



MUNICIPAL NEWS

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CYPRriot MAYORS VISIT BRUSSELS

A delegation from Cypriot Municipalities, composed of mayors, municipal councillors and town clerks has recently visited Brussels and a number of EU institutions.

The visit, which took place between 17th – 20th of April, was supported by the European Parliament (through the department of Visits and Seminars of the Cypriot section), with a view to help Cypriot local policy makers familiarise themselves with the European scene in Brussels. The visit was organized by the Brussels office of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, in close collaboration with the European Parliament.

During the visit, the delegation attended meetings of the European Parliament,



the Committee of the Regions and the Directorate General for Regional Policy of the European Commission (**continue to page no 2**).

THE HOUSE OF CITIES, MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS OPENS ITS DOORS IN BRUSSELS

The House of Cities, Municipalities and Regions was officially inaugurated on 6 June in Brussels by Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of institutional relations and communication strategy, and Danuta Hübner, European Commissioner for Regional Policy. The house, located at the heart of the EU quarter, is home to the widest range of organisations representing local and regional interests at European level – among which the Brussels Office of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities.

Some 400 guests, including Members of the European Parliament, Members of the Committee of the Regions, ministers, mayors and representatives from the European Commission attended the opening event of the House.

"I have to thank you for the fact that you, so many associations of cities, municipalities and regions, have agreed to work here, together, under the same roof", said the European Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström. "You are an inspiration for us all, because of your capacity to innovate and to make a difference on the ground".

EU Commissioner Danuta Hübner also spoke to the guests. "This House is a unique place which mirrors the experience I have gained as an EU Commissioner travelling across Europe's cities, municipalities and regions. This experience has helped me realise that Europe is not only about economic and institutional issues - it is also about feelings, passion and compassion".

The House of cities, municipalities and regions covers 4000 sq meters of brand new facilities and is located in the centre of Brussels on Square de Meeûs 1. It hosts over 20 associations of local and regional governments, as well as the representation offices of eight European cities.

Cypriot Mayors Visit Brussels

(From page 1). During the second day of the visit, a seminar on European issues was held at the new premises of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, based in the House of Cities, Municipalities and Regions in the centre of Brussels.



The main speakers of the seminar were representatives of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, members of the Directorate General for Environment (European Commission), the Region of Valencia and the Directorate General for Education and Culture (European Commission).



From the visit to the European Parliament

During these meetings, the members of the delegation acquired a better knowledge of the organizations they visited and were given the opportunity to discuss the latest developments on the European level concerning European projects, funding, Town Twinning, structural funds and cohesion policy as well as the new trends in Europe on waste and cultural issues.

Cooperation with the Committee of the Regions

Two seminars were held on Tuesday the 12th of April at the International Conference

Center in Nicosia, Cyprus, at the initiative of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities and in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union.

The first seminar concerned "Participatory Democracy", a question for all contemporary democracies, and included two presentations: one on the Participatory Democracy in Germany and another one on the European programme "Europe for the Citizens".

Speakers to the seminar were Mr. Christian Gsodam, Head of Unit at the Committee of the Regions and Mr. Jacques Kemp from the EACEA - Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency of the European Union.



The second seminar concerned the "Public Private Partnerships", a relatively new but very effective tool, which aims at securing the planning, funding, construction, management and function or maintenance of public infrastructure, as well as the planning and provision of services. Speakers to this seminar were Ms. Catarina Segersten-Larsson and Mr. Jean Louis Destans, both members of the Committee of the Regions.

In his welcoming speech, the president of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities Mr. Andreas Christou referred to the many aspects of Participatory Democracy which have often been subject to discussions in Cyprus. He also added that through Public Private Partnerships there is a chance to limit the problems and difficulties of the municipalities, linked to the great needs of modern society for new and complicated infrastructure.

Both seminars were organised in the framework of the Cooperation Agreement between the Union of Cyprus Municipalities and the Committee of European Regions, signed in 2006 and renewed in January 2007.

Commissioner Danuta Hübner visits Cyprus

Regional policy Commissioner, Danuta Hübner, made her first official visit to Cyprus in April 2007. The visit took stock of the implementation of the cohesion policy since 2004, and aimed at finalizing preparations for the programming period 2007-2013.



During the meeting with President Papadopoulos, Commissioner Hübner emphasized the importance of Cyprus' membership in the European Union. The Commissioner and the President exchanged views on the current state of affairs in the Union and discussed the state of preparations of Cyprus for the adoption of the Euro.

Commissioner Hübner also underlined Cyprus' chance to benefit from the cohesion policy, which will increase the competitiveness of the Cypriot economy and enable it to catch up with the best performing economies in Europe.

On Monday, 16 April, during her talks with Finance Minister Michalis Sarris, Commissioner Hübner welcomed the Cypriot authorities' efforts to improve the efficiency of cohesion policy implementation. She also emphasized that, as in the coming years the amounts available for investment will increase dramatically, further efforts will be necessary to ensure the creation of a good quality project pipeline.

Commissioner Hübner also addressed the conference on "EU Cohesion Policy 2007-2013: Opportunities for SMEs" organised by the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In her speech, she focused on the role played by SMEs in Cyprus and the need to strengthen cooperation among companies, with a view to enable smaller firms to enter European markets.

The Commissioner supported the approach of the Cypriot Government to diversify the tourist sector through the creation of new tourist products, which will also help to revitalise many rural areas.

In Limassol the Commissioner visited a number of European projects in urban regeneration and transport.

Finally the Commissioner toured the historic City of Nicosia where she made a stop at Ledra Street and visited several European projects related to urban renovation and public transport. Local authorities presented to the Commissioner plans for the Cyprus Cultural Centre, an investment likely to be co-financed by cohesion policy in the new, 2007-2013 period.

One more step towards the EURO

On 13 February, Cyprus asked the Commission to assess that it met the criteria necessary to adopt the euro.

Having carefully assessed the request, the Commission adopted on the 16th of May a Convergence Report (available on: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/convergence/2007/report2007_cyprus_en.htm), concluding that Cyprus meets the criteria and proposing to the Council that it adopts the euro next January. The European Central Bank also adopted a Convergence Report reaching the same conclusion.

"Cyprus has achieved a high degree of economic convergence with the euro area and is ready to adopt the euro in January 2008.



However, in order to ensure that euro adoption will be a truly successful story, Cyprus must continue to implement stability-oriented policies in order to safeguard its external competitiveness. In addition, Cyprus must also speed up and finalise the crucial practical preparations to ensure that the changeover takes place smoothly, as was the case in Slovenia at the beginning of this year" said Joaquin Almunia, European Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs.

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THE UNION OF CYPRUS MUNICIPALITIES

The Union of Cyprus Municipalities was established in 1981. Even though membership is voluntary, all municipalities (33), accounting for 65 per cent of the population of Cyprus, are represented.

The main objective of the Union is to contribute to the development of local government autonomy, as well as to act as spokesman of local government interests vis-à-vis the central government and other national organisations and institutions.

The Union's decision-making power is vested in the General Assembly, which may look into and decide for all issues. The Executive Committee implements decisions taken by the General Assembly. The President of the Union represents the Union before any authority, while the Secretary is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Union.

The Union follows closely and participates in international activities related to Local Authorities and in recent years, especially after the accession of the Republic to the EU, it takes an active stand and develops relations with organisations, institutions and departments of the European Union that concern Local Authorities. In this regard, the Union has, since July 2005, opened an Office in Brussels.

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