

**Statement by Minister-President Erwin Teufel
(German Bundesrat)
at the Convention session
of 25 June 2002
in connection with the hearing of elements of civil society -
Regions and local authorities**

Check against delivery

Not to be released before the beginning of the debate

Address,

Local authorities' right of self-government has not been anchored in any European treaties yet. This must be changed, for regions and municipalities are something rather different from what is called “civil society” today!

They are not a civic association. Nor are they merely administrative units.

They are the political bodies that are closest to the citizenry. This applies both to practical life and to their feeling of identity.

They have been an elementary pillar of democracy in Europe since the days of the ancient Greeks. The Europe of the Middle Ages up until early modern times was a Europe of towns and cities.

Therefore, the future Europe must have a federal and subsidiary structure. It must be established from the bottom upwards, and in the final analysis, on the basis of local self-government.

For this reason, regional and local authorities play an especially important role.

I also support the call to discuss the role of the regions in the future European constitutional structure at the Convention this autumn. The Committee of Regions should also be strengthened, as its

representatives stated this morning at the hearing. This discussion should then be followed up more intensively in a working group.

I should like to raise three points in that respect today already:

- It is important that a new constitutional treaty makes it even clearer that the respect for the national identities of the member states already laid down in Article 6, paragraph 3, of the EU Treaty also covers the internal structure of the member states. This includes—depending on their respective constitutions—their division into regions and the right of local self-government.
- In the definition of the principle of subsidiarity (presently in Article 5 of the EC Treaty), an indication should be added that, before EC rules are adopted, the abilities to act of the member states, including their regions and municipalities, must be considered.
- Within the context of their rights and responsibilities, the regions possessing legislative powers—as well as the Committee of the Regions—should be granted their own right of action before the European Court of Justice.

On this basis, regional and local authorities can become active and effective partners of the European Union.