

UNIVERSITY OF  
NEWCASTLE



Global  
Urban  
Research  
Unit

**School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape  
Global Urban Research Unit  
University of Newcastle upon Tyne**

**Electronic Working Paper No 19**

**The European Union Committee of the Regions,  
its UK Membership and Spatial Planning**

**Previously published in February 1996 as Working Paper No. 52  
By R H Williams  
Department of Town and Country Planning,  
University of Newcastle upon Tyne.**

Contact: [kim.mccartney@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:kim.mccartney@ncl.ac.uk)

ISBN: 0 905770 42 0

## Introduction

***'I am firmly convinced that the Committee of the Regions will become a key player in the Community decision-making process if it concentrates on topical issues of direct interest to local and regional authorities. In so doing, the CoR may also establish a strong position in time for the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference.'***

**Commissioner Monika Wulf-Mathies, April 1995 (CoR 1995)**

The EU Committee of the Regions is a new European Union body. It was created, following ratification of the Treaty of European Union (the Maastricht Treaty), under Article 198 of the Treaty as a new deliberative assembly.

In other words, it is a body to be consulted and whose opinion must be sought on proposals for European Union legislation, but it is not a legislative body, nor does it have the status of an Institution of the European Union (EU).

It has 222 full members and 222 alternates. Seats are allocated between member-states as follows: 24 each for France, Germany, Italy and UK; 21 for Spain; 12 each for Austria, Belgium, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden; 9 each for Denmark, Finland and Ireland, 6 for Luxembourg.

Membership of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) was intended by those who drafted the Treaty to be drawn from politicians holding elected positions in local and regional authorities in the member-states. However, the wording of Article 198a - '*A Committee consisting of representatives of regional and local bodies, hereinafter referred to as "the Committee of the Regions", is hereby established with advisory status*' - did leave some scope for interpretation concerning who was eligible for appointment (see 1.4 below).

The purpose of establishing the CoR was to address the democratic deficit within the EU, in other words to increase the role of elected representatives of the population in the EU's decision-making processes, and to do so by an institution which explicitly involves those politicians deemed to be closest to the local communities throughout the EU.

The CoR has been in effective operation only since 1994. It does not receive a lot of attention in the mass media, and there is to date not a great deal written about it in the academic or professional press. The main exceptions to this are the publications of the Local Government International Bureau, especially the monthly European Information Service, Bache *et al* (1995) and Gallacher (1995).

One issue on which the CoR can be expected to make a significant contribution is that of spatial planning, in view of its prominence among the responsibilities of local and regional authorities. This is a subject to which the Commissioner responsible for regional policy and for relations between the Commission and the CoR, Monika Wulf-Mathies, is giving priority: '*As Commissioner responsible, European land-use policy is particularly important to me, and hence I am very interested in holding a constructive dialogue with the Committee of the Regions on the subject*' (CoR 1995). Considerable policy-development work is underway in the regional policy directorate (DGXVI) of the European Commission and by the Committee of Spatial Development. It is widely expected that the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in

1996 to review the operation of the EU Treaties will address the issue of extending the competence of the EU in the fields of spatial policy (Williams, 1996, Chs 12, 15).

With this in mind, in 1995, the German government's spatial research institute, the *Bundesforschungsanstalt für Landeskunde und Raumordnung* (BfLR), undertook a study of the CoR and of its membership from all 15 member-states of the EU. Issues that are covered include membership, the selection process, who and where the membership represents, the place of regional and other forms of sub-national government within the state, the role of regions in spatial planning, and the levels of interest and expertise of spatial planning and awareness of EU spatial policy issues that can be expected of each national delegation to the CoR.

A report was commissioned from each member-state. This working paper is based on the UK national report compiled by the author. Interim reports were discussed in Bonn in April 1995, following which final reports were drawn up in May 1995. In the case of the UK, this coincided with local government elections in England and Wales. It is the intention that a set of shortened national reports, plus an overall analysis, will be published in *Information zur Raumentwicklung*, the publication of BfLR, in 1996. Meanwhile, given the relative shortage of material on the CoR, it was thought that it may be useful to make the UK report available in this format.

