

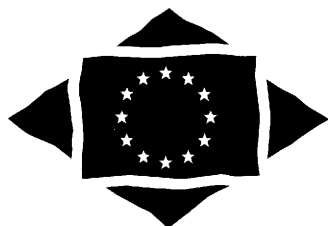


Impact and follow-up of opinions

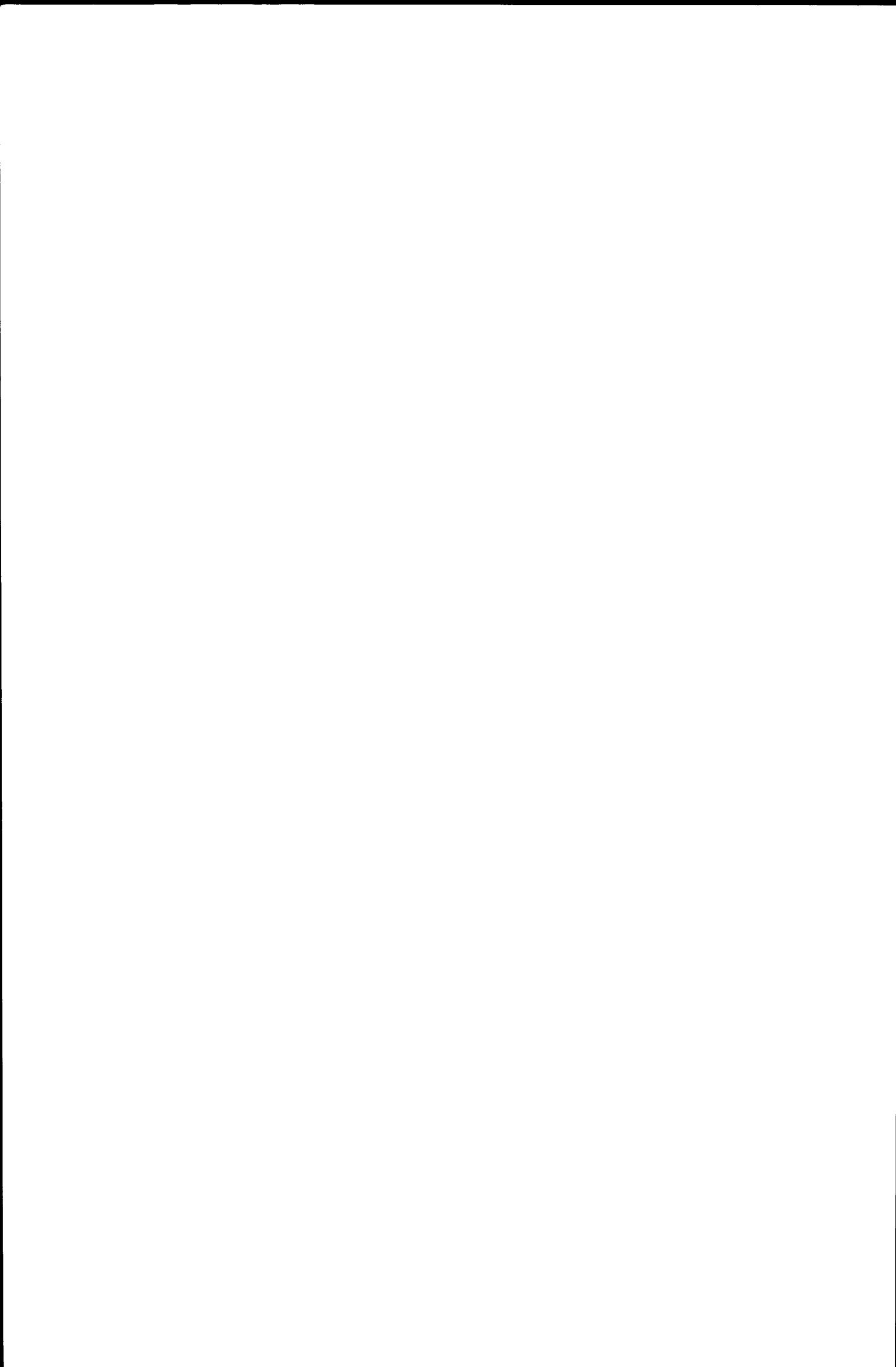
1996



EUROPEAN UNION



Committee
of the
Regions





**The contribution
of the Committee
of the Regions
to European construction**



Brussels, February 1997





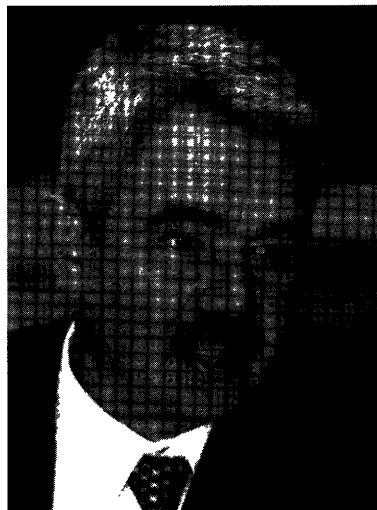
CONTENTS

Editorial	5
Introduction	7
1. Development, economic and social cohesion, structural policies, industry	9
2. Education, youth, culture	15
3. Health	21
4. Trans-European networks, transport, telecommunications	23
5. Energy, environment	29
6. Agriculture, rural development, tourism	33
7. General subjects	37





Serving the concept of Europe



Assessing the effects of the opinions of the Committee of the Regions (COR) is now a regular practice and provides an opportunity for a periodic examination of its position in the context of political dialogue with the European institutions.

The work calls for united practical efforts and contributions. The European Commission's regular "Reports on the follow-up to Opinions adopted by the Committee of the Regions" provide very useful information about reactions to the Committee's positions in the Commission's services and their effect on the formulation of Community policies.

Analysis of the impact of the COR opinions on Council decisions, on European Parliamentary debate and on the work of the Economic and Social Committee is also an ongoing task in the COR secretariat.

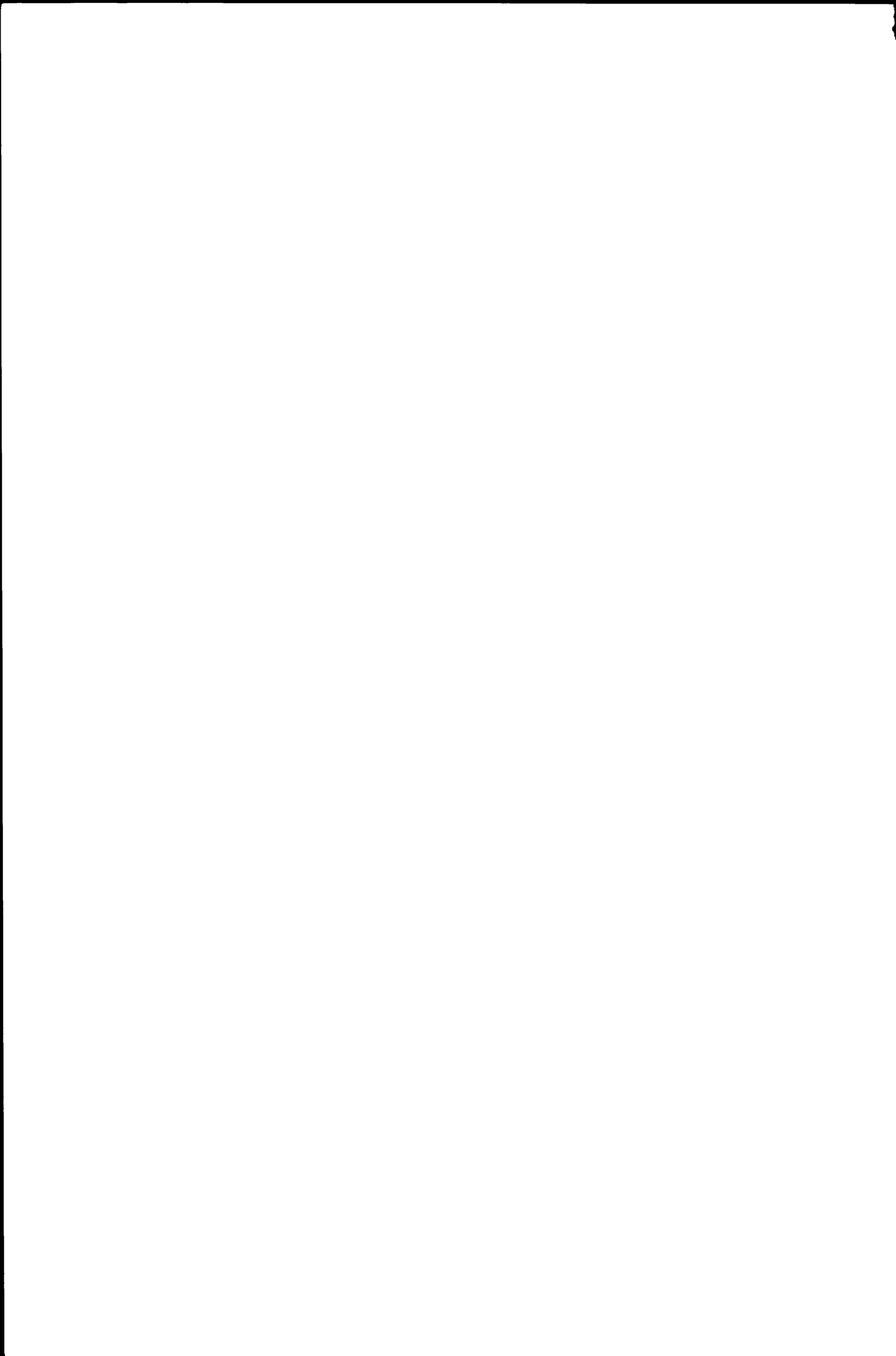
The analysis of all this information demonstrates the COR's increasing influence on European decisions both through its opinions and through the public initiatives undertaken jointly with the European Commission and the European Parliament; nor should we forget its vocation as a forum for influencing opinion.

