

Committee of the Regions

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Committee of the Regions

Set up by the 1992 Treaty on European Union (TEU), the Committee of the Regions is an advisory body that consists of representatives of regional and local bodies. Its establishment reflects the resolve of the Member States of the European Union ‘to continue the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity’ (Preamble to the TEU).

Historically, the process that led to regional and local authorities becoming part of the institutional structure of the European Union began within the European Parliamentary Assembly in the 1960s. The Assembly called for the establishment of an advisory body (a *Consultative Committee on Regional Economies*) with the aim of involving regions and local authorities in shaping Community regional policy.

Following the establishment of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in 1975, a Regional Policy Committee was set up to assist the Council and the Commission. The Committee, consisting of high-ranking officials of the Member States and of members appointed by the Commission, was unable to meet the expectations of the Members of the European Parliament.

In the Joint Statement made on 18 June 1984 during the conciliation process on the reform of the ERDF, the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament resolved to take into account regional implications when discussing common policies and agreed on the importance of more effective relations between the Commission and the regional and local authorities. The implementation of Community structural policies, particularly after the introduction of economic and social cohesion by the 1986 Single European Act, involved the regional and local authorities more and more directly.

These sub-national authorities became involved in drafting and implementing regional policy for the first time in 1988 with the establishment of the *Consultative Council of Regional and Local Authorities* under the auspices of the Commission. The Consultative Council consisted of 42 members holding an elected term of office at regional or local level. They were appointed by the Commission on a proposal from the Assembly of the Regions of Europe (ARE), the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). The Consultative Council could be consulted by the Commission on all questions concerning regional development.

The 1991 Intergovernmental Conference on Political Union was an opportunity to revive proposals from the Commission and the European Parliament aimed at establishing a body to represent the regions within the Community. The Rome European Council (14–15 December 1990) also noted the political importance that some Member States, such as Belgium, Germany and Italy, attached to this issue.

The Committee of the Regions was created by the Maastricht Treaty of 7 February 1992. Its first constituent meeting took place in Brussels on 9 and 10 March 1994.

Like the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions does not have the status of a Community institution as defined in the founding Treaties, as its function is purely advisory.

The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam strengthened the organisational autonomy of the Committee of the Regions and introduced further amendments which extended its advisory role.

The 2001 Treaty of Nice confirmed the democratic legitimacy of the Committee of the Regions by introducing the necessity for political responsibility of its members in their capacity as representatives of regional and local authorities.

In the same way as the Constitutional Treaty, the Treaty amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed in Lisbon on 13 December 2007 and not yet in force, strengthens the advisory role of the Committee and grants it the right to refer to the Court of Justice in order to defend its prerogatives.

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