

# Le bicamérisme et la représentation des régions et des collectivités locales : le rôle des secondes chambres en Europe

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## Prospects for the representation of regions

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This presentation is divided into three short stories: The first story will be on decentralisation in the new democracies after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the second one on good governance and finally the third story on the need to improve the relations between national, regional and local authorities.

1. First story: In the 1990's as the new democracies became full members of the Council of Europe they were obliged to sign, ratify and implement the **European Charter on Local Self-Government** (ECLSG). By doing so, the previously very centralised states, established local and regional self-government, decentralised political powers, brought the decision making process closer to the citizens and enabled them to directly elect their representatives. By my opinion the ECLSG contributed to the democratic process in the new democracies more than any other document in the last two decades. Even in the most difficult situations, for instance, during and after the war in the Balkans it was the local and regional authorities that came together first, started rebuilding the damaged infrastructure and commenced economic and cultural cooperation far before the national authorities. This first story on decentralisation is no doubt one of the most successful stories in Europe's recent history.
2. Second story: During the last 10 – 15 years citizens were not always satisfied with the way local and regional authorities were dealing with public affairs. Transparency, efficiency, ethical conduct, competence and responsiveness of local and regional representatives were

sometimes mentioned in a negative context. Taking this into account the recent initiative of adopting a **Strategy on Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level**, represents a very important new phase in the development of local and regional democracy in Europe. The draft text of this Strategy was discussed in Valencia several months ago and hopefully will soon be adopted. While the ECLSG pressed on the national authorities to decentralise, the Strategy on Innovation and Good Governance insists that the local authorities themselves must comply with the 12 principles on which the Strategy is built.

Ladies and gentlemen, if the Strategy be equally successful as the Charter, this will no doubt be another great contribution to democracy in Europe.

3. Finally, the third story is the story on the **need to facilitate co-operation between the three levels of governance**. Because even if the State is decentralized and even if the local and regional authorities are doing their best, optimal results can be achieved only if there is vertical co-operation and co-ordination between all levels of governance. Since none of the countries of the Western Balkans have a bicameral system enabling a balance between the centre and the State's geographical components, different attempts and approaches have been made to achieve this balance. Here are some examples:

- Local and regional authorities have established associations to have a stronger political position when communicating with the national authorities.

- Parliaments have established Committees that contact the local and regional authorities before adopting legislation which concerns these authorities.

- Some Governments have established Ministries for Local and Regional affairs.

- Two new Euroregions have been founded (Adriatic Euroregion and Black-Sea Euroregion) which have in their Statutes foreseen the need to have representatives of the national authorities to be included in the different bodies of these Euroregions.

However, these are only partial solutions to the overall need for a permanent co-operation between the three levels of governance. An additional problem lies in the fact that Statistical Regions are often very much different in comparison to the Self-Government Regions.

Therefore, this Conference and future Conferences on this topic should besides examining the role of the second chambers in representing the Regions have an additional objective. We should try to propose a possible model or models **how to substitute the role of the second chamber in the States were a bicameral system does not exist**.



One such model was recently discussed at a meeting of the Association of Local Democratic Agencies. It was suggested that the **Parliaments in South-Eastern Europe should establish a body in which representatives from the National Association of Towns, National Association of Regions, Parliamentary Committee on Local and Regional affairs and the representatives of the National Government should regularly meet, jointly plan and follow the realization and implementation of their common projects.**

Ladies and gentlemen, if we manage in improving the co-ordination and co-operation between different levels of governance, we will no doubt additionally contribute in bringing Europe even more closer to its citizens and their expectations.

