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Speech to European Economic and Social Committee,
Brussels 26 February 2003

Dear President, Roger

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Dear Colleagues, Friends

I am delighted to have this opportunity to be with you today and outline the CoR's (Committee of Regions) priorities both in the context of the close cooperation between our two Committees and in terms of our roles as representative, consultative bodies, at this important time as Europe seeks to bring itself ever closer to our citizens.

Globalisation and External Relations

An institutionalised culture of dialogue is appropriate today more than ever as the cities and regions of Europe need an active and engaged civil society to defend the principles of an open society and cope with differences, conflicts and fears that are imposed by changes in the global sphere. There is no mistaking today just how interconnected the local and global dimensions actually are. And I know the EESC is aware of this through your structured dialogue over the course of the last few years with civil society in other regional groupings, including Mercosur and the Afro Caribbean (Pacific) (or ACP) group of states.

Through the course of a recent discussion, I am also aware of President Briesch's own personal interest in exchanging experiences of government with other continents including Latin America. I particularly welcome this initiative since I believe that communicating and sharing examples of best practice and knowledge of such co-operation schemes and successful projects are fundamental to improving not only the success of the enlargement of Europe but also our own approach to the way we think about governance and globalisation. It is not only about expressing solidarity. It is about being aware of the challenges for our Continent, in dialogue with other Continents.

The CoR lays considerable importance on this spirit of mutual cooperation, exchange of information, the participation of our respective members and administrators at each others commissions. I feel strongly that this contact should and must be maximised and more coordination given to joining up contacts between our respective networks, such as the regional representation offices and forum for civil society.

Finally, I therefore also feel that there is quite considerable advantage for both Committees in focussing on the way in which we administer European legislation.

This, in the short term responds to a proposition by our respective administrations to organise in cooperation with the European Commission a seminar that will look at ways of developing common evaluation methods for major European proposals. This relates directly to our wider objective of bringing European policies closer to the citizen, offering scope to examine how major policies are administered, their costs and benefits, and the scope for improvement and further development.

The range of these three, brief examples indicates the capacity for cooperation between our Committees. Our institutions share common services. Recently we have traversed a difficult, and somewhat disruptive period in regard to both our buildings and personnel situations. Progress on these matters is often not visible and is slow.

This is normal. I do feel though that we are making progress and we must now respond to progress by

reinforcing our commitment to the co-operation agreement between ourselves that can carry us both forward, through the Convention and Enlargement processes.

The Future

The present Europe ideal was built around the heritage that older generations, who had suffered World War Two and the inhumanity of that war wanted to leave to their sons and daughters: peace, welfare and European integration. Today, we need to build up a stronger consensus for Europe around an ideal that is embraced by younger generations: a Europe built up on peace, dialogue, economic, social and territorial cohesion – and unity on the world stage. We will not be able to do it if we do not listen to what our society, in its different organisational and participative forms have to say.

Our cities, our regions, as well as our economy and society, do not take sufficient account of the specific needs and concerns of the younger and older generations. There is a need here to look for real examples of best practice in this field and to that end I would wholeheartedly welcome an initiative on youth in all its diversity during the course of the coming year which will lead us to seriously consider the real expectations and ambitions for the EU in 2020 and beyond.