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For all of us it is obvious, that the European Union will be strong if its regions will benefit from sound governance and good relations both with the local communities, as well as with higher levels of administration – the national state and the Union.

It is the one of the main goals of the Convention to push forward the task started by the Maastricht and the Amsterdam Treaties, which founded the Committee of the Regions and gave it a wide scope of tasks to fulfill. Only then will we be able to fully stand with the burden of the Laeken Declaration, which says, that the European institutions must be brought closer to its citizens. We have to remember that the regional and local administrations can play an important part in bringing the EU closer to citizens, which is a key point in the Nice process.

However, we must be aware of the fact, that the countries of the European Union differ greatly. Some of them - like Germany, Austria or Belgium - are federations, where the regions have a strong “say” and usually are empowered with various legal instruments given by its capitals. On the other hand - countries like France, Poland or Slovakia are much more unilateral and the prerogatives of the regions are not mentioned in the constitution. Bearing that in mind we should not try to homogenize fully the legal competencies of the regions, because it would hinder the relations between the states and the regions and it would be against the rule of subsidiarity. We have to be aware that the Union should not interfere in the internal relations between the state and the regions, because it is the state that decides how much autonomy the regions obtain.

Mr. President,

I believe that the regions of the enlarged Europe will play a very important role in the twenty first century. The subnational entities are much closer to the citizens and thus can reply much faster and better to their needs. It is necessary that the Constitution of Europe will state clearly the important role of the regions, both in the article 2 “the values of the Union”, as well as in article 3 “territorial cohesion”.

I think that it would be appropriate if the regions themselves could control the implementation of the rule of subsidiarity, but only if they do not interfere with the internal organization of the member states. It seems bizarre to me, that every ordinary citizen of the Union can appeal to the Court of Justice, if his rights are neglected, while a region cannot. I do believe that this situation is going to change as soon as possible.

It is appropriate for the European Union to introduce greater participation of regional and local authorities in the European decision-making process, as early as the stage when Community policies and acts are being devised. The key role is to be played by regional and local bodies, in particular in the process for the drawing up of Community decisions and in the implementation of Community policies, since that will increase the support of the Union's citizens for further progress in European integration;

Yet I believe that the constitution of the Union should give all the regions the opportunity to enjoy the rights, but we should leave it upon the national states to decide whether the regions could benefit from them.

Mr. President,

The regions of the acceding countries have a much heavier burden. On one side they have to implement the *acquis communautaire* while learning it, and they have to do it in a very short time. On the other side they have to learn how to cooperate in a Union combined of more than 300 regions, where their 'say' on the European forum might be weakened by voices of much stronger and wealthier regions of the 15 older member states.

We have to avoid that threat – we have to empower the Committee of the Regions with such prerogatives, that it will represent equally all the regions of Europe, no matter their size or assets or connections.

I welcome the Liaison Group initiative, which the Committee of the Regions has started, which prepares the local authorities in the acceding countries to fulfill their mission in the new *grande Europe*.

Additionally, I believe that it is essential that the Committee of the Regions will be named as one of the institutions of the Union in the European Constitution. I am fully convinced that the Court of Justice may also rule on proceedings for annulment brought by the Committee of the Regions with regard to acts which might infringe the principle of subsidiarity or in order to defend its prerogatives.

Mr. President,

Poland, as I said earlier, is a unilateral country and our 16 regions, despite receiving much autonomy in the last decade, having now their own parliaments, which decide of their local affairs, our regions have a different situation than the regions, which have enjoyed autonomy during decades or even centuries. Poland is not an exception - similar situation is in other future member countries.

Many of Polish regions - like Silesia (in Germany know as Schliesien) - where I come from – faces severe problems having to restructure its heavy industry and develop new objectives. Silesia is a heavily industrialized region, one of the biggest European producers of coal and steel. It is the mostly populated region in Poland and it produces 12 percent of the whole income of Poland.

Restructurisation of Silesia means closing many coal mines, steel mills and other connected plants, which boosts unemployment. As a member of the local community I do count on the wisdom of the regional policy of the European Union, which will help to stipulate the development of Silesia and will encourage almost 5 million people who live there.

Mr. President,

I have heard many words about the close neighborhood, about cooperation between regions which lie in different EU-states, or even among the regions, which have been divided by frontiers, like in the contribution of Sir Neil MacCormick. I would like to ask the Convention – what about the regions, which will be split by the external borders of the Union? What about the regions, like Galicja, which lies partly in Poland and partly in Ukraine? What about Karelia, which lies partly in Finland and partly in Russia? How do we see cooperation in this field? Is the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) the right answer?

Mr. President,

I am fully convinced that you, as the President of the Regional Council of Auvergne, understand fully the importance of the special relations between the European Institutions and the regional authorities and I do count on you taking special care of the role of the regions.

I would like to end my speech with a statement, which should be our credo: “if the regions will be closer to the Union – then the Union – according to the Laeken declaration – will be closer to the citizens.”

Thank you for your attention.