

Meeting of the AER Bureau

Göteborg (S), 17 & 18 September 2009

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Draft minutes of the meeting of the Bureau of the Assembly of European Regions

I) Opening of the Bureau meeting

As a preliminary, the Bureau members rose to listen to the European anthem.

Mimmi Von Troil, Vice-President of the Västra Götaland region, took the floor to say how pleased she was to welcome the members of the AER Bureau. She did so in particular on behalf of the President of the Regional Council, Mr Aronsson, whom some will recognise as being a member of the Bureau.

Following the adoption of a European strategy for sustainable development in 2001 in Göteborg, Sweden's second largest city has put in place an effective sustainable development programme based on biogas plants and the construction of passive housing.

Mimmi Von Troil welcomed the fact that the agenda includes the Copenhagen conference, which concerns the fight against climate change, as well as the macro-regions and all questions related to this strategy. She wished all the participants a pleasant meeting.

AER President Michèle Sabban had the painful duty of announcing the death of Adrien Zeller (Alsace -F). A minute of silence was observed in his memory.

Mrs Sabban then thanked Knud Andersen, Vice-President of the Chamber of Regions and Vice-President of the Danish Congress, for his presence. She also made a point of thanking Götaland County for its invitation and the organisation of the working days. The meetings and events of the Assembly of European Regions owe their success in large part to the places where they are organised. She noted in this respect that Sweden has held the rotating European Union Presidency since 1 July. So it was very natural for some of the core policy areas of this presidency to structure the Bureau's agenda.

II) Adoption of the agenda

The motion by Mr Watson (West Sussex -UK) to add an item on the Channel Arc Manche Assembly was approved.

The agenda was adopted.

III) **Adoption of the minutes of the latest Bureau in Fribourg (CH), on 14 and 15 May 2009**

The minutes of the Bureau's meeting in Fribourg were adopted.

IV) **Macro-regions: A new EU deal on macro-regions**

Olivier Baudelet explained as a preliminary that the European Commission had participated in the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and is also preparing the European Union's strategy for the Danube region.

He detailed what a strategy consists of and explained the European Commission's working methods. Mr Baudelet pointed out that the European Commission proposes resources to facilitate the process but that implementation is the responsibility of the Member States.

The European Commission worked on the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region on the basis of four hypotheses: it is impossible to obtain any additional European funds for its financing; in the short term, European legislation cannot be changed; the content, actions and projects are the result of a consensus by the different partners since the action plan must be implemented; the aim is not to create a complementary structure but to make use of existing structures.

Mr Baudelet informed the Bureau that the Council of Europe would be accepting the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in the coming weeks. It will then be launched and those in charge will present their first report to the Polish EU Presidency in 2011. The strategy for the Danube region will be launched in parallel.

Olivier Baudelet then turned to the macro-regional approach and its added value.

Coordination and greater cooperation is needed among the 27 countries that make up Europe, which should also agree on what needs to be done to take up challenges and seize opportunities. A new dynamic has been created among the different stakeholders in the Baltic Sea region. Everyone knows that it is now time to move from words to action and to embark on the project together. This is the first time such an approach has been launched with all the stakeholders. It is what is known as an integrated strategy.

Europe will make sure that everything is implemented by providing political support. The priorities have been carefully identified. Of course, implementation is not a legal obligation but there is a sort of moral obligation and the European Commission will report. Mr Baudelet stressed that this follow-up action by the European Commission, an independent body, had been requested by the countries themselves, which are extremely confident in the EU executive.

The Member States endorsed the 150 extremely detailed proposals and all the countries of the region agreed with these 150 projects. So the strategy is a success.

Everyone must monitor the extent to which every new financing opportunity or new decision is in keeping with the strategy. The alignment of these funds is a very important idea, particularly for private investors. The latter are looking for projects and know that they can invest when the strategy has been approved and when political support is ensured.

Lastly, Olivier Baudelet explained the advantages for the regions. First, they will be able to make a real contribution to the development of macro-regional strategies. The regions represent a very important contributing factor in terms of ideas. Second, the regions will

be consulted during implementation by the Member States. They can also implement actions and projects. For example, in the case of the European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, tourism will be coordinated by Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (D). If a project is beneficial for the Baltic region, it will necessarily be beneficial for all regions, whether it involves cleaning up rivers or enhancing the economic environment.

In conclusion, Olivier Baudalet noted that the European Affairs ministries were meeting on that same day in Stockholm to discuss the Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. They will discuss the concept of macro-regions. He himself was supposed to be there, but attended the AER Bureau meeting instead. This is a strong signal. The Member States are important, but so are the regions. Mr Baudalet thanked the AER warmly for the invitation.

The floor was then handed over to Esko Antola, Professor and Jean Monnet Chair at the University of Turku, for a presentation of his report on the new approach, notably on the macro-regions.

Esko Antola said he was very happy to have been invited by the AER. He explained first that this was a memorable day because it was the 200th anniversary of the signature of the Treaty of Hamina between Sweden and Russia, which changed the status of Finland by enabling it to develop as a nation.

Mr Antola pointed out that Mr Ilves – the current President of the Republic of Estonia – and Mr Stubb – who is now Foreign Minister of Finland – had as members of the European Parliament drafted a proposal for a Baltic Sea policy in 2004. At the time, this region had four new members of the European Union and the Baltic Sea was therefore becoming an inland sea within the European Union – with the exception of Leningrad Oblast.

Mr Antola then put the focus on the European Union. It has been in the process of modifying its structures since September 2001, the date of the Laeken Declaration that recommended thorough reforms. The members of the European Union have increased in number from six to 27 today. Geographical homogeneity has been lost and the Union finds itself in a political impasse in terms of institutional reform. Solutions are expected from the Treaty of Lisbon, but according to Mr Antola, this new treaty is coming too late and is too limited.

The process of mega-regionalisation requires more flexibility and differentiation. Schengen and monetary union are two examples of differentiation. There is also increasing intergovernmental cooperation between certain Member States and coalitions. Since the advent of the economic crisis, examples of such differentiation have increased and we are witnessing greater cooperation between countries.

The European Commission considers the Baltic Sea zone to be a macro-region. This zone covers a number of administrative regions that have enough themes in common to justify a single strategic approach.

Mr Antola returned to the Baltic Sea Strategy and three-level governance, for which the Member State takes decisions, the European Commission coordinates, takes follow-up action and reports, and the partners implement actions on the ground. The regions are among these "already active" partners. They must take the initiative and even increase their initiatives.

Mr Antola challenged Olivier Baudalet's views: the method of differentiation and parallelism does not seem to be working, in his opinion. It is not enough for a member of the European Commission to draw up reports and submit them to those who take the decisions. The Treaty of Lisbon is a good example.

On the other hand, there is a need for direct participation by the "already active" partners as well as a political commitment, namely decisions by political leaders to commit their power, their influence and their personal participation to guarantee that the strategy is given visibility, leadership, resources and permanent political support. This is the weak link. For example, for the Baltic Sea zone, the countries and governments all have their eyes on Sweden: it has to achieve results. For this to be possible, institutions of political leaders have to take things energetically in hand and support the movement. The pre-eminence of the political dimension has to be accepted. That means also taking account of institutions (governmental and non-governmental) and determining priorities and the agenda of political decisions. For the process to continue to unfold, it must work from the ground up.

Esko Antola emphasized that the AER, with its 270 members, is a very important organisation. It is a sizeable sectoral inter-regionalisation in which "para-diplomacy", i.e. diplomacy at sub-state level, may be exercised.