The effects of the COR's opinions and its political and institutional work are evident at the decentralized levels, which increasingly insist on their right to have an input into strategies for Europe as well as into the choice of national priorities and the programme approval procedures.

Local government is always closest to the people, and enhancement of its role in the European debate is particularly important at a time when the basic elements of the Maastricht Treaty and the main Community policies are being assessed with a view to building a wider and deeper Europe.

This is a decisive phase in which the voice of regional and local authorities can interpret the subsidiarity principle at the deepest level, reconciling the concept of Europe to the needs and aspirations of its citizens. The Committee of the Regions, where the EU's regional and local authorities are democratically represented, places itself at the service of this strategy which aims to build an "*ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as close as possible to the citizens*".

Pasqual Maragall i Mira
President



INTRODUCTION

1. The political activity of the Committee of the Regions extended in two directions in 1996 :

– external political presence; activity centred first and foremost on developing common initiatives with the European Commission and the European Parliament;

– consultation; there was a visible increase in the production of opinions, 47 being adopted at the 5 plenary sessions, as against 38 in 1995 and 27 in 1994.

2. In 1996 the Committee organized six seminars on land-use planning in the European regions in co-operation with DG XVI. The seminars, covering Arc Alpine (28 March), Mediterranean Area (22 April), East/West Frontier (6-7 May), Central Towns and Capitals (4 June), Nordic and Baltic Zones (10 September) and Atlantic Regions (8 October), were attended by hundreds of local and regional political players and gave an extraordinary impetus to the debate on the future of spatial planning and land-use in Europe. The final documents from the seminars present an able analysis of the current problems throughout Europe and form a sound basis for establishing targets for developing the European area in 1997.

3. The president of the European Commission, Mr Santer, urged the Committee of the Regions to a strong commitment to define and implement the Territorial Employment Pacts; the Committee responded immediately to his call for support with a resolution which was adopted unanimously at the plenary session of 12/13 June.

The Committee of the Regions also thought it would be useful to establish a definition process for territorial employment pacts, presenting the positions and proposals of the regional and local authorities which it represents within the European Union. These proposals were approved by the COR's Plenary Assembly on 19 September and appear in the document "Contribution of the Committee of the Regions to the setting up of Territorial Employment Pacts in the European Union", which was sent to the president of the European Commission on 11 October.

The Committee continued working on employment issues and added new elements on the scope allowed for job creation schemes, favouring the procedure of territorial employment pacts. A global report on the Pacts was debated and adopted at the plenary session of 13/14 November.

The conclusions of this report propose joint action with the European Commission to implement territorial employment pacts by organising a Forum to pool experience, with a Conference in the second half of 1997, initially to review and eventually to develop initiatives for employment policy.

The Forum on Territorial Employment Pacts, organized by the Committee of the Regions alongside its plenary session of 13/14 November, exhibited over

40 original working examples of employment pacts set up by towns or regions in the European Union.

Mrs Monika Wulf-Mathies, European Commissioner for Regional Policy, opened the exhibition, which was visited by some 800 regional and local elected representatives, area administrators, journalists and community officials. She observed that it was "an ideal place for local authorities to pool their experience and know-how and to demonstrate their dynamism".

4. The European Parliament's Regional Policy Commission also held its first conference (European Parliament - EU Local Authorities, 1/3 October). The conference was organized in co-operation with the Committee, which drafted two preliminary reports, one on institutional issues and the other on economic and social cohesion problems; along with two EP reports on the same subjects, they formed the basis of the conference and its final resolution.

5. Consultative work increased and referrals by the Commission and the Council were better targeted: there were 27 referrals and 20 own-initiative opinions, reversing the position of the two categories as compared with 1995, during which own-initiative opinions predominated.

The Committee's outlets increased; in addition to the usual opinions, there are now reports (3 during the year) and resolutions (2).

6. The COR's opinions carry greater weight with other institutions and we can now say that the decentralised interests represented by the Committee are taken into account in shaping community policy which directly affects or involves local and regional authorities.

A summary of the impact and effect of COR opinions is presented in the following pages.

1. Development and economic and social cohesion, structural policies, industry

1

A. Opinions adopted

In 1996 the COR adopted 10 opinions and 3 reports in these areas:

a) Three opinions on trans-frontier co-operation policies:

CdR10/96 fin

The Northern Dimension of the European Union and cross-border cooperation on the border between the European Union and the Russian Federation and in the Barents region

CdR 207/96 fin

Report from the Commission on the implementation of cross-border cooperation between the Community and countries of central and eastern Europe in 1994

CdR 141/96

Current and future EU policy on the Baltic Sea region with specific reference to local and regional aspects

b) Five opinions on structural policies :

CdR 113/96

Communication from the Commission on the new regional programmes under Objectives 1 and 2 of Community structural policies

CdR 74/96 fin

Draft Commission proposal, the Allocation of the Reserve for Community Initiatives for the period until 1999

CdR 129/96 fin

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision adapting for the second time Decision No.†1110/94/EC concerning the Fourth Framework Programme of Activities in the field of Research, Technological Development and Demonstration (1994-98) as adapted by Decision 94/268/EURATOM concerning the framework programme of activities in the field of research and training for the European Atomic Energy Community (1994-1998)

CdR 211/96 fin

Proposal for a Council Decision on a third multi-annual programme for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the European Union (1997-2000)

CdR 306/96 fin

Community Structural Interventions and Employment

c) 2 opinions and 3 reports on general Community economic policy issues which are of the greatest importance to local and regional authorities:

CdR 66/96 fin

Second UN Conference on Housing and Human Settlements - Istanbul 1996 (Agenda 21 at regional and local level)

CdR 65/96 fin

Economic and Monetary Union

CdR 379/96 fin

Report on the implementation of territorial employment pacts in the European Union.

CdR 47/96

Report on regional and local government in the European Union, which constitutes the final results of an in-depth analysis, in Cupertino with national experts, of the powers, financial resources and areas of intervention for local and regional authorities in all EU States;

CdR 251/96 fin

The future of social and economic cohesion which was a basic document for the first European Parliament-EU Local communities conference in Brussels 1-3 October 1996.

B. Follow-up and impact of Opinions

In the three reports on the follow-up on COR opinions in 1996" (5th, 6th and 7th reports), the European Commission considered several opinions.