The text which follows (sections 1-5 of the working paper) is largely that submitted to the German BfLR at the beginning of May 1995, subject only to minor editing for clarity and to update in the light of the May 1995 local elections and the July 1995 Cabinet reshuffle. The titles are those required by the brief from BfLR. A concluding section has been added after section 5 containing some suggestions of issues that may be expected to arise from the comparison between the UK picture and that of other national reports, and from consideration of the political strengths and resourcing of the UK membership of CoR *vis-à-vis* those of other member-states. This is not based on a full analysis of all the other nation reports, but on the round table discussions in April 1995, and on interim reports as available.

## **1. Territorial Representation**

### *1.1*

Some key points concerning the UK constitution must be addressed first.

The UK consists of 2 kingdoms (England & Scotland, united by the Act of Union 1707), 1 principality (Wales, integrated with England by the Act of Union 1535) and 1 province (Northern Ireland, consisting of 6 counties or 2/3 of the historic Irish province of Ulster following partition and Irish independence in 1921). However, the UK has a unitary and highly centralised form of government, with no written constitution. All sovereignty and legislative power is vested in the single national Parliament at Westminster, London.

There is no regional level of government as the term is understood in other large EU member-states (see Appendix 1). In other words, there are no regional elected authorities (but see 1.5 below) although there is no shortage of regional administration (Bache *et al* 1995).

No UK member of the CoR therefore represents a regional authority. All are drawn from local government.

Local self-government by local authorities with powers of taxation and decision-making by elected councils does have a long tradition. However, the constitutional doctrine of Parliamentary sovereignty (which incidentally lies at the root of many of the divisions of opinion the

Conservative Party is having over European integration) means that local authorities can only exercise powers given to them by Parliament, and are constrained by the legal rule of *ultra vires*. Furthermore, the very existence of a local authority is dependent upon the will of Parliament.

In practice, local authorities are to a significant extent the executive arm of government, implementing policies determined by central government. Increasingly, they are also responsible for implementing EU Directives and Regulations. Under the present government, legal and financial restrictions on their freedom to exercise independence of policy-making have increased notably.

The basic constitutional structure as it affects the planning system is outlined in Williams & Wood (1994, Ch.1.1), and is compared to that of certain other EU member-states (Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands) in Dransfeld & Voss (1993, in German).

Following the adoption into UK law of the Maastricht Treaty and the creation of the CoR, an ironic consequence is that UK local authorities are accorded a stronger constitutional role within the institutions of the European Union than they are within the constitution of the UK (Morris 1991, p.1).

## 1.2

Comprehensive reorganisation of local government took place with effect from 1st April 1974 for England and Wales, and 16 May 1975 for Scotland. Wales and Scotland are to have totally new systems taking over jurisdiction on 1st April 1996. In England, the Greater London Council and the 6 Metropolitan County Councils were abolished in 1986, and there are some other changes in parts of England which will also come into effect in April 1996 (see 1.3 below).

The present system of local government, from which CoR members have been selected, has therefore remained unchanged only for the period 1986-1995. During the 1986-95 period, there has been a 2-tier structure of counties and districts in most of England outside the major conurbations of London and the 6 former metropolitan counties centred on the cities of Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield, for all Wales and Scotland apart from the 3 Island Authorities of Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles. The term Region has been used in Scotland for the upper tier, but it is a form of local government equivalent to counties in England and Wales. District Councils often call themselves Boroughs or Cities. These different names have no constitutional significance, and are the result of historic rights or charters granted by the Crown.

Some UK members (8 in total, see Table 1, below) represent the upper level of local government.

**Table 1. Type of Local Authority**

	Full	Alternates
lower tier (E, Sc & W districts)	8	10*
upper tier (E & W counties)	6	6*
upper tier (Sc regions)	2	3
single tier (London boros)	3	1
single tier (E, mets)	3	3
single tier (NI)	2	2

NB: \* 1 Alternate (Jill Evans, Plaid Cymru) was a member of both a District and a County Council.

The full list of UK membership is given in Appendix 1, and of Alternates in Appendix 2.

### 1.3

The government has a preference for single-tier local government. Therefore, in many areas, local government is in the process of reorganisation in order to create more single-tier local government. Following this reorganisation, all of Scotland and Wales will have single-tier local government, as will a larger proportion of England.