He noted that macro-regionalisation has started to snowball. In ten years' time, with the Baltic Sea region, the Danube region, the Adriatic region, the Atlantic Alliance and the North Sea equivalent, six or eight mega-regions will exist in Europe.

Mr Antola then raised the question of the impact of mega-regionalisation on the European Union and the role of these mega-regions. The Baltic Sea region is a pioneer and must make the most of this opportunity to influence the rest of Europe.

Mr Antola stated that the regions must speak with a single voice, not only with their neighbours, but also with the institutions in Brussels. This is one of the key components of mega-regionalisation, which is part of the process of globalisation. With this "G-isation" – G for global –, they can strengthen their position.

In conclusion, Mr Antola invited the members of the Bureau to give very serious thought to the role they wish to play in the implementation and governance of macro-regionalisation.

Mrs Sabban considers it necessary to place politics at the heart of the action. She noted that the role of politics is central in the Assembly of European Regions.

She returned to the concept of para-diplomacy to point out that AER members are engaged in this activity on a daily basis. This is only a beginning, but the role of the regions is essential in the effects of globalisation.

Madam President pointed out that President Barroso had just been re-elected to head the European Commission. She will have the opportunity to reiterate to him in Belfort, since he is invited to the AER General Assembly, what she had the occasion to tell him at a meeting in Brussels immediately after the launch of the European recovery plan, namely that he must engage in dialogue with the regions, which are in contact with small enterprises and the economy. The AER's 270 regions represent 280 million men and women who must engage in reflection and move forward together.

Mr Rymarczyk (Dolnoslaskie -PL) asked Esko Antola whether macro-regionalisation might create new barriers to cooperation between regions.

Mr Antola replied in the affirmative, but added that this would not be in the interest of the regions, which must on the contrary try to become much more successful actors in the process of globalisation. The macro-regions are simply trying to be stronger and always place themselves under the supreme legislation of the European Union.

Mr Olin (Central Finland -FIN) asked the speakers to explain their criteria for the definition of a macro-region. He pointed out that a sociological dimension is perhaps missing, namely a macro-regional identity. It would be possible to define north, west, east and

south macro-regions in the European Union, but Mr Olin wonders whether such a process of macro-regionalisation may contain the risk of heightening existing disparities.

Mr Baudalet stated that there is no master plan aimed at dismantling Europe or dividing it up into x number of territories. This concept is the result of a request by the Swedish Presidency, which sought a report on the subject. It is not an idea stemming from the European Union or the European Commission. He then explained that the European Commission has not defined a macro-region in clear terms. It does not want a hermetic definition and prefers to think in strategic terms.

The concept is new. The European Commission does not have a great deal of hindsight or experience. The idea is mainly to find structures that allow for action. The Baltic Sea rim regions wished to team up to combat pollution in this sea. The same holds for the Danube regions. The starting point is a common interest shared by very different populations. The strategy of macro-regions is targeted on action.

The European Commission has already contemplated a strategy for the North Sea as well as a concept for the Mediterranean. Two meetings with representatives of the Union for the Mediterranean have already taken place. It is too early to know what will result over the longer term, but the representatives of the Union for the Mediterranean were very interested. It was very clear to them that it would be possible to develop a variety of very concrete projects taking a strategy as a starting point. The area is open to multiple strategies.

Mr Antola presented four possible definitions of the concept of macro-region.

1. A definition of construction for action. Concerning the Baltic Sea region, this construction was totally artificial but works because the idea was clear.
2. A definition based on the economic dimension. Some countries whose economies have taken a serious turn for the worse have grouped together. These regions have every interest in teaming up to rebuild together.
3. A definition based on a territorial concept. These are the Baltic Sea states or the Danube countries. The territorial link is clear and can be an ocean, a sea or a river. This natural characteristic of water makes it possible to develop projects. Mr Antola added that the Western Balkans is also a very interesting region. This subject will be discussed at the Conference of the Committee of the Regions, which will be held next week in Bruges (B). He thinks it would be interesting to have the AER's contribution on this type of debate.
4. A definition based on the concept of identity. The macro-regions often have an identity forged by history.

Mrs Carlsson (Norrbotten -S) commented that the AER does indeed have an important role to play in this process of macro-regionalisation. Following enlargement of the European Union, prosperity has risen but there is still a great deal of work ahead. A macro-region consists of solving practical problems that an individual state cannot solve alone. Climate change and pollution of seas are cross-border problems that must be solved through a joint effort. She therefore encourages this type of strategy, which produces results, and wishes it every success. The AER has a very important pivotal role to play, since it groups many different communities and populations. The regions facilitate macro-strategies, regional or local strategies and serve as their intermediary. She hopes that the AER will keep up a very active dialogue with all the players in the macro-strategy, assess results and continue to be involved and participate in other macro-strategies still to be defined.

The General Secretary, Mr Klipp, mentioned that the AER is an organisation in which subsidiarity plays a major role. It should always be borne in mind that elected political leaders, at every level of governance, are actors in change. It is the populations that elect them. Citizens therefore address their needs and expectations to their elected leaders. Mr Klipp understands the fears populations can have of an additional and totally anonymous level of governance. So care has to be taken to ensure that the relationship between political leaders and citizens is kept in the forefront.

Mr Klipp pointed out that the results of the study on subsidiarity as a factor of success were presented at the Fribourg meeting. It was found that the greater the regions' possibility to decide for themselves, the greater their economic success. It is citizens who act locally, and not certain theorists who are far removed from all their problems.

Mr Meyer (Alsace -F) recognised that this reflection on macro-regions is almost a logical consequence of Interreg B. In the territories of the Alpine, Danube or Atlantic areas, some have come to realise that they had no use for partners from this territory and others realised that they could no longer advance other than by working together. If the European Commission helps the territories and regions directly, extremely interesting solutions can be found on the basis of free cooperation where the common interest is clearly recognised.

There are 10 or 15 territories in Europe. New analysis is under way, notably in Germany, on the concept of metropolitan regions. Players are starting to realise that big cities have to cooperate with the adjacent territory. This is another level of cooperation, still freely agreed on the principle of the common interest, to develop actions and not define new borders and new areas.

Mr Meyer said it would be a pity for the AER to miss out on these opportunities.

Mrs Sabban reassured him in this regard and mentioned the remarks by Adrien Zeller at the University of Fribourg on the effects of decentralisation. She pointed out that France is in the midst of a reform of its territorial approach.

Mr Watson (West Sussex -UK) said he finds that this debate on macro-regions is emerging in due time. Some regions can indeed work together even though, on the face of it, they may not seem to have many points in common. However, it should be kept in mind that the European Union is above all an economic union. It is very important to include the concept of macro-economy in the macro-region. It is also important to keep sight of the fact that there are practical benefits for the population. Citizens always ask politicians what policies mean for them. Whichever players may be working on a macro-region, improving the quality of life for citizens is what is most important.

Mr Baudelet pointed out that benefiting the population is the main issue of these macro-regions. Considering differences and disparities, the macro-regions are a possibility for bridging the gap between the population and the European Union's institutions in Brussels, to ensure that strategies are more targeted on specific needs.

Mr Baudelet reiterated the definition of subsidiarity: "taking action at the most appropriate level". That is the very logic of the macro-region. Certain problems cannot be solved either in Brussels or at national level. The idea is not to create a conflict between States and their regions but to take decisions at the most appropriate level. The AER must absolutely be involved in this future strategy of macro-regions.

