



Contribution to the European Multi Stakeholder Forum

Brussels, 10 February 2009

1) Introduction

Since 2001, the European initiative CSR-Vaderegio has offered a space for mutual collaboration, interaction and learning for regional authorities interested in promoting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in their territories. **CSR-Vaderegio is a structure that promotes CSR cooperation among regions by helping local and regional public authorities promote CSR in their spheres of influence.** To this effect, CSR-Vaderegio has developed tools and networking platform to facilitate experience exchange and collaboration.

Above and beyond sharing and improving best practice in regions across Europe, CSR VADEREGIO gathers local evidence of CSR in order to actively engage in, and contribute to, the EU stakeholder dialogue and related initiatives such as the European Alliance on CSR.

To date, a significant number of regions and organisations within them have been involved in the CSR VADEREGIO initiative. These include:

Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flanders Region ▪ Trivisi Initiative
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Green Network ▪ South Denmark Region
Estonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Responsible Business Forum (RBF)
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nord Pas de Calais Region
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ North-Rhine Westphalia Region
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Business in the Community Ireland
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tuscany Region ▪ Sicily Region
Portugal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oeiras City Council
Serbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Serbian network for CSR – Smart Kolektiv
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Integra Foundation
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Basque Country Region ▪ Junta de Andalusia Region ▪ Biscay Provincial Government ▪ ESADE business school in association with the Autonomous community of Cataluña
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ London Region ▪ Yorkshire & Humber Region ▪ Article 13 Group ▪ Agenda Scotland

2) Concrete initiatives 2007-2008

Among the CSR-Vaderegio Partners, two of the founding organisations have been selected to present activities undertaken in 2007-08, in addition to the CSR Vaderegio association.

a) CSR Vaderegio Network (www.csvaderegio.net)

Since March 2006, CSR has entered a new phase with the launch of the **European Alliance for CSR**, under the auspices of the European Commission. This initiative, which emphasizes the leading role to be played by enterprises CSR, nevertheless stresses the need for an active involvement of all stakeholders, as “CSR affects us all”. The CSR Vaderegio network has welcomed this initiative and taken significant action in response to this call.

i) Creation of the Vaderegio Association

On 29th January 2007, CSR-Vaderegio initiative reached maturity with the creation of the **Vaderegio Association**, a legal entity for, and mainly consisting of public authorities at local and regional level across Europe promoting Responsible Business Practice to achieve sustainable competitiveness and innovation.

In this it is unique, no other body fulfils the same function in Europe.

Founding members of the Vaderegio Association are:

- Novia Salcedo Foundation (E);
- Responsible Business Forum (EE);
- Agenda Social Responsibility in Scotland (UK)
- Regional Government of the Basque Country – Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism (E).
- Regional Government of Biscay (E) - Department of innovation and economic promotion

Public Authorities constituting the Board are, in addition to the above:

- President: Basque Government – Division for Innovation of the department of Industry, Trade and Tourism
- Regional Government of Biscay - Department of innovation and economic promotion
- Government of South Denmark (in progress).

ii) Market Research

In order to better understand and address the needs of public authorities on CSR, the CSR-Vaderegio network launched a research programme with support from the European Commission (DG Employment & Social Affairs), which led to the development of the online Toolkit for Local and Regional Authorities.

Through extensive qualitative and quantitative market research among public authorities from throughout Europe, this project identified the current situation and constraints of public authorities in order to elaborate a practical and useful tool adjusted to their needs.

The research demonstrated that while public authorities are very conscious of the need for responsible business practices, their perception of Corporate Social Responsibility as a means to achieve this varies tremendously. Furthermore, research found that the opportunities for benchmarking, networking and learning among public authorities engaged in the promotion of CSR and sustainability are very limited.

Among the needs expressed by public authorities, highest ranking needs expressed are access to information and in particular relevant best practices, development of management standards, as well as recognition schemes for public authorities and regions engaged in these issues.

