Foreword

The Committee of the Regions (CoR), at the age of just over 20, is still a young and rapidly evolving institution in the context of a European Union which is also changing. This means for those working in and with the Committee of the Regions, or those studying it, that they are constantly facing new challenges, and there is a continuous debate about the role and nature of the endeavour. Trying to look beyond the political discussions of the day and seeing things in a wider perspective is all the more important in such a dynamic environment. I am therefore very happy to recommend this in-depth study of the Committee of the Region's role in shaping European Union policy 'from below' by Simona Piattoni and Justus Schönlaue. I may be biased, but I believe that the Committee of the Regions is a fascinating subject of study, not only because of its relatively recent creation and constant development, but indeed because it is a very visible expression of the new kind of democratic structures that are being built in Europe.

The European Union does not just, and maybe not even foremost, consist of the member states – it must exist and develop as a union of citizens with their very different histories, traditions, political expectations and loyalties – and the regions and local communities in which they live are an essential part of this fabric. This is why the Committee of the Regions, which brings these different voices together to feed the experience of representatives of very different realities across Europe into the policy process, is so important. This is also why it is in the best interests of the other EU institutions to listen to these voices and ideas and to take the democratic contribution that the CoR can make seriously. Having had the honour of presiding over this colourful and diverse assembly for two-and-a-half years, I know that it is not always easy to strike the right balances and to focus on the right issues. As a consultative body, the Committee of the Regions needs to work closely with its institutional partners, it needs to concentrate on the most important

concerns of the citizens, and it needs to adapt itself all of the time.

Bringing an up-to-date account of the Committee of the Regions together with some deeper reflections about the kinds of democratic structures which Europe needs in order to face the challenges of the twenty-first century, like the present volume does, will help to move forward both at the scientific and at the political level, and hopefully to realise the potential of this as yet ‘young’ institution.

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