Mr Antola said he does not understand the concept of subsidiarity as a Finnish national, unlike the Germans whose country is organised in a federal structure. In his view, it is impossible to develop a concept that means different things depending on one's culture of origin.

Esko Antola made a point of using another term: multi-level governance. To use this multi-level governance, there is a need to start thinking in terms of macro-regions.

Mega-regions will be another challenge that will soon have to be met by the traditional regions.

Mrs Sabbam mentioned in this respect the example of metropolitan Paris, which is completely interlinked with its region, namely Ile-de-France. She asked Mr Antola to provide input to the forthcoming work on the Black Sea region. This will be the third case of a grouping based on a body of water.

Mr Klipp went back to the principle of subsidiarity and noted that it dates back to the Greeks. The idea is for citizens to make as many decisions as possible for everything related to their own lives. This is a principle of Judeo-Christian Western civilisation and it was thanks to this principle that the European Union was created.

Mr Kieffer (Salzburg -A) thanked Klaus Klipp for pointing out that subsidiarity is not just important in countries with a federal structure. He noted that the concept of multi-level governance is very new to the extent that the partnerships are accepted and that it is recognised that it is not necessarily the higher level that takes the best decisions. In his view, the macro-regions are a challenge for giving responsibility back to citizens.

To bring this agenda item to conclusion, Mrs Sabbam thanked the different speakers. She added that the debate is worth being continued.

V.) Priorities of the Swedish EU Presidency – the economy

Mr Sandgren, President of Committee 1, briefed the Bureau on the priorities of the Swedish Presidency of the European Union.

Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt summed up the two main Swedish priorities in his speech in Brussels in June 2009: managing the financial crisis and unemployment, and addressing climate change.

The Swedish government also wishes to manage and enhance cooperation in justice and home affairs. This includes border controls and cooperation in customs and legal matters, immigration policy, visas and civil protection.

The adoption of a European strategy for the Baltic Sea region is also an important point for the Swedish government. The objective is to improve the Baltic Sea environment and to enhance integration and competition in the region.

The Swedish Presidency will also tackle the Union's strengthening and enlargement.

In terms of external commitments, the Swedish Presidency is preparing summits with South Africa, Brazil, Russia, China, India and Ukraine. The Swedish Prime Minister has also expressed his will to develop relations with the new American administration.

Completing ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, so that it can enter into force as soon as possible, is also a priority of the Swedish Presidency.

Mr Sandgren continued his presentation by discussing the points on which Committee 1 is working.

Some 99.8% of businesses in the European Union are small or medium-sized companies. They are important for growth and environmental innovation. They provide two thirds of jobs, sometimes even up to 80% for artisans. In addition, SME-micro-entreprises make an important contribution in terms of vocational training for young people. According to a survey by the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-

sized Enterprises, SME-micro-enterprises only dismiss workers when they have no other alternative. They make a major contribution to the social dimension of the European economy.

SME-SMIs are nevertheless particularly vulnerable, because they are faced with obstacles, notably when it comes to obtaining bank credits or expanding at international level. It is obvious that any complementary strategy for growth and employment must take into account the importance of SME-micro-enterprises for the European economy and must contribute to creating new employment opportunities. Concentrating on SME-micro-enterprises and on entrepreneurship is one of the priorities of Committee 1 in 2010.

Committee 1 plans to continue the Innovation Award to encourage entrepreneurship by women and young people and better cooperation with the regions in experience-sharing.

One of the challenges of the Lisbon Strategy concerns taking ownership of objectives. This is put into practice at regional level. The region is the best level for a significant contribution to the success of growth and employment.

At the latest Bureau meeting in Fribourg, Mr Sandgren discussed the survey conducted by the AER which clearly shows that the regions have defined very precise needs in their territory to combat the crisis, but that these needs are generally not sufficiently taken on board at European level, which is focusing more on large companies and the financial system and is not really concentrating on the real economy.

By supporting entrepreneurship and demonstrating the innovative capacity of SME-micro-enterprises, it becomes clear how to transform these difficulties into opportunities, develop the economy and protect jobs. The regional dimension is crucial in terms of innovation strategies. Committee 1 will continue to keep up pressure for involving all the regions in issues that affect them.

For 2010, a seminar is planned in cooperation with European chambers of commerce and industry, which will develop recommendations and submit them to the Council for review.

There will also be a review of the practical implications for the regions, which must be equipped with good practices for the promotion of SME-micro-enterprises, entrepreneurship and innovation. The regions play a role through their experiences and their proposals.

Mrs Sabban opened the debate, noting that SME-micro-enterprises are the drivers of economic recovery. However, the regions can also play a role through their experiences and make proposals.

Mr Olin (Central Finland -FIN) said he was very interested in knowing what is taking place at the level of the presidency. Competitiveness is not really an end in itself, but a means. More in-depth work is needed to determine the Union's real objective. The idea is to improve everyone's lives, not just the lives of the select few.

Mr Olin pointed out that Sweden has succeeded in solving unemployment problems. On the other hand, from 70,000 to 80,000 people live close to the poverty threshold in the European Union. He wishes to know whether the Swedish Prime Minister has recommendations on how to solve unemployment, particularly among young people.

Mr Olin ended his remarks by observing that Sweden is doing quality work but that a rotating presidency that changes every six months is impractical for management of a Union of 27 States. He is therefore impatiently awaiting the Treaty of Lisbon, since it will provide a permanent presidency lasting two and a half years.

Mr Sandgren made a point of noting that Sweden is currently in a situation that it has not experienced since the end of the Second World War, since its rate of unemployment is close to 10% and between 20 and 25% among young people.

Mr Rymarczyk (Dolnoslaskie -PL) referred to a survey that demonstrated that SME-micro-enterprises in Europe are less competitive than equivalent enterprises in the United States. It is therefore important to strengthen internationalisation and external trade. Large companies subcontract their production, whereas SME-micro-enterprises do not leave their region, but stay put at local level.

Mr Albayrak (Istanbul -TR) pointed out that there is a close connection between competitiveness and success. He called for the Assembly of European Regions to address this aspect of competition.

Mrs Sabban went back to the issue of youth unemployment. She noted that the European Union has put in place the Erasmus programme for students and that the Assembly of European Regions has the EURODYSSEY programme, which targets all young people.

In her view, it would be useful to strengthen this part of the organisation of the AER. A declaration will be signed in Belfort with the Province of Quebec to enable more than 400 young Europeans to go to Quebec. She said she would return to this point.

Mrs Sabban encouraged the Bureau to highlight the AER survey in all their external activities and within the regions.

Mr Sandgren commented that this opportunity for young people is extraordinary. The fact remains, though, that Swedes do not speak French. Three reasons have been given for the curb on the development of SME-micro-enterprises: they have difficulties obtaining funds for investments, venture capital to help young entrepreneurs to get started has to be developed and bureaucracy is excessive.

Mrs Sabban thinks that the barrier of the French language has found a solution with LOJIQ, which is open to all countries, notably North and South America. There is no need to be held back by the language barrier. Young people themselves do not ask themselves these questions. Eurodyssey operates in all languages.

VI.) Combating climate change

Mrs Sabban commented that this item was a good transition with the previous one, since climate change creates employment.

For Claude Trémouille, Vice-President of Committee 1, one of the principal objectives of the Assembly of European Regions is to take a dynamic approach to present and future needs and developments, in order to understand all developments. This approach is all the more relevant and urgent when it comes to climate change.

