

EUROPEAN & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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Date:	24 November 2005
Time:	09:00 - 12.30
Venue:	National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay
Title:	Conference (of Presidents) of European Legislative Regions (CALRE) - Report

Purpose

1. To report to the Committee on the 10th CALRE plenary conference.

Background

2. The 9th CALRE Plenary Conference took place in Barcelona at the Catalan Parliament 24-25 October 2005. Peter Kellam, the Assembly Parliamentary Service Overseas and External Liaison Officer attended as an observer in the absence of the Presiding Officer and the Deputy Presiding Officer. The conference brought together speakers, presiding officers, presidents and chairs of regional parliaments, councils and legislative assemblies from 8 EU Member States, with 53 or more of the 74 eligible regions attending. Notable external speakers addressing the conference included the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, the President of the European Parliament and the First Minister of Catalonia.

3. A copy of the conference programme is included at Appendix 1. The conference focussed on four main themes:

1. The application of the principle of Subsidiarity;
2. Decentralisation and regional democracy;
3. Developing transparency and participation through e-Democracy;
4. Improving relations with European institutions.

4. The session on Subsidiarity included an introduction to the Committee of the Region's (CoR)

forthcoming monitoring network exercise in which the Assembly has been invited to participate as one of 8 European regional legislatures, one from each CALRE Member State.

5. Decentralisation and regional democracy will be a focus for the forthcoming CALRE Presidency which will be led by the Tuscan Regional Council. The Deputy Presiding Officer will attend a seminar at the Tuscan Regional Council on 28 November 2005. A copy of the programme is included at Appendix 2.

6. CALRE has established an e-Democracy working group, led by the Basque Parliament, to develop and exchange good practice between regional legislatures and to contribute a report to the forthcoming United Nations World Summit on the Information Society.

7. CALRE has been active in developing relations with European institutions. The Catalan Presidency was successful in ensuring the Conference's inclusion in the European Commissions Structured Dialogue with regional associations. The Conference has engaged with the CoR on the monitoring of Subsidiarity. This has been helped by President Peter Straub of Baden Württemberg's dual roles as President of the CoR and CALRE Steering Committee Member. The Conference has also been, and intends to remain, active in developing co-operation with its executive counterpart, the Conference of European Legislative Regions (REG LEG) during the Welsh Assembly Government's anticipated presidency.

8. The conference concluded with the unanimous approval of the Barcelona Declaration, which the Committee is invited to note at Appendix 3.

9. The themes outlined above will be carried over into the Tuscan Presidency. The President of the Tuscan Parliament outlined two further themes for the next year:

1. Development of a network for the exchange of communication between European parliaments, focussed at European committees
2. Co-operation with the United Nations in developing regional democracy at the sub-state level in Africa.

Issues

10. The Committee is invited to note the possible development of a network for the exchange of information between European committees as an initiative of the Catalan Presidency. Details are yet to be confirmed though it is anticipated that this will be discussed in the CALRE Steering Committee on 28 November with the potential for a more detailed report to be made available to the Committee afterwards.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 CALRE Conference Programme

Appendix 2 Regional Democracy Seminar Programme

Appendix 3 Barcelona Declaration