



## AER Bureau Meeting

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FOR ADOPTION

### DRAFT MINUTES OF THE BUREAU MEETING IN FRIBOURG (14<sup>TH</sup> AND 15<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2009)

#### I. Opening of the Bureau

Michèle Sabban welcomes the participants and is happy to meet the members in this important Bureau further to the latest General Assembly of Tampere in 2008.

Mr. Beat Vonlanthen, Vice-president of the canton of Fribourg, takes the floor to welcome the guests and to give a presentation on the canton of Fribourg.

#### II. Adoption of the draft agenda

The draft agenda has been unanimously adopted.

#### III. Adoption of the minutes of the two last Bureaus in Tampere (FIN), 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> November 2008

The minutes of the two last Bureaus, Tampere 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> November, have been unanimously adopted.

#### IV. Adoption of the Presidium minutes in Pula (HR), 16th March 2009.

The minutes of the last Presidium, Pula 16th March, are adopted.

#### V. Global Economic Crisis

Håkan Sandgren, President of Committee 1, takes the floor to present the outcome of the AER survey on how members are affected by the crisis and what are their strategies to tackle it. One of the regional strategies to tackle the crisis is to stimulate the demand through public investment. Secondly, regions must ease the access to finance and to help SMEs to innovate. Thirdly, development of employment and skilled labour plays an important role in tackling the crisis. Fourthly, support to customers and private individuals must be maintained in times of crisis. And finally, communication strategies are part of many recovery plans, as for example organizing hearings and round tables with stakeholders and entrepreneurs. The conclusions of the outcome of the survey are the following: Firstly, regions are at the forefront to fight against the economic crisis and, secondly, interregional cooperation is a way to improve regional action.

Following Håkan Sandgren's statement the AER Bureau adopted its final declaration "European Regions: A Trump in Tackling the Economic Crisis".

Christina Diegelmann comes to the floor and speaks about AER activity in the field of entrepreneurship and SME policy. The most important factor for the competitiveness of

enterprises and regions is their innovation. A big part of this innovation is due to SMEs although it's finally bigger enterprises that take over the production and distribution of it because SMEs can't afford the necessary specialists and investments. That's where regional economic policy comes into play, which is for a huge part SME policy. Regional support for SMEs has a long tradition. Therefore many activities of the AER are directly linked to the development of SMEs in the regional context. Mrs. Diegelmann gives the following examples: regional strategies to tackle the economic crisis, the innovation prize of the AER which illustrates how innovation policy could be organised, courses and training academies on regional innovation strategies in the field of environment and energy, the INTERREG project PRESERVE in the tourism sector which supports the regions in further developing their tourism strategies, e-health and the youth summer school 2008 on youth entrepreneurship.

Professor Urs Müller (BAK Basel) then presented the results of the AER study "From Subsidiarity to Success". The question was whether there is a link between the degree of decentralisation and economic performance. Therefore he presents the results of a study on what impact regional competences have on the success of a region, and how to measure decentralisation. Since decentralisation is multidimensional and cannot be directly observed, a multitude of different aspects has been analysed, both qualitative and quantitative information, in order to measure the degree of decentralisation. In total, there have been 185 indicators. In general, the study revealed that there is a tendency that in the regions implementation power is higher than decision-making power, which is mostly kept at a national level. With regard to the economic performance the study showed that regional policy is much more effective because it is more targeted and regional politics are closer to the population and know therefore better what changes need to take place. Furthermore, there is a tendency that more decentralisation of a country leads to a higher GDP level, which means that decentralisation has a strong positive impact on welfare. Decentralized regions have also higher innovation capacities. To summarise these results, it can be said that regions with more competences develop better than others and that countries that are more decentralized are more successful from the economic point of view. Consequently, the application of the principle of Subsidiarity seems to be the key to success.

Mrs. Carmela Cotrone presented a project in the context of ESPON in which AER is involved. It is about the question why some economically weak regions are able to develop and others, with a similar background, stay back or make only very little progress. She proposes a close cooperation between the project and AER Committee 1 for systematic comparisons, bench learning models and dissemination. The results are to be presented in May 2010. The proposal was approved.