In Scotland, all existing local authorities other than the 3 Island Authorities which are already single-tier are to be abolished and replaced by new authorities, which will take over jurisdiction on 1st April 1996. Likewise in Wales, all existing local authorities are to be replaced by new single-tier authorities. In the mean time, the existing authorities continue to have responsibility and jurisdiction until midnight, 31st March 1996. The local elections which took place in April 1995 in Scotland and May 1995 in Wales were for the new authorities, to elect so-called shadow authorities which will prepare for the take-over in 1996.

In England, the picture is more complicated and not all the necessary decisions had been taken by the responsible Minister, the Secretary of State for the Environment (John Gummer) by April 1995. In general, the reorganisation will have the effect of creating single tier local government for more of the larger or medium-sized cities.

Some counties (eg Avon, Cleveland, Humberside) are to be abolished, to be replaced by unitary district for which shadow councils were also elected in May 1995. In other parts of the country, some existing districts within 2-tier counties will become single-tier authorities (eg Darlington, York), some former counties will regain independence (eg Hereford, possibly Rutland), and some counties will become single-tier authorities (eg Hereford, Isle of Wight). All changes are intended to come into effect on 1st April 1996, with the exception of the Isle of Wight, where the new arrangement came into immediate effect and the 2 existing districts abolished following the May 1995 local elections.

### 1.4

Membership of CoR is now seen officially as representing the local level of government, not specific regions or territories. This was not the view taken by the government in 1992-3, however, when the question of its role and membership first came to the attention of Parliament (Bache *et al* 1995).

All UK members and alternates were at time of nomination local authority councillors. This is a legal requirement under the Act of Parliament to ratify the Maastricht Treaty, the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, following the adoption of Amendment 28 in the House of Commons. It was not the government's original intention to have this legal restriction on eligibility, but the amendment had strong support from all local government interests including those from its own party.

The vital vote took place in the House of Commons on 8 March 1993, when the government was defeated and Amendment 28 carried by 314 votes to 292. Amendment 28 reads:-

*"A person may be proposed as a member or alternate member for the United Kingdom of the Committee of the Regions constituted under Article 198a of the Treaty establishing the European Community only if, at the time of the proposal, he is an elected member of a local authority."*

(Gallacher 1995, p.29)

Previous to this vote, the government had intended to nominate members of the CoR from people active in public life in different parts of the country who were regarded as sympathetic to the government, whether or not they held any elected office. Such people would have been selected from local businesses, regional Chambers of Commerce, regional Quangos, and possibly civil servants and Ministers themselves from territorial departments of government such as the Scottish and Welsh Offices. The then Secretary of State for Wales, David Hunt, said that he would like to represent Wales in person (Bache *et al* 1995; Local Government Chronicle, 19/12/91).

In fact there was some basis, prior to the passage of Amendment 28, for the government to argue that it was consistent with the wording of Article 198a to appoint members of the Committee of the Regions in the manner described above. The English text referred to "regional and local bodies" rather than authorities, as had been expected by the local government associations following the Maastricht meeting itself. This was explained by the Minister on the basis that bodies was a better translation of *collectivités* in the French text or *Körperschaften* in the German (Bache *et al* 1995).

### 1.5

Identification of suitable candidates and nominations for membership of the CoR was handled in the UK by the local authority associations (AMA, ACC, ADC, ALANI, COSLA). The nomination process for UK membership was coordinated by the Local Government International Bureau (LGIB), who submitted to the government a list agreed as a result of negotiations with all the local authority associations. The government accepted this advice with minor amendments other than the revision of overall allocation referred to in 1.6. There was no attempt to ensure that any specific major cities or other local authorities were represented, or that each region of England was similarly represented. The only explicit criteria for territorial representation were those referred to in 1.6 below.

The political balance was in principle proportional to the number of local government seats held by each political party, although the Liberal Democrat party is very underrepresented and the two nationalist parties (PC and SNP) overrepresented. The pattern for the Alternates is similar for the main parties, although the Liberal Democrats get one extra and the opportunity was taken to widen the party base of Northern Ireland membership. The party distribution is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Party Distribution**

	CoR seats:	Full	Alts	Cllrs
Conservative		7	7	7934
Labour		9	9	9059
Liberal Democrat		2	3	4081
Plaid Cymru (W)		1	1	159
Scottish National Party (Sc)		1	0	181
Ulster Unionist Party (NI)		1	0	na
Social Democratic & Labour Party (NI)		1	0	na
Ulster Democratic Unionist Party (NI)		0	1	na
Alliance Party (NI)		0	1	na
Independent (non-party)		2	2	676
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24432</b>
				(incl others, not NI)

source: *Municipal Yearbook 1994*.

