

**Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency
ITER – A European Perspective
Brussels, 13 July 2010**

Speaking points for CIVEX commission Chair Mr Luc Van den Brande

Round Table "Investing in Youth"

It is a distinct honour and pleasure for me to address this conference and to welcome the distinguished participants from my side to the Committee of the Regions. I would like to thank the organisers for their kind invitation and for giving me the opportunity to speak briefly about the activities of the Committee of the Regions to empowering youth. In my capacity as chair of the CIVEX commission, which is inter alia responsible for citizenship and the area of freedom, security and justice, I will touch upon the work our members have been doing, but I will also draw upon the activities of the other CoR commissions, which have tackled related issues with equal interest and dedication (notably the EDUC and ECOS commissions).

I would say that this is a uniquely interesting occasion: today's event brings together two separate but related strands of EU policy, i.e. youth policy and the area of freedom security and justice – notably the prevention of crime, and aims to discuss a noteworthy experience from Spain, Denmark, Italy and Bulgaria – a multi-professional network designed to provide support to the prevention and eradication of juvenile delinquency in local societies. The innovative element of this network is the active integration and involvement of the security forces/ services in the efforts taken within the local communities, thus fostering a better understanding between these actors and creating integrated strategies.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me start with the obvious. Youth is the future of society – and this is especially true at an age like ours. Europe is facing an unprecedented demographic challenge, which in the context of the current economic situation makes the prospects of recovery and growth seem distant. It is, therefore, in our collective interest to create the right conditions so that all young people have the possibility to fully develop their potential and talents. This is a joint responsibility of public authorities, primarily at the local and regional level, civil society organisations and other associations, but also of individuals and families. All these actors can work together in order to empower youths for a better future.

In this context **juvenile delinquency is an important problem**, not least because of the public order implications and the discomfort caused to individuals and families, but also because it can act as a disruptive factor for local communities channelling human and financial resources away from activities designed to improve the living conditions of young people and their families. I only need to remind the audience of the various **causes to be found behind young people's violent behaviour**. Poverty, inequitable access to quality public services such as education, health care, cultural and sport facilities as well as transport, all act as to deprive young people of opportunities for the future. This is especially true in some urban areas, where problems are especially acute in deprived inner-cities. Racism and xenophobia can also contribute to marginalisation, which can also find expressions in violent behaviour. Peer-pressure and media influences can be significant aggravating factors.

Combating juvenile delinquency needs indeed a cross-sectoral and multi-professional approach. At the policy level, this effort centres on an active, positive, and cross-cutting **youth policy**, that addresses the potential of all youth by providing favourable conditions to develop their talents and skills to live, work, and actively participate in society, and not solely concentrates on youngsters who require special attention in view of their problems. Such a policy must be supported by initiatives within the **area of freedom, security and justice** which act as to improve judicial and police cooperation in view of fighting and preventing delinquent behaviour. An active policy aimed to guarantee fundamental rights and to provide the appropriate conditions for the development of youngsters is also necessary. The **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** gives us some important tools: it recognises the rights of children and it provides for a whole range of social rights, such as education, health-care, social protection and housing and access to the labour market. Legislators and policy makers at EU, national or sub-national levels must have these rights in mind when contemplating measures designed to galvanise the inclusion of youth in society. Finally, the importance of the **EU's cohesion policy** should not be disregarded: social, economic and territorial cohesion can help ensure an equitable level of development, where investment in youth can be fruitful and can be translated in economic growth and societal progress.

A number of CoR opinions have highlighted various formal as well as informal mechanisms, whereby the full involvement of young people in society can be achieved. Of course, comprehensive and inclusive education is fundamental in equipping youths with the resources needed to play an active role in social, economic and political life of their communities. Balanced and varied extra-curricular activities and sport can help bring together youths from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds and can contribute to the promotion of tolerance and

understanding. Mechanisms promoting youth participation in society can foster civic education, help develop a sense of belonging and reinforce the notion of citizenship. Vocational training with a strong integration element can be useful in giving young people the opportunity to develop their own potential and establish themselves in the labour market. Finally, intensive and tailor made support measures are needed to integrate young people into the labour market and the employment process.

For the Committee of the Regions it is crucial that these initiatives are accessible to all youths, regardless of their place of residence, ethnic, social or economic background. But we are aware that particular efforts are needed to stimulate the social inclusion and integration of disadvantaged and particularly vulnerable young persons, such as youths living under the poverty level, in deprived urban or rural areas or coming from an immigrant background. For the success of all these initiatives targeted and coordinated financial support is needed, primarily from the structural funds but also from other instruments established under specialised programmes.

Finally, the Committee recognises the need to improve juvenile justice, develop age-appropriate methods for juvenile crime prevention, intervention and reintegration.

Local and regional authorities have a key role to play in all the aforementioned fields. First and foremost their proximity to youngsters makes LRA aptly placed to provide immediate responses to the challenges and difficulties of today's society. In the spirit of subsidiarity and multi-level governance, the EU as well as national authorities should work in a constructive partnership with Europe's regions and cities in order to provide an efficient and workable framework for the development of young people. Policies implemented at the local and regional level can serve as examples of best practice, which could be of use in other contexts; and this is demonstrated by the ITER project here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This introductory reference to the Committee's vision of an active, inclusive and cross-cutting youth policy in the context of the European Union, where local and regional authorities take the lead in implementing innovative solutions, is only one element of the background for the present round table on investing in youth. I look forward to the presentations from the other panellists and the ensuing discussion. I am confident that today's conference will constitute a very useful occasion for all participants to share constructive ideas and experiences.

I thank you for your attention.