This was followed by a discussion. With regard to the speech of Urs Müller, the question was raised whether in times of crisis centralisation would not be a better solution than decentralisation. Another remark was, to also take into consideration that within Europe there are four different political systems, notably the federal system, the regionalised system, the decentralised system and the centralised system. Urs Müllers replied that of course, decentralisation can not be the solution for everything and that you must carefully look what you want to do. In some cases the national level might be more appropriate to act. However, the study revealed that on average decentralised countries perform better.

## VI. Reports

Johanna Miki-Leitner reported on the engagement of AER and Committee 3 concerning the Union for the Mediterranean.

Michèle Sabban and Klaus Klipp reported on their visit to Moscow where they met with

representatives of Duma, Council of the Federation, Ministry of Regional Development and the office of the Prime Minister. There was great interest in the activities of the AER and Russian regions will become more involved with AER. A meeting was set up for next year in Russia to organise this involvement and there is still a need for member regions from Western Europe who would like to join the President and the Secretary General for this event. On demand, Mrs. Sabban gave a short synopsis of the meeting with the Council of the Russian Federation. They met with the President of the Committee of Local governments within the Council of the Russian Federation, who is at the same time the President of the national Russian Congress of Municipalities. During the meeting key points of discussion were the activities of the Congress, important topics like employment and social benefits as well as further cooperation with the AER. Mrs. Sabban also met with the ambassador of France to Russia as well as the Russian ambassador in France (in Paris), discussing important issues like environment, economy, transport, and climate change. Furthermore, she met with the ambassador of Georgia to France to discuss about the regions surrounding the Black Sea with regard to water availability and pollution. A report on these meetings will be available for all members.

Pierre Meyer reports about the visit to Québec, and the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between the AER and the Office Franco-Québécois pour la Jeunesse, which should be finally adopted at the next General Assembly in Belfort. The background of this cooperation is to mobilise youth towards new professions on the one hand, and to organise exchanges, on the other hand.

The representative of the Acores, speaking for Rui Bettencourt, gave a short overview on the situation of Eurodyssee.

Ulla Hoeglund (Vaermland, SE) raised awareness for the importance of Eurodyssee during the Swedish presidency.

Eliane Giraud (Rhones-Alpes, F) supports the importance of Eurodyssee and similar activities, including cooperation with Quebec.

Irakli Goradze asked whether during the visit to Moscow the Russian-Georgian war had been discussed. Michele Sabban clarified that this was not the case and all talks have been solely around matters of technical cooperation between regions.

#### Closing of the Bureau (1<sup>st</sup> part)

Michèle Sabban closes the meeting for recess and invites the representatives to the University of Fribourg for a debate on the economic crisis.

#### Opening of the Bureau (2<sup>nd</sup> part)

Michèle Sabban reopens the meeting on Friday morning, the 15th of May 2009, to continue discussion.

Michèle Sabban gives a brief overview of the last FOGAR meeting, the Executive Committee in Florence.

Michèle Sabban gives a brief overview on the lunch with EU Commission President J.M. Barroso, under the CoR initiative and in presence of a few large European networks including the AER. She asked Barroso to give more consideration and attention to the regions, that this would also have been useful in the context of the debate on the economic recovery plan of the EU.

Michèle Sabban speaks about her visit to the Canary Islands in June 2009, with the aim to making the region an AER member. The AER will set up special projects on peripheral regions such as the Canary Islands, Madeira and Corsica, and their specific issues such as tourism, renewable energy, exchanges via the Eurodyssey program, and global warming.

Michèle Sabban gives a brief overview on the AER meeting in Pula where she met with the Presidents (Zupans) of most of the Croatia regions. The discussion was on membership in AER, an appointment in Brussels with the Zupans, the upcoming elections, and the difficulty of Croatia in entering into the EU.

Michèle Sabban reports on the visit to Istanbul, Turkey, where she attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> Forum of Alliance of Civilisations, under the invitation of the Istanbul government. At the forum, topics covered included integration, youth, media, politics, culture, and civil dialogues, classical topics of AER.