In the AER, the fight against climate change has long been addressed in an overarching way but also transversally. The AER welcomes the fact that this subject will be at the heart of the priorities of the Swedish EU Presidency in the coming months. The Swedish Presidency agrees with the AER that the issue can no longer be postponed and that courageous and decisive measures to combat climate change need to be taken immediately.

The fundamental question that precedes the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen is how to reconcile economic development with an environmental approach, while including a social dimension. This vital question will have to be addressed in large measure at regional level, because it is at this level that many climate change policies are implemented.

In the course of the last two years, the AER has organised events aimed at developing regional solutions to problems caused by climate change. It is important to mention the declaration in support of renewable energy and energy efficiency adopted by the AER and FEDARENE in 2006.

To date, 86 European regions have signed up to this initiative which, in addition to the statement of intent, contains very detailed phases and measurable objectives with regard to renewable energy for instance.

The importance of concluding agreements that produce concrete results to fight climate change is also stressed by the Swedish Presidency of the European Union, because the target is a 20% to 40% reduction in CO₂ emissions by 2020 and an 80% to 95% reduction by 2050. This ambitious target can only be met through the development of precise policy instruments and substantial innovation capacity, by developing new forms of clean industries.

The AER contributes to the attainment of these targets, for instance through the *More for Energy* project launched in 2008, which involves 13 regions and the creation of a platform for the exchange of best practice in the areas of renewable energy and energy efficiency. *More for Energy* is based on the methodology of expert audits. It consists essentially of the visit of an interregional or interdisciplinary team of experts to a region that intends to make its energy policies more sustainable.

The AER now enjoys a reputation that goes beyond European borders. Its President will be visiting the United States within the framework of an international conference on climate change, during which she will meet the United Nations Secretary General.

Together with the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) and eight other associations of local and regional governments, the AER has developed a comprehensive programme aimed at promoting low CO₂ emissions and environmentally acceptable regional practices.

The main objectives of this ambitious project is to create awareness of problems related to climate change in more than 500 regions worldwide, calculation of the carbon footprint in more than 50 regions and the development of strategies to reduce carbon emissions through the production of alternative energies, an innovative approach to transport and other measures aimed at coping with the challenges of the coming decades.

In recent years, the AER has also organised a number of events focusing on climate change, such as the conference held in Limoges. That conference concluded with a joint declaration by the AER and the UNDP on strengthening the role of the regional authorities in the context of the Kyoto 2 discussions that will culminate in Copenhagen in December.

Here too, the AER is in line with the programme of the Swedish EU Presidency, seeking a planetary solution to the problem of global warming.

The AER is not limiting its action to participation in the Copenhagen conference but places this conference within a wider set of events in order to guarantee a long-term result through ongoing actions. The next step will take place in Sundsvall (S), at the plenary meeting of Committee 1, which will focus on the subject of new financing systems for enhanced energy efficiency.

At the start of 2010, Committee 3 will organise a conference in Andalusia within the framework of the European Platform of Local and Regional Authorities for Development. This conference will focus on climate change and development cooperation. It will give the developing countries an opportunity to voice their concerns and to set up partnerships with European regions to optimise the fight against climate change.

This commitment is proof of the responsible attitude on the part of AER members, who are aware that climate change must be fought not only in Europe, but also at global level on a coordinated basis.

The AER has given itself means and set ambitious goals in the field of climate change. It encourages the Swedish EU Presidency to pursue its ambitious programme on climate change and assures it of the AER's support. The regions of Europe are reliable partners.

VII.) The Copenhagen Climate Change Conference. With the contribution of the Climate Group and the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)

(Not applicable)

VIII.) Eastern Partnership

Lars-Gerhard Westberg, Vice-President of the Standing Committee on Institutional Affairs, pointed out that the Swedish EU Presidency announced in its programme that it would endeavour to implement this Eastern Partnership.

Mr Westberg has already presented this initiative but he reviewed its general outlines. The AER has many active members who come from these regions, but also others like Ukraine and Georgia, which are not members. Models of political cohesion models have therefore been put in place under a memorandum of understanding.

This initiative was discussed with the participation of Klaus Klipp, in Guria (GE) on 2 July 2009. The meeting brought together the governors of the different regions of Georgia, the Minister of State for Europe and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Mr Giorgi Baramidze, and representatives of Armenia and Poland. These participants discussed the concept of and possibilities for interregional cooperation within the framework of the AER network and the European Union. Study visits and training sessions were discussed and exchanges of regional representatives were planned. The AER was also invited to launch intense cooperation with the Armenian regions. A visit by the AER President is planned.

This first regional policy agreement was signed between the European Commission and Ukraine and its member regions, in particular the Donetsk region (UA), last summer. The AER wishes to ensure that the regions see themselves as partners under this agreement. The regions of Ukraine clearly stated their interest in being an integral part of this policy of cooperation between the European Union and Ukraine. The regions are involved and all regional financing and training policies must benefit the regions, not just the national level.

It was also decided that the AER would act as organiser with DG Regio for training sessions on Europe's regional policy and would contribute to interactions between regional administrations. The AER continues to follow developments and debates on this partnership in Brussels and with the different European institutions.

Mrs Sabban will be in Armenia with a delegation. This initiative is in parallel with the Black Sea conference. She invited Lars-Gerhard Westberg to join her, since he is following this work within the AER.

IX.) Meeting with the Black Sea regions

Mrs Sabban pointed out that, following the accession to the European Union of Romania and Bulgaria, on 1 January 2007, the Black Sea has become Europe's third largest sea.

During the last 15 years, many initiatives relative to the Black Sea have been implemented. Most of these attempts have not produced the anticipated results. This explains why, in 2007, the European Union carried out an initiative to see how it might be possible to interconnect all these structures and programmes. The Black Sea Synergy initiative was launched as a result. It is based on five core policy areas: the environment, energy, transport, internal security and democracy. It is incomplete for the moment and there is a need for leadership and dynamism, especially because these initiatives have not sufficiently involved the populations and civil society. Mrs Sabban commented that the regions and the AER could intervene on the latter point.

For this reason, with the President of the region of Ajaria (GE), the Assembly of European Regions is taking the initiative of convening the representatives of the 33 Black Sea regions to discuss water management and tourism. This project is set to culminate with a summit. The geopolitical dynamics of the region, for example frozen conflicts, will be discussed. The aim is also to identify broad outlines for the region's economic development and to review the extent to which the European Union's financial instruments can contribute to this renewal. This is a starting point, but Mrs Sabban hopes that it will lead to tangible results.

She is counting on the representatives of Istanbul (TR) to help her in this task.

Mr Albayrak (Istanbul -TR) replied that the members of his region are prepared to participate in all the actions for the Black Sea with which the AER President would like to involve them.

Mr Greenslade recalled the period of accession to the European Union of the Eastern European countries. The AER's work with the regions in the accession countries was intense and very useful. This Black Sea initiative is a dual opportunity. On the one hand, the AER can have a proactive impact for the regions in this part of the world and help them to grow and develop. On the other, the AER's objectives of including new regions could be attained.

Mr Greenslade said he was delighted to offer his help.

Mrs Sabban gladly accepted his offer. She noted that Mr Greenslade was behind the initiative of associating these different regions.

Mr Watson (West Sussex -UK) made a brief presentation on the regions of the Channel Arc Manche Assembly, of which he is President. A conference on adaptation to climate change has been held. The DVD of this conference is available to members of the Bureau.

