

## **Welcoming speech by the vice-president of the Generalitat de Catalunya, Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira**

Barcelona, 15 November 2007

It is with great satisfaction that we have been able to preside the REGLEG Network throughout this year 2007. The secretary for the European Union, Anna Terrón, in her capacity as secretary general of REGLEG during this period, is about to explain in detail the activities undertaken.

It is an honour and a pleasure to welcome you to the 8th Conference of Presidents of Regions with Legislative Power, presidents, secretaries of state, participants and observers.

This is the meeting of the so-called “regions” in European terms. In reality, regions, nations, states, autonomous communities..., of the sub-state entities that, since we are Europe too, want to build Europe too, and therefore, from our own political and legal reality, we hope to play a significant role in the European context. We are not talking about just any kind of sub-state entity, but only those whose parliament holds legislative powers and which therefore has a direct involvement in the transposition of European legislation. But it is also us who, thanks to our proximity, bring the decisions to the general public, we are in a better position than anyone to build and explain the Europe of proximity, the Europe of the People, the Europe concerned with resolving the problems of our peoples.

Because Catalonia has had a European vocation since its beginnings, our Statute of Autonomy –which is equivalent, if you will, to our Catalan Constitution– contains an entire chapter dedicated to our relations with the European Union, describing their nature and providing a bilateral space with the State on the European issues affecting our powers.

Our legitimate ambition is to promote a strengthening of the role of the regions with legislative power, by means of a distinguished political and legal status in all areas of governance in Europe (legislative, executive and legal powers).

Along these lines, during our presidency of this REGLEG, last July the president of Catalonia presented the Portuguese presidency of the European Union –represented here by Mr. Lobo Antunes–, with a declaration in which we requested that the negotiations of the Reform Treaty take into account our demands. As the Government of Catalonia, we also presented our comments to the Government of the Spanish state along these same lines and, logically, we are delighted with the presence here amongst us of the Spanish secretary of state for the European Union, Alberto Navarro, on its behalf.

We are pleased that the reform treaty maintains the advances achieved in the European Constitution, particularly with regard to regional self-government, the strengthening of the mechanisms that safeguard the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the inclusion of the objective to promote territorial cohesion and also the respect for territorial and linguistic diversity.

It is precisely with regard to the respect for linguistic diversity –something that Catalonia has always given the greatest of importance–, that we trust the Spanish Government shall submit to the Council as soon as possible, preferably upon signing the Treaty, the Catalan version of the aforementioned documents, as set forth in the European Union Treaty and accompanying Declarations. Moreover, I must stress the willingness of the Government of Catalonia, the Parliament of Catalonia and the most widely held sentiment amongst Catalan society, is to continue working to improve the recognition of those languages that, like Catalan, spoken by nine million people, are official only in part, not in all, of the member States.

However, we still have a great deal of work to do. At this conference, we propose that REGLEG be the direct interlocutor for the European Commission in the consultations regarding the adoption of legislative acts. We propose that we also work towards rendering the presence of the Committee of the Regions in the European Court of Justice effective for the defence of our powers.

There are also, however, issues that we must demand in terms of the member States. It is already possible to reinforce the rapid alert mechanism that should also allow our parliaments to exercise political control over the adaptation of the legislative proposals to the principle of subsidiarity. State parliaments must be urged to approve the mechanisms that enable our Parliaments to participate in this rapid alert mechanism as quickly as possible.

Some of our demands, those of REGLEG, have yet to be fully met. Direct access by the regions with legislative power to the EU Court of Justice or a provision allowing the member states to designate certain regions as “associated regions” of the Union, enjoying specific rights at European level, taking into account that they have exclusive powers and share responsibilities with their member states.

In short, each and all of us must work, from our own reality, to build a great structure: democratic Europe. Working towards the EU recognising its diversity and its regional dimension. This reinforces the EU, it is the authentic Europe of proximity, it builds the European integration process based on the peoples of Europe and, therefore, it reinforces the legitimacy and the acceptance of the process by all of the citizens. In order to explain this, we need to make a pedagogical effort, to make ourselves understood and to advance towards a

democratic Europe, which cannot be any other than a Europe which respects diversity, and diversity is wealth.

Welcome to Catalonia. Good work!