CdR 113/96

Communication from the Commission on the new regional programmes under Objectives 1 and 2 of Community structural policies

The European Commission agreed to the COR's request to strengthen its action to integrate other Community policies into regional policy.

The Commission also shares the COR's views that Member States and the Commission's services must increase their efforts to co-ordinate initiatives and actions and integrate them into programmes.

The Commission states that it cannot act on the Committee's request to integrate Community Initiatives into general programmes owing to the need to safeguard the specificity of decreed measures in the framework of the CI. This is also the case for budget guidelines, which differ from one CI to another, and for the general programmes (CCA and DOCUP).

Finally, the Commission notes the COR's view that consultation on structural policy would be preferable at the strategic consideration stage; however, in the Commission's opinion this is unnecessary, as it already provides the Committee with all the data on structural policy.

CdR 74/96 fin

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Allocation of the Reserve for Community Initiatives for the period until 1999

The Commission shares the COR's views on a clear separation of the objectives of Community Initiatives and measures taken under Article 10 of FEDER, on the priority of actions implemented in eligible areas for Objectives 1, 2 5b and 6 and on the need for an interim assessment of Community initiatives.

However, it cannot consider the COR's requests concerning the inadequate funding of CIs and resources allocated to regions covered by Objectives 1 and 6, as financial decisions taken by the European Council of Edinburgh must be respected.

With regard to the INTERREG II C initiative the Commission agrees with the COR that land-use planning must be approached in principle "from the bottom up", but points out that Member States and local and regional authorities sharing in the co-operative venture must define the strategies and priorities jointly for each area.

On the URBAN initiative, the Committee drew attention to the opportunity to concentrate on the most deprived urban districts and the Commission states that it does so systematically in implementing the initiative.

CdR 129/96 fin

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision adapting for the second time Decision No. 1110/94/EC concerning the Fourth Framework Programme of Activities in the field of Research, Technological Development and Demonstration (1994-98), as adapted by Decision 94/268/EURATOM concerning the framework programme of activities in the field of research and training for the European Atomic Energy Community (1994-1998)

Generally speaking the Commission welcomes the COR's opinion, which stresses the need for additional funding for the 4th programme-framework; it supports the "task force" concept and the COR's requests were taken into consideration in its amended proposal.

On specific points, the Commission favours dialogue with decentralised political, social and cultural interests and states that the guideline document for the 5th programme-cadre "Inventing tomorrow" already includes numerous spontaneous contributions; those from local and regional authorities are particularly appreciated. An assessment report on the past 5 years of the programme-cadre will be presented in the first half of 1997, in accordance with the COR's wishes.

In addition, the Commission assures the COR that the setting up of Task Forces will not affect the broad outlines of the programme-cadre, which are altogether in keeping with the present structure of specific programmes.

However, the Commission does not share the COR's opinion on reserving part of the additional funding to run existing programmes; resources must be concentrated on priorities having an impact on the whole of the Union if the programme is to be more efficient.

Nor does it agree with the Committee that the Multimedia Task Force breaches the principle of subsidiarity, maintaining that the Task Forces' research aims to create European networks which will be of benefit to the Union's regions in the first instance, and is in line with the principles and procedures of the programme-cadre.

CdR 10/96 fin

The Northern Dimension of the European Union and Cross-Border Co-operation on the Border between the European Union and the Russian Federation and in the Barents Region

The Commission shares the COR's view of the importance of the new northern dimension which the entry of Finland and Sweden have given to the Union and, like the Committee, it is convinced of the importance of co-operation with Russia across the external land frontier of the Union and in the Baltic region.

The Commission has taken account of the COR's recommendations on co-operation with Russia in the framework of a new Tacis programme and in the INTERREG programme. The Commission believes that several of the Committee's recommendations are already effectively included in the Objective 6 programme, in INTERREG and in the reworked Tacis programme, which stresses the common frontier with the European Union in priority.

Finally, the Commission cannot reply to the COR's proposal for a free-trade zone in south-east Finland and the Russian border zone until the subject has been studied in depth and invites the COR to share in its future work on this subject.

The three reports on the follow-up of COR opinions which the European Commission sent to the Committee in 1996 also set out the Commission's position on the opinions adopted by the COR in 1995.

CdR 235/95

Urban development and the European Union

The Commission found the Committee's document very stimulating, raising points which it is important to consider if the Community is to make an appropriate contribution to the development of European towns.

It shares the COR's opinion that the future of urban areas is a major issue for the Union and it therefore intends to include a Communication on the urban question in its work programme. Furthermore the Commission has proposed that the URBAN initiative should be allocated additional funding from the Community initiatives reserves, to enable other towns to take part in it.

The Commission takes a negative stand on writing urban development into the Treaty, which was requested by the COR, but stresses that the urban aspect must be strengthened when implementing Community policies and programmes, even in the absence of amendments to the Treaty.

CdR 368/95

Evaluation of administrative and financial consequences of EU legislative acts

The Commission is aware that Community legislation can affect regional and local authorities' operation and budget, and the COR is justified in bringing this question to the attention of Community institutions.

On the other hand, the Commission thinks that some of the COR's recommendations are incompatible with the rules on decision-taking set out in the Treaty. This is particularly true of the recommendation to amend the Treaty to provide for the assessment of the financial and administrative impact, and the COR's responsibility for assessing it.

Whilst expressing its reservations, the Commission is conscious of the need to assess as far as possible the costs and benefits of Community legislation to public and in particular to regional and local authorities. It therefore undertakes to co-operate with the Committee in this area and looks forward to receiving the information which the COR, as the representative body for regional and local authorities, is best placed to provide.

CdR 371/95

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament - Strengthening the Mediterranean policy of the European Union: Proposals for implementing a Euro-Mediterranean partnership

The Commission welcomes the Committee's support for the approach proposed and is in full agreement with most of the proposals in the opinion, particularly the objectives of peace and security in the Mediterranean, the respect for pluralism and democracy and in particular the strengthening of democratically elected national, regional and local authorities, the importance of decentralized co-operation and the priority to be given to cultural dialogue and education, the development of SMEs, the infrastructure and tourism (the Commission is planning a specific meeting on interregional co-operation in 1997). The Commission does not share the Committee's opinion regarding the creation of a permanent Euro-Mediterranean secretariat or a Mediterranean environment agency.

With regard to the COR's request for the inclusion of Libya in the partnership, the Commission points out that an international solution must be found before the embargo can be lifted.

CdR 375/95

Communication from the Commission and proposal for a Council Decision on the Commission's activities of analysis, research, cooperation and action in the field of employment (ESSEN)

The action plan: the Commission agrees with most of the observations, suggestions and recommendations in the Committee's opinion and intends to involve the Committee and more generally the regional and local authorities as fully as possible in the programme activities.

Implementing the programme: the Commission stresses that it will proceed by tenders, which will answer the COR's concerns and proposals. The Committee stressed the importance of co-ordination with other policies; the Commission points out that its Communications on structural interventions and employment and on a confidence pact for employment meet the Committee's requests.

Participation of local and regional authorities: the Commission stresses that the principle of subsidiarity and partnership with Member States governs the implementation of schemes; however, this need not exclude practical action by local and regional authorities, particularly in pooling experience and passing on sound practices.

Regarding the Committee's proposal for support grants for regional centres which could serve as points of contact and information, the Commission believes that these centres can already finance their work within the framework of structural funds, particularly the ESF.

CdR 377/95

Action programme and timetable for implementation of the action announced in the communication on an industrial competitiveness policy for the European Union.

The Commission states that the Committee's opinion stresses a number of points which occur either in the Communication or in the revised version of the draft Council decision.

In particular, the amended Decision proposal the action programme pays special attention to SMEs and specifies action to be taken in accordance with the Committee's request. The Commission also assures the COR that the new version of the initiative work programme could take account of some of its requests.

Even though this opinion has not yet been analysed in the European Commission's follow-up reports, it is important to stress that, from the point of view of the effects of the COR opinions.

CdR 141/96

Current and future EU policy on the Baltic Sea region with specific reference to local and regional aspects

This opinion was drafted by the Baltic Sea ad hoc group and representatives of the European Commission (DG IA and DG XVI). As a result the role of the regional and local authorities was specifically mentioned in the document presented at the Baltic Sea States Summit (Visby 3-4 May 1996) and the summit's final declaration included a specific reference to it.