To this effect, CSR Vaderegio developed the CSR Toolkit for Public Authorities and a networking platform in support of learning and exchange among public authorities engaging at all levels in sustainability within their region of authority.

iii) The CSR-Vaderegio Toolkit for Public Authorities

The goal of the toolkit is to deliver material that is practical and very accessible which assists public authorities in engaging and inspiring CSR in local business for regional competitiveness.

Available in 6 European languages, the toolkit can be freely accessed at www.csrvaderegiotoolkit.net.

It addresses themes highlighted during the extensive market research conducted last year by the Vaderegio Team with the aim of identifying the specific needs and interests of local and regional authorities across European regions. The easy-to-follow assessment tool enables public authorities to check their level of familiarity with CSR and helps them to pinpoint how much they would like to develop CSR in a two-year timeframe. It also gives authorities an opportunity to compare their assessment results with other regions or countries, and compare the average score to the rest of Europe.

Via an extremely user-friendly interface, public authorities are able to learn about the basics of CSR, and undertake a self-assessment of their current situation, and benchmark against other regions. By using best practices available, public authorities are able to identify areas for improvement, map key stakeholders with which to engage in the process, and monitor progress.

iv) Networking

The CSR-Vaderegio Association is actively engaging in networking and establishing alliances with organisations and public authorities in Europe. Beyond the above-mentioned organisations with which CSR-Vaderegio has associated, the association is partner of several initiatives such as the project “Sustainable Clusters: How CSR in Industrial Clusters Impacts Innovation, Competitiveness, Sustainability and Societal Well-being” submitted within the framework of the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission in 2009. CSR-Vaderegio has also developed new partnerships within the framework of project submissions to DG Employment & Social Affairs in 2008.

b) Noviasalcedo Foundation, Spain (www.noviasalcedo.es)

As a leading organisation of the CSR-Vaderegio network, the Noviasalcedo Foundation has been actively involved in the promotion of the association and leadership in its activities as mentioned above.

Since 2001, NSF is committed to CSR. It pursues to contribute to the adoption of CSR policies both locally and at regional level. Therefore NSF outlines an annual Agenda for implementing activities that will favour the widespread of this concept, by leading a permanent Committee in Bilbao, with the aim of disseminating best practices among corporate and local bodies at Regional and National Level.

The main outcome of this period has been the permanent support and commitment gained from the local authority of Biscay in the different CSR-Vaderegio Phases. As a result of this cooperation the Biscayan Provincial Government currently supports and implements a CSR division, XERTATU, within the Innovation and Economic Development Division. Xertatu wants to

be the framework for cooperation in the field of Corporate and Social Responsibility (CSR), hosting the different organisations and institutions involved in the promotion of this concept in Biscay. Its aim is to be the shared, unifying platform, from which initiatives can be taken on and coordinated to cover a large part of the field that comes under CSR (www.xertatu.net). During 2008 the Regional Basque Government has created a CSR multi stakeholder group, where both NSF and Xertatu play an active role.

Noviasalcedo Foundation and Xertatu further cooperate in the organisation of regular CSR seminars, entitled 'Dialogue among Companies', and which aim to raise awareness and foster dialogue among companies and stakeholders active on CSR in the Biscay region.

c) Responsible Business Forum, Estonia (www.csr.ee)

Responsible Business Forum in Estonia (RBFE) is a non-profit organisation with an aim to inspire and support furthering CSR in Estonian society through being the centre of competence building and communication on CSR. Major strands of activity today include communication and awareness raising activities, carrying out multi stakeholder discussions around furthering CSR in Estonian society, conducting related research, putting together CSR Index and working with businesses, public authorities and other stakeholders to mainstream CSR among Estonian SMEs. RBFE has played an active part in CSR-Vaderegio network since 2005, being also one of the establishers of CSR-Vaderegio Association and helping to mainstream CSR among European regions.

