

## COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

**Date**                    **17 October 2001**

**Time**                    **9.00am**

**Venue**                   **Committee room 3**

**Title: CPMR General Assembly Opporto – 20/21 September**

### **Purpose:**

**To brief the committee on the General Assembly.**

### **Background :**

The Assembly applied to join the CPMR (and the Atlantic Arc geographical commission), as approved by the European Affairs Committee, in June. This application was approved by the CPMR political bureau in July. The Assembly has paid a pro-rata membership fee of 15,503 euro for the remainder of 2001.

### **The General Assembly:**

The First Minister was unable to attend the General Assembly but was represented at official level by the Head of the Brussels Office.

The agenda for the General Assembly is attached. Attending were representatives from 112 regions spread across 19 countries, plus 16 regional organisations.

The Atlantic Arc meeting welcomed the Assembly as a new member. The Assembly representative passed on the good wishes of the First Minister and the Assembly and said that Wales looked forward to contributing to the work of this Commission during the years ahead.

At the full plenary of the CPMR, two sessions were of special interest to the Assembly's agenda:

Cohesion and regional policy – CPMR has produced a reaction to the Cohesion Report (attached) as a basis for discussion. Following a presentation on the implications of the report

the Assembly representative was invited to contribute to the debate – speaking notes are attached. The Assembly is not, of course, bound by any views reached by the CPMR but their thinking is well-informed and ought to contribute to our own discussions.

Governance, the Future of Europe and the role of Regions – speakers included the President of Portugal (Jorge Sampaio); the EU Commissioner for Regional Affairs (Michel Barnier); the Walloon Minister-President (Van Cauwenbergue); the Vice-President of the European Parliament (Jose Pacheco Pereira) and the author – de facto – of the Commission’s White Paper on Governance, Jerome Vignon. The salient points were:

- President Sampaio – the trick is for democratic regions to have a special status of some sort recognised by the EU but without under-mining the position of Member States;
- Commissioner Barnier – in the enlargement debate, cohesion and agriculture cannot be separated. There needs to be a real political debate followed by financial conclusions, not the other way around. Priority must be preserved for those regions that need it most and regions must be treated equitably (ie must not discriminate against those currently receiving Objective One if there is continuing need). GDP is not the only factor – must consider other elements: sparse population, isolation, ultra periphery, horizontal problems like environment. Also need to de-centralise, so governance is important to this debate. Europe should be more than simply a market place and regionalism is the antidote to the idea of a super-state.
- Minister-President Van Cauwenbergue – believes regions are poor relations institutionally within the EU, with no right of initiative. Believes that competences should be shared between regions and Member States.
- Jerome Vignon – the preparation of the White Paper on Governance proved a capacity for regional government to contribute to EU development. The Commission needs to recognise key actors in the life of the EU (there is, for example, a growing partnership between the CPMR and DG Regio). Need a deeper role for the Committee of the Regions. The Commission actively welcomes responses from the Regions of Europe to this debate.

## **Future**

- Members are invited to update themselves on the CPMR’s activities by consulting its web-site at: [www.crpm.org](http://www.crpm.org)
- The Assembly’s Brussels representative is meeting the Director with responsibility for the Atlantic Arc (Patrick Anvroin) on 16 October to examine how to take forward the Assembly’s involvement;
- The CPMR’s current calendar is attached to this paper;
- Xavier Gizard, Secretary General of CPMR, will visit Cardiff 21/22 January and hopes to meet members of this committee.

**European and External Affairs Directorate**

**Desmond Clifford**