



VRE Vorstandsitzung

Fribourg, 14 & 15 Mai 2009

Ref. Agenda: VII.3.10

original auf Englisch

ZUR INFORMATION und ANNAHME

FOGAR

Hintergrund

Seit über einem Jahr wurde in den Gremien der VRE die Frage diskutiert, ob die VRE FOGAR (Forum of Global Associations of Regions) beitreten soll. Als Konsequenz daraus und, um eine informierte Entscheidung diesbezüglich treffen zu können, hat der Vorstand im November 2008 in Tampere entschieden, eine Arbeitsgruppe ins Leben zu rufen, die die Vor- und Nachteile eines VRE Beitritts in FOGAR erörtern und Ihre Ergebnisse bei der Vorstandssitzung in Fribourg im Mai 2009 vorstellen sollte.

Die Teilnahme an der Arbeitsgruppe war offen Mitglieder der Vorstandes, des Ständigen Ausschusses für Institutionelle Angelegenheiten, sowie der Kommission 3, die sich mit Frage der internationalen Kooperation befasst (politische Ebene und Beamten Ebene. Das Generalsekretariat der VRE hat Anmeldungen aus 13 Regionen erhalten, von denen jedoch nur 5 Regionen bei dem Treffen der Arbeitsgruppe in Brüssel erschienen sind. Die anderen Regionen haben weder Ihre Abwesenheit begründet, noch haben sie zu einem späterem Zeitpunkt an der Diskussion der Arbeitsgruppe teilgenommen.

Ergebnisse der Arbeitsgruppe

Im Anschluss an eine kurze Präsentation über die neuesten Entwicklungen in Bezug auf FOGAR wurde den Teilnehmern die Möglichkeit gegeben, ihre Meinungen und Fragen zu einem möglichen FOGAR-Beitritt zu artikulieren. Darauf aufbauend wurden die wichtigsten Themen identifiziert, in drei thematische Cluster eingeteilt und diskutiert. Diese Diskussion kann folgendermaßen zusammengefasst werden¹:

Rechtliches Cluster – Die Diskussion fokussierte sich vor allem auf die Frage, ob eine Mitgliedschaft in FOGAR mit der VRE-Satzung möglich sei. Während die Satzung zwar nicht explizit vorgibt, dass die VRE mit Partnern außerhalb Europas zusammenarbeiten soll, geht aus ihr auch kein Verbot für eine solche Zusammenarbeit hervor. Die VRE Strategie 2007-12 hingegen, die bei der Hauptversammlung 2006 verabschiedet wurde, sagt eindeutig aus, dass die VRE Entwicklungsregionen unterstützen und die Vertretung der europäischen Regionen in Organisationen, die für Globales Regieren zuständig sind, verstärken soll.

¹ Dies ist nur eine Übersicht zu den in der Diskussion gefallenen Fakten in Bezug auf FOGAR. Die einzelnen Positionen der Arbeitsgruppenteilnehmer befinden sich im Anhang.

Technisches Cluster – Die wichtigsten Fragen, die im Rahmen der Diskussion in diesem Bereich angesprochen wurden, bezogen sich auf den potenziellen Mitgliedsbeitrag, sowie die Frage, ob das VRE Sekretariat die zusätzliche Arbeitsbelastung leisten kann. Die Frage bezüglich des Mitgliedsbeitrags konnte nicht abschließend beantwortet werden, da gegenwärtig keine Beiträge anfallen. Die Höhe der ab 2010 anfallenden Mitgliedsbeiträge wird zurzeit innerhalb von FOGAR diskutiert. Die zusätzlichen Arbeitsbelastung und Kosten werden jedoch mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit gering ausfallen, da die FOGAR Hauptversammlung nur alle 2 Jahre stattfindet und die VRE nur jeweils eine kleine Delegation zu diesen Treffen entsenden würde.

Inhaltliches Cluster – Die Diskussion konzentrierte sich auf die potenziellen Vorteile die für die VRE mit einem FOGAR-Beitritt einhergehen würden. Die Teilnehmer stimmten überein, dass viele der heutigen Probleme einer globalen und konzertierten Antwort der Regionen bedürfen. In diesem Zusammenhang wurde diskutiert, dass die EU sich für eine engere Zusammenarbeit zwischen regionalen und lokalen Verbänden in Europa einsetzt, die im Bereich der Internationalen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit tätig sind, um ihre Effizienz zu verbessern (z.B. die Europäische Plattform für Entwicklung). In der internen VRE-Diskussion wurde deutlich, dass einige Mitglieder befürchten, dass der Fokus auf internationale Themen mit der Vernachlässigung Europäischer Themen einhergehen würde. Die internationale Ausrichtung würde jedoch nicht auf Kosten Europäischer Interessen gehen, sondern vielmehr den Mitgliedregionen die Möglichkeit geben, ihren internationalen Handlungsspielraum zu vergrößern.