NB: Cllrs denotes the number of Councillors holding council seats in 1994, after the local elections of that year wherever applicable.

#### 1.6

At first, the proposed national allocation was approximately in proportion to the population in each of the constituent parts of the UK (see Table 3, col 1). The allocation of 18 seats to England allowed each of the English regions to be properly represented. However, in order to secure passage of the European Communities (Amendment) Act, the government agreed to revise these in favour of the non-English parts of the UK so that respective nationalist parties could be better represented (see Table 3, col 2). As a result of this process, England is underrepresented and there is a feeling that is less balanced geographically, with a number of regions considering themselves to be inadequately represented.

**Table 3. National allocation of UK CoR seats**

	(1)	(2)
England	18	14
Wales	2	3
Scotland	3	5
Northern Ireland	1	2

#### 1.7

The Alternates have not been analysed for the purposes of this report to the same extent as the full members. This is because the UK delegation does not operate as one integrated team of 48 members. There is a mixture of arrangements for substitution depending on local and party agreements. For example, in general the English Labour members have agreed that an Alternate should take their place on their second CoR Commission as normal practice, whereas in contrast the Conservative Alternates are in effect a reserve team acting as substitutes when the Full Member is ill or unavailable for CoR business.

The distribution of Alternates follows the pattern of Full Members. Table 3, col.2 applies also to the Alternate list, and relatively minor variations are noted in Table 1 and Table 2. However, three Alternates (all Conservative) were already no longer elected members of the former local authority prior to the 1995 local elections (see Appendix 3).

#### 1.8

Local elections took place in Scotland on 6 April 1995 and in England and Wales on 4 May 1995. In the case of Scotland and Wales, all were for shadow authorities which will take over in April 1996. In the case of England, the majority of seats contested were for existing authorities, although some were for shadow authorities (see 1.3 above). No elections took place in Northern Ireland.

In the case of Scotland and Wales, all full CoR members were reelected, but this was not the case with all the English members. The outcome of Local Elections in April and May 1995 on UK membership of Committee of the Regions is set out below:

##### Full Members:

Anson lost seat on Waverley Borough Council.

Cross did not stand for election to Richmondshire District Council.

##### Alternates:

Fleming lost seat on Fenland District Council.

Prior did not stand for election to South Somerset District Council.

Cross and Prior continue to be members of Town Councils, which have powers similar to those of Parish Councils, but under English law they are recognised as being Local Authorities, so the legal basis for CoR Membership required under the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 is satisfied (see 1.4).

In addition, in the 1994 elections, from the list of alternates, Mitchell lost seat on Solihull Borough Council, Salt resigned from Barnsley Borough Council, Hughes lost seat on Swansea City Council and Humphrey lost seat on Grampian Regional Council. However, Humphrey was elected in April 1995 to Aberdeenshire County Council, a shadow authority which will take power on 1st April 1996 (see 1.3). His mandate will thereby be renewed.

The question of mandate is to be discussed at a forthcoming meeting of the UK CoR delegation. The legal position is unaffected, however: all nominations fulfilled the requirement under Amendment 28 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

Nevertheless, the situation could arise where a UK member of the CoR is not only no longer an elected local authority councillor, but that after 1st April 1996 the local authority to which s/he was previously elected no longer exists. This could cause other members to question that person's mandate, and also make it difficult for that member to obtain an adequate support and advisory service from the staff of a local authority or regional association.

As a result of the changes in Scotland, 2 of the full members (Gray and McKenna) now sit on the same relatively small local authority, North Lanarkshire District Council, which comes into being on 1st April 1996. Again, there is nothing unconstitutional about this, but it will cause local authorities elsewhere to regard this as a potential unfair advantage, and also place an extra burden on the support services provided by that authority.

For comparison with the numbers of councillors shown in Table 2, the numbers elected for the main parties in the 1995 local elections is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Councillors elected, 1995 elections**

	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Total</b>
Conservative	4940	42	82	5064
Labour	10136	731	613	11480
Liberal Democrat	4956	79	123	5158
SNP	-	-	181	181
Plaid Cymru	-	113	-	113

sources:

*The Scotsman* 8 April 1995, *The Guardian* 6 May 1995

### 1.9

In the event of a change in governing party after the next General Election, it is likely that some form of elected assembly will be established for Scotland, probably also for Wales, and possibly at a later date for the English regions (see 3.1 below). The exact form that these may take will depend on the composition of Parliament, but any government by the Labour party or any plausible combination of Labour and Liberal Democrat members would legislate on these lines.