In addition the conference organised by Sweden's regional and local authorities and the COR (Kalmar, 1 July 1996) adopted a resolution on the role of regional and local authorities in co-operation between the Baltic Sea zones.

2. Education, youth, culture

A. Opinions adopted

During the 5 Plenary Sessions in 1996 the COR adopted 6 opinions and a resolution on education and training, information, youth, sport and culture:

a) Two opinions and the resolution covered the information society:

CdR 22/96

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament accompanied by a proposal for a decision from the Council to adopt a multi-annual Community programme for purposes of stimulating development of a European multimedia content industry and of encouraging utilization of this multimedia content in the emerging information society: INFO 2000

CdR 220/96 fin

Communication from the Commission on the multilingual information society, accompanied by a proposal for a Council decision on the adoption of a multiannual programme to promote the linguistic diversity of the Community in the information society

CdR 337/96 fin (resolution)

Resolution on the information society: from Corfu to Dublin: the new emerging priorities

The implications of the information society for European Union policies: preparing the next steps

b) Two opinions on educational issues:

CdR 115/96

White Paper on education and training - Teaching and learning towards the learning society

CdR 193/96 fin

Proposal for a Council Decision amending Decision 93/246/EEC of 29 April 1993 adopting the second phase of the trans-European cooperation scheme for higher education (TEMPUS II 1994-1998)

c) Two opinions on youth:

CdR 222/96 fin

Interaction between education of young people and sport - proposal for Union-level actions to promote the positive effects of sport in Europe

CdR 191/96 fin

European voluntary service for young people - Commission working document

2

Education, youth, culture

B. Follow-up and impact of Opinions

In the three reports on follow-up of COR opinions for 1996 (5th, 6th and 7th reports), the European Commission is examining:

CdR 22/96

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament accompanied by a proposal for a decision from the Council to adopt a multi-annual Community programme for purposes of stimulating development of a European multimedia content industry and of encouraging utilisation of this multimedia content in the emerging information society: INFO 2000

The European Commission has followed up several of the Committee's requests and suggestions in its amended proposal.

In order to meet the COR's request to stress the link between INFO 2000 and the Structural Funds and the complementarity with the FEDER programme (Article 10), the Commission has amended a recital to specify that all action on information content must complement other on-going initiatives and must generate synergistic benefits for other structural fund actions and initiatives.

The COR's recommendations for preserving cultural and linguistic diversity within Europe have been taken into consideration by additions and specifications clarifying the importance of this aspect. The Commission has taken up the Committee's recommendations on the risk of a dual information society, free public service information broadcasts and the active role of the public sector; the initial proposal has been specified and included. .

The COR's request on mutually beneficial co-operation between local and regional authorities on action line 1 has been included in the amended proposal, which states that the national and regional organisations concerned should make the final selection, as they are closer to the target groups.

The Commission feels that it cannot amend its proposal to include other COR proposals, but it undertakes to take account of them when implementing these activities. With regard to the request for an increase in the budget, the Commission declares that resources cannot exceed 100 MECU's, given the constraints imposed by financial forecasts.

CdR 115/96

White Paper on education and training - Teaching and learning: towards the learning society

The Commission welcomes the Committee's very positive opinion, which clarifies the issues and the guidelines proposed to develop education and training policies in rapidly changing socio-economic circumstances.

In this context the COR opinion is of considerable interest. More specifically, the Commission shares the many of the Committee's views, particularly regarding the aim to reduce operational illiteracy, the need to develop life-

long training, the opportunity to validate informal skills, the importance of permanent access to language learning and the need for public awareness of the role of education and training. The Commission endorses the COR's observations on the development of new skills in sectors such as the environment, health, information technology and local services.

The Commission wholly agrees with the Committee about local partnerships and the central role of local and regional authorities in developing networks and co-ordinating local partnerships.

At its meeting of 6 May 1996 the Council considered the Committee's opinion, expressing its agreement on many points, including the belief that the white paper overemphasizes the economic aspects as compared with the social and civic aspects, the need to interpret the notion of the learning society very widely and to ensure equality of access to the new education and training technologies, the opportunity to validate informal skills and the importance of teachers and teacher training.

The draft report of the EP's Social affairs and Employment Commission has taken up several suggestions from the COR opinion, as a result of co-operation between the rapporteurs.

These include the need to focus not only on young people, as does the Commission, but also on children, adults and in particular on deprived groups, to provide more support for measures to combat scholastic failure and to promote a system of continued opportunities instead of associations of senior technical schools envisaged by the Commission. The report also reflects the COR's suggestions to support aptitude assessment, study and career counselling and local information centres to ensure access to education and training and the points taken up by the Council.

The EP report supports the COR's request to develop local and regional partnerships involving the regional authorities and recognizing their important co-ordinating role, in order to motivate local and regional communities to promote life-long learning and to spread good practices in this area.

At its meeting on 21 November 1996 the Council recognized the importance of developing regional and local education and training networks, stressing that this could motivate local communities, maximising their development potential and improving the level of cultural and civic life.

CdR 220/96 fin

Communication from the Commission on the multilingual information society and the Proposal for a Council Decision on the adoption of a multi-annual programme to promote the linguistic diversity of the Community in the information society.

The Commission declares that it has amended its initial proposal in accordance with the Committee's opinion, though it has not been possible to adopt all the recommendations. The Commission accepts the proposal regarding consultation with the Committee in taking strategic decisions on MLIS.

The Commission has also included a recital favouring minority languages and cultures in its proposal and as an addition to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The Commission's amended proposal was more explicit on the need for co-operation with other Community initiatives, in particular such active programmes as SOCRATES, IDA, INFO 2000, MEDIA and RD. The original proposal already included co-operation with Member States' and regional initiatives and the Commission undertakes to create concertation bodies comprising representatives from Member States and the regions as well as from the private sector.

The Commission does not share the COR's position on broadening the legal basis of Article 128 of the Treaty, as the main object of the programme is better based on Article 130 paragraph 3.

The Commission agrees with the Committee that there are other modes of human communication than the written and spoken use of natural language, but at this stage it does not wish to extend the field of application beyond the two principal means of communication.

Finally the Commission is unable to accept the COR's budget proposals, though conscious of their modesty, owing to the extremely severe restrictions on Heading 3 initiatives in the budget forecasts.

CdR 222/96 fin

Interaction between education of young people and sport - Proposal for Union-level actions to promote the positive effects of sport in Europe

The Commission welcomes the COR opinion, many factors of which could contribute to reflection on the impact of sport in the European Union. The Commission expresses its agreement with most of the recommendations and asks the Committee to consider giving its opinion on the possibilities of job creation in sport at regional level.

The Commission thinks that the suggestion to declare a "Year of Sport" during the next few years, should be discussed in the first instance by all the institutions concerned, in close co-operation with bodies representing the sporting world.

Other opinions not yet analysed in the European Commission's follow-up reports have had visible effects on other European institutions:

CdR 193/96 fin

Proposal for a Council Decision amending Decision 93/246/EEC of 29 April 1993 adopting the second phase of the trans-European cooperation scheme for higher education (TEMPUS II 1996-1998)

At its meeting on 21 November the Council proposed extending the TEMPUS II programme for two years, as the Committee requested, in order to have a positive assessment of the past.