As representative of the Channel Arc Manche, he was asked to attend the Maritime Days in Rome. This conference illustrated the importance of the maritime activities of the European Union and of Europe. Their visibility has increased in the wake of the Blue Book. The Maritime Days conference will take place next May in Gijón (E). The Channel Arc Manche has been contacted with a view to its participation. This is how the Channel Arc Manche ensures multiregional cooperation.

X.) The AER's expectations of the new European Commission

Mr Westberg, Vice-President of the Standing Committee on Institutional Affairs, pointed out that the new cycle of governance at European level began in June. A new European Parliament was elected this year and a new Commission will be put in place. The

European Parliament approved the appointment of José Manuel Barroso as President of the European Commission. Cooperation conditions at European level will change if the Treaty of Lisbon enters into force. There is a need to await the Irish vote in late October.

A document has been drawn up that includes several requests to be submitted to the new Commission. The idea is to build awareness of regional issues and regional interests among the new representatives. Lars-Gerhard Westberg asked members whether they had any comments to make or amendments to table for this document. Since this was not the case, it will be sent to the European Parliament and the European Commission.

XI.) Proposal from the Committee of the Regions: multi-level governance

Mr Westberg, Vice-President of the Standing Committee on Institutional Affairs, said that new initiatives such as the Baltic Sea strategy require new governance mechanisms. Multi-level governance is the exercise of authority at different levels of governance.

In 2008, the Committee of the Regions relaunched a debate on European governance and multi-level governance in Europe. It published a White Paper to set out its views on the future of European governance. The Committee of the Regions is now launching a general consultation to gather views and comments from the local and regional authorities, associations and different stakeholders on the best way of implementing multi-level governance in Europe.

The Committee of the Regions holds its consultation on 30 November. The Standing Committee launched a consultation of its members to learn their views and to transmit the information to the member regions. A summing-up document will be drafted for the next Bureau meeting, at which time a formal declaration will be adopted by the AER and the Committee of the Regions.

Mr Kieffer (Salzburg -A) pointed out that the Council of Europe had issued an opinion on multi-level governance. The Chamber of Regions will discuss it on 14 October. Mr Kieffer invited the secretariat to make this document available to AER members on the website. It would be a good idea for the AER to support the Council of Europe's position and to call for the regions to be better represented than they are presently in all bodies. The regions must also be more involved in legislation and in the drafting of certain laws.

Mr Kieffer also announced that, following the retirement of the General Secretary of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE), he is a candidate for the vacant position. It will be necessary to await the publication of the election list, but the President of Salzburg plans to contact all the AER member regions to seek their support. In this position of General Secretary of the CLRAE, Mr Kieffer believes that he could work in the interests of the AER.

Lars-Gerhard Westberg thanked Mr Kieffer for his very useful comments and said he would be happy to meet him in this context. This will be placed on the agenda of the Standing Committee and an answer will be given for 13 November.

Mrs Sabban considers the candidacy of Mr Kieffer to the General Secretary's position of the CLRAE to be very promising. She hopes he will be selected from among the declared candidates and that he will be elected. In that case, she would like to see close coordination with the AER General Secretary to promote the regions, notably in the Council of Europe. Certain issues that do not always please the European Commission or the Council of Europe, but for which the regions' interests take precedence, could be promoted jointly.

XII.) Innovation for demographic change

Mrs Sabban regretted the absence of Constantin Ostaficiuc, who was set to speak on this point. She noted that he has not participated in any Bureau meetings since Tampere and considers this a problem for the AER's activity. Mrs Sabban pointed out how important it is for elected leaders to report on their committee work. She added, on the other hand, that Vice-President Christina Wahrolin is very effective in this respect.

Martin Andreasson, of the Västra Götaland region, who participates in Committee 2, therefore made the presentation on demographic change. He said he was honoured to provide certain insights into the challenges of demographic change. He thinks that the AER should try to make it clear to the public opinion that these challenges are also a strength for Europe.

At present, there are four working people for every person over age 65. In 2030, there will be two working people for every person over age 65. If no decision is taken, the economy and the social system will not survive. This impact of demographic change is already visible and the cost of healthcare will become increasingly higher.

Mr Andreasson recalled the initiative of Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Prize winner in 2006, who developed the concept of microcredit. Following his lead, we have to find new ways to organise and manage resources, create jobs, make education available and take care of children and the elderly. Innovation is needed to adapt to all of today's changes.

Mr Andreasson presented a few examples taken from work carried out by Committee 2. There is a need for a more inclusive and fairer society that offers equal opportunities to all. People with physical or mental disabilities must be able to participate fully in the life of society. To understand the concept of disability, it is important to analyse it. A disabled person can of course be someone confined to a wheelchair, but also an individual who has difficulty accomplishing a given act, for example speaking a language other than his mother tongue. Disabilities have appeared because the differences that exist in the population have not been taken into account. Ensuring that buildings and transport systems are accessible is the first step towards including these persons with disabilities, keeping in mind that all other persons will also benefit from a more accessible physical infrastructure.

It is also important to ensure that the labour market is accessible. Too often, persons with disabilities receive benefits. However, they represent real added value at work. They must be placed "in the spotlight" to counteract stereotypes. The European Structural Funds are used to finance activities that include persons with disabilities. Attention needs to be given to this issue.

There is also a need to give thought to how to build synergy between young people and the elderly, and how to improve interactions between the two generations. More opportunities need to be created for young people on the labour market. An ageing generation that is expanding rapidly implies a different economy, but also needs and interests that the market should take into account. Several companies that monitor these tendencies have developed very specific products and services for the elderly. The type of public services needed by these persons should be reviewed and personnel trained. There can be expected to be a growing demand for access to health services. We need to reflect on new careers and develop them.

Working hours have to be made more flexible. To encourage couples to have children, they need help in striking a balance between work and family life. The same holds for encouraging seniors to work longer so that companies can benefit from their knowledge and experience. The result is greater productivity and increased employee satisfaction.

Greater productivity does not mean having to work longer or more intensely, but rather working more intelligently.

The contribution of technology and innovation must not be disregarded. The new information and communication technologies are very important. They make it possible to communicate in different ways. It is important for everyone to have access to information technologies in general. The elderly should be able to talk to their grandchildren in another country, using Skype for example, or to contact the administration using internet.

By going a step further, the new information and communication technologies can enable certain persons to continue living in their own homes rather than being placed in institutions. The Noord-Brabant region (NL) has developed intelligent and automated homes that allow remote monitoring.

Mr Andreasson took advantage of the opportunity to mention a conference to be held on 29 October in Brussels. Europe can be more competitive by exporting care products to other countries and regions.

Mrs Sabban thanked Martin Andreasson for standing in for Constantin Ostaficiuc and for his dynamic presentation of the work of Committee 2. She said she was proud to note that the future of Committee 2 is assured.

Madam President mentioned an advertisement that she wished to share with the Bureau. It shows a person who is in a hurry taking a parking space reserved for the disabled: "*Since you're taking my place, take my disability!*" She asked Committee 2 to establish contact with the advertising firm.

Intelligent houses are a major development. The population is ageing. People are living longer but they participate actively in the life of society. This creates many economic and social problems but also problems related to housing.

Mrs Sabban would like to see the Assembly of European Regions anticipate the impact of the growing number of seniors. The AER must make proposals and not just take part in the debate.

Mr Trémouille pointed out that the Limousin region is in the process of taking up an operation that already exists in Belgium on intergenerational housing meant to bring the elderly out of isolation and enable young people to live with them, with both sides providing services for the other.