National general elections do not take place on fixed dates. The exact date is normally chosen by the Prime Minister, unless forced by loss of a vote of confidence in Parliament. The next General Election must take place not later than May 1997, but could quite possibly be called sometime in 1996.

In the mean time, the English regions are administered for many spatial planning purposes by so-called Government Offices of the Regions (see 3.2, 3.5 below). The regional division used does not correspond to the 8 standard regions of England traditionally adopted (see official European Union map). Several of the standard regions have established ad hoc regional associations which play a role in relation to CoR members.

## **2. Sectoral Composition**

### *2.1*

All CoR members except the 2 from Northern Ireland are from Local Planning Authorities. All are widely experienced local politicians who hold or have held senior positions on their council as Committee Chair or in several cases as Leader of the Council. Some have also held high office in their appropriate Local Authority Association. Local planning issues and the duties set out in the Town and Country Planning Acts come frequently to the attention of local councillors. Several have held the post of Chair of their council's Planning Committee, and all have experience of the planning committee and of planning issues.

Similarly, all will have experience of local economic development and environmental policies. In the case of economic development, all those members whose local authority comes within an Objective 2 or 5b area (and most of the others as well) will be familiar with the operations of the EU Structural Funds and the process of generating proposals for funding within the Community Support Frameworks. Experience of Objective 1 is less because it was only extended to Scotland (Highlands, 1 CoR member) and Merseyside (no CoR member) in 1994, while in Northern Ireland the funding process is handled by the Northern Ireland Office of central government.

Therefore it is possible to conclude that the UK membership of the CoR has wide experience and a good knowledge of the British planning system, and of opportunities offered by the EU Structural Funds. However, the focus of this experience has for the most part been very local. Unfortunately, therefore, this expertise will not ensure that they are well-equipped to understand the issues surrounding spatial policy-making at the wider EU scale, and the role and concepts of strategic spatial policy-making which underlie the *EUROPE 2000+* report (European Commission 1994) and the European Spatial Development (Williams 1996). Perspective currently being prepared by DGXVI and the Committee of Spatial Development. This is because strategic spatial thinking and policy-making at the regional scale has played almost no role in British planning for many years, and the development of such thinking at the national and supranational scale has been beyond the experience and expertise of most people (whether politicians or professionals) engaged in local planning in Britain (see 5.1 below).

### *2.2*

The decisive factors in selection were wide experience, prominence and senior political responsibility within local government not only within the member's own authority but also within regional assemblies and associations and in the national local government associations. The LGIB and these associations, the AMA, ACC, ADC, COSLA, ALANI, were the key players in the selection process.

### 2.3

The leader of the UK delegation, Charles Gray, is President of LGIB; Anson, Gray and Farrington have been Presidents of ADC, COSLA and ACC. Two are former MPs (Bellotti, Tope, both Liberal Democrat); three are members of the House of Lords (Farrington, Kenyon, Tope; Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat).

## **3. Region within the State**

### 3.1

No political rights attach to regions. Local government has no constitutional status or protection other than that implied by the adoption of the Treaty of European Union noted in 1.1 above. All subnational government is the creation of Parliament and can be dissolved by Act of Parliament (eg Greater London Council, abolished in 1986). Cities or Boroughs with historic charters are no exemption. Therefore periodic reorganisation is within the legal competence of government, and this also applies to any system of regional government which any future non-Conservative government may propose.

### 3.2

In England, the standard regions (as depicted on the official map of administrative units issues by the Commission) correspond to the set of Regional Assemblies, whose membership is appointed from local authority councillors, and whose role is advisory and coordinating without any legally binding authority. As non-statutory bodies, there are variations in the formal structure and membership of each association. In general, however, it is normal practice for CoR Members and in several cases also Alternates from each region to be invited to attend meetings of the Regional Assembly with Observer status, in order to hear the views expressed and offer advice based on knowledge of the CoR.

