites obviously contribute to the growing understanding that we live in a networked world. «Knowledge is power», but in the networked world of today «shared knowledge» is even more powerful.

The European Union therefore has to adapt to this reality in order to promote, preserve and export its unique model. Not only do we need a different kind of cooperation between the institutions to tackle the challenges of today and the future more efficiently, we also have to invite all the relevant actors – including those in neighbouring countries – to take part in this debate. We have to put an end to the silo mentality and foster a culture of partnership and dialogue instead.

The European Union – as a dynamic federal structure – is well placed to make both multi-level governance and intercultural dialogue a reality. Accordingly, and in the follow-up to its White Paper, the Committee of the Regions is ready to initiate the adoption of a «European Charter on Multi-level Governance», as a common basis for cooperative governance and

inclusive dialogue platforms in Europe. It will make our Union stronger both internally and externally, and will provide us with a soundly-based window of opportunity to actually deliver on our «2020 Vision for Europe».

Let us built a political Union that is inclusive, open, and owned by every single citizen, resident in our European society. I therefore advocate not only a «multi-actor» and «multi-level» Europe, but above all the true «multi-ownership» of our European construction!

I heartily welcome Padua University's new thematic platform for «Intercultural Dialogue, Human Rights and Multi-level Governance». May it become a launch pad for innovative thinking, top scientific research, and tangible results on the ground. «Costruiamo insieme Europa!».