Mr Olin (Central Finland -FIN) noted that the ageing of the population began at the middle of the previous century due to technological advances, technical progress and therapeutic and medical progress. This is a source of enrichment. The ageing of the population must not be seen as a problem but as an enrichment. Seniors have knowledge and skills from which young people can benefit. This subject must be explored further.

Mr Andreasson expressed full agreement with this comment. The ageing of the population is not a problem. It is even a great success but the elderly must not be left completely alone in the last stage of their life. Living in dignity in old age may mean staying active as long as possible.

Mrs Sabban welcomed this open and complex-free debate by the Bureau, because the Assembly of European Regions must be a source of proposals in this area.

XIII.) Standing Committee on Equal Opportunities: violence against women

Mrs Sabban stated that a debate had been held at the Standing Committee meeting that same morning. She regretted that Monica Carlsson had not been invited to participate.

Equal opportunity concerns not only women, but also the disabled.

Mrs Sabban wishes to ensure transversality among the AER committees on these questions of equality. She said that Håkan Sandgren has proposed that one or two rapporteurs in each committee report on equality issues not only to the Bureau, but also to the standing committees. In Fribourg, the idea was even discussed of strengthening the Group on Equal Opportunities and transforming it into a standing committee. Mrs Sabban knows that the creation of committees is something of a taboo in the Bureau. She promised a real debate on the organisation of the AER in the year following the General Assembly in Belfort.

Mrs Carlsson, President of the AER Observatory on Gender Issues, stressed the usefulness of this group. Emphasis this year has been placed on violence against women. In cooperation with the Belgian Institute for Gender Equality, the AER Observatory on Gender Issues sponsored an introductory seminar, on 28 May in Brussels, to give the regions an opportunity to become fully informed on the activities of the European institutions in this area. They were given the very valuable expertise of the European Women's Lobby and the Institute for Gender Equality. Ile-de-France and Murcia (Spain) also presented their best practice.

The Observatory on Gender Issues will continue to take an active interest in this subject and will establish a connection between domestic violence and public health challenges, without neglecting prevention and the treatment of those who act violently. The Observatory is also working on other subjects for the future.

The AER statutes must attach clear importance to gender equality and put it into action, as stipulated in the Kiruna Declaration (S) in 2006. Mrs Carlsson thinks that there are not really any modern European democracies without gender equality and that it is essential to fight against the under-representation of women elected to the AER, because it is a serious obstacle to the democratic legitimacy of this political organisation.

The Secretariat General must also draft proposals that ensure that all the different nationalities are clearly and equally represented in the AER presidency. These efforts to internationalise the Secretariat must also be deployed for equal opportunity and parity in the presidency.

The AER has always promoted the regions' participation in European policy. Gender equality also has to be added to this list of demands. Equal treatment of men and women in the European Union is an indispensable condition for real democracy.

It is also important to ensure that this approach is multidisciplinary and transversal. That is why the Observatory is already working closely with Committees 1 and 3 and the AER's institutional bodies. Gender equality must be built into all of the AER's activities. All AER partnerships and programmes must be sure to include this dimension of gender equality.

Mrs Carlsson therefore concluded that a Standing Committee on Gender Equality should be set up as an integral part of the AER Bureau. She hopes that the AER Bureau will support this proposal so that it can be put to the vote at the General Assembly in Belfort.

According to Mr Vorburger (St. Gallen -CH), equal opportunity must not concern women alone, but also minorities. This is an integral part of the constitutions of all Council of Europe member states, moreover. He also pointed out that the AER is a lobbying organisation for all regional affairs at European level. He noted that the AER structures are organised into three committees and two standing committees. Mr Vorburger does

not really understand why a third standing committee needs to be set up on such an evident subject. According to the German documents, this would be problematical in financial terms. In that case, a new budget item should simply be created. To promote parity, Mr Vorburger suggested a change in the statutes to this effect. Through the statutes, the member regions agree to make these equality issues a profession of faith and this solution would not encumber the structures by creating a third standing committee.

Mr Kirk (Hampshire -UK) thinks that the fact of writing this point into the statutes would not be enough. He suggested that the term "equal opportunity" should be used as a generic term for this standing committee. He therefore proposed that the Bureau draft a recommendation to the General Assembly for the creation of a standing committee for all equality issues, in which representatives of the three committees and persons with expertise in the matter would sit.

Brian Greenslade, President of the Standing Committee on Monitoring and Evaluation, agreed with this recommendation, while noting the importance of ensuring that the budget remains balanced.

Mr Sandgren, President of Committee 1, also expressed support for the proposal.

Mrs Höglund (Värmland -S) spoke on behalf of the political majority of Värmland, which also welcomed the initiative to transform the Observatory on Gender Issues into an AER standing committee under the Bureau's direct responsibility. On the other hand, this standing committee should not have direct ties with the different committees, in order to keep its autonomy and independence.

Mr Kirk (Hampshire -UK) reassured Mrs Höglund on this point, since a standing committee under the Bureau's direct responsibility would not be attached to any committee.

Mrs Sabban said she would survey all the presidents of the AER's 270 member regions on this issue. In her view, the issue of inequalities between men and women cannot be approached as a budgetary matter. The same holds for persons with disabilities. This is a political issue which must be addressed by political leaders. She considers that this is progress for the AER and therefore asked Pierre Meyer to convene, in conjunction with the Bureau meeting, Ulla Höglund, David Kirk, Monica Carlsson, Håkan Sandgren, Brian Greenslade and Rolf Vorburger to review the best wording for this recommendation to the General Assembly. She added that she wished to return to this subject the following day, in connection with the agenda item on the statutes.

Madam President adjourned the meeting and invited the participants to join her for an official dinner on a replica of a ship operated by the Swedish East India Company.

XIV.) Subject of general interest – Working group on statutes and rules of procedure: presentation of the draft for adoption at the General Assembly

Mrs Sabban reopened the meeting and immediately gave the floor to Pierre Meyer, whom she had placed in charge of setting up a working group on equal opportunity.

Mr Meyer thinks that the question of the gender equality group should be addressed by tying it in with the statutes.

He began with a brief review of the work to update the statutes. The decision to set up an ad hoc group was taken in Fribourg. Written proposals were submitted during the month of August and a meeting was held on 3 September. That meeting proceeded with a

standard review of the German, English and French versions of the current statutes. The objective is to adapt the statutes of the Assembly of European Regions and its rules of procedure to present and future requirements.

Many points are under discussion. The summary will be made in the coming weeks, before the General Assembly.

The statutes are the constitution of the Assembly of European Regions. They must include the fundamental principles that the regions lay down for themselves. For example, the AER statutes strongly encourage the regions to apply strictly the principle of gender equality. This is a general philosophical rule.

The statutes are strict because they are deposited with the court. In contrast, the rules of procedure can be changed with considerable more flexibility. It is preferable to place certain proposals in the rules of procedure, for example, those concerning elections.

Pierre Meyer tabled a proposal on the creation of a standing committee on gender equality drawn up by the working group set up the previous day. This standing committee would report directly to the Bureau of the Assembly of European Regions. Its president would be a member of the presidium. The standing committee would have delegates in each committee. This subject would be approached not as being perfectly defined at the outset, but as an ongoing and transversal concern. It would be written into the statutes.

It would be seen later how the Assembly of European Regions organises to address the subject.

Mrs Sabban thanked Pierre Meyer and the working group and then opened the debate.

Mr Vorburger (St. Gallen -CH) continued to object to the creation of a standing committee on equal opportunity. The AER, which is very incisive at present, does not need another structure. Even if the subject is very important politically, it is not of paramount importance for an organisation that deals with regionalism and for an organisation as political as the AER. He added, however, that he would side with the majority.

