



**10th Anniversary of the Committee of the Regions, Plenary Session
European Parliament, Brussels, 17th November 2004
Speech by Marcus Pollard, Rapporteur from the College of Europe**

Mr President, Fellow Europeans

The approach that the students at the College of Europe took was not just young people looking at youth issues. We challenged ourselves to try to examine the issues that matter to all of us – the Union, its institutions, and its peoples.

The Youth Debate that we have had TODAY is in fact the end product. We have had 4 weeks of discussions and debates on the full range of issues that matter to us when we try to picture the future of Europe and its regions. Let me try to summarise that process

Firstly, the institutional & participation dimension

A point that we are very keen to stress is that that regions and this Committee have a tantalising prospect of being able to deliver better quality policies because they are the closest form of government.

Everyone assembled here today want to MAKE REGIONS WORK and to do so, we cannot shy away from questions of legitimacy and democratic accountability. But if we want to use democracy and legitimacy – the institutions and organs need to begin to ask questions? How can we ensure that all local authorities have an equal say and equal chance on influencing European wide policies?

How can we explain that the voices of the Regions are not widely known in the regions themselves?

We concluded that the challenge for the CoR is to be able to link Europe to local and municipal councils directly. The more local bodies that can be involved – the greater the potential for service and policy delivery there is.

Bringing Europe closer to its citizens must be more than a slogan – it has to be a rationale for further reform and the Constitution is just part of that.

Secondly identity and citizenship

A series of questions arise on the actual role and concept of A EUROPE OF REGIONS. One issue of some contention is how can regional identity reinforce the notion of European identity?

Towns, cities and regions seem THE most effective channel of communication. Through a greater sense of channelling ideas and information, we sincerely believe that the citizen will begin to understand more about what the EU does for them.

But we also challenge this Committee to examine the problem that Regions in Europe have very different characteristics.

Some regions have a strong identity

Some regions rely on a loose sentiment of commonness

Some regions exist simply due to the administrative map created by the MS's.

Some regions have strong legislative power and autonomy – some don't.

One challenge is to answer how can a citizen in a less organised region feel part of this Europe of Regions?

We also had some discussion on the problems of Regionalism – can we ever have too much focus on the regions? And how can we answer the paradox of a system promising Subsidiarity – with attempts for European wide policies? After our discussions discussion, it is clear that Subsidiarity isn't just a provision of the Treaty – it has to be a mentality that takes the different levels of the Union and their preferences into account.

Thirdly social cohesion and the regions.

A European Union of its peoples cannot continue to be built or sustained by its institutions alone and we welcome all attempts to drive towards a true social cohesion across Europe. At present the difficulty across the Union is that there are far too many people at the fringes of society. Unemployment, crime, education, economic deprivation, protecting the vulnerable – these are all issues that we are worried about. And even those that are not marginalized, they may have some difficulty in identifying or feeling a part of the EU.

The challenge for this Committee is how can the regions deliver social cohesion policies?

Of course social and structural funds are delivering important results. BUT distributions of funds alone are not going to answer deeper questions of exclusion, poverty, disenchantment and the lack of solidarity. Government closer to the people of course will be able to engineer more local and targeted results – but building cohesion isn't going to be solved by the mere allocation of funds. We have to ensure our European societies are ones that people want to be part of and indeed can be a part of. 10 years ago, Monsieur Delors said to this Committee that it had a “heavy responsibility” in strengthening the sense of belonging. That responsibility is still ongoing and it is one that matters a now more than ever.

And it is there perhaps that I should conclude.

Our discussions over 4 weeks and the debate today have not produced a series of definitive answers or definitive solutions. Our discussions and debate have not got all the answers to the problems we have raised. But our discussions have raised challenges and difficulties that we, the youth of Europe, are concerned about.

The thing about the European Union is that there is rarely ONE ANSWER.

But at this VITAL point, it needs someone or something to begin to give more convincing and reliable answers. After 10 years of growing in confidence, the Committee of the Regions is well placed to both demand, and give those answers

We wish you the very best of luck in the next 10 years and beyond.