The English Regional Associations generally welcome closer links with the European Commission and are very supportive of the Committee of the Regions as a means to that end. Most have in recent years set up representative offices in Brussels in order to promote their region positively in the EU and participate in European lobbying and networking as well as providing an information source independent of central government for their own local authorities (who pay for these offices).

### 3.3

Scotland has its own legal system and institutions, including the Scottish Office with its own Secretary of State in the Cabinet (in May 1995 Ian Lang, now Michael Forsyth); Wales has the Welsh Office, also with its own Secretary of State in the Cabinet, although for most planning purposes Wales and England operate the same way (in May 1995 John Redwood, now William Hague); Northern Ireland also has its own Secretary of State in the Cabinet (Sir Patrick Mayhew), and planning in Northern Ireland is a direct responsibility of the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment within the direct-rule arrangements, and is therefore not a local government function. Political responsibility is held by one of the junior ministers in the Northern Ireland office.

### 3.4

In England, regional planning guidance is issued by central government Department of the Environment, following advice and consultation with the local authorities and the regional assembly if any. However, final approval of the guidance must be given by the Secretary of State.

### 3.5

For England, the government recently (1994) established 10 integrated regional offices known as Government Offices of the Regions (GOR), combining the functions of the Environment, Employment, Transport and Trade and Industry Departments (4 ministries), in order to coordinate delivery of national government functions in each region. The only political accountability for these GORs is via the respective Secretaries of State in Parliament. In July 1995, the Department of Employment was abolished with many functions taken over by the Department of Education.

The Regional Directors appointed by central government to these GORs are senior civil servants, not politicians. They are seen by some commentators as provincial governors or viceroys, comparable to the system of *Préfets* as they operated in France prior to any of the decentralisation reforms, or even to the system of District Commissioners formerly appointed to govern British colonies (*Independent on Sunday*, 5/2/95).

The Regional Directors are responsible for very large budgets, including £1.4 billion for the new integrated urban regeneration programme, the Single Regeneration Budget, plus several other economic development, training, community and housing programmes. They will also play a key role in determining what is included in the programme of actions to be put to the European Commission for funding under the EU Structural Funds. Negotiating with local authorities and with the Commission will be part of their duty.

The list of GORs and their territorial extent is set out in Appendix 3. It will be noted that the boundaries do not conform to those of the standard regions or those adopted by the English Regional Associations. This could be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to undermine the growing assertiveness of the English regions, especially in respect of EU affairs.

## 4. Regions and Spatial Planning

### 4.1

Almost all local authorities except those in Northern Ireland are local planning authorities (LPAs), and all the other 22 UK members are from authorities with powers under the Town and Country Planning Acts. In all areas with 2-tier local government except certain parts of Scotland (eg Highlands), planning powers are held jointly at both upper and lower levels.

### 4.2

Planning powers are also held by Development Corporations and National Park Authorities. In all cases, ultimate supervisory authority lies with the respective Secretaries of State (Environment for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). In the latter case, executive authority is also held at this level.

### 4.3

The English Regional Associations and the Scottish and Welsh local authority associations are keen to contribute to spatial policy-making at the EU level (often with regional self-interest in mind), and through the UK local authority offices in Brussels are active in lobbying for their regions. Some CoR members are actively involved in this process. The biggest of the English regional associations, SERPLAN, the London and South-East Regional Planning Conference, is one of those with spatial planning as an explicit purpose, and takes a most active interest in EU spatial policy and the CoR.

#### 4.4

Among CoR members, several have experience of Council of Europe work, CLRAE, etc (notably, Farrington, Morgan), some of networking through RECITE networks or EU political associations, but several feel that they are lacking in experience of EU politics as such, of the style of politics (more consensus than confrontational), and of debating techniques in a multilingual situation.

### 5. CoR and EU spatial planning

#### 5.1

The UK members are able to bring an interdisciplinary view, most having held a wide range of responsibilities at a senior level in local authorities. However, they and their professional advisers (planning officers) often lack understanding of the wider spatial perspective required at the EU scale. Regional spatial planning in the sense of *Raumordnung* or *aménagement du territoire* is something of a lost art in the UK among both politicians and professionals.