Mr Kirk (Hampshire -UK) pointed out on the contrary that this is a very political subject and is intrinsically tied to regionalism and to the level of governance of the AER. He declared that he supported the proposal tabled by Pierre Meyer.

Mr Greenslade commented that the proposal deserved support.

Mr Watson (West Sussex -UK) echoed that view, but stated that equal opportunity must not focus solely on gender equality, which would risk leading the AER into a quota system and thus bringing about a loss of expertise.

Mr Olin (Central Finland -FIN) noted that the AER is 15 years behind the times on the subject of equality and parity, even though it has twice had a woman president. A great deal of effort needs to be put into involving women more in the AER's activities. In his view, no one will be able to oppose creation of this committee, because doing so would mean that the AER is against equality.

Madam President said she supports qualitative parity, not quantitative parity. Her starting point is the principle that the work must serve others. When the Group on Equal Opportunities attends meetings in other assemblies, it must be able to speak on behalf of the Bureau. In this respect, the solution of the standing committee that forms an integral part of the Bureau and the presidium is the ideal concept.

The fact of having an additional standing committee does not add more structure since the team already exists, particularly with Stéphane Cools and Monica Carlsson. Mrs Sabban even projects within two years to propose to the General Assembly to have the committees work on all inequalities. She finds that the scope of the committees is

quite restrictive and does not give a wide enough view of the problems raised by societies' progress.

The proposal by Pierre Meyer was adopted by a majority.

XV.) Summer university

Mr José Alberto Comas, Director of the "Agua y Progreso" Foundation, replaced Rafael Ripoll to present this item.

He began by thanking the Assembly of European Regions for having held the summer university in Valencia, with 250 participants, to develop and promote the best practices for sustainable water management in Europe. Water is a priority for the Valencia region.

The idea is to increase awareness of the development of water resources and help regional administrations to understand the importance of creating a water-saving culture in Europe.

Workshops were held and a speech was made. During the plenary, discussions concerned the use of water and the water situation throughout Europe. The participants could propose ideas relating to the question of water. Three groups were set up: water management; water and climate change; water governance and communication.

After a week of direct interactions and intense contacts, the participants identified a number of crucial factors that need to be addressed to develop a water-saving culture.

First, all relevant data on ground water management need to be compiled and there should be a full risk analysis, including the repercussions on the environment, prior to any infrastructure projects. The aim is also to increase awareness of the importance of water among the population. Climate problems imply water. Its management will be one of the most important issues of the adaptation strategy. The European regions have the responsibility to support each other and develop in order to adapt to climate change.

The AER has a draft water charter. The AER working group on water will receive ideas and suggestions that will be developed by the summer university participants.

Mr José Alberto Comas concluded his presentation by stating that the Valencia government is prepared to explain its water management policy to AER members.

Mr Valentin (Kärnten -A) pointed out that the Kärnten region has for a number of years sent a delegation of young people to this AER summer university. This delegation reported on the summer university and noted that its organisation was perfect. The programme was also deemed excellent because all the presentations were targeted on practical measures. The programme was too dense, however. The presentations followed one another too quickly and some discussions could not be developed sufficiently.

Mr Vorburger (St. Gallen -CH) expressed a similar view. He noted that the 2010 summer university would be organised by St. Gallen and Thurgau. The general subject will be mobility, but the organising committee will break it up into several sub-themes (public transport, development of transport, etc.). The event will be organised jointly by the two regions, which illustrates the close cooperation between the Swiss cantons. St. Gallen, Zurich and Thurgau will participate financially. Mr Vorburger thanked in advance the regions that are already involved in the organising committee and called on the other regions to provide assistance, particularly by sending delegates or experts.

Mrs Sabban said that the young people's views would be taken into account. She noted that she had opened the summer university and thanked the Valencia region again. She

also made the commitment, in the presence of the Bureau, to open the 2010 summer university.

XVI.) Eurodyssey Forum in Amiens

(Not applicable)

XVII.) Report on Eurodyssey

(Not applicable)

XVIII.) International mobility of young people (LOJIQ) – cooperation with Quebec

Mrs Sabban noted that young people's mobility is most often tied to employment. All the European regions are affected by youth unemployment. This explains why she accompanied a delegation to Quebec to sign a statement of intent with the LOJIQ, an association that enables more than 400 young people from European regions to go to Quebec to learn a trade or gain experience. In parallel, Quebec will need 700,000 people to fill vacancies. That is why it is appealing to young Europeans. This agreement will become a reality at the General Assembly in Belfort.

XIX.) General Assembly

Mr Klipp, Secretary General of the AER, provided practical information on the upcoming General Assembly, which will be held in Belfort (F) on 26 and 27 November, on the invitation of the Franche-Comté region. The Bureau will meet on the afternoon of 25 November.

The General Assembly is supported by the Franche-Comté region, but also and for the first time by a sponsor, GE Energy Europ, which has a research centre in Belfort. This is a pilot project on both sides and on which feedback will have to be given. Caution will be needed and it is of the essence to avoid giving any impression of corruption or bribery.

Mr Klipp provided details on the agenda, which is still subject to change.

Mrs Sabban thanked Klaus Klipp for this important preparation. She said she had been contacted by the President of Franche-Comté, who had received certain criticisms from Brussels over the fact of having an exclusive sponsor. Mrs Sabban mentioned that she herself was surprised to see on the agenda that the General Electric logo is more apparent than those of the Assembly of European Regions and Franche-Comté. She considers this problematical because there are rules in France on the functioning of political parties and public funds. She pointed out that the French regions had started an election campaign in September.

Mrs Sabban thinks that it is time to come to grips with the situation and she wishes to hold a meeting with GE. She noted that the General Assemblies and the Bureau meetings are always held at the expense of the hosts and she would not like to see the President of Franche-Comté put in a difficult spot over these questions.

Mrs Sabban noted that the Copenhagen conference would take place a month after the General Assembly in Belfort. She hopes to see the Assembly of European Regions adopt a very strong declaration. The regions can create employment as a result of climate change.

Mr Beelen (Wallonia -B) said he fears that his region may practice the "empty chair" policy at the General Assembly if the partnership with GE is not clarified.

Mr Olin (Central Finland -FIN) proposed to find other sponsors to water down this predominance.

Mr Albayrak (Istanbul -TR) thinks that the Secretary General should be asked to detail the terms of the contract signed with GE. That could make it easier to decide whether or not to keep it and to reiterate the rules. Sponsoring seems to be a good idea, provided it is beneficial to both parties.

Mrs Sabban accepted Mr Olin's proposal to open the partnership to other sponsors, notably in the framework of the subjects that have been chosen.

Mrs Allegrini-Simonetti (Corsica -F) voiced support for the President's suggestion of clarifying the terms of the contract. She is not opposed to having other sponsors, provided the negotiation is fair.

Mr Watson (West Sussex -UK) commented that it should be kept in mind that this is the General Assembly of the AER, but that it is normal, to keep its support, to allow GE to affix its logo, provided it is not given too much importance.

Mrs Sabban agreed totally with this.

XX.) Budget and state of membership

Mr Wuthrich-Pelloli, Vice-President and Treasurer, remarked that due to stable membership, income is steady and that the next financial year may be approached serenely. Thanks to the indexing of dues to average inflation in the European Union, the AER's "purchasing power" is holding steady. The AER is therefore maintaining its capacity of action for next year.

