Mr President, I thank you for this opportunity to speak. I would also like to thank the Government of the Azores for the outstanding welcome they have given us and greet President Martini and the Secretary General, Mr Gizard, as well as people from the United Nations here today and all my colleagues, Presidents of Regions, and everyone else here.

What I have to say will – and I hope this will not shock you – be very political, and in the good sense of the word I hope. We need to discuss the extremely serious issue that is globalisation. We have seen, since we started our work, that this phenomenon has many essentially positive aspects, obviously in terms of trade, in terms of the economy, for the social development of the world, its peoples, but also in cultural terms – an opening of the heart and mind to other cultures, facilitated by new information and communications technologies, as well as with the spread of tourism and travel.

But I have been asked to state, as an elected local representative and President of a Region, the feelings of the population whose President I am, in the Provence-Alpes-Côte-d’Azur Region, stretching from Marseille to Nice, from the Italian border to the Rhône. This includes around five million people, and the social situation here is of particular concern. I am not referring to those who, like us, have the time to read, write and discuss in order to better understand the reality of today’s world. This population is suffering and it is suffering precisely, it believes, because of a globalisation of which it can only perceive the negative aspects.

We have been facing the arrival of globalisation for quite some time. Without having had to read “le Monde diplomatique” for twenty years, it has been possible to see what was going to happen after the disappearance of the two power blocks, as mentioned by Mr Barnier this morning. On the other hand, the people, or at least the lower socio-economic groups within the populations, yours and mine, did not see the phenomenon coming and it has crashed over them, or brutally crushed them, not just through the news they read in their newspapers or see on television, but in their everyday lives, at the most personal of levels, the most significant for their day-to-day lives. This sudden disruption of their day-to-day existence, this irresistible force that has changed people’s lives, has happened in what is felt to be an excessively painful way and this situation is an extremely perilous one for democracy. This is why I was glad to hear this aspect raised here this morning.

Globalisation, is not simply about economics. The economy is naturally linked with the social, if only through employment, and, naturally, the job market, the housing market, day-to-day life are all themselves related, through the feelings of the citizens, to the level of vitality of democracy.

There is a great of talk in France at the moment about security, and it is often believed that this is simply about restoring order in the suburbs, where people are suffering from racism and misery, and some think – at least some politicians believe – that these social problems can be resolved by police or military actions. The reality is that the insecurity felt by the population is not just the insecurity that one might feel walking in a rough area late at night. This is about a general sentiment of insecurity
which, according to popular logic, is wholly linked with globalisation. This is an all encompassing insecurity in the same way as we talk about globalisation.

Job insecurity – the most serious – first of all, which because of relocation, trade unions and people correlate with globalisation. Everyone now, and not simply manual workers but also managerial employees, get home after work with the sinking feeling that perhaps tomorrow a decision made in New-York or Tokyo will close the company and he/she will be out on the street. There is thus a high level of worry and a degree of destabilisation that did not exist previously when capital was closer to the industrial site.

There is also a feeling of insecurity about housing. The Provence-Alpes-Côte-d’Azur Region is a Region which attracts a lot of property and building investment, and a great deal of property speculation. Thus, and not just in cities like Marseille and Nice, but also in the small villages of Provence, delightful - praised by our poets and with a worldwide reputation - the people of the Region are obliged to leave their villages, leave their land, leave their towns, the centres of their towns, somewhere that was historically their home, their family, their memories, their family memories, obliged to go because it has become too expensive for them, and they have to move out for millionaires and billionaires often coming from a long way away.

Problems of housing, problems of social insecurity with, in their minds, a globalisation that compels the dismantling of their public services - transport, education, public health provision – as well as the social gains to which the French people, especially the lower socio-economic groups, are extremely committed (pensions, social security).

Insecurity in terms of health with the globalisation of epidemics, epizootics. Mad-cow disease was seen as being something different and was very badly received by the French population. There was then avian flu with its unbelievable phenomena. We know that the world was at risk, but I (because I am President of the Region I am responsible for schools) had to ask whether for example whether to keep chicken on school menus. And of course, parents told their children to make sure they did not eat any chicken in school canteens! This is what a psychosis is when it spreads, and it is the globalisation of all sorts of diseases that is worrying people. And I will not, especially in the presence of our friends from Réunion, go into the problem of mosquitoes which, so it seems, take the plane! And thus mosquitoes have arrived from Réunion with Chikungunya in Provence-Alpes-Côte-d’Azur. I don’t need to tell you what my fellow citizens make of it.

There is also food insecurity. not just with avian flu, but in terms of knowing exactly what is on one’s plate. There is now a widespread mistrust, a lack of confidence, relative to certain discoveries, just as there is a lack of confidence among workers in their corporate managers with all the implications arising from asbestos and cancers caused by asbestos.