RBFE is actively involved assessing current database of CSR-Vaderegio as well as in identifying European good examples of CSR and employment, specifically concentrating on Eastern-European geographic region. Relying on its central role in CSR-Vaderegio development until now, it will further develop monitoring, evaluating and follow up process of CSR learning path of public authorities

Dissemination, Communication and Promotion of the Toolkit in Eastern European networks and European level resulting on good awareness and participation of public authorities in implementing the Toolkit and joining CSR-Vaderegio network.

Added value to the proposal objectives:

- 3 years of experience of working on furthering CSR among local and regional authorities
- Combined theoretical and practical knowledge of the area
- Experience of CSR-learning path development as a part of CSR-Vaderegio Toolkit development process in 2007-2008

3) Proposals on key issues and initiatives at EU level for 2009 and beyond

The European Commission has since 2000 been taking an active leadership in the area of CSR, making it a cornerstone of the **Lisbon Agenda** promoting competitiveness of Europe while maintaining social cohesion. The CSR-Vaderegio association and its members commend these efforts and encourage the European Institutions, and in particular the upcoming Commission, to pursue these efforts, and **in particular the engagement of stakeholders in supporting corporate efforts for sustainable business practices.**

The **European Alliance on CSR**, launched in 2006, has shown demonstrable and tangible results of corporate engagement in CSR. This alliance should be pursued, and further engage stakeholders from civil society, including public authorities, in working alongside companies. As a means to achieve this, the **European Multi Stakeholder Forum** can play a fundamental role in further engaging stakeholder dialogue and action around CSR.

Within this European framework, the CSR-Vaderegio Association proposes to play a leading role in deepening the engagement of public authorities on CSR, both by supporting their uptake and integration of CSR, and by acting as the voice of public authorities in EU stakeholder dialogue.

To this effect, CSR-Vaderegio will continue to **develop and promote the tools and other resources required to support public authorities**, both at regional and local levels, in the mainstreaming of CSR into their policies. Efforts must be made both by participating organisations and other concerned actors to support the promotion and encourage further uptake of tools and networking as those proposed by CSR-Vaderegio.

Such tools and learning networks will enable public authorities to develop and/or enhance strategic approaches to design public policies that mainstream CSR, while at the same time enhancing competitiveness of regions. Furthermore, strong measurement and reporting tools have been developed to enable the measurement of impact of such initiatives.

Networking and exchange among regions is of critical importance to support and encourage the further commitment of regions. Networks like CSR-Vaderegio, as well as other organisations such as Committee of the Regions, Eurochambres, Eurocities, and UEAPME, among others, are critical to serve as platforms for learning among practitioners, and must be encouraged and supported wherever possible.

Building on initiatives and actions undertaken at regional level, CSR-Vaderegio proposes to be the **voice of public authorities on CSR in European policy dialogue**. Based on action-research undertaken at the local and regional levels, CSR-Vaderegio will be in a position to associate with leading organisations and networks within the framework of the European Alliance on CSR, and contribute actively to stakeholder dialogue, contributing a wide range of applied practices and experiences brought together under the umbrella of CSR-enabling strategies and public policies implemented at the local and regional levels.

To support this and other initiatives, it is of critical importance that the European Alliance on CSR further encourage leadership and best practice sharing by all concerned stakeholders, particularly in the context of the current economic recession. This period will be critical to test the true integration of CSR and sustainability in business and society, and therefore public authorities must take a stronger stance in promoting, but also implementing internally, responsible organisational and business practices.

Public authorities, at all levels, should demonstrate the internal implementation of the responsible practices they preach, and encourage responsible business practices among their providers and other partners. They should also actively contribute to the creation of more understanding and awareness as to the linkages between public policy issues and the business agenda / competitiveness at local and regional levels.

Specifically at the EU level, it is important that CSR be integrated into the policy agendas of a wider number of DGs. While numerous efforts have already been undertaken in this direction both within and outside the Commission, it still remains that too few Directorates lead the CSR agenda. And beyond the policy-related issues, a concrete example of engagement might be the integration of CSR into selection criteria of EU-funded projects.