Fazit:

Obwohl die meisten Fragen, die während des Treffens angesprochen wurden, beantwortet werden konnten, sah sich die Arbeitsgruppe nicht in der Lage, eine gemeinsame Position zu finden, da einige Teilnehmer sich klar für einen FOGAR-Beitritt aussprachen und einige deutlich dagegen waren. Eine Abstimmung hat nicht stattgefunden, da diese aufgrund der geringen Anzahl der Teilnehmer nicht repräsentativ gewesen wäre. Vor dem Hintergrund dass trotz der Diskussion der Fakten die Differenzen fortbestanden, wurden keine zusätzlichen Arbeitstreffen vereinbart, da dies wenig Aussicht auf konkrete Ergebnisse gehabt und nur zusätzliche Kosten verursacht hätte.

Mögliches weiteres Vorgehen:

Der Vorstand sollte über das weitere Vorgehen in Bezug auf FOGAR abstimmen. Gegenwärtig sind 2 Optionen denkbar: Entweder tritt die VRE FOGAR bei und beeinflusst aktiv den Aufbau und die Ausrichtung von FOGAR im Interesse der VRE (z.B. in Bezug auf Mitgliedsbeiträge, zentrale Aufgaben und Ziele, etc.). Alternativ tritt die VRE FOGAR nicht bei und beobachtet weitere Entwicklungen. Problematisch an dieser Option ist jedoch, dass die VRE in Zukunft keinen Beobachterstatus innehaben wird und somit an zukünftigen Sitzungen nicht teilnehmen kann.



Vor dem Hintergrund das die gesamte gegenwärtig vorhandene Information sowie alle Argumente vorliegen, sollte eine Entscheidung über den Beitritt in FOGAR möglich sein.

In anbetracht der Tatsache, dass:

- a. Die Fähigkeit der VRE, die Interessen europäischer Regionen gegenüber internationalen Organisationen (z.B. den Vereinten Nationen) vertreten zu können, von ihrer institutionellen Einbindung abhängt, erscheint der Beitritt in einem globalen Netzwerk von Verbänden äußerst sinnvoll. Gegenwärtig existieren mit UCLG und FOGAR 2 solcher Netzwerke. Die Mitgliedschaft bei UCLG ist für die VRE weniger attraktiv, da diese Organisation nicht nur Regionen sondern überwiegend Städte und Gemeinden vertritt. Dieser Sachverhalt reduziert die Wahrscheinlichkeit für schnelles und effektives Handeln im Interesse der Regionen. Die Mitgliedschaft bei FOGAR hingegen beschränkt sich auf Netzwerke regionaler Regierungen und erlaubt somit gezielte und zielgruppengerechte Initiativen.
- b. FOGAR zunehmend Sichtbarkeit und Unterstützung bei der Europäischen Kommission sowie dem Europäischen Parlament erhält, sollte die VRE nicht passiv bleiben, sondern sich aktiv in FOGAR einbringen um sicherzustellen, dass die Aktivitäten FOGARs sich an den Interessen der Regionen Europas orientieren.

Zur Annahme

Die Präsidentin und der Generalsekretär schlagen daher vor, dass der Vorstand folgenden Entschluss fasst:

Der Vorstand beschließt, das die VRE FOGAR beitrifft und autorisiert den Generalsekretär, die dazu benötigten Schritte einzuleiten. Die Mitgliedschaft tritt erst in Kraft, wenn sie durch die VRE Hauptversammlung ratifiziert wird.

Folgende weitergehende Information zur bisherigen FOGAR-Diskussion innerhalb der VRE finden Sie im Anhang:

1. Protokoll des ersten Treffens der FOGAR Arbeitsgruppe
2. Reaktionen der Teilnehmer der Arbeitsgruppe nach dem Treffen
3. FOGAR-Erklärung des Unterausschusses Internationale Zusammenarbeit

1st Meeting of the FOGAR Working Group (23/02/09 Brussels)

Participants:

- Catarina Segersten Larsson (Värmland)
- Ulla Höglund (Värmland)
- Sten-Erik Nilsson (Gävleborg)
- Alf Osterdahl (Jönköping)
- Jenni Moberg (Jönköping)
- Paul Kirkman (Essex)
- Chris Fegan (Essex)
- Nolwenn Le Tallec (Aquitaine)
- Klaus Zorbach (AER)
- Jascha Scheele (AER)

Objective:

In accordance with the mandate given by the AER-Bureau at the 2008 GA in Tampere (Finland), to analyze the advantages and disadvantages for AER of joining FOGAR and to be able to make an informed suggestion on the issue at the next Bureau meeting in May 2009.

