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*O.P.C.E.,
the association of the entrepreneurs' organizations
of the European capital cities:
a historical outline*

Rome 2006

This brief document summarizes the events which led to the establishment and development of OPCE-Association des Organisations Patronales interprofessionnelles d'entrepreneurs des Capitales Européennes, that is the association which joins the entrepreneurs' organizations of the European capital cities. Upon a specific request by the various Presidents of UIR, the Rome Union of Industrialists and Companies, the author of this document had the chance – since the very beginning - of following the sequence of events, which have characterized the development of a path which started in 1989. This is the reason why the considerations included in this document sometimes sound as the memories cherished by a real witness of said events and not just a mere historical outline.

As we will see later on, the harbinger of the “compulsory” creation of OPCE was the summoning of a meeting of the entrepreneurs' associations operating in the European capital cities in Paris on September 29, 1989, which was promoted by the then Board of Directors of UP75, *rectius* Union Patronal de Paris (currently MEDEF Paris). Said meeting was attended by the delegations of the entrepreneurial representative offices (not always associations) of Paris, Bonn (which was a capital

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Marie-Sophie Claverie and Fabrizio Borraccia have kindly cooperated in the drafting of this document.

city at that time), London, Brussels, Rome, Madrid, The Hague, Stockholm, Lisbon, Athens, Reykjavik, Dublin and La Valletta.

The fundamental goal of said meeting – which subsequently also became the OPCE statutory aim – was the search for a *multilateral forum* for meetings and exchanges of views to supplement the traditional set of tools and instruments provided by the *bilateral cooperation agreements* between associations.

The spirit underlying said initiative can be easily grasped if we consider that the favourable economic and political situation prevailing in the late eighties called for the need to generally rethink and relaunch the “territories”, particularly the sensitive ones having a *metropolitan* size and hosting the *political capital city* of the respective state. Hence, the need was also felt to identify a strategic role to be played by the relevant entrepreneurs’ associations and to decide to make the multilateral operational tool *permanent*.

Therefore OPCE was created with the specific aim of allowing a *steady comparison* of the common *problems* faced by the productive facilities located in the political capital cities, as well as of the *possible solutions* put forward in the network member associations.

The conditions to be met in order to be eligible for the OPCE membership were identified since the very beginning and are still basically two: (a) be the political capital city of a Council of Europe member state (hence following the logic of a potential wider dimension than the European Community); (b) be a territorial association depending – where possible – on a national confederation belonging to UNICE-Union des Industries de la Communauté Européenne (Union of Industrial and Employers’ Confederations of Europe).

The establishment of OPCE was decided in the Assembly meeting held in Madrid on October 2-3, 1990; said association was formally set up in Paris as a result of the request submitted to the Paris Prefecture on June 8, 1990. OPCE is an association established under the French law, pursuant to the law of July 1, 1901 and subsequent decree of August 16, 1901 (it is to be noted that the word *club* - which had been initially used and long maintained during the preparatory works - was finally eliminated from its denomination), which has its own registered seat and operational headquarters in Paris. The OPCE founding members were the entrepreneurs’ associations of Paris, London (CBI-London Region), Madrid (CEIM-Confederación Empresarial Independiente de Madrid) and Rome (UIR), which all attended the founding ceremony held in Paris on September 17, 1990 before the then mayor, Jacques Chirac. Shortly afterwards these four associations were joined by the Brussels one (UEB-Union des Entreprises de Bruxelles).

Some statutory provisions (subsequently supplemented by the by-laws and internal rules of procedures) are worth mentioning. Article 2 reads as follows: “The aim of this international association is ensure the creation of links among the entrepreneurs’ organizations of the capital cities of the Council of Europe member states, with a view to fostering exchanges of information and mutual technical assistance; promoting partnerships and economic, social and cultural exchanges, as well as protecting and enhancing the European specificities”. Article 5 envisages four classes of members: (1) active members (*membres actifs*), namely the associations which meet all the necessary requirements to submit an application and be admitted; (2) the associate members

(*membres associés*), namely the associations which only partially meet the above stated requirements; (3) the supporters (*membres bienfaiteurs*) and (4) the honorary members (*membres d'honneur*), which can also be individuals.

Besides the President and the Assembly, the notable OPCE bodies are the Board of Directors and the Technical Committee, of which the representatives of the four founding associations are *de iure* members (respectively indicated between the “lobby structure” and the “technostructure”). The official languages are French and English.

In the early nineties the entrepreneurs’ associations which participated in the OPCE meetings and proceedings were those of Ankara, Athens, Berlin and Bonn, Bern, Brussels, Budapest, Copenhagen, Dublin, Helsinki, The Hague, La Valletta, Liechtenstein, Lisbon, London, Luxembourg, Madrid, Nicosia, Oslo, Reykjavik, Rome, San Marino, Stockholm, Vienna. It is worth noting that over time – also due to the evolution of the domestic political scenario in some countries – some associations, which represented the respective capital cities, have changed. In some cases the representation tasks, which initially had been performed by the Chambers of Commerce, were entrusted to the respective free entrepreneurs’ associations. Subsequently further entrepreneurs’ associations, such as those of Yerevan, Tallin, Moscow and Tashkent, became OPCE members or took part in its activities.