Insecurity in terms of climate change and natural catastrophes due to a world climatic phenomenon and, as a result, at home, we have not only natural catastrophes but also industrial catastrophes and clearly, in my Region, with the Mediterranean forests, we are now entering the period when people are worried about forest fires. On a grand scale, we have seen what has happened in Portugal, on the continent, and what has also happened in terms of water and the air. On some days we recommend that the people of Marseille do not use their cars or do not go out. The right to water as well, which up to now for the French has been a universal right and which is now becoming a restricted right and perhaps tomorrow a right only for the rich. And we have also had Seveso and Tchernobyl, which have left their marks, and people, here again, do not feel secure.

Finally, there is the destruction of the countryside under concrete which means that the magnificent countryside of Provence, as in Tuscany, I am speaking before President Martini, is gradually being eaten away and destroyed by property speculation. Thus people who were committed to their land, people who were attached to a countryside that symbolised for them their cultural identity, are being deprived by this construction, which is void of any cultural identity, are being deprived of what used to be Provence and the Côte-d’Azur.

Cultural insecurity, I have mentioned this in relation to the countryside, because the steamroller of a single culture, of a single way of thinking, of a single language, evokes a fear in the population,
obviously, of seeing the gradual destruction of what is its cultural identity. It clings to it because this is the basis for its sense of honour, its history, what embodies its difference and which it thus claims without aggression, without racism, without rejecting others, but with the aim of living in accordance with its own values, both ethical and aesthetic. Here again there is the issue of the privatisation and merchandising of culture, with the cultural means falling into the hands of major international finance, along with the means of information. We can see this currently with the media crisis in France, where television is private and newspapers are falling into the hands of what was previously known as big business. The result is that today there are fewer newspapers and there is no need to read several papers because exactly the same thing is reported by all the papers and on television.

Insecurity, finally, because of the close proximity of populations with differences that are far too great in terms of cultural models or economic means. And naturally, for a Mediterranean region such as mine, it is a phenomenon that is being exploited by the far right, who, looking for a scapegoat for the miseries and worries I have just outlined, are naturally turning on those they believe to be outsiders. People, where I live, mostly originating from the Maghreb, coming from nearby countries that have very young populations whilst the population of Europe ages; very poor populations, whilst Europe is relatively wealthy. As a result, this is leading to the migratory movements of which we are all aware, and, with the danger of creating a racist psychosis, with alarming everyday images from the Canaries, from Gibraltar, from the Lipari Islands, from Ceuta and Melilla, giving rise to fear among people afraid of a torrent of barbarian hordes or starving hordes. The irresponsible reaction of governments, to insist that Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria act as the border and the security to reject the black populations back to black Africa and protect Europe which can then turn its back on the Mediterranean and Africa, and develop its economic and democratic model sheltered by its Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian neighbours. It cannot of course be allowed to happen like this. Not only is it immoral, it is also stupid. No wall, no border has ever prevent population movements. The Chinese built the Great Wall of China which was useless, the Emperor Hadrian had Hadrian’s Wall built in Britain, which proved pointless. Today these are historical monuments, of interest to tourists. But could the Mediterranean itself become a wall in its own way, or at least a moat? We do not think so but it is one of today’s problems.

As a result, faced with these problems, there is finally this moral insecurity, which is a result of the endangering of our ethical values and which makes people complain about a loss of moral reference points, even when there is no need. We have moral reference points, our history is rich in these, they have religious, philosophical, political, trade union, labour and popular roots. These differences and these reference points, equality, fraternity, liberty, social justice, are ours, there is no point in looking for others. But it is clear that we need to find answers to this experienced inequity and privation, without which we have before us a movement that feeds on what we all condemn, a revolt, a movement against globalisation. Because as we have agreed this morning and I fully accept, globalisation is a reality, one cannot be against an obvious reality. We do however need to react – and this gives the value to politics – find out how to deal with this reality which has been imposed on us and which is deeply worrying for our peoples. We can provide a political response that matches with our desire for economic modernisation, but that also reflects the needs of an ethical nature, without which there is in the end no use for politics.

Politics can thus reassert its place through the challenges we face with globalisation, and, if it is not reasons of an ethical nature that we spread – and these would be sufficient ground for the definition of a policy – it is in any case a concern for those who do not share this ethic, the proper management of the affairs of the world and, for us in Provence-Alpes-Côte-d’Azur, the affairs of the Mediterranean.

If the States, as they have demonstrated with Barcelona 1 and Barcelona 2, are not capable of getting the measure of the problem and providing satisfactory responses for our Southern partners, and then, this shared destiny that we have with all countries and peoples around the Mediterranean, will not happen or will occur in an adverse and violent manner, and not in peace and with respect for each other and in cooperation.

