

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you on behalf of the Institutional Affairs committee. In the following minutes I will give you a short overview on recent developments regarding the Eastern Partnership initiative which is, next to Climate change and economic recovery, another priority of the Swedish Presidency. I will also update you on the recent activities undertaken by the AER to support this new initiative.

Furthermore I will propose to adopt a statement on what we, as European regions, expect from the new European Commission and also ask you to contribute to an AER position on multilevel governance.

Eastern Partnership - update:

In its work programme the Swedish Presidency said that it will pay particular attention to the implementation of the Eastern Partnership. At the last bureau meeting in Fribourg I introduced you already to this initiative. Let me shortly remind you what the Eastern Partnership is all about and why it is important for AER members.

Content:

The Eastern Partnership is a new policy framework of the EU for multilateral cooperation between EU Member States and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The Eastern Partnership seeks to complement the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy and to support further economic development as well as greater democratic governance and stability in the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU. In other words, this new structure wants to provide an institutionalised forum for discussing issues such as visa agreements, free trade, energy security, environmental protection and people to people contact. The Swedish Presidency wants to ensure that the implementation of the Eastern Partnership gathers momentum and will lead to concrete

partnerships and cooperation agreements.

Relevance of the Eastern Partnership for AER members:

Why is it so important for AER members to be informed about these policy initiatives? As you know AER has many active member regions from the Eastern Partnership countries in particular the Ukraine and Georgia. The Commission proposes various instruments for interregional cooperation based on the EU Cohesion policy model which will be put in place in the framework of a Memorandum of Understanding between the European Commission and the respective countries from the Eastern Partnership.

What has been done so far?

Let me tell you about what has been done so far. As the European Union's Eastern Partnership initiative started to be discussed in Brussels, an AER delegation led by Secretary-General Klaus Klipp was in Guria, Georgia, on 2nd July 2009 to bring that partnership to the South Caucasus regions. The meeting brought together governors of the Georgian regions, the Georgian State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Giorgi Baramidze, as well as representatives from Armenia and Poland. Participants were introduced to the concept and possibilities of interregional cooperation in the framework of the AER network and also the European Union. Study visits, training sessions and exchange of regional representatives have been discussed and planned. In addition AER was invited to start close cooperation with Armenian regions. A visit by AER president Michèle Sabban to Armenia is foreseen.

Furthermore a first Memorandum of Understanding on Regional Policy was signed between the European Commission and the Ukraine this summer. Together with Ukrainian AER member regions, in particular the region of Donetsk, AER made sure that regions are recognised as partners in the Memorandum of Understanding. Regions in the Ukraine made clear that they want to be part of any policy cooperation between the EU and the Ukraine when regions are affected and that any funding and training on regional policy must benefit the regions and not only the national level. It has been furthermore agreed that the AER will be facilitating together with DG Regio training sessions on European regional policy and contribute to the exchange of regional

authorities.

AER will continue to monitor developments and debates on the Eastern Partnership taking place in Brussels and the various European institutions and inform AER members about further activities.

(..)

Are there any questions from the floor?

(..)

Dear colleagues, let me now come to another important institutional aspect related to European governance and the institutional changes at the European institutions.

Multilevel Governance:

As we have seen today at the example of the Baltic Sea strategy, new initiatives such as this strategy ask for new governance mechanisms. We have already heard about the term "multilevel governance". Multi-level governance can be understood as the exercise of authority across various levels of government. Since it implies that multiple actors of government are involved, governance of public policies become more complex, more demanding and requiring a rethinking of how central and sub-national governments should collaborate.

In 2008 the Committee of the Regions relaunched the debate on EU governance and on multilevel governance in the EU and published in 2009 for the first time ever in the course of 2009 a White paper on multilevel governance in Europe in order to formulate its vision of the future of European governance.

Currently the Committee of the Regions is launching a general consultation to collect the views and comments of local and regional authorities, associations and other stakeholders on the best way of implementing multi-level governance in Europe. The

CoR consultation is open until 30 November 2009. The Standing Committee will also launch a consultation amongst its members in order to gather opinions and feedback from its member regions. It will then prepare a summary document for the next bureau meeting during which a formal statement of the AER to the CoR will be adopted.

(..)

European Commission:

Let me come now as my final point to the most recent developments on European level. You all know that a new governance cycle on European level has started. In June this year we elected a new European Parliament and we will have very soon a new Commission. The day before yesterday, the European Parliament has approved the nomination of Jose Manuel Barroso as president of the European Commission. Also the conditions for cooperation on European level will change if the Treaty of Lisbon enters into force.

In order to make the new representatives aware of regional issues and interests we have prepared a summary document with several demands for the new Commission. I would kindly ask you to provide your comments to this paper so that we can send it later to the European Parliament and the European Commission.

(..)

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your comments (approval). The Standing Committee will inform you about further activities regarding the new Eastern Partnership.

I thank you for your attention.