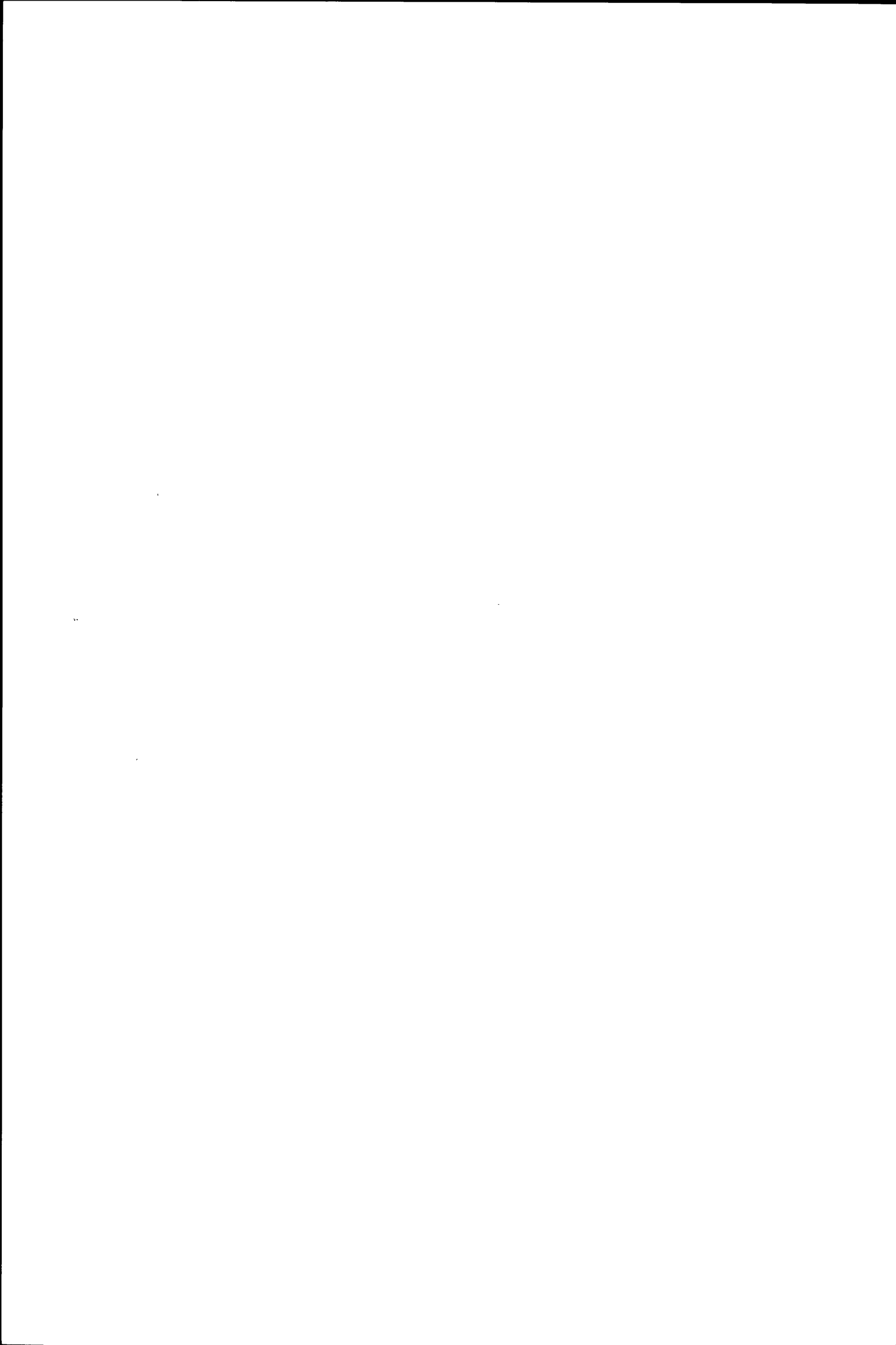
The EP's Committee on foreign affairs took up the COR's proposal to develop the programme of relations between universities and industry.

CdR 191/96 fin

European voluntary service for young people - Commission working document

The COR opinion asked the European Commission to involve regional and local authorities in defining the framework of the multi-annual programme. The Commission invited COR members to the seminar on European voluntary service at Poitiers at which several of the Committee's proposals were recognized, in particular, the importance of the educational dimension, the need to target the most disadvantaged young people, the importance of languages and the need for an effective follow-up of the initiative.

The opinion of the EP's Committee on Culture on the White Paper on Education and Training took up the COR's declaration that European voluntary service should never be regarded as a substitute for employment.



3. Health

A. Opinions adopted

The COR adopted three opinions on health in 1996/

CdR 25/96

Communication from the Commission concerning a Community action programme on health monitoring in the context of the framework for action in the field of public health and a proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision adopting a Community action programme on health monitoring in the context of the framework for action in the field of public health

CdR 157/96 fin

Commission Communication concerning communicable disease surveillance networks in the European Community

CdR 307/96 fin

Draft Council Recommendation on a parking card for disabled persons

B. Follow-up and impact of Opinions

In the three "Reports on follow-up on COR Opinions" for 1996 (5th, 6th and 7th report), the European Commission examined the following:

CdR 25/96

Communication from the Commission concerning a Community action programme on health monitoring in the context of the framework for action in the field of public health and proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision adopting a Community action programme on health monitoring in the context of the framework for action in the field of public health

The Commission shares the Committee's view that the health monitoring programme is the beginning of a wider Community activity in public health; regional and local authorities will be involved appropriately in implementing the programme when it is feasible. The Commission recognizes the advantages of co-operation with local and regional authority representatives; such co-operation will respect their role and their obligations.

As for the COR's request to include associated States in the programme, The Commission assures the COR that Associated States included in the programme as far as possible.

However, the Commission is unable to take up some of the COR's proposals, in particular the request to co-opt supplementary members from regional bodies onto the Consultative Committee, the mention of organisations such as the WHO and the OECD in the text, and the request for an increased budget allocation for the programme.

CdR 157/96

Opinion on the Commission Communication concerning communicable disease surveillance networks in the European Community and the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision creating a network for the epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases in the European Community.

The Commission notes a large measure of agreement with the Committee on the establishment of a Community epidemiological surveillance network for the control of communicable diseases and the need for anonymity, reliability and uniformity of practice in the collection of data.

In particular the COR asked that greater consideration be given to data collection locally by the primary health care services. The Commission replies that though this is the prerogative of Member states, it will try to integrate the contribution of these health services into the operation of the network within the framework of a regulations committee. The Commission will also draft a periodical report, as requested by the COR.

However, the Commission cannot agree to Committee's proposal to appoint health experts from local and regional authorities to the Regulating Committee, as the existing regulations only provide for representatives from Member States' governments. Similarly, the Commission cannot follow up the COR's proposal to establish regional centres on the network, as this is the prerogative of Member States. Finally, the Commission declares that in the present financial situation it cannot give a favourable answer to the Committee's recommendation that funds should be earmarked for the network.

The ministers of health, meeting in council on 12 November 1996 sent the proposal to Coreper, but it should be stressed that there are still legal problems regarding the sharing of powers between the Commission and the States.

In the week of 11 November 1996 The European Parliament adopted its report on the proposed decision and amended the proposal at the first reading. The Parliament asked that an early warning system should be included in the duties of this network, recommending that the data collection structures in each State should be called Eurocentres and should be obliged to transmit data to a central body, The European Centre for the Monitoring of Communicable Diseases.

4. Trans-European networks : transport and telecommunications

A. Opinions adopted

The COR handed down eight opinions in 1996:

CdR 15/96

Proposal for a Council Directive on access to the groundhandling market at Community airports.

CdR 16/96

Draft Commission Directive amending Directive 90/388/EEC with regard to mobile and personal communications

Draft Commission Directive amending Directive 90/388/EEC regarding the implementation of full competition in telecommunications market

CdR 19/96

Commission Communication on the Green paper on the development of short sea shipping in Europe: prospects and challenges

CdR 20/96

Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a methodology for the implementation of information society applications and the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council decision on a series of guidelines for trans-European telecommunications networks

CdR 42/96 fin

The citizens' networks - fulfilling the potential of public passenger transport in Europe - European Commission Green Paper

CdR 406/95 fin

Communication from the Commission on the common Transport policy action programme 1995-2000

CdR 422/95 fin

Communication from the Commission on the set of measures proposed for the development of Community postal services; Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive on common rules for the development of Community postal services and the improvement of quality of service

CdR 243/96 fin

Proposal for a Council Decision on inter-administration telematic networks for statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States - EDI-COM - (Commercial Electronic Data Interchange)

4

Trans-European networks

B. Follow-up and impact of Opinions

In the three "Reports on follow-up on COR Opinions" for 1996 (5th, 6th and 7th report), the European Commission examined the following:

CdR 15/96

Proposal for a Council Directive on access to the groundhandling market at Community airports.