The OPCE first years of activity were characterized by an intense pace: soon after the Paris Congress in 1989, other congresses and extraordinary meetings were organized such as those in Madrid (October 1990), London (October 1991), Brussels (October 1992), La Valletta (February 1993), Rome (June 1993) and Athens (September 1994). OPCE delegations and representatives were received by Heads of State and Government (including the King of Spain, D. Juan Carlos I; the Maltese President of the Republic, Cansu Tabone; the two Presidents of the Italian Republic, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro and Carlo Azeglio Ciampi). Prominent personalities marked the life of this association in that period: among the Presidents and the Board members we can recall Stephen Haykhan, Fernando Fernandez-Tapias, Remy Robinet-Duffo, Constantine N. Yannidis, Eric Andersen, Alberto Tripi, Teresa Janz-Guerra, Erich Gerard, Catharina Roos, Hans Kristian Hustad and Anthony Miceli-Farruggia; among the members of the Technical Committee we can mention Christine Jacquemart, Roberto Molero y Gómez-Elegido, Jane Calvert-Lee, Pierre Thonon, Aphrodite Bletas, Guy Lévêque, as well as the author of this document.

The subsequent yearly Congresses were held in Lisbon (1995), Oslo (1996), Madrid (1997), Stockholm (1998), Paris (1999), Berlin (2000), Rome (2001), Warsaw (2002), Madrid (2003), Athens (2004), Moscow (2005) and Rome (2006).

After the above described “first phase” of the OPCE life, a second one started during which - for a certain period of time - a particularly significant role was played by associations such as the Oslo and Stockholm ones. Among those who – at different levels – have been particularly committed to OPCE association we can recall José Maria Isardo, Hartmann Kleiner, Christian Amstick, Diego Vivarelli von Lobstein, Invar Melin, Gian Francesco Rizzuti, Sol Olabarri Cervantes, Alessandra Allaria, Fabrizio Borraccia, Sylvie Cordeiro, Antal Csupport, Alexander Borisov, Jean Claude Arousseau and Marek Orlowski.

In those years, working groups were created such as the WG on *relations with the European institutions* and the WG on *benchmarking among the European capital cities*, which periodically produced *position papers* on issues such as infrastructure and traffic; the cost of labour; the development of technological poles and parks; the impact of the single currency; the regional policies; the search for new governance models to manage the large metropolitan areas (in this regard, the specific matters tackled were the networking among capital cities and the renewed self-governance formulas); training, etc. The results of these works and the resolutions adopted were systematically reported by the media and acknowledged by the European, national and local bodies to which they were submitted on a case by case basis.

Relations were started with UCUE-Union des Capitales de l'Union Européenne (Union of Capitals of the European Union). The statutes were changed between 1999 and 2000 to allow the functional adjustments needed as a result of the gradual increase of its members. In October 2004 a formal contact was established to exchange information on the mutual activities carried out with UNICE-Union des Industries des Pays de la Communauté Européenne (Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe). A permanent link was created among groups of young entrepreneurs operating within some associations and with YES for Europe-Confederation of the European Young Entrepreneurs.

In particular, during a technical meeting held in Stockholm in October 2002, the decision was taken to organize the OPCE activity at three operational levels [original text of the *Annual Report*]:

- *Political Level. An important tool is comparisons between the capital cities. In this work, OPCE must use existing studies and surveys and concentrate on analysis, recommendations and communication. The annual conference should be recognized as an important opportunity of making the analysis and the recommendations more widely known. There should, however, be an awareness of other possible opportunities of communicating the OPCE recommendations.*
- *Networking. Capital cities in countries that are members of the European Council can play an important role in the EU enlargement process. In order to strengthen the possibilities in that respect and also to strengthen the standing of capital cities within the European Union, the OPCE will arrange a technical meeting in Brussels each year. Prominent EU officials will be invited to these meetings.*
- *Business. The OPCE must live up to the fact that the organisation was created by businessmen for businessmen. To make this clear, it should be recognized that a congress is a good meeting place and provides a good opportunity for business contacts.*

Currently, as can be clearly seen also in the web-site www.opce.org, there are *sixteen permanent OPCE full members* (Lisbon, Madrid, Paris, London, Brussels, Rome, Vienna, Berlin, Athens, Stockholm, Warsaw, Budapest, Sofia, La Valletta, Nicosia and Moscow), and there are many more members which periodically or occasionally take part in the initiatives undertaken by this association. A campaign is underway to increase the number of members. Among the ambitious projects, which are supposed to be pursued in the medium term, there is the intention of starting a dialogue with the entrepreneurs' associations of the Mediterranean Third Countries' capital cities.

OPCE was chaired by: Maurice Gruson, Fernando Fernandez-Tapias, Stephen Hayklan, Alberto Tripi, Christos Fyrogenis, Teresa Janz-Guerra, Eric Andersen, Hans Kristian Hustad, Rémy Robinet-Duffo, Erich Gerard, Catharina Roos and in September 2006 Gerardo Diaz Ferrán was appointed as new President of this association. Initially the Presidency term of office lasted one year and was served by the association which had hosted the yearly Congress. Subsequently the decision was taken to elect the President for a two-year term of office.

The following people were appointed as OPCE Secretary-General (on the basis of an agreement among members, the General Secretariat is organized by the Paris association and has its headquarters there): Christine Jacquemart, Barbara Efftymiou, Guy Lévêque, Christian Germain, Jean-Christophe Loubet del Bayle and Marie-Sophie Claverie.

We can clearly say that – over time - OPCE has embodied the concept of a “Europe which is created with a bottom-up approach”, namely with a *voluntary initiative* by the various operators rather than with top-down decisions. Nor shall we underestimate the fact that the link among the territories of the capital cities supplements that “Europe of Regions”, which should probably be the most advanced model of internal organization to be pursued. If the European socio-political (and economic) unification process continues in line with the hopes and efforts of the founding fathers, credit shall also be given to bodies and entities such as OPCE.