Klaus Zorbach welcomed the participants and gave an overview of the discussion on FOGAR that, up to now, has taken place within AER. Furthermore, he presented the agenda:

1. Overview on FOGAR (latest developments, etc)
2. Tour de table: participants are given the opportunity to express their opinion and ask questions with regard to FOGAR
3. How to structure the working group in order to answer the questions raised and to come to a conclusion

All participants approved the agenda of the day.

1. Overview on FOGAR (latest developments, etc.)

Jascha Scheele gave an introductory presentation, which touched on the following issues:

- Reason for the creation of FOGAR
- History of FOGAR
- Main objectives of FOGAR
- Developments with regard to FOGAR

2. Tour de table: participants are given the opportunity to express their opinion and ask questions with regard to FOGAR

The participants of the working group formulated questions with regard to the modalities and the details of joining FOGAR and put forward arguments for and against becoming a member of it. Particularly the following aspects were mentioned:

- It is one of the strengths of AER, that it is not limited to the EU, but that it incorporates also regions beyond EU-borders. AER member regions have gained from this approach and a demarcation of this sort and a limitation of activities would be difficult and result in the weakening of AER (Paul Kirkman).



- In times of financial crisis, extra expenditure needs to be critically assessed and costs for joining FOGAR need to be known (Catarina S. Larsson and Jenny Moberg)
- Since AER already possesses structures that focus on international cooperation (sub-committee internat. coop.), it should be avoided to create redundant structures.
- The question needs to be answered, whether the AER charter allows us to join FOGAR (Sten-Erik Nilsson, Ulla Höglund)
- What is the benefit for AER to become a member of FOGAR? (Chris Fegan)
- Who will be representing AER in FOGAR? (Paul Kirkman)
- How will we deal with those regions, that are members of CPMR and AER in order to ensure that they do not pay double? (Catarina S. Larsson)

3. How to structure the working group in order to answer the questions raised and to come to a conclusion

It was agreed upon to structure the discussion according to different thematic clusters.

Cluster 1 – Legal questions:

In cluster 1 it was discussed, whether AER's statutes would allow it to join FOGAR. The majority of the participants did not see that becoming a member of FOGAR would present a contradiction to the AER statutes. Some participants suggested that in the context of the revision of the statutes, which will be facilitated by a working group in 2009 under the chairmanship of Pierre Meyer, an additional passage could be introduced to clarify this aspect. Some participants, however, maintained their scepticism as to whether joining FOGAR could be done under the current formulation of the statutes.

Klaus Zorbach said that the statutes were drafted during another period of European integration and that therefore it is only natural that AER's statutes have a very European focus. Contrary to the apparent worry of some members, this European focus of AER will not change in the future. However, the statutes do not explicitly state that AER cannot work beyond European borders. Therefore, in his opinion, the statutes do not exclude the possibility for AER to join FOGAR. Furthermore, he expressed his view that the question is not, whether all AER initiatives take place in Europe, but whether they serve the interest of (all or some) of the AER-members.

Jascha Scheele informed the participants that the GA interpreted the statutes in the same way in 2006 when it adopted the AER working plan 2007-13, since it states the following:

SECTION 2: AER KEY PRIORITIES 2007-2012

Promoting Modernisation and Internationalisation of Regional Governance

(...)

4. To develop decentralised co-operation initiatives to assist developing and transition regions
5. To ensure representation of the European regions in organisations responsible for global governance
6. To promote interregional co-operation within Europe and beyond

Source: [AER Strategic Plan 2007-2012](#)



The participants decided that Klaus Zorbach should contact Pierre Meyer to find out about the status quo of the working group. Depending on the decision of the FOGAR working group, a suggestion will be given to the working group on the statutes to include a formulation into the statutes that states that AER can work internationally, if this engagement is in the interest of AER's members. Klaus Zorbach contacted the AER secretariat on this issue and informed the participants, that the working group has not been formed at this point.

Conclusion for cluster 1: The participants could not resolve their difference of opinion on the statutes, with some participants arguing that they exclude AER's involvement beyond Europe and therefore its accession to FOGAR, while others (this seemed to be the majority) thought that the statutes sanction AER's international engagement. Furthermore, no agreement could be found with regard to the question whether the working group should make a suggestion to amend the statutes to include a positive narrative on AER's international engagement.