On this subject the European Commission shares the COR's opinion on the key role of airports in regional economic development and the opening of the ground-handling market as a means of reducing transporters' costs and passing on the reduction to citizens as passengers. The European Commission also shares the COR's opinion that the ground-handling market should be opened in successive stages, depending on the size of airports and the possible effects involved; this will allow consideration of the interests of regional airports.

The Council's position coincides with the COR's Opinion, as accepted by the Commission, at various points, including the Member State's option to limit the number of operators for certain categories of service, the possibility of compensation for the airport both on the infrastructure and the concession and the consideration of social standards, in particular the protection of employees' rights.

On 15 October 1996 the Council took a final decision on the proposed directive mentioned above.

CdR 16/96

Draft Commission Directive amending Directive 90/388/EEC with regard to mobile and personal communications

Draft Commission Directive amending Directive 90/388/EEC regarding the implementation of full competition in telecommunications market

The European Commission appreciates the COR's special efforts to speed the adoption of its opinion to enable the speedy adoption of the two directives.

The COR's special recommendations were largely accepted by the Commission.

In Article 2, paragraph 1 of the directive on mobile and personal communications the locution "when it is justified" has been deleted and Article 2, paragraphs 3 and 4 of directive 92/2/EC have been clarified to meet the COR's request to eliminate any uncertainty or discretionary margin for special cases justifying the extension of the licence for GSM services to DCS 1800.

Article 4d of directive 96/19/CE (on the realisation of full competition in the telecommunications market) takes up the COR's recommendation for the provision of rules prohibiting discrimination on "rights of passage". The Commission shares the COR's concern about the social impact and is taking

a number of steps in this context, including a study of the social impact of the free use of telecommunications, in particular on employment, a follow-up of the effects of liberalisation on universal service and encouraging projects in areas such as tele-teaching and telemedicine.

The Commission could not, however, endorse the COR's recommendation forbidding the renewal licences to bodies which have special and exclusive rights on the network infrastructures, as it believes that such a prohibition would be construed as an attempt to impose full liberalisation before the agreed time.

CdR 19/96

Commission Communication on the Green paper on the development of short sea shipping in Europe: prospects and challenges

The European Commission welcomes the COR's positive contribution to the debate on measures encourage the development of short sea shipping and is giving particular consideration to the need to develop small and medium-sized ports as the Committee requested; several research projects were conducted by consortiums of small and medium ports in different regions of the Union and supported by the 4th R and TD framework programme. With regard to the COR's request for finance for merchant shipping, the Commission points out that discussions in the context of the EUROS proposal have shown that Member States were not prepared to agree to Community obligations to introduce State aid of the kind suggested by the Committee and also stresses that the proposed international agreement on the elimination of shipbuilding grants would severely limit the type of aid which could be given in this sector.

The European Parliament report agrees with the key points, in particular the elimination of harmful monopolies, the suppression of onerous administrative formalities, the promotion of up-to-date technologies and the improved training for seamen in the European Union.

CdR 20/96

Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a methodology for the implementation of information society applications and the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council decision on a series of guidelines for trans-European telecommunications networks

Generally speaking the European Commission shares the COR's views on supporting local demand for an information society which is primarily of benefit to EU citizens and SMEs, on equal terms. In particular it supports local and regional authorities' efficient co-operative initiatives on the information society and its new methods of communication, targeting activities which create employment, mainly through the SMEs.

The Commission is also pleased that the COR shares its approach on the key role of public interest applications in developing interoperable generic

services and basic infrastructures throughout Europe. The development of these applications is linked with the establishment of a partnership between the public and private sectors with the regions and localities as a major element. The European Commission therefore wishes local and regional authorities to remain privileged partners in setting up trans-European telecommunications networks to ensure the balanced development of the information society.

The European Commission shares the COR's opinion on introducing competition into the telecommunications sector. This is a new challenge for regional development; improved access will result in lower-priced services and a better market for advanced telecommunications services and this can generate new activity. Dynamic regions and communities will take up the challenge of the information society.

The European Commission intends to refer to the important lessons to be learned from local and regional networks combining citizens, SMEs and local government. It confirms that the "City Information Highway" network covers both towns and regional networks, including those with small populations.

On human resources, the European Commission agrees with the COR's opinion that better use should be made of Community expertise in information society projects, especially where they are trans-European.

In this year's call for tender, the European Commission has concentrated on an information file describing the type of project to be developed and would like to include comments from national and regional partners in any such document in future. The European Commission particularly supports the COR's opinion on continuing to develop Euro-ISDN as an immediate support for interoperable generic services, at affordable prices, evolving towards multimedia solutions. The Commission also agrees on the importance of future wide-band networks and the need for interconnection.

Progress reports on establishing Commission guidelines will take account of the involvement of regional and local players in the development of the information society and its economic and social implications.

However, the Commission is unable to meet the COR's request to give preference to a particular type of regional initiative when identifying projects of common interest, as the Council has fixed the conditions and criteria for assessing proposals and has established rules for financial grants to trans-European networks.

CdR 422/95 on

Communication from the Commission on the set of measures proposed for the development of Community postal services; Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive on common rules for the development of Community postal services and the improvement of quality of service

The European Commission fully approves the COR's views that the absence of action on postal services would have a significant impact on other

economic sectors and would be prejudicial to economic and social cohesion. It agrees that Member States must establish minimum criteria for contact and collection points, especially in rural areas, and must guarantee special assistance to post offices in rural zones when implementing the directive, as requested by the Committee.

At the same time, the Commission recognizes that Member States are free to set a higher standard than the minimum fixed by the directive, (including, for example, the COR's for two daily collections for professional users in the main urban zones).

The Commission also recognizes, that the wording of Article 9 of the proposed directive should take account of the fact that stamps do not always bear the name of the country of origin, (this is the case in the United Kingdom).

The Commission was unable to endorse several points in the Committee's opinion), these included the request for an express reference to the consultation or representation of local or regional authorities at national level.

On this subject the Commission thinks that it is for Member States to determine the circumstances for such consultation or representation, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

With regard to the request for a compulsory single tariff, the Commission agrees that this could often be appropriate but it thinks that this is a decision for Member States, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. Finally, the Commission regards the COR's target of a 90% improvement in the quality of national postal services as unrealistic in the short term for some Member States.

Other COR opinions in these areas, already adopted by the COR but on which the European Commission has not yet delivered its analysis, have had visible effects on other European institutions.

CdR 176/94

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision for the development of the trans-European transport network

On 23 July 1996, i.e. almost two years after the COR's opinion, the Council took its final decision on Community guidelines for the development of a European transport network.

On the whole, the consequences of the European Parliament's political pressure during the conciliation procedure were positive from the standpoint of economic and social cohesion, favouring peripheral regions and respect for the environment.

In accordance with the COR's position the Council and the Parliament decided to link isolated, enclosed and peripheral regions to the Community's central regions and integrate the environmental dimension into the implementation and development of the transport network.

Nevertheless, the final text will not include the COR's request to involve the local authorities in the decision-making process.

CdR 177/94

Proposal for a Council Directive on the interoperability of the European high speed train network

On 23 July 1996 the Council took a final decision on the interoperability of the European high-speed rail network.

The final text reflects the COR's major concern for compatibility with existing sub-systems, as it is vital that trains which are not covered by the TIS (Technical Interoperability Specifications) should continue to run on the network. The directive also intends to ensure that the European rail network converges progressively towards interoperability, in particular for cross-frontier regional traffic, as requested in the COR opinion.

CdR 243/96

Proposal for a Council Decision on inter-administration telematic networks for statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States - EDI-COM - (Commercial Electronic Data Interchange)

In the amended proposal of 8 July 1996 which replaces the Commission's proposal of 12 March 1993 the European Commission amended the text to correspond with the main ideas in the COR's draft opinion.

The European Commission also stresses the importance of installing information systems at regional level, recognizing the principle of subsidiarity in Community action and the need for interim and final assessment reports on the programme.

