

UBC comment on the White Paper on European Governance

1. The European Union is a system of multi-level governance. This implies that the arenas of policy making are linked rather than nested. Linkages between the levels of decision-making (the Union level - national level - regions) challenge the division of labour between the authorities. This has led a situation where the European Union has lost its purpose and clarity in the eyes of European citizens. The White Paper of European Governance is not an answer to the democratic deficit of the European Union as such but aims at reducing the management deficit of the Union.

2. The White Paper is a product of the Commission and views the European Union from the perspective of the Commission. Its main argument is that the Community method should be revitalised and the balance between the institutions restored. This would contribute to openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence of the European Union.

3. The UBC welcomes the general approach of the Commission. The restoration of the confidence of the European Citizens towards the Union activities is needed and the White Paper offers important insights into that. The UBC sees that in the process of bringing the European Union closer to its citizens, local and regional authorities have could have an important role. The UBC welcomes the Commission's approach, which stresses the value of these actors. Regions and local authorities have an important role in many policy areas.

4. Regions have in particular a key position in the management of structural policies. Their voice and needs are not, however, directly channelled into the work of the European Union. On the contrary, structural policy instruments have strengthened the position of central governments. The present systems does not offer channels and instruments to voice the interests of local and regional authorities.

5. The UBC welcomes the proposals of the White Paper to emphasise the expertise of local authorities. This would in the best take place in a triangular relationship between the central institutions, national governments and local authorities. Local authorities have the expertise and experiences not only in the field of structural policies but also in issues that a close to the needs and interests of the European citizens. Local authorities represent the best expertise in these policies and this should be exploited in better ways in the European Union.

6. The UBC welcomes proposals concerning the better use of local expertise in the work of the EU. This will help the EU to reach out to citizens in ways, which take into consideration local conditions. This calls for a new kind of partnership. Therefore we urge the Commission to establish a more systematic dialogue with national and European associations of regional and local authorities at an early stage of policy shaping. The UBC is ready to take a constructive part in that dialogue. We also offer out partnership in "target-based contracts" suggested by the White Paper.

7. The UBC calls for a new kind of partnership not only between the institutions of the European Union but also between the local authorities and central government authorities in order facilitate

the participation of local authorities in early stages of decision-making that concerns local authorities.

8. We welcome the recognition of the White Paper to the role of networks in the European governance. The UBC is in itself a voluntary network of cities on a regional basis. The region of the Baltic Sea constitutes an area of Europe where different traditions of local administration can work together through networking. Our organisation covers both Member states of the EU and applicant countries. Our achievements show that networking among cities offers good possibilities for the exchange of experiences, expertise and concrete actions. The UBC demonstrates that the network approach is a valuable instrument in promoting collaboration between the local authorities. We suggest that the European institutions should devote more attention to these types of activities and recognise their value.

9. The UBC also recognises with satisfaction that the White Paper notes with appreciation the important role of exchange of staff and joined training between administrators at different levels. This is an important element in strengthening the bases of good governance in Europe. We stress in particular the importance of networking in regions where the enlargement of the EU is likely take place. We stress that the role of local authorities is of a central value to the governance of the EU through training and twinning in acceding countries.

10. The UBC also welcomes proposals concerning new methods of regulation and the use of new legislative instruments. In our view the use of framework directives and co-regulation would serve the interest of cities and local authorities in allowing the into consideration local conditions and national and regional differences. The use of these instruments should be studied and tested before their universal application.

11. The UBC evaluates positively the proposals of the White Paper. The larger involvement of local authorities and their associations could greatly contribute to the governance of the European Union. We urge the Commission to pursue its ideas forward in collaboration with local authorities. Many of the problems addressed in the White Paper call for deep changes in the European Union. Problems of transparency, participation, accountability and openness should be addressed by the work of the Convention.