Cluster 2 – Technical questions:

In this cluster the participants exchange practical and technical questions with regard to FOGAR membership. Catarina Segersten Larsson asked for a projection about the membership fee which would apply from 2010 on. Furthermore she enquired whether regions that want to participate could not join FOGAR individually. Klaus Zorbach responded that, at present, AER could join FOGAR without any costs attached to it. In 2010 FOGAR members will discuss membership modalities and the question of the location of the secretariat. Within this procedure, it is likely that a mandatory membership fee will be introduced. This fee will be differentiated according to the financial background of the FOGAR members, which according to current statements by FOGAR representatives, will not exceed 10.000,-. An additional financial burden on the AER member regions (in terms of a FOGAR supplement) will not emerge from the FOGAR activities. Furthermore, if, at the end of 2010, it turns out that AER does not benefit from its membership in FOGAR, it could decide to leave the network again. Individual regional membership, he added, will not be possible due to the character of FOGAR (being a network of associations).

The question was discussed, whether joining FOGAR and then leaving it within 1-2 years would be politically possible. Some participants saw a problem in this, while others did not.

A number of participants expressed their concern that considerable additional costs would result from international travel to the meetings beyond European borders. Jascha Scheele informed the participants that, according to the FOGAR statutes, the General Assembly will only take place every 2 years and that the Executive Committee will meet twice per year. Paul Kirkman said, that in general only two representatives from AER should be sent to these meetings (president and general secretary) in order to limit expenses. The other participants welcomed this suggestion.

Ulla Höglund asked, whether the secretariat would be able to manage the additional workload that is implied by the possible accession to FOGAR. Alf Osterdahl added that the same question needs to be applied to the other FOGAR members: Do they have the manpower? Klaus Zorbach said that in his opinion, the additional workload could be kept to an acceptable level and that the benefits exceed the additional work involved (for more information on this issue, see Cluster 3).

Cluster 3 – Content questions:

This cluster mainly dealt with the question, in what ways AER benefits from joining FOGAR. The participants agreed that many problems of today require a global and concerted approach by regions. Klaus Zorbach said in this context that, in the long run, regions need to build global networks if they want to be actors in an increasingly globalized world and not merely be sidelined by other actors. Furthermore, if the EU and other international organisations increasingly emphasize the need for a global outlook as well as the importance of regions in this process, AER should not turn a blind eye to this development. Hence, the main consideration should be: what can AER win and what can AER lose with regard to FOGAR; especially concerning the question what can AER lose by not seizing this option for the future. The risks of joining FOGAR are, in his opinion, manageable. The benefits of joining it on the other hand are tangible in the sense that it gives AER access to a global network and contacts to politicians, civil servants and experts. The AER Climate Change Conference (Limoges 30-31 March 2009), where AER was able to attract a number of speakers through our contacts established through FOGAR, is an excellent example for this (to see the programme of the conference, please use the following link: [AER Climate Change Conference](#)).

4. Next steps:

The participants agreed that the bureau has given the working group the mandate to give an informed suggestion to the question if AER should join FOGAR. At present the working group could not agree to make a decision on this topic. Therefore the following steps were agreed upon:

1. The AER secretariat will send out the protocol of the meeting as soon as possible
2. The participants of the working group will consult with their respective regions and either pass the minutes or ask for changes within 2 weeks of receiving them
3. Also within these 2 weeks the participants will convey their opinion to the secretariat, whether AER should join FOGAR or not.

Reactions to the first meeting of the working group:



Mr Klaus Zorbach, Senior Political Advisor
Mr Jascha Scheele, Senior Policy Coordinator
Assembly of European Regions
6, rue Oberlin
F-67000 STRASBOURG

Dear Mr Zorbach,
Dear Mr Scheele,

Referring to the mandate given by the Bureau at the General Assembly 2008 concerning the possibility for the AER to become member in the global organization FOGAR, a working group was established to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of a membership and to present an informal proposal to the Bureau in May 2009.

On behalf of the County Council of Värmland (SE) I should like to make the following comments:

First of all, I would like to underline that we do not have enough facts to base our opinion upon when it comes to FOGAR. The working group did not reach a mutual proposal to put forward to the Bureau in May 2009. The AER's role and aim in FOGAR is still very unclear. It should be of great value to have the Presidium's / Secretary General's intentions with a membership – a membership that would influence the overall AER objectives and work.

Several international organizations for regions and local authorities on a global arena have already been established, for example UCLG. I believe that the AER should coordinate its' global interests with already established organizations. To become strong, it is necessary to gather the resources and concentrate instead of splitting the means.