Doubtful dues are of course a risk, but this risk is taken into account when drawing up the draft budget. Reserves are set aside to this effect to leave room for manoeuvre in the event some member regions do not pay their dues. However, late payment or non-payment of dues is very regrettable. At present, doubtful dues add up to around €370,000. According to Mr Wuthrich-Pelloli, every case of late payment of dues should be dealt with individually.

Mr Wuthrich-Pelloli said that the details of all income and expenditure are contained in the documents and that there are comments on the different items. He made a point of thanking the Secretary General and his entire team for having helped him to draw up this preliminary draft budget.

Mr Wuthrich-Pelloli submitted the proposal for the 2010 budget for the approval of members of the Bureau and is confident that they will recommend it to the General Assembly for approval.

Mr Wuthrich-Pelloli observed that the current budget makes it possible to guarantee the status quo of projects and activities. To be more ambitious, AER would need to increase its membership. Lastly, Mr Wuthrich-Pelloli called for better targeting of expenditure or rather for restructuring of the budget headings so that money will be spent on priorities.

Mrs Sabban prefers to avoid use of the term "doubtful dues" because it has a particular connotation.

Mr Klipp explained that these are dues that are placed in a doubtful position so that the money will not be spent. They can be both paid dues and unpaid dues. This heading of "doubtful dues" has been used in the budget for the last 10 years.

Mrs Sabban asked that they be referred to as "dues pending settlement".

Pierre Meyer (Alsace -F) noted that several situations are possible.

- Certain partner regions do not have payment appropriations in the first half of the year. They cannot pay before August or September. These are virtually guaranteed dues.
- Dues owed by some regions can be delayed or even very uncertain. They may never be paid.

This point needs to be clarified in the statutes or in the rules of procedure. If dues are not paid during a certain lapse of time, the regions and partners automatically exclude themselves since they no longer have voting rights.

Mr Olin (Central Finland -FIN) agreed with Mrs Sabban to change the terminology used. In his opinion, €370,000 seems to be too high an amount. He asked the Vice-President/Treasurer what he planned to do to collect these funds. Mr Olin also wished to know after how many years in arrears members lose their voting rights at the General Assembly.

Mr Kirk (Hampshire -UK) concurred with Pierre Meyer and said he thinks it would be a good thing to make a distinction in the budget between the different cases discussed. In his view, each region could remind and encouraged regions close to them to pay their dues.

As a result of the crisis, Mrs Sabban fears that some regions may not give top priority to their membership in the AER. This needs to be taken into account, especially in future budgets.

It is also important to bring new regions into the organisation. Mrs Sabban therefore wishes to strengthen the role of the General Secretary along these lines. This is her priority: he must be able to meet the regions and contract their membership. For the immediate future, his other activities oblige him to minimize this role. That is why Mrs Sabban would like for Pierre Meyer to help her on the key issues. They already work together a great deal.

Mr Wuthrich-Pelloli finds that it would be a good idea to sub-divide the heading into "pending dues", paid in September, and "risky dues". He will analyse in greater depth the reasons for late payment.

There is a need to determine which member would be in the best position to approach a region that it not paying its dues. This should be someone with a network of contacts to approach the region in question.

It always has to be checked that the team has not changed and analyse the political priority before excluding a region. There is always an explanation for a delay and each case must be examined individually.

Mr Meyer (Alsace -F) pointed out that regions that wish to withdraw from the AER may do so in two ways: by sending an official registered letter or by not paying their dues. The latter case is fortunately very rare.

He noted that certain presidents of regions were looking for ways to reduce the dues paid to different bodies and that they encouraged the least expensive. It is therefore very important for the AER to engage in a marketing effort.

Mr Sandgren asked for more details on the heading "Other external services".

Mr Klipp replied that this allowed for targeted actions by the AER. This can be, for example, to launch targeted actions for the 25th anniversary of the AER.

Mr Klipp confirmed that most of the regions that wish to withdraw from the AER send a registered letter. Very often, the regions do not pay their dues out of a lack of information and relations between civil servants and elected officials of the region. In his view, it is enough to explain the AER's mission to convince people to make a commitment. It is really a question of communication. The previous day's meeting of the Standing Committee on Monitoring and Evaluation discussed this matter: there is a need for AER ambassadors who can distribute information in the regions and motivate their colleagues and elected officials.

Mr Kirk (Hampshire -UK) commented that Klaus Klipp was very generous with the regions where the payment mentality is lacking. The other regions should know which ones are not paying so as to "put pressure" on them.

Mrs Sabban wishes to work harmoniously. The AER's aim is to reach out to other regions. It is through the quality of its debates and the way Bureau meetings and General Assemblies are organised that the regions will want to join. She pointed out that she has asked for support for Klaus Klipp in this role. She does not wish for certain regions to pull out because of the crisis. If the AER provides them with elements essential to their regional activity, they will stay and will contribute to the debates. This is a central question.

Mrs Sabban reiterated her total confidence in Urs Wüthrich-Pelloli. She called for a meeting at an early date with Pierre Meyer, Urs Wüthrich-Pelloli and Klaus Klipp. She does not see better ambassadors than the Bureau members, or members of the Assembly of European Regions. She will make a proposal along these lines at the Bureau meeting to take place just ahead of the General Assembly in Belfort.

The budget was adopted unanimously.

XXI.) Report on missions since the previous Bureau

By way of introduction, Mr Klipp, General Secretary of the AER, asked that the questionnaire that was distributed be completed by an energy official in the different regions. This will provide basic input for the AER's work on energy policy.

He also pointed out that the AER and a few Russian institutions would sponsor a conference on 15 and 16 April. Mr Klipp plans to bring together 20 Russian regions that have consistent human and pecuniary resources. Klaus Klipp wishes to be present with a delegation of persons who can present the AER and start up as many concrete projects as possible between Western European and Russian regions. There will not just be political discussions, but also technical cooperation. This is the result of long-term work undertaken with Russia. Mr Klipp asked the Bureau members to inform him of their presence.

In February, a meeting was organised with the French Ambassador to Moscow, who informed the delegation that an operation between Nordrhein-Westfalen (D) and Samara (RUS) had been implemented. The delegation then met entrepreneurs and visited SME-micro-enterprises. They compared export statistics. Since then, there have been very strong ties between Samara and Nordrhein-Westfalen. This could be the start of close cooperation with the Russian regions. It is of course open to all AER member regions.

Mrs Sabban took the floor to explain that many Russian regions are apparently interested in working with the AER in the framework of a European approach. She would like for the presidents of Committees 1 and 3 the vice-president of Committee 2 to accompany her in this delegation, as well as the members of the standing committees. Mrs Sabban wants this mission to succeed.

Mr Klipp mentioned that he had been in Poznań (PL) on 28 and 29 May for a commemoration ceremony. This gave him the opportunity to discuss the AER.

On 28 June, he visited the Association of Regions, which discussed satellites that can contribute to better energy policy.

In early July, he was in Guria (GE). The idea is to prompt the regions of Western Europe to discuss tourism, agriculture and rural development. Georgia's huge potential for tourism and agriculture is not yet being exploited. The country needs more modern production methods to improve profits and productivity. Mr Klipp appealed to all those with a training centre or who have undertaken agricultural reforms or introduced new technologies in agriculture to join the delegation.

Lastly, on 21 August, Mr Klipp was in Moscow.

Closing of the meeting

Before adjourning the meeting of the AER Bureau, Mrs Sabban thanked the hosts for their exceptional reception, as well as the interpreters and all the AER staff.