



# ZWIĄZEK POWIATÓW POLSKICH

ASSOCIATION OF POLISH COUNTIES  
(member of Council of European Municipalities and Regions)

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Or.A.0715/288/11

Warszawa September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011

### **Mr Giuseppe Castiglione**

President of the Union of Italian Provinces  
President of the European Confederation  
of Local Intermediate Authorities (CEPLI)

### **Ms Claudia Giovannini**

Vice-Director of the Union of Italian  
Provinces

Dear Colleagues,

The issue of internal political system is a sovereign matter of each state.

Following the decision of the Italian Council of Ministers, made on September, 8th, on the abolition of Italian provinces as local government entities - intermediate divisions between the municipality and the region, the Association of Polish Counties, acting within the Framework of the European Confederation of Local Intermediate Authorities (CEPLI), wishes to share Polish experiences in creating and reforming local government structures.

1. Man created the monarchy and established republics but a commune seems to have been given by God himself - as Alexis de Tocqueville wrote over a hundred and fifty years ago. Indeed – a commune understood as an elementary community of people interrelated by social ties has a primal character.

Yet history shows that the scale of a commune was too small in terms of satisfying all the needs of local population.

This could be achieved only by units, which linked city as a service centre and its surrounding rural areas.

It was true in case of the nomes in ancient Egypt, the poleis in ancient Greece, and finally the medieval city republics of Italy. Counterparts of those administrative units today are local government units of intermediate level - in the case of Poland: counties and in the case of Italy - Italian provinces. The origin of these local government units is as natural as the origin of communes.

2. The above observation can be confirmed by the history of Polish lands.

Local authorities at a county level functioned in two out of three annexed territories of partitioned Poland. The only territory where such local authority was not present was the territory annexed by Russia. That fact however did not result from lack of needs but from the repressions of the Polish nation.

The network of county cities, which was formed at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, functions until this very day, emphasizing that it is not of arbitrary character but a result of genuine social needs.

3. Poland's experience proved that abolition of local government units of county level did not result in real organisational and financial effects.

The communist dictatorship, as part of the agenda of destruction of local identity on the one hand, - and in search for savings on the other, in 1975 took a decision to abolish counties.

Already within a year from that decision it became necessary to create administrative region (typically within previously existing counties) to perform public tasks, serving the needs of local society. Such regions functioned until counties were recreated in 1998, which clearly speaks for illusory of some organizational changes in the administration.

4. The existence of local government units of intermediate-level is particularly important in large countries - those where regional bodies are too large to be able to perform certain tasks for the benefit of local communities. Before 1998 Poland was divided into 49 provinces (without functioning local government bodies), which on the one hand turned out to be too small from the point of view of a coherent regional policy, while still being too large to meet local needs. Consequently, the government of Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek, the current President of the European Parliament, performed a territorial, creating local governmental bodies and restoring counties.

This structure has proved to be functional and allowing to meet social needs.

Positive assessment of the functioning of local governments in its present form has undoubtedly been affected by a practical proof, by local governments at all levels, of the thesis pointed to out by the theorists of administration, that decentralized system is much more effective than the centralized one. Failure to adapt the management of the scale of actual needs will always lead to waste of money.

Yours sincerely,



Marek Tramś

President of the Association of Polish Counties