



AER Bureau Meeting

Fribourg, 14 & 15 May 2009

Ref. Agenda: VII.3.10

original in English

FOR INFORMATION and ADOPTION

FOGAR

Background

For over one year AER's ruling bodies have been discussing the question whether AER should join FOGAR (Forum of Global Associations of Regions). As a consequence and in order to be able to make an informed decision on the topic, AER's Bureau decided in November 2008 in Tampere to establish a working group to compare the advantages with the disadvantages of joining FOGAR and to present their findings at the Bureau-meeting in Fribourg in May 2009.

This working group was open to politicians and civil servants of members of the Bureau, the Committee on Institutional Affairs and Committee 3 that is responsible for International cooperation. The AER secretariat received registrations from 13 regions but of those only 5 regions actually showed up for the 1st working group meeting in Brussels. The other regions did not give any further feedback with regard to their absence or participate in the further discussion on FOGAR afterwards.

Results of the Working Group

After a presentation on the latest developments with regard to FOGAR, a tour de table gave all the participants the opportunity to voice their opinion on the issue and to address open questions. Subsequently, the most pressing issues were identified, organized into three different clusters and discussed in more detail. These issues can be summarized as such¹:

Legal cluster – The discussion centred around the matter, whether AER membership in FOGAR would be possible according to its statutes. While the statutes do not explicitly state that AER should cooperate with partners beyond the European borders, it neither prohibits this. AER's strategic plan for 2007-13, on the other hand, which has been adopted in 2006, explicitly states that AER should assist developing and transition regions and that it should strengthen the representation of European regions in organizations responsible for global governance.

¹ While the different positions of our members on each of these topics can be found in the minutes of the working group (in the appendix), this overview will allude only to the facts that have been put forward during the meeting.

Technical cluster – The main technical questions that arose during the discussion were those regarding potential membership fee as well as the whether the secretariat could handle the additional work if AER would join FOGAR. The question of membership fee could not be answered in a satisfactory manner because currently no fees are charged and the actual amount that will be introduced starting next year is still being discussed within FOGAR. It became apparent, however, that the additional workload and costs could be limited, since the General Assembly takes place every 2 years only and AER would only send a small delegation to the meetings.

Content cluster – The discussion focused on the potential benefits AER could derive from joining FOGAR. Participants agreed that many problems of today require a global and concerted approach by regions. In this context it was discussed that the EU is trying to promote more cooperation among local and regional associations in Europe that work in international development, in order to improve aid effectiveness (i.e. the European Platform for Development).

It became apparent in the internal AER discussion that some members fear a focus on international topics at the expense of European issues. The broader focus, however, would not imply the renunciation or neglect of European interests but would afford AER members with the opportunity to improve their policies and approaches through the exchange with a wider group of partners and to increase their efforts for internationality. This still seems to remain an important topic for the AER in the years to come.

Conclusion:

Despite having been able to answer most of the questions that arose during the tour de table, it was not possible for the participants of the working group to agree on a common position with some participants strongly supporting AER joining FOGAR, while others opposed this. No vote was taken on this issue, due to the small number of members in the working group, which would have given the result an unrepresentative nature. Additional meetings of the working group are currently not designated, because, while the facts have already been discussed, the difference of opinions persisted. Against this background, further meetings are likely to lead to further expenses without having an effect on concrete results.

Suggestion:

The Bureau should take a vote on how to proceed with regard to FOGAR. Currently two options are feasible: Either to join FOGAR and to participate in the process of shaping the organization (i.e. with regard to membership fee, core issues, etc.) according to AER's interest. Alternatively, AER could stay out of FOGAR and observe further developments. The problem with this approach is that we will not be able to sit in the internal FOGAR meetings anymore, because the observer status is no longer granted.

In light of the abovementioned situation (namely the limited number of participants), a suggestion by the working group with regard to specific action in relation to FOGAR can not claim to be of representative nature.



Against the backdrop that all available information and all arguments have been exchanged among members of the Bureau, a decision with regard to AER joining FOGAR or not, should be possible.

Taking into consideration that:

- a. AER's ability to represent the interests of European regions vis-à-vis organisations responsible for global governance (i.e. United Nations) depends on its institutional integration, joining a global network of associations therefore seems a logical step. With UCLG and FOGAR, currently 2 networks of such character exist. Membership in the former network seems less attractive for AER, because UCLG represents not only regional authorities but also cities and municipalities, thereby reducing the likelihood of decisive action in the interest of regions and reducing its attractiveness to them. Membership in FOGAR on the other hand is limited to associations of regions, which allows for targeted and precise initiatives.
- b. FOGAR is gaining visibility and support by the European Commission and the European Parliament, AER should not be left behind but rather be actively involved with FOGAR in order to ensure that the interests of European regions will be at the heart of the activities of FOGAR.

For ADOPTION

The President and the General Secretary therefore propose that the Bureau takes the following decision:

The Bureau resolves that AER join FOGAR and authorizes the Secretary General to initiate all necessary steps to achieve this end. Membership will only take effect if it is ratified at the next AER General Assembly.

For further information, please find the following items attached in the annex:

1. Minutes from the 1st meeting of the working group
2. Reactions from the participants after the meeting
3. FOGAR declaration by the Sub-committee international cooperation



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.

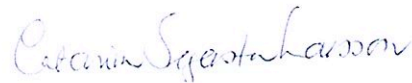
Our conclusion is to recommend the AER not to become member in FOGAR at present.

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



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