5. Energy, environment

A. Opinions adopted

The Committee of the Regions adopted six opinions in 1996:

CdR 21/96

Europe's way to the information society, an action plan

CdR 114/96

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the integrated management of coastal zones

CdR 2/96 fin

White Paper on an energy policy for the European Union and proposal for a Council Directive to introduce rational planning techniques in the electricity and gas distribution sectors

CdR 134/96 fin

Environment and economic and social cohesion

CdR 142/96 fin

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision on the review of the European Community Programme of policy and action in relation to the environment and sustainable development - towards sustainability

CdR 186/96 fin

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on European Community water policy

B. Follow-up of impact of Opinions

In the three "Reports on follow-up on COR Opinions" for 1996 (5th, 6th and 7th report), the European Commission examined the following:

CdR 21/96

SAVE II - Multiannual programme for the promotion of energy efficiency in the European Union

The Commission welcomes the contents of the COR opinion which wishes to see a strengthening of Community interventions energy efficient in the EU.

It agrees the Committee's proposals on the lines for establishing priorities, the introduction of energy efficiency as a criterion into the relevant Community programmes and on the opening of the SAVE II programme in Cyprus and Malta.

The Commission is pleased that the COR has taken a favourable position on the integration of the pilot project to improve energy management at regional and urban level in the SAVE II programme, in particular because it stress-

5

Energy, environment

es the importance of direct contact between the regions and towns and the European Commission which co-ordinates the programme.

The Commission declares that it cannot follow up the Committee's request for representation on the consultative committee because of the Council decision that attendance at meetings of committees appointed to help the Commission in the exercise of its powers is confined to representatives of Member States.

Finally, the Commission regrets the Council's decision to substantially reduce the programme funding and stresses that this could limit its scope and effectiveness.

CdR 114/96

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the integrated management of coastal zones

The Commission agrees with many points in the COR's opinion. It undertakes, however, to make a special effort to see that demonstration projects constituting the base of the programme should represent the diversity of regional and local situations, to ensure the involvement of non-Member coastal states bordering on the EU and to consider the United States' experience in implementing federal law on the planning of coastal zones.

The Commission stresses that the programme will attach considerable importance to the role of regional and local players and to co-operation with other levels.

The Commission specifies, finally, that the various financial bodies and programmes which could support projects on this initiative should extend invitations to regional and local communities to submit projects or to take part in them, but points out that existing regulations do not include involving the representatives of regional and local communities in the selection procedures.

CdR 2/96 fin

White Paper on an energy policy for the European Union and proposal for a Council Directive to introduce rational planning techniques in the electricity and gas distribution sectors

The Commission welcomes the COR's support for the White Paper on energy policy for the Union, which includes most of the suggestions from the Committee's previous opinion on the Green Paper.

The Commission shares the COR's view of the key role of regional and local authorities in energy matters but cannot accept the proposal on the energy consultative committee envisaged in the White Paper, specifying that this body must be strictly confined to representatives from the sectors directly concerned.

With regard to the COR's opinion of the Proposal for rational planning, the Commission agrees about the role of local and regional authorities in attaining the targets, but stresses that situations vary considerably between Member States.

CdR 134/96 fin

Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Cohesion policy and the environment

The European Parliament has responded to the COR's opinion, adopting the position that the Cohesion Fund must strike a balance between actions on the environment and transport and the proposal to carry out a study of the impact of various investments.

The European Commission has also signified its agreement to the proposal for separating the various types of investment and believes that it is necessary to monitor investments and more particularly their environmental impact, within the framework of European policy.



6. Agriculture, rural development, tourism

A. Opinions adopted

The Committee of the Regions adopted five opinions in 1996:

CdR 14/96

Impact of measures under the Common Fisheries Policy on regions highly dependent on fisheries

CdR 17/96

Regional consequences of the CAP reform

CdR 18/96

Proposal for a Council Regulation concerning the organization of the market in the fresh and processed fruit and vegetables

CdR 54/96 fin

Promoting and protecting local products - a trump-card for the regions

CdR 302/96 fin

Proposal for a Council Decision on a first multiannual programme to assist tourism - PHILOXENIA (1997-2000)

B. Follow-up and impact of Opinions

In the three "Reports on follow-up on COR Opinions" for 1996 (5th, 6th and 7th report), the European Commission examined the following:

CdR 14/96

Impact of measures under the Common Fisheries Policy on regions highly dependent on fisheries

The Commission stresses, firstly, that the Community initiative PESCA was expressly designed to stimulate the development and economic diversification of zones dependent on fishing, using a "bottom-up" approach involving regional and local players in the decision-making process, but satisfying the principle of subsidiarity. In this respect the Commission points out that the preparatory work for POP IV (1997-1999) included consultation on the ground with professional organizations and decision-makers in the local authorities.

Like the COR the Commission favours consideration of a rapprochement between the Common Fisheries Policy and the region. It points out, however, that reflection should be within the existing institutional framework which is that of a common policy and not a juxtaposition of policies.

The Commission states that some of the COR's criticisms are no longer valid because of recent developments in the Common Fisheries Policy, particularly in relation to socio-economic considerations, the disparity observed

6

Agriculture

between the available resources and the fishing fleets and the need to re-establish a balance whilst minimizing the impact on communities which are heavily dependent on fishing.

CdR 17/96

Regional consequences of the CAP reform

The Commission welcomes the COR's support for the objectives and the basis of CAP reforms and recognizes the positive effects recorded on the markets.

It shares the Committee's opinion on the need for simplification but points out that the advantages of administrative simplification may involve injustices to producers as certain (especially local) characteristics cannot be taken into consideration.

The Commission agrees with the Committee on the need for an annual review of the set-aside rate as the market develops, but stresses that it cannot follow up the COR's recommendation to distribute set-aside credits to the regions. The Commission will safeguard the Community's interests in international affairs and will monitor international obligations for compatibility with the CAP as the Committee requests.

The Commission also welcomes the Committee's consideration for rural development in the common agricultural reform policy; it stresses that the problems facing rural zones are expressly mentioned in the Treaty and that they benefit specifically from European policies to strengthen economic and social cohesion.

In answer to the COR's suggestion about young farmers, the Commission reaffirms the special attention given to them as key players in the agricultural and rural world and points out that there are specific provisions for them under the Objective of Structural Funds.

On the CAP generally, the Commission's strategy paper on the outlook for enlargement towards the east stresses that in future Member States and/or regional authorities will have more freedom in the implementation of EU legislation, in particular back-up measures. The Commission believes that specifically sectoral policies of the CAP type have their limits and the "territorial" criterion seems to be receiving greater consideration.

There is an important innovation in the Commission's first Cohesion Report, which not only questions the effects of structural policy on cohesion but analyses the performance of other policies under the Treaty obligation to take account of economic and social cohesion regionally. It therefore analyses the results of the Union's widest common policy on the regions; this is an important movement by the Commission towards the COR's position.

The "Report on follow-up of Opinions given by the Committee of the Regions" addressed to the Committee in 1996 also sets out the Commission's position on CdR 376/95 on "The Green Paper on the Role of the Union in Tourism" adopted by the COR at the November 1995 plenary session.

The Commission welcomes the Committee's opinion and the favourable reception and analysis of the Green Paper.

