



## **AER Position on the European Neighbourhood Policy reform<sup>1</sup>** **Adopted at the AER Bureau, Brussels, 30 September 2011**

### **Executive summary**

#### **The objectives of the future European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)**

1. The future European Neighbourhood Policy must ensure a **balanced approach** between its Eastern and Southern dimensions, as both are equally important.
2. The future European Neighbourhood Policy should, following the example of EU regional policy, pay more attention to territorial diversity:
  - i. Ad hoc **territorial programmes** must be maintained, to give greater support to south-south and east-east interregional cooperation: this is particularly the case for the Black Sea basin, which plays a strategic role for the whole continent of Europe.
  - ii. **Synergies** should be fostered among the macro-regional strategies developed at EU level<sup>2</sup>, EU regional policy<sup>3</sup>, and the future ENP.
  - iii. **Regions**, and the organisations representing their interests, **must be duly involved in the definition of future ENP territorial programmes**, to ensure that they better match their needs and assets<sup>4</sup>.
3. **Principles of multilevel governance and partnership** must govern, to that end, the development and implementation of the future ENP, as for EU regional policy.
4. In addition, **the future European Neighbourhood Policy must foster the process of decentralisation** in concerned countries, in order to support sustainable democratic reforms efficiently, as regional democracy is a cornerstone of territorial stability. In this context, synergies should be established with the European Neighbourhood Policy currently developed by the Council of Europe and in particular the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities regarding the sub-national level.
5. To efficiently support inclusive economic development, **the future ENP guarantee and micro-credit schemes must** be designed in such a way that they **respect the role played by Regions in SME policy and be easy to manage** to be really taken up by SMEs.

#### **The operational aspects of the future European Neighbourhood Policy**

If visa facilitation and the provisions for extra-loan possibilities are to be welcomed, experience shows that much remains to be done to make the ENP territorial programmes more efficient. The future European Neighbourhood Policy must be adapted in such a way that:

1. **the operational rules for the various programmes are simplified**. In the case of the Black Sea ENPI CBC Programme, a single fund should be created for all partners, including the Turkish Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds.
2. **the programmes are more rapidly adopted, and the evaluation and selection procedures more rapidly concluded**, as they are currently much too long and hamper partners to start working together.

<sup>1</sup> Joint Communication « A new response to a changing Neighbourhood » COM(2011) 303, 25 May 2011

<sup>2</sup> Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Danube Strategy, Union of Mediterranean

<sup>3</sup> In particular its objective 3 on territorial cooperation

3. **the place of interregional and cross-border cooperation** in future ENP **is strengthened.**
4. **greater support is guaranteed to capacity building and trainings**, as this is a key element – underlined by the European Court of Auditors - which would ensure the more efficient use of funds.

## AER Position

### The objectives of future European Neighbourhood Policy

1. AER members welcome the suggestion of the European Commission to maintain the two geographical dimensions, East and South, in future European Neighbourhood Policy, but share the call of Members of the European Parliament to ensure that **both components** be “recognised as equally important, mutually enriching and synergetic”<sup>5</sup>.
2. AER members underline that, to be efficient, **the future ENP should**, following the example of EU regional policy, **pay more attention to territorial diversity**, to ensure that appropriate priorities and targets are defined which better match the needs of the concerned countries and regions. In this context, AER members:
  - i. call for **the development of the territorial cooperation within the future ENP**, to give greater support to interregional south-south and east-east cooperation. Concrete proposals on how to strengthen the territorial component of the future ENP are made below. They also underline, with reference to the AER Batumi Declaration, **the major strategic importance of the Black Sea for the continent of Europe** and reassert its call for a true Black Sea Strategy endowed with its own ambitious budget line.
  - ii. ask that **synergies and coordination** be developed across the macro-regional strategies developed at EU level (Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Danube Strategy, Union of Mediterranean), EU regional policy and the future ENP. The participation of non-EU members in territorial cooperation projects, in particular, should be highly promoted, to ensure the dissemination of best practices beyond the boundaries of the Union.
  - iii. Insist that **Regions must be duly involved in the definition of future ENP territorial programmes**. This way, lessons learnt from the ground and the first programmes could be efficiently used. AER members also welcome the EC proposal to build on the pilot programmes to tackle economic disparities between regions and ask that interregional organisations be involved in their definition<sup>6</sup>.
3. AER calls for **multilevel governance and partnership** to be set as guiding principles of the future ENP, as this is the case for EU regional policy, thus allowing Regions to truly become actors and not only beneficiaries of the ENP.
4. AER considers that **the future ENP should help foster decentralisation processes** in concerned countries. To this end, AER proposes that:
  - i. the Comprehensive Institution-Building Programmes announced in the EC Communication, should clearly include the sub-national level.
  - ii. to ensure a better recognition of regional and local authorities by the nation states concerned, synergies should be established between the future ENP and the European Neighbourhood Policy currently developed by the Council of Europe and in particular the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities regarding the sub-national level. Interinstitutional agreements could be established to ensure a leading role to the Congress in promoting the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in neighbouring countries.
5. AER members stress the **importance of regional administration in the promotion of SME policy** and the key role played by SMEs in contributing to the overall economic

<sup>5</sup> Letter and non-paper by five European People’s Party Members of the European Parliament representing the Visegrad Plus Initiative to Catherine Ashton and Stefan Füle, date 25/05/2011

<sup