

## Views on plan D

It is of course commendable of the commission to initiate more democracy in Europe. The communication between the politicians and the citizens must be improved. However the basic platform for this process must rely on the local community.

First of all I identify myself with my hometown. This is the place where the decisions are made – important decisions effecting my everyday life. This is also the place where I should have the opportunity to choose my political representatives – this is where the dialogue takes place – this is the place for the core of the debate. These issues will perhaps from a European perspective seem trivial but in fact these matters touch the hearts of the citizens deeply – i.e. the planning of roads and streets in my area, the way the disposal of garbage is organized, the way my children are being educated within the educational system etc etc.

This being my point of view – that democracy and personal commitment are anchored on the local level – leads me to my first question:

Why do we not discuss the principle of subsidiarity to a greater extent?  
The citizens will accept or reject a decision effecting their ordinary life on the basis of understanding

- 1) how decisions are being made
- 2) the different levels of the decision making
- 3) the balance of integrating the local level into the decision.

The principle of subsidiarity and the way it is applicable within each disciplin should be made very clear on the European level as well as on the national level.

Today there is a risk that the debate will focus on how the European Union should reach its citizens and inform them of decisions made on a central level – instead of starting off with

- 1) what should be decided on the local level and
- 2) moving further on to decisions needed on the national level and
- 3) of course decisions depending on a trans-national level solution.

The trans-national decisions could include permanent institutions as well as ad-hoc alternatives.

So there is a need to identify different kinds of trans-national cooperation. The next example is from the Baltic Sea and the network of cities called

The Union of the Baltic Cities. During a relative short period of time this cooperation has developed and expanded within different sectors such as cultural activities, city planning, education, tourism etc etc.

My second question involves The European Union and how the union should act in order to facilitate the different forms of collaboration. Making the cooperation easier will also strengthen people's influence – what we are looking at now, is a boarder created for bureaucratic reasons – which in reality is an obstacle to a well-functioning network (150 km boarder).

The D-plan and the white book on communication presents several great ideas. Of course we must use new ICT to communicate. I come from one of the world's most intense broadband connected cities – Umeå – and as a local politician I receive e-mail messages every day from our citizens. We are on the local level trying to facilitate our services by being accessible 24 hours a day via our website. Our citizens have the possibility to pick out their building site for their new house via our homepage. In the same way all the activities of The European Union should be made transparent to its citizens.

My point is that democracy in Europe must grow from its roots. We must focus on local identity and give people a chance to influence the decisions in the city or region where they live. Trust is there, when you know how decisions are being made and when you know that you can influence the decision-making. However we all realize that there are some decisions with the characteristics of being comprehensive decisions, equally important to us all, such as our safety, environment and sources of energy. Hopefully we may, with a good plan-D, put confidence in our representatives on the European level. But the subsidiarity principle must be the leading star in order to avoid very strange extremely detailed decisions – otherwise The European Union will be ridiculed. In order for us to trust we must be able to see good sense in the decision. (Who can see the sense in moving the parliament once a month? The understanding would probably increase and be enriched by placing institutions permanently in various member countries)

My conclusion is, that plan D should deal less with the issue of how Brussels should reach out to the European citizens and more with on how the citizens, profoundly based in local democracy, could effect the development of The European Union.

Marie-Louise Rönmark

1 st Vice President of The Union of the Baltic Cities

Mayor of The City of Umeå.