The Secretary-General of the European Committee of the Regions, Jiri Burianek, and the Deputy Director General of the European commission Directorate general for international cooperation and development, Marcus Cornaro, representing the co-organisers of the Assises of Decentralised Cooperation for development, were the two speakers of the opening session.

Mr Burianek, started the session by welcoming all participants of the Assises, with a special mention for the representatives from developing countries who had travelled long distances to participate to the event. Their growing presence, he said, witnessed the crucial role of the Assises as a permanent forum of political dialogue on decentralised cooperation, a role also supported by the participation data presented by the CoR Secretary-General:

- EU local and regional representatives coming from all 28 EU member states
- representatives coming from the developing world covering all continents and 46 countries
- many international organisations and institutions including UNDP, UN-Habitat, UNEP, the Francophonie organisation, the West African Economic and Monetary Union
- associations of Local and Regional authorities, civil society members,
- national authorities representatives and
- private sectors representatives

Mr Burianek pointed out how this great diversity among participants would allow to take into account different points of view and approaches and would help to identify in which ways development cooperation policies can be better adapted to provide better answers to specific territorial conditions.

He went on to recall that many European Local and Regional authorities have long-standing and close links with their counterparts in developing countries in many and different fields. Through their relations, they share financial resources but also the skills, know-how, practices and experiences in various and major topics for development. Due to their local knowledge and closeness to citizens, authorities can better customise policies to special local and regional conditions and have a crucial role and added value for development cooperation and, ultimately, to build a better world.

After thanking all the participants of the preparatory meetings for their work and commitment, Mr Burianek positioned the fourth Assises as the CoR's most important event within the framework of the
European Year for Development 2015 aiming at raising citizens' awareness on development challenge. On this point, he then presented the "Wall of initiatives" installed in the CoR premises and whose aim is to map local and regional authorities within the European Union which encourage and promote initiatives to inform citizens on development issues and policies.

Furthermore, Mr Burianek introduced the CoR activities and, more specifically, the opinions related to development and at that time to be discussed in the CoR plenary session of 3-4 June 2015. The first opinion, "A decent life for all: from vision to collective action" proposes the CoR position with regard to the Post-2015 development agenda, paying special attention to the role of local and regional authorities in this process. The second opinion presented by the Secretary-General was "Local and regional support for fair trade in Europe" which proposes a new EU commitment towards Fair trade and development and how LRAs can implement new means to promote it.

To conclude, the Secretary-General wished all participants good, rich and dynamic round tables and outlined the major steps in the development cooperation field during 2015: (i) the European Development Days (EDD) organised by the European Commission on 3 and 4 June, (ii) in July, the international conference on financing for development in Addis Ababa; (iii) in September, the conclusion of the post-2015 discussion in New York, (iv) in December, the Conference of the Parties on climate change in Paris (COP 21).

When taking the floor, Marcus Cornaro expressed his satisfaction in witnessing the growing success of the event. Echoing the words of the CoR Secretary-General, Mr Cornaro pointed out how strong participation demonstrates the interest of LRAs towards global issues and the Development agenda while also sending a strong signal to all European Institutions that local governments intend to be fully included in the EU’s development policy.

Mr Cornaro's intervention developed around three main themes: (i) the post-2015 agenda, (ii) the EYD15 and (iii) the outcome of the Assises discussion as a means to push forward the role of local authorities in the EU development policy agenda.

Regarding the first point, Mr Cornaro underlined how the 2015 edition of the Assises take place at a very special moment, with the discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the implementation of the European Year for Development; as well as the preparation of next year's Habitat III Conference which will define the Urban Agenda for the next twenty years.

While explaining that the Post-2015 debate and the preparation of the Addis Conference have both entered a decisive stage with the beginning of intergovernmental negotiations, Mr Cornaro highlighted that these two processes are closely interlinked and the Addis outcome should be seen as the Means of Implementation pillar of the Post-2015. A successful outcome in Addis Ababa, the Deputy Director-General continued, will be crucial to secure an ambitious outcome to the Post-2015 negotiations. He also emphasised that the EU is supporting the localising of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the reinforcement of the multi-stakeholders partnership including in particular the Local Authorities for implementing the SDGs.

Moving to the European Year of Development, Mr Cornaro identified as the main goal the information and awareness raising of EU citizens, especially young people, on the results of EU development cooperation and recognised that local and regional authorities hold responsibility in
mobilising local societies' opinions while acting as catalysts for change. He gave particular attention to the Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) programme which celebrates 40 years of existence this year and whose actions and projects aim to develop European citizens' awareness and critical understanding of the interdependent world.

During his conclusion, the Deputy Director-General expressed his confidence about the outcome of the round tables and seminars of the Assises which would certainly bring valuable contribution to the most salient development policy discussions (Post-2015 agenda, climate change and urbanisation). Furthermore, the exchanges on the new EU policy to support Local Authorities would give the Commission food for thought in view of ensuring an appropriate follow-up through their programmes, which aim to support decentralised cooperation and particularly networks and exchanges of experiences.

Before ending the opening session, Mr Cornaro expressed his gratitude to all participants and to the Committee of the Regions for co-organising and hosting the event.