Michèle Sabban gives a brief report on the meeting with Armenian parliamentarians and the Ambassador of Armenia to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, in the context of Armenian regions membership. They set up a plan to meet again officially in September 2009.

At the request of Brad Watson of Sussex, Michèle Sabban gives a brief overview of her meeting with Claudio Martini, who wanted to meet with the AER President. Regrouping the associations could make them stronger. Also cooperation in a global context was discussed.

With the agreement of the Bureau she would like to invite all the presidents of the associations, inclusive REG-LEG President Mercedes Bresso.

Orhan Albayrak from the region of Istanbul took the floor to tell members that despite the changes in personalities after the elections Istanbul would continue its work on disabilities that had been started by Murat Ellialti for Istanbul.

## VII. Short Overview of Committee Activities

Håkan Sandgren, President of Committee 1, takes the floor to speak about the activities of Committee 1. The consultation concerning territorial cohesion highlights the increasing need for new forms of territorial cooperation in Europe and the improvement of the existing ones. Initiatives such as European grouping for Territorial Cooperation, INTERREG and INTERACT should be strengthened and completed by new co-operation opportunities such as rural-urban partnerships and tighter co-operation along external borders. Furthermore, territorial cohesion should be a comprehensive concept influencing all policy areas, which are of significance to sustainable development, growth and quality of life in the European regions. The next meeting of the reflection group on cohesion policy will be held in June or July 2009. With regard to the conference on climate change in Limoges, the following aspects must be mentioned: The objective was to showcase the importance of decentralized cooperation towards climate change and to highlight the imperative for regional and local authorities to become more actively implicated in the international talks on Kyoto II Protocol. The Limoges Declaration also calls on the European regions to support sustainable development initiatives in Africa's territories, especially in the promotion of energy efficiency, alternative fuel sources and the use of clean technologies. Furthermore, Committee 1 stresses that rural development is also one of the domains to which this year a special priority is given. In this context, a broad consultation over rural development policies in European Regions has been conducted. Last point: progress of the two INTERREG IVC projects, MORE4NRG and PRESERVE, in which AER is involved. MORE4NRG aims to strengthen the delivery of regional strategies for renewable energy and

energy efficiency and jointly developed integrated tools for monitoring the effects of regional sustainable policies. The PRESERVE project is one of AER's main activities in the field of sustainable tourism for the upcoming three years. One of the next Tales from Europe organised regularly by AER in Brussels will be exclusively dedicated to the issue of sustainable tourism.

This was followed by contributions of Rhône-Alpes, West-Sussex and Campania.

Claudia Meschede, Senior Policy Coordinator of Committee 2, takes the floor to speak about the recent developments in Committee 2. She first of all mentions that the Committee have been stressing, since spring, on questions linked to public health systems financing and organisation. A seminar was dedicated to these topics, allowing the participants to share their point of view on structural funds and the other available possibilities of financing in the sector of public health, like private-public partnerships and other investment opportunities. A declaration was adopted at the end of the seminar. Mrs. Meschede keeps on by presenting the topics dealt with during the last plenary session of the Committee. Three political positions were adopted to answer the consultations launched by the European Commission. The first concerns the directive project related to patients rights regarding cross-boarder healthcare. The Committee 2 heavily insisted on the necessity to implement a fast-alert system for the regions being in the obligation to face arrivals and/or departures more or less massive from patients. The second is related to the green book dealing with health system staff in Europe. The Committee 2 made some proposals on the management of specialised healthcare professionals' migration. To finish, the third focuses on activities that the EU has settled in order to fight inequalities in the different public health systems. The AER invites the Commission to take measures in order to reduce as much as possible these inequalities. Mrs Meschede then presents the results of the elections within the Committee 2, whose president remains Contantin Ostaficiuc, as well vice-president of the AER, and the vice-presidency has been given to Mrs. Christina Wahrolin. Mrs. Meschede concludes her speech by announcing the creation of a new working group on Equal Opportunities for disabled people. All the documents presented at the Bureau were unanimously adopted.