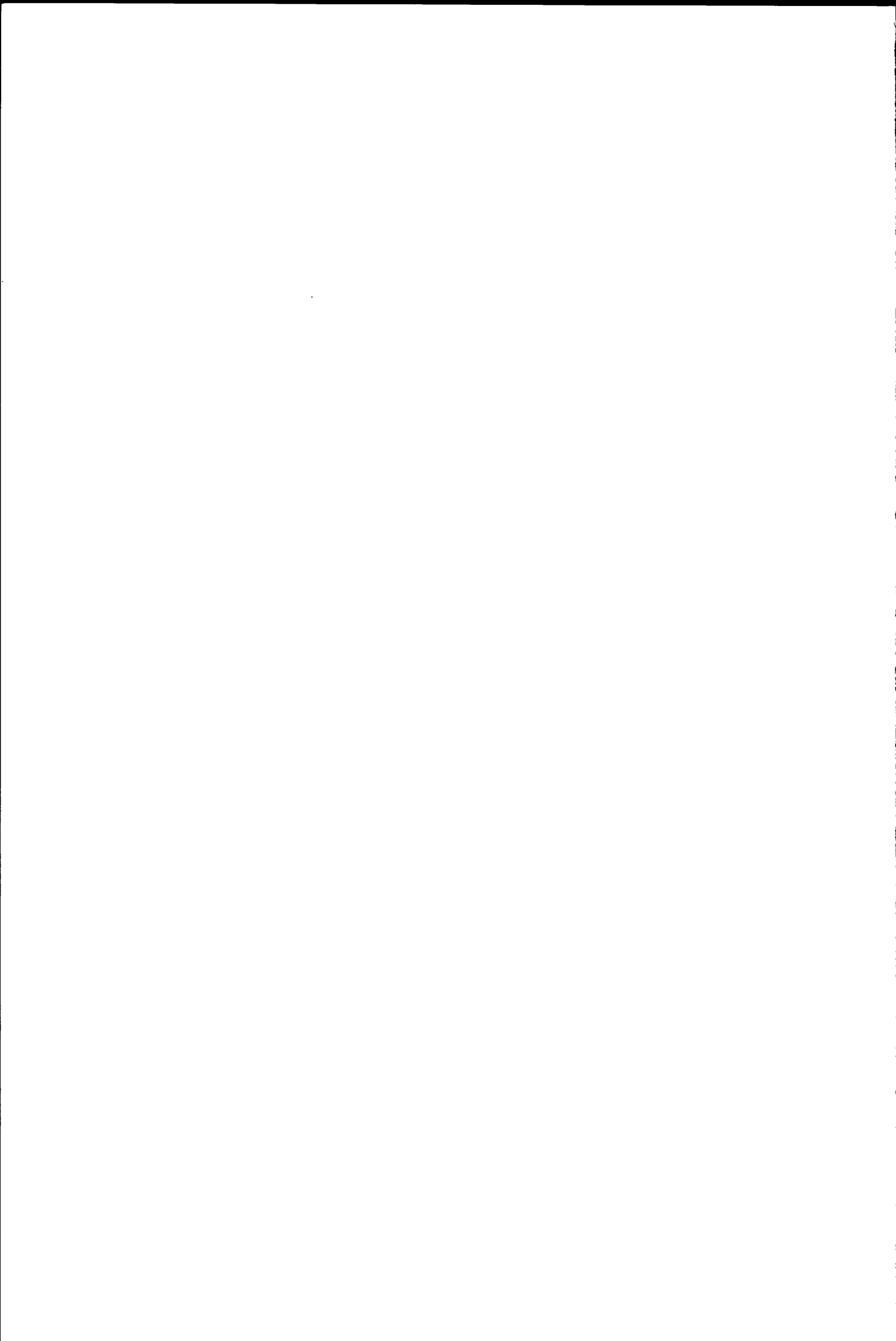
Generally the Commission has adopted the Committee's guidelines on the perspectives for extending the Union's role in tourism, its main objectives and the means for attaining them, when the Communication was presented to the Council under the declaration attached to the Treaty, as well as at the drafting of the Council's proposed decision on the first multi-annual programme for European tourism "PHILOXENIA".

The Green Paper covers the structure of the main bodies managing national tourist policies, including regional and local authorities. The Commission undertakes to complete and update the Green Paper annexe and publish it annually as the COR requested and asks the Committee to contribute to the work by providing useful information.

In following up the Committee's suggestion the Commission stresses that the proposed programme is compatible with the principle of subsidiarity, and that the criteria established and the implementation methods recommended will ensure that this principle is respected in practice.

The Commission shares the COR's concern for co-operation and co-ordination, which it regards as regulators of the quality and competitiveness of the European programme for tourism.

However, the Commission does not agree with the Committee's view that a common European "image" would erase the individual and cultural identities which local and regional authorities stress in their promotions. The Commission's programme is intended to promote Europe as a tourist destination and tourists regard Europe as a destination in itself, but its action aims to exploit the continent's pluralism and diversity in presenting the many opportunities offered to visitors from other countries.



7. General subjects

A. Opinions adopted

The COR adopted five opinions and one resolution on subjects of general importance in 1996.

CdR 23/96

Proposal for a Council Directive on the right of third country nationals to travel in the Community
and

Proposal for a Council Directive on the elimination of controls on persons crossing internal frontiers

CdR 112/96

Green Paper on Innovation

CdR 156/96 fin

Proposal for a Council Decision proclaiming 1997 European Year against Racism

CdR 221/96 fin

Communication from the Commission on priorities for consumer policy 1996-1998

CdR 161/96

Equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union

CdR 55/96 fin and CdR 55/96 fin Appendix

Resolution on European year of local and regional democracy

B. Follow-up and impact of Opinions

In the three "Reports on follow-up on COR Opinions" for 1996 (5th, 6th and 7th report), the European Commission examined the following:

CdR 23/96

Proposal for a Council Directive on the right of third country nationals to travel in the Community
and

Proposal for a Council Directive on the elimination of controls on persons crossing internal frontiers

The Commission fully endorses the observations in the Committee's opinion and particularly welcomes its support for the legal framework in the two proposed directives.

The directive on the abolition of controls: The Commission shares the COR's concern on the need to link the abolition of internal frontier checks with effective compensatory measures to ensure internal security within the Union

7

General subjects

and affirms its agreement with the Committee in asking that this link be written into the directive in the clearest terms. However, it points out that the establishment of this political link has been studied in the framework of negotiations conducted by the Council.

With regard to the Committee's request concerning the non-application of the directive to persons subject to geographical restrictions on their visa or residence permit, the Commission believes that this is provided for indirectly in its proposal on the public order reservation.

The three "Reports on follow-up on COR Opinions" for 1996 (5th, 6th and 7th report) addressed to the Committee by the European Commission in 1996 also set out the Commission's positions on opinions adopted by the COR in 1995.

CdR 233/95

Commission Communication on cooperation for European territorial development: Europe 2000+

The Commission is basically in agreement with the Committee's view of European land-use planning as a way of promoting cohesion by achieving durable and harmonious growth.

It also stresses its agreement on two key points, the first being that land-use planning is a major issue in achieving a citizen's Europe and the second being the need to see land-use planning in Europe in the context and in terms of strengthening the Union's economic and social cohesion.

The Commission states that there is no objection in principle to the possible inclusion of land-use planning in a future Treaty, in line with the COR's request. This proposal would give the policy a legal basis, gaining recognition for it and making it easier to implement.

The Commission shares the Committee's viewpoint regarding the revision of the eligibility criteria for certain Community initiatives in liaison with the development of urban policy but points out that eligibility criteria can only be determined and implemented at present within the framework of the Structural Fund rules in force until the end of 1999.

CdR 370/95

Council Directive 92/50/EEC relating to the coordination of procedures for the award of public service contracts Directive 92/50/EEC

The Commission shares the COR's view that the general revision of Directive 92/50 EEC, co-ordinating the procedures for awarding public service contracts require an in-depth assessment covering more aspects and leading to more provisions than those envisaged at the moment in the context of the amendment following the agreement on public contracts (PMA).

However, given the general state of its implementation, the Commission does not think it opportune at present to undertake a general revision of the direc-

tive in the absence of sufficient information on “the way the directive has operated”. Furthermore the Commission shares the COR’s views on issues such as “privatisation” and collaboration between the public and private sectors, the exact classification of the services fully or partly covered, the method used to calculate thresholds, the possibility of taking active steps to promote employment and the participation of SMEs in public tender allocations. The Commission confirms that all these questions will be examined carefully in drafting the general revision of the directive.

Finally the Commission states that it cannot follow up the COR’s recommendation for a general increase in thresholds, as this would amount to a failure by the Community to respect its international obligations under the agreement on public contracts.

CdR 112/95

Green Paper on innovation

has not yet been examined in the Commission’s follow-up reports, but the effects of this opinion can already be assessed; after discussing the green paper, the European Commission adopted an “Action plan for innovation in Europe” which includes many suggestions from the Committee’s opinion.

Suggestions adopted include in particular the proposal regarding the importance of local and regional authorities as providers of information to SMEs and the use of Structural Funds and the instruments of the R and TD policy to promote innovation.

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee
of the
Regions



Rue Belliard 79 - 1040 Bruxelles
Tél. +32 2/282 22 11 - Fax +32 2/282 23 25

