

Address by the Queen's Commissioner for the Province of Limburg, L.J.P.M. Frissen, at the close of the conference *Practical approaches towards effective European transfrontier co-operation*, 7 July 2009, Provincial Government Buildings, Maastricht

Dear Mr. Micaleff,

Dear participants to the conference,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe is part of everyday life in the Province of Limburg. Our past and our future bind us to the German and Belgian regions that surround us. The Province has worked closely with its neighbours for many years in four separate Euroregions. And there are good reasons for us to join forces in this way, for we are facing major challenges. Among them are the current economic crisis, democratic trends, and the ageing of our population and decline in the number of young people. "United we stand, divided we fall" is the motto of our Belgian neighbours. That applies equally for the Euroregions.

We are therefore delighted and grateful that you have gathered in our region for a conference to discuss and promote effective European cross-border cooperation.

The aims of this conference were twofold. First, you wished to identify the factors that promote or obstruct cross-border cooperation. Secondly, you wanted to offer local and regional authorities a forum for sharing knowledge and information on that topic.

You have worked hard in the past day and a half and engaged in many serious discussions in order to achieve these aims. The results of your labours are useful and valuable. You have recorded those results in a set of recommendations, and have expressed the ardent hope that they will be adopted.

To prevent decision-makers and policy-makers at various levels from simply sitting around and not acting at all on your recommendations, you have addressed them directly. Member States, local and regional authorities, the Council of Europe, the European Commission: all can and must make a vital contribution to facilitating and simplifying cross-border cooperation.

I would like to quote a number of important recommendations from your closing statement.

Member States are asked to adjust the legal framework for cross-border co-operation to meet the needs of local and regional authorities to co-operate with their neighbours across the borders.

Local and Regional Authorities should support cooperation with NGOs and the private sector. They should also support their involvement in the implementation of cross-border cooperation projects.

It is important for Local and Regional Authorities to see in cross-border co-operation an opportunity enabling them to perform more effectively their functions. In the interest of their populations.

Local and Regional Government Associations should harness whatever resources are available to support the development of local government expertise in the field of cross-border co-operation. They also should provide support to their members in order to ensure the effective implementation of cross-border cooperation at regional and local level.

The Council of Europe and the European Commission are urged to support key stakeholders in their efforts to develop structures for effective cross-border cooperation.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe also has an important role to play. This closing statement will be submitted to the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government, taking place in November 2009 in the Netherlands.

More specifically, the statement addresses the Working Group on Inter-regional Cooperation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. Its technical support is crucial for the implementation of a European legal instrument for inter-territorial cooperation. This Working Group also plays a leading role in the European Regions obtaining financial support from the EU, namely through cooperation with the Committee of the Regions.

I myself am a member of the Committee of the Regions, and I will do whatever I can to help you achieve your aims.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope with all my heart that the outcome of this conference will bear fruit. It was an honour and a pleasure for the Province of Limburg to be your host yesterday and today. I would like to wish you a pleasant and inspiring stay in this European region, the Province of Limburg.

And now I would like to hand over the final declaration of this conference to Mr. Micaleff.