#### 5.2

Several hold the opinion (which I share) that the CoR should concentrate on a limited number of themes on which it can offer real expertise, insight and influence on the eventual policy, rather than try to respond to the whole range of EU Commission proposals. Spatial planning is clearly seen as one such sector on which they should concentrate. Until the reputation of the CoR is secured by this means, its constitutional structure should not be radically changed. One UK member stated in an interview that spatial planning and *Europe 2000+* was one of the two most important subjects to be addressed by the CoR (the other being subsidiarity). While other members were less emphatic, they did not dissent from this view of its importance. This interview also drew attention to the extent to which the French membership had placed itself in a very strong position to influence to eventual Opinion to be prepared on *Europe 2000+*, through the appointment of rapporteur and the close interest taken by the President of CoR Jacques Blanc.

#### 5.3

Spatial planning falls within 5 of the CoR Commissions (the specialist subject committees into which the CoR is divided, and which undertake the bulk of the sectoral policy work). Although this may be expected to present problems, there is not a strong feeling that it actually does so. However, some tension was reported between Commission 1 and Commission 5 over who should take the lead and appoint the rapporteur for the Opinion on *Europe 2000+*.

The term spatial planning is not in common usage domestically within the UK. If it is to be given a wide interpretation, to include all the range of policy-matters that a Local Planning Authority or Planning Committee may typically be concerned with, then 5 of the CoR Commissions have an interest in spatial planning:

Commission 1 - Regional Development, Economic Development, Local and Regional Finance.

Regional policy is often taken to include the regional scale of spatial planning.

Commission 2 - Spatial Planning, Agriculture, Hunting, Fisheries, Forestry, Marine Environment and Upland Areas.

Spatial Planning is in the title with the specific focus here of rural planning.

### Commission 3 - Transport and Communication Networks.

Transport and Trans-European Networks is the policy sector where it is most obvious to the outside observer, at least in an island state, that a European spatial planning policy has a role.

### Commission 4 - Urban Policies.

Urban policy is not always as clearly distinguished from spatial planning in UK usage as it is for EU purposes.

### Commission 5 - Land-use Planning, Environment and Energy

The lead Commission for EUROPE 2000+.

#### 5.4

In spite of extensive (but often ill-informed) public discussion in the last 3 months concerning the EU and Britain's place within it, stimulated by divisions within the ruling Conservative party and by the media, the role of the CoR has hardly been mentioned. However, within local government itself, particularly those sections with specific EU and European liaison functions, there is considerable interest, and the CoR receives frequent coverage in the EIS (European Information Service), a monthly publication of the LGIB. It has received some attention from academic political scientists (eg Bache *et al* 1995, 1996) but very little by the planning profession other than those with direct responsibilities relating to EU policy.

## **6. Concluding remarks**

### 6.1

Although it is clear that the membership of CoR represents sub-national government, not regions and localities as such, each national delegation has been selected to ensure a geographical spread of membership from that country. Thus there is an implicit acceptance that regional representation is a valid function of the CoR.

### 6.2

Membership of CoR is almost entirely drawn from the ranks of senior and experienced local and regional politicians. Their Opinions should therefore command respect. However, one consequence is that there are very few young members. Women are also underrepresented. Several national delegations have no women, or only one. The UK is one of the less bad in this respect with 4 women Full members and 4 Alternates.

### 6.3

The original impetus to establish the CoR came from Germany, supported by other EU member-states with strong regional authorities. Several national delegations are dominated by politicians from the level of sub-national government that does not have any equivalent in the UK, that of regional authorities. The main categories of government from which members of CoR are drawn are federal states (Austria, Belgium, Germany), autonomous regions (eg Spain), regional authorities (eg France), cultural communities (Belgium), the chief cities of the country (eg Greece) and local authorities (eg Portugal, UK). While most delegations draw members from more than one form of local and regional authority, the balance between these categories varies widely. For example, 21 out of 24 German members are from the federal states (*Länder*). German membership is completed by 1 member from each of the 3 local government associations. All 9 Austrian federal states (*Länder*) are represented. In Spain and Italy, where some regions enjoy

autonomous status (eg Cataluña, Sicilia), their regional presidents are members, and some countries gave priority in selection to the mayors of the most important cities (eg Greece).

#### 6.4

It follows from the variety noted above that the level of support services in the form of a secretariat and official and political advisers available to members will also vary greatly. More than one UK member remarked in interview on the scale of the retinue accompanying some of the other members to meetings of CoR. It was evident that some experienced a long learning process and took some time to learn how best to exert political influence.