The Mediterranean problem in Provence-Alpes-Côte-d’Azur is not a problem of neighbouring with Algeria, Tunisia, the Maghreb or the other Arab countries or even the Israeli-Palestinian problem. It is a matter of domestic policy, as tens of thousands of my fellow citizens are French citizens with their origins in the Maghreb, and tens of thousands of the inhabitants in my Region are people with
Maghreb nationalities and needed in my Region. However, we are currently experiencing a rise in racism which is interlinked with the manipulations of politicians, with the rise in communitarism, racism, ethnicism, ghettoization, exclusion and violence. We are thus being confronted with two options, either that of a society that settles its problems with ghettos, ghettos of the increasingly poor and others of the increasingly wealthy, the one protected by private police and the other from time to time subjected to water canons by the State police. This is obviously an image of France and of the Republic that we do not and cannot accept. Not just for, as I said, ethical reasons, but on the grounds of the proper management of the future for our Region.

There is thus unfortunately, in the face of this globalisation, a crisis of democracy, of which I have spoken, with this terrible declaration that has been made by a number of French politicians, and not the least among them, when a factory worker whose job has disappeared overnight or an office worker whose job has disappeared overnight, or when those who cannot find housing because it has become too expensive, turn to their political representatives, there are some politicians who respond: “There is nothing we can do. We are powerless against globalisation and we can do nothing, either about the economy, or finance, or about property speculation”. And at that point, naturally, people respond: “If you can’t do anything, what’s the point in voting for you, what’s the point of politics, what use is democracy?”. And this is when voters start abstaining, or start protest voting and often for fascist models, which they see as being a solution for restoring order - but what an order - to this global disorder.

I remember – I will soon bring this overlong discourse to an end – but I remember during the last round of regional elections, going to certain areas of Marseille and Nice, and when confronted by Le Pen, the leader of the Front National, the extreme right party, saying to the people who had turned out that we must, we need to defend the Republic. The response was: “Why should we defend the Republic. The Republic has done nothing for us. We are living in abject poverty, we don’t have jobs, we don’t have decent housing. We have been promised the earth for ten or twenty years, and we still have nothing”. How do I tell them they are wrong when clearly democracy has not done anything for them. The temptation can be huge to either not vote at all, or to lump all politicians together saying as is said in France: “They are rotten, all careerists, there is no point voting for any of them or only in voting for the Front National and the extreme right which will give them a kick up the backside”. The answer, which I will end on, is Europe, provided that it is social, because in my Region the vote was no to the draft constitution and at a much higher rate that in the rest of the country. But people are not stupid, as someone pointed out this morning the people are not stupid. The people are intelligent. They know what is good and what is bad, but we need to show the way, that is the very principle behind our role. And as a result, whilst my in Region the Provençale people voted “No” to the European constitution, it was not a “No” to Europe, because they know they need Europe in competing with China, India, Brazil, or the United States, but a “No” to the text which was in their eyes, and they may have been wrong, which was in their eyes the embodiment of the very ultra-liberal model they did not want and under which they are suffering at the moment.

The nation must not be given to the far right and we should not only wave flags during football matches. I should not talk about this at a time when the Football World Cup offers some chances for France, and we are naturally optimistic, but I should say that we must acknowledge a significant need at the national level, but not against Europe or the Regions, for cultural identity and social solidarity.

Finally, there is the Region which is the relevant category for proximity, this is participative democracy. People need to be able to express themselves on policies that are going to be implemented. It is an appropriate level for local development and also for proximity, enabling the prevention of over urbanisation, that is a Europe based around a few major cites, Barcelona, Milan, Munich, London, for a more harmonious, human-scale development of the territory, the defence of cultural identity – the regional cultural identity in Provence is very strong – a shared destiny. We have, as a Mediterranean region bordering on Piedmont, Liguria, and with strong links with the countries of North Africa, a shared destiny to defend in Europe as in the Mediterranean.

Finally, decentralised cooperation, this is a participative diplomacy which, just like participative democracy, means that all the elements of a Region, not just the diplomats or elected politicians, but industrialists, universities, young people, students must be involved in the construction, for instance, of the Mediterranean community that we want to see. The French Regions are particularly weak in
this field. I am always a little embarrassed to find myself in meetings with Mr. Martini, the President of Tuscany, and Mr. Chavez, the President of Andalusia, because I am between two giants, whilst I am a political dwarf with very few powers, and I sense that they feel a degree of pity for me, but do so with great politeness and I would like to publicly thank them for this.

Thus – and now I have finished – the weakness of the French Regions leads us to really look forward to a Europe of Regions, which the CPMR is helping us to establish, within networks with the resources and solidarity that will enable us to overcome the immense problems and to take up the challenges facing all of us.

I will end by first of all now thanking President Martini and our friend Gizard. I believe we need to go further than Europe, the peripheral Regions must become in effect central Regions, with borders that are not borders but crossroads. This is easy to say but we need to make it happen, and I see as a symbol of this the fact that we are here on the Azores today. It is an invitation to this most remote Region, to see here that in reality we are at the heart of a Latin-American and European space symbolised by the Azores Region.

I offer my congratulations for this agreement between the United Nations, through the UNDP, and the CPMR that will allow us to move forwards and find answers for our populations with their real eagerness for Regions and democracy.

Thank you.