



Report on the Final Plenary Session
Closing Debates
Saturday 14 June 2008
Hôtel de Ville, Paris

As a preliminary to the final statements, **Ahmou Bouakkaz**, the deputy mayor of Paris in charge of local democracy and associations, commented on the presentation of the different workshops by the rapporteurs. He talked about the European paradox: the Union goes from the particular to the general, from the local to the transnational; and the complexity of the questions, the difficulty of the problems, is thereby increased, but also the range of possible solutions. For Ahmou Bouakkaz, it is segregation, and the elaboration of prejudices, that must be the primary objects of our attention. We are all discriminators; we all have our prejudices; and everyone is a victim of this situation. The relationship to otherness is what lies at the heart of our thinking about participative democracy. Ahmou Bouakkaz pointed out the fact that many categories of the population are regarded as second-class citizens – immigrants, for example, or handicapped people. No one should be overlooked. He also warned about the risk of participation being subverted, and about the segmentation of struggles and legitimate demands. He assured the Conference participants of his responsiveness to their concerns, and invited them to put forward ideas and initiatives that could be implemented in concrete ways.

After **Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes** had read the final Conference statement, **Catherine Lalumière** invited reactions from the representatives of the European Commission and the European Parliament, and local politicians.

Pierre Mansat, the deputy mayor in charge of Paris Métropole and relations with the Ile-de-France authorities, observed the extreme heterogeneity of participative practices: it is the major cities that are making the greatest efforts in this area, and developing new forms of thinking and practice. The Conference asked politicians the question: "What are you doing to give citizens, individually and collectively, greater control over their lives?" Thinking about participation and power relations in cities has brought to light the question of establishing a correspondence between the reality of the issues and the levels at which decision-making takes place. Where is democratic participation being played out, given that the centres of decision-making have changed in recent years? Inequalities, discrimination, territorial and social questions, access to citizenship: these subjects were at the heart of the Conference. And the necessary preeminence of public policy over private interests was recalled many times: the problem of the privatisation of public space does not only affect the new member States in the east that are undergoing economic transition, but also the cities of the older member States. Milan, for example, has just sold 25 hectares of its city centre to Heinz. Still, positive

initiatives do exist: in Paris, Bertrand Delanoë has decided to bring water – a quintessential public good – back into the public sector. The question of deliberation was introduced: in many cases, "participation" is used to justify current policy, whereas in fact it is authentic only when it is deliberative. Finally, participation cannot be dissociated from questions of financial resources. This is an area in which local, regional and national authorities must make contributions. And resources must be seen as integral to participation.

Pierre Mansat admitted that participation remains inadequate in large cities, while recalling the work done in Paris, where, starting from scratch in 2000, remarkable progress has now been made. But "progress" must be assessed in a dispassionate way, and with an awareness of the ground that remains to be covered.

Bruno Julliard, the deputy mayor of Paris in charge of youth policy, insisted on the omnipresence of Europe. All current thinking about cities must take place at the European level, and there is no subject with regard to which this is not a decisive factor. But there is a democratic rift between Europe and its young people. On the creation of a European space, in Bruno Julliard's view, there is little argument. Most citizens are favourable to it. On the organisation and political content of a common space, however, there is no consensus, because real political deliberation on these precise questions has been taken out of the citizens' hands. What is needed is to proceed in the direction mapped out by the Conference, with clear, firm proposals.

Bruno Julliard felt that Europe had to generate new and genuine rights in cities, with political participation and citizenship for resident non-Union citizens. And the need for democracy does not stop at the boundaries of the city; it must be widened to take in the continent as a whole. Unfortunately (and as the reaction of the political class to the Irish "No" has shown once more) we are faced with a theorisation of a denial of democracy ("There should not have been a referendum"). It is urgent for citizens to reappropriate Europe in terms of its content. One way for the European Union to demonstrate its relevance would be to come up with ambitious plans for its worst ghettos, which cause problems for those who live in them, and for the local politicians within whose responsibility they fall.

Pierre Schapira, the deputy mayor of Paris in charge of international relations, European affairs and the French-speaking world, and also a member of the European parliament, insisted on the importance of cooperation between cities, which were already becoming organised long before the European Union was set up (with, for example, the IULA – the International Union of Local Authorities – created in 1913). They understand that they are in a position to provide local solutions for European or global problems. With European construction, cities have continually increased their degree of joint organisation. The citizen can count on the city, and the city can count on other cities, because the problems are the same everywhere. Since 2001, as regards democracy, considerable progress has been made in a number of places – in Paris, for example, with the inception of the Conseils de Quartier, the Conseils de la Jeunesse and the Conseils des Etrangers Non Communitaires. Nonetheless, the level of participation remains low, and there are still many Parisians who take no real interest in the life of their city.

Europe is too far removed from its citizens. The Eurocrats talk a certain language, and the citizens simply lose interest. Work on raising awareness is indispensable. The institutions and the politicians have not fully realised what happened in 2005, with the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty. They fail to see that citizens do not want a Europe appropriated by an intellectual, urban elite. Europe needs to be explained, and Europeans need to be encouraged to register as voters in European elections. From this point of view, the role of cities is to disseminate information, and to enrich Europe with their democratic innovations.

G rard Lombard, one of the European Commission's representatives in France, recalled that the Commission has invested heavily in difficult situations, and in isolated zones. In the name of the Commission, he thanked the Maison de l'Europe, Paris, for its work in establishing relations between the different European cities and countries. The Conference was supported by the European Commission through the "Europe for Citizens" programme. With the diversity of its participants, both from European Union countries and elsewhere, it expressed the dynamism of local democracy, and the civil society that animates it.

Links between proximity and local democracy (cf. the European Commission's "Europe Direct" information service) favour qualitative exchanges and partnerships.

Marie-Christine de Saint-Araille, a member of the European Parliament's delegation in France, said she had noted the call to promote convergences with the Citizens' Agora, and to create a European Charter of Citizenship. She reiterated her support for these initiatives.

Catherine Lalumi re, the President of the Maison de l'Europe, Paris, wound up the two days of intense work and debate. The European Conference of Citizens and City-dwellers was held in a context of crisis for Europe and democracy, the major cities being crucial terrains for observation. The work done at the Conference showed that it would be instructive to study the shortcomings of democracy in cities. Social and legal problems (e.g. the presence, on a given territory, of people who do not all have the same rights) were identified, along with the damage caused by legal, political, social, educational and other inequalities, which were looked at as possible causes of the disengagement of citizens. The Maison de l'Europe, Paris, and its partners in the organisation of the Conference, along with all the participants, were concerned to create a forum and a bond of confidence between institutions and citizens.

In the course of the Conference, some participants expressed a desire to reproduce the formula, which was characterised by the abolition of barriers between groups that normally do not come into contact (politicians, associations, militants, professionals, squatters, researchers, etc.), and also between generations and nationalities. The deliberate diversity of the Conference participants proved successful as a means of stimulating debates that were informed, productive and promising. This was the first such Conference – but there will be others. They will be organised in different venues, and a network is now developing on the European scale, whose function will be to publicise civic initiatives, experiments in participation and innovative forms of "living-together", with the circulation of ideas and strategies. Links will be established with the European Parliament's Agora.

Thus it was that Catherine Lalumi re closed the first European Conference of Citizens and City-dwellers.

H l ne Bouchardeau
17 June 2008