In order to play a full role within CoR, a member needs an effective secretariat and advice services. In comparison with membership from other large countries, the resource base for UK members is weak. It is not a problem of expertise but of pressures of time, and the fact that local councillors are often part-time politicians whereas CoR members from other countries are full-time salaried politicians. It is also a question of numbers and expertise of officers and political advisers available.

Responsibility for servicing the UK membership of CoR is taken by the Local Government International Bureau. However, the individual local authority associations, especially COSLA for the Scottish members, also contribute. The English Regional Associations, although underresourced and lacking any formal constitutional status, all try to support members from their region as fully as possible. Not all members are equally responsive to this. Some see themselves as representing local government as a sector, as formally they are. Others see themselves primarily as representing their party rather than their region.

The UK is not alone in having relatively underresourced CoR members from local government. Portugal is in a similar position, and Ireland is not very different although it does have a more integrated support system than the UK, and in future its members will hold positions on both local and regional authorities. There is a serious danger, nevertheless, that the UK may not be able to exert as much political influence as might be expected from the size of the country and the wealth of experience that its CoR members have of local politics and local spatial planning.

#### 6.5

The UK report concentrated on the 24 Full members of CoR, although as noted the Alternates do sometimes play a full role as well. Some national delegations operate as a fully integrated team of Full and Alternate members (eg Italy, effectively doubling the human resource, though not of course the voting power, of local and regional politicians who are actively supporting that country's contribution to the work of CoR.

#### 6.6

Finally, is it all worthwhile? Evidence is not yet available on which to evaluate the influence of its Opinions, although the CoR has received assurances from Monika Wulf-Mathies, the Commissioner with overall responsibility for Commission-CoR relations, that they will be taken seriously. This is key issue. To prepare well-argued Opinions and to defend them and secure adoption in plenary sessions of CoR requires a lot of work. For CoR to fulfil its role in overcoming the EU's democratic deficit, members must be confident that this effort is worthwhile.

## **Bibliography**

Bache I, George S & Rhodes RAW, 1995 *The United Kingdom and the Committee of the Regions*, chapter in Hesse JJ (Ed) Regions in Europe 1: the institutionalisation of the Committee of the Regions, Nomos, Baden Baden.

Bache I, George S & Rhodes RAW, 1996 *The European Union, Cohesion Policy and Subnational Authorities in the United Kingdom*, chapter in Hooghe L (Ed) European Integration, Cohesion Policy and Subnational institutionalisation, Oxford University Press, Oxford

CoR 1995 Appendix II, minutes of 7th plenary session, Brussels, April 20/21, CdR 149/95.

Dransfeld E & Voss W 1993 *Funktionsweise städtischer Bodenmärkte der Europäischen Gemeinschaft - ein Systemvergleich*, BMBau, Bonn.

European Commission 1994 *Europe 2000+ Cooperation for European territorial development* OOPEC, Luxembourg.

Gallacher J, 1995 *Committee of the Regions an opportunity for influence* Special Report 3, Local Government International Bureau, London.

Morris J, 1991 *Foreword*, European Information Service 125, December.

Williams R. H. 1996 European Union Spatial Policy and Planning, Paul Chapman Publishing, London

Williams RH & Wood B, 1994 *Urban Land & Property Markets in the UK* UCL Press, London.

## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ACC	Association of County Councils
ADC	Association of District Councils
ALANI	Association of Local Authorities of Northern Ireland
AMA	Association of Metropolitan Authorities
CLRAE	Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe
CoR	Committee of the Regions
COSLA	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
GOR	Government Office of the Regions
LGIB	Local Government International Bureau
LPA	Local Planning Authority

### Appendix 3: English Government Offices of the Regions.

Region:	Counties included:
Eastern	Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk.
East Midlands	Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire.
London	Greater London Council (*) area (32 London Boroughs plus City of London)
Merseyside	Former Merseyside Metropolitan County (*) (5 municipalities, Objective 1 area)
North East	Cleveland (#), Durham, Tyne & Wear (*), Northumberland.
North West	Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester (*), Lancashire.
South East	Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight (#), Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey, West Sussex.
South West	Avon (#), Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire.
West Midlands	Hereford & Worcester, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands (*).
Yorks & Humberside	Humberside (#), North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire (*), West Yorkshire (*).

NB:

(\*) denotes GLC/ metropolitan counties abolished in 1986.

(#) denotes counties to be abolished from April 1996.