Monika Carlsson, President of the AER working group on Equal Opportunities between Men and Women, takes the floor to evoke the current problems, including migrant women. She expresses that their group wishes to have a larger degree of involvement in the AER, in order to ensure that the AER policy does not overlook the gender issue angle. The question is raised that the working group on Equal Opportunities could become a Standing Committee. A decision should be taken during the next Bureau in Göteborg.

The report for Committee 3 was given by David Kirk, Vice-President and Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Education and Training, on the matters involving youth, cultural tourism, the cultural managers network (to increase the number of cultural managers), European cultural heritage, culture and health, education (mobility of education).

Malgorzata Kucinska then reports about the youth activities, the meetings of the AER Youth Regional Network, and the Youth Summer School in Valencia. Michèle Sabban suggested that the proposal on the Youth Regional Network will be developed further and that this will go to the GA in Belfort. The president will write a letter to all presidents of the member regions to send one young representative to the Youth Regional Network.

It was proposed to allow the President and the Secretary General to do whatever is necessary to fulfill the objectives. To be voted upon at the next General Assembly.

This was followed by an intense discussion on the matter if AER should join FOGAR. A decision was not taken. But Michèle Sabban said that she wants to write to all presidents of AER member

regions to ask for their opinion, which was approved.

For the Standing Committee on Institutional Affairs Lars-Gerhard Westberg, Vice-president, reports about the recent activities organised by the committee, notably the conference on “Communicating Europe” and the debate in the European Parliament with representatives of the European groups and the “Do you speak European?” Competition. He continued to report about recent policy developments with regard to the Eastern neighborhood, notably the establishment of the Eastern Partnership (EaP). He presented the AER position on the EaP. The AER position on the Eastern Partnership was adopted by AER Bureau members.

Brian Greenslade, President of the Standing Committee on Monitoring and Evaluation, reports about the discussion in the Standing Committee on AER’s investment strategy, the budget, and the introduction of a cost accounting system.

#### IX. General Assembly

Klaus Klipp takes the floor to give the representatives information about the General Assembly. The Assembly will take place on the last Thursday and Friday of November in Belfort, Franche-Comté, France on the premises of General Electric energy, which is supporting the AER. The working title is “Energising Europe Responsibly: Regional innovation and Diversity for Growth and Jobs”. Members took note.

#### X. Finances and Membership State

Klaus Klipp takes the floor to speak about membership state. He states that two regions would like to become members: Kvemo Kartli and Tbilisi, both from Georgia. Both regions are accepted as new members.

Urs Wüthrich-Pelloli, Vice-President Treasurer, speaks about the 2008 Account. He remarks that the KPMG audit report states that the accountancy is correct and there are no reservations or restrictions. In the end we had a surplus of about 16,000 Euros thanks to careful economic activity.

The 2008 accounts are approved unanimously with one abstention.

Anja Ruhland, AER Funding Coordinator, takes the floor to present recent activities in project development and the acquisition of funding for AER activities. AER continued to receive a structural support from the “Europe for Citizens”-Programme and started to implement a number of new EU-funded projects, such as PRESERVE and MORE4NRG (funded through INTERREG IVC) and the Platform for Decentralized Development Cooperation (funded through EuropeAid). She also gives an overview on several project proposals (such as ECREIN - European Clusters and Regions for Eco-Innovation Network; YES – Youth Entrepreneurship Strategies in European Regions) that are currently evaluated by the different programme authorities; a decision for funding will be taken by autumn / winter. In order to further enhance regions' access to and capacity to absorb funding, she proposes an AER working group on European funding. The proposed mandate for the working group and its admission to the Standing Committee Institutional Affairs is adopted by the Bureau members.

#### XIII. Topics of General Interest

Pierre Meyer, AER representative, takes the floor to speak about the working group on AER

Statutes and Internal rules: presentation of the mission entrusted to him and constitution of the working group. He proposes a 3-step-program to put together the elements of these statutes so that each country can confirm that the changes to the system correspond with them culturally and, lawfully, morally. The proposal shall be adopted at the General Assembly.

#### Closing of the Bureau

Michèle Sabban closes the meeting.