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TECHNICAL NOTE FROM THE CPMR GENERAL SECRETARIAT

THE SHORT-, MEDIUM-, AND LONG-TERM FUTURE OF THE CPMR: SOME THOUGHTS FOR THE POLITICAL BUREAU MEETING IN JANUARY 2008

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Over the next two years, the CPMR will have to address a dual challenge:

- A) to define the broad outlines of its mission and its objectives for the coming decade (a survey is planned on this subject during 2008 in the framework of the five-early client surveys, part of the ISO 9001 quality standard)
- B) to nominate a new Secretary General who will carry through its action (the change is due to take place at the end of 2009).

These two aspects cannot be considered in isolation. The “job description” of the future Secretary General will necessarily depend on the overall objectives that the CPMR will have set itself. We may be looking for a political “heavyweight”, a network coordinator, or a plain manager, etc.

It is therefore important to coordinate these two aspects closely, and in view of the tight deadline, to implement without delay a procedure that will allow us sufficient time for reflection, exchanges, and discussions.

This exercise is made more difficult by the fact that the CPMR and the context in which it operates have both evolved considerably. Thus (to cite just a few examples):

- The CPMR's membership has changed since the organisation was set up. It now comprises side by side regions that are very strongly committed to the defence of the periphery, as well as regions that are not - or are no longer - peripheral, and even a certain number of regions that have no coastline. Except in the case of certain clearly identifiable territories (such as those with permanent geographical or demographic handicaps), the term “maritime periphery” no longer has any meaning. In the context of EU27, these two situations are no longer linked together. On average, the maritime regions have a GDP higher than the EU average, and the continental regions have a GDP lower than the EU average.
- In some fields, the CPMR's action intersects with that of other regional organisations. In other areas it runs parallel with the action of the COR, which has made great advances over the past three years in terms of the quality of its services. It is important therefore to avoid duplication of efforts, especially considering that the regions do not have an unlimited capacity to contribute financially to a number of different organisations. Due to an increasing need to rationalise public expenditure, more and more regions are seriously re-assessing the usefulness of their participation in one or more organisations - including the regions in the south of Europe, which represent almost two-thirds of the CPMR's budget (6 countries out of 26 represent 80% of membership dues contributing to the general budget: France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, UK).

- The CPMR made an important contribution in achieving the inclusion of the notion of “territorial cohesion” in the Treaty. Paradoxically, an increasing number of its members are no longer in receipt of significant amounts of grant from the Structural Funds, and this is a trend which, despite our organisation’s efforts, is more than likely to be accentuated as a result of enlargement and of the reduction in these Funds. An area of action that has always been one of the principal “drivers” of the CPMR therefore risks becoming less important, at least for a considerable number of its members.
- These last two points are particularly marked in the regions in the south of Europe (Mediterranean and Atlantic). Many of these regions pay a high level of membership dues to both the CPMR and the AER (between €30,000 and €65,000, multiplied by two) whereas at the same time they will no longer benefit after 2013 from the same return on their investment.
- Lastly, and most importantly, as a result of enlargement and of developments in the global context, the European project no longer arouses the same enthusiasm as in the past, which naturally is an incentive for devoting fewer means to it. When European and international affairs departments have to make budgetary choices, this criteria is of course crucial.

It therefore seems highly desirable that we start to undertake a major reflection on these questions now, rather than waiting for the future Secretary General to do so ...

For one thing, the future Secretary General will not necessarily have a detailed knowledge of the history and machinery of the CPMR, its way of working, etc.

For another thing, this would postpone any necessary reform until at least 2010 or 2011... which would certainly be too late in view of the rapidly changing situation. What is more, - unless such a process is postponed even further until after 2012 - this reform would be taking place just at a time when we would be devoting most of our efforts and resources to the future of structural policies after 2013!

It should be added that, in order for such an initiative to be constructive (in particular in anticipating or defusing latent or potential crises), the reflection must be audacious, with no taboo subjects. We must be prepared to examine all the options, even the most radical ones, even if it is only so that these can act as a foil and reveal what our members absolutely do not want. We could put forward a range of choices that includes (for example) the following options:

- maintenance of the status quo. This undoubtedly represents the most comfortable solution in the short term, but the one with the highest degree of uncertainty in the medium and long term (loss of direction of the organisation, apart from the defence of the interests of territories such as the islands or very sparsely populated areas, whose peripheral nature is an indisputable geographical fact).
- A redefinition of the CPMR’s action and its role around a number of new priorities, (this would need to include, among other things, an assessment of the usefulness of a more in-depth involvement in certain areas). For example:
 - o support for interregional cooperation both internal and external,
 - o the place of the regions in the governance of the public policies “of the future” - areas in which we are not necessarily (yet) specialised,
 - o focusing in greater depth on territorial cohesion and maritime questions (which have numerous points in common).

In attempting to answer this question, it will be important to clearly prioritise the areas in which an organisation such as ours could contribute substance and not simply limit itself to reiterating slogans.

- The splitting-up of the CPMR on the basis of its Geographical Commissions (or on some other basis), with the General Secretariat’s role being limited to coordinating their actions and pooling their resources (federalist scenario). A fully transparent assessment of the regions’ investment respectively in their Geographical Commissions and in the overall activity of the CPMR needs to be undertaken.

- A merger with one or more other organisation(s) and/or even the disappearance of the CPMR. Numerous rumours are circulating concerning notably a “return to square one” with a merger between CPMR and AER, in particular to avoid the duplication of membership dues mentioned above. The regions most concerned by this situation must of course play an important role in this reflection.

Each of these scenarios (which are of course not mutually incompatible; a mix of options is in certain cases possible), and other possible scenarios, could be subjected to an “opportunities/threats” analysis and the conditions under which they could be implemented examined in greater depth. These scenarios could be submitted to the member regions, in the form of a document presenting the arguments, prepared by the extended CODIR, after agreement in principle by the Seville Political Bureau.

The question is, how can we undertake this process of reflection and decision-making on such sensitive issues during 2008-2009, while at the same time offering our 160 member regions satisfactory conditions under which the debates can take place and proposals be made in compliance with democratic procedures?

The deadline is very short – too short, even! Nonetheless, the following mechanism and timetable can be proposed.

January 2008		Preparation of a (short) working paper by the General Secretariat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identifying the main challenges facing CPMR - proposing a (limited) range of preliminary options to be submitted in order to launch debates in which the regions can take a position in relation to these proposals and from which overall trends can emerge - setting out a timetable
	Meeting of the extended CODIR	Discussion between the members of the General Secretariat and the Executive Secretaries of the Commissions
	Political Bureau meeting, Seville	Submission of the principles of the proposal to the PB. Adoption or modification of the working paper
February		Preparation of a final working paper, validated electronically by the members of the PB
Spring	GAs of the Geographical Commissions	Discussion within the Geographical Commissions
June	Political Bureau meeting, Rhodes	Debate within the Political Bureau on the basis of the discussions within the Geographical Commissions
October	CPMR GA	Debate at the GA Decision on which option to take
January 2009	CPMR Bureau	The PB draws the conclusions from the GA and integrates them into the procedure for the recruitment of the future SG (drafting of the job description) Submission to the PB of the recruitment procedure
During 2009		Recruitment process
October	CPMR GA	Nomination of the new SG