

Intervention by Peter Hain, member of the Convention
representing the UK Government and Secretary of State for Wales
on the role of the regions.

Living in Wales, and representing Wales in Britain's Cabinet – a nation with a proud and distinct heritage, and its own legislative assembly - I strongly believe in greater recognition for Europe's regions in Europe's structures.

This Convention will fail unless we make the EU more relevant to people. In my country – as in most of yours - many significant decisions are taken by democratic assemblies outside our national parliament: by local and regional government. Many of their policies are determined by what's happening in Europe. But their voice is not effectively heard in Europe.

To my mind, that means we are all missing out. Missing out on the opportunity to improve the quality of legislation. Missing out on the chance to involve more people in European business. To win their interest and trust. To reconnect Europe to its citizens.

In the UK our devolved administrations spend up to 80 per cent of their time and resources on implementing EU law. But the Treaties do not recognise this burden of responsibility. I believe they should.

If we are serious in wanting greater democratic legitimacy, we must ensure regions and localities are routinely consulted about proposals that will affect them. And that consultation needs to take place early on, so that their views can be properly taken on board.

As you will see from the paper I have submitted to the Convention, I am not advocating a Union of regional and local partners. Not at all - I firmly believe that the Member Nation States must remain the foundation of the Union. And that it would be misguided to give regions and smaller countries within Member States direct access to the ECJ – even if that access were restricted to subsidiarity concerns.

But we should move to allow regions and localities to seek justice from the Courts through the Committee of the Regions – the body that we set up specifically to represent those regions and localities at the Union level.

This body has arguably not been as influential as we hoped. We should look again at how it might more effectively represent the regions and localities. We might start by renaming it the Assembly of the Regions to better explain what it is.

By deepening and widening the role of the regions and localities in the EU, we can start to tackle some of the issues at the heart of this Convention - enhancing democratic legitimacy, improving the quality of legislation, and connecting Europe to its citizens. We can show our commitment to a Europe that works for its people.

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