Of course, it is of interest to the AER members to cooperate and work together with neighbour regions also outside Europe, for example in North Africa. Furthermore, many of the AER members have recently become EU members and the AER:s mission is to give priority to Europe and its border regions striving towards an equality for all.

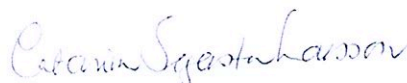
Our conclusion is to recommend the AER not to become member in FOGAR at present.

However, if the AER decides to become a FOGAR member the following should be fulfilled:

- The existing activities of the AER may not be affected
- An eventual membership fee has to be taken within the AER budget
- Travel costs must be kept to a minimum as the AER budget is already slimmed
- A restricted policy on delegates participating in FOGAR meetings must be taken. Only the President and the Secretary General or persons next in line who may have the mandate to represent the AER could have a function as AER delegates in FOGAR meetings.

Until further notice, I remain

Sincerely Yours,



Catarina Segersten Larsson
County Councillor



Christina Wahrolin
County Councillor



Monica Ekström
County Commissioner



Carin Melin
County Councillor

c.c.: AER Presidium:

- Ms Michèle Sabban
- Mr Constanin Ostaficiuc, Vice President
- Mr Peter Straub, Vice President, President Standing Committee on Institutional affairs
- Mr Urs Wüthrich-Pelloli, Vice President Treasurer
- Mr Håkan Sandgren, Vice President/President Committee 1
- Ms Christina Wahrolin, Vice President/Acting President Committee 2
- Ms Johanna Mikl-Leitner, Vice President/President Committee 3
- Mr Brian Greenslade, President Standing Committee on Monitoring and Evaluation

11/03/2009

Jönköpings County Council

FOGAR

The desire to expand the AER activities to a global scale is on one hand understandable, many of our future challenges are lying in cooperation on a global scale.

Nevertheless, it is of crucial importance that AER as an organisation remains strong and focused on European issues. By engagement in a global organisation we put our objectives at stake and we also run the risk of watering down our core area, which is, and ought to be even in the future, a full concentration on Europe and regional matters. It is also important that we always will be able to see the result of our work. In most cases it can be transparent and understood by the voters from our different regional constituencies. The further away we are from the grassroots, the further away we are from their understanding and support.

Kind regards

Lisbeth Rydefjärd

County Council of Jönköping

Leader of the Opposition

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Essex County Council

Cllr Paul Kirkman
Leader of the Opposition
Leader of the Labour Group

21 April 2009

Dear Jascha

I believe that we should join FOGAR, if only to monitor what is going on. I still have not understood why we could not take the decision to do this when we were together in Brussels at the end of February.

Unfortunately it seems these comments, which were made by me on 6 March by e mail, did not reach you as we are having trouble sending emails from Essex County Council to the AER network.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Kirkman', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Paul Kirkman

Jascha Scheele
AER



**AER Sub-committee International Cooperation
Declaration on joining FOGAR
Durrës (AL) 2 April 2009**

Climate change, resource depletion, financial and economic crisis, migration – many of today's most pressing problems can only be met by coordinated efforts on a global scale. With the international context undergoing radical and increasingly rapid change, regions are forced to adapt ever more quickly if they do not want to be left on the sidelines with regard to these changes that are shaping the world.

Nation states alone are not able to propose and implement solutions in response to these challenges. As a result, new spaces are opening up in which to reflect on, negotiate, make decisions about and manage the new challenges which can neither be regulated solely at the national state level, nor through intergovernmental cooperation.

Many European regions have understood the need for coordinated action, have become principal actors of international cooperation and have partnerships with regions from around the world for many years. Regional authorities in Europe have, for a long time, been grouping together, firstly at national then at European level, in order to take joint action, and to increase their influence in the debates and decision-making and their participation in the delivery of policies on the ground. This European model of regional cooperation is seen as a leading example by many countries of the world and similar movements have emerged in the other continents such as Asia, Africa and America.

If these regional organizations are to have an impact on a global scale, they need to work more closely together in order to make their voices heard. FOGAR – the Forum of Global Association of Regions – is an attempt to coordinate regional associations around the world by creating a platform for cooperation and exchange.

After having discussed the advantages and disadvantages for AER to join FOGAR, the members of AER's sub-committee International Cooperation have therefore decided at their meeting in Durrës on the 2nd of April 2009 to declare unanimously their support for AER to join FOGAR at the earliest possible time.

Adopted by the Sub-committee International Cooperation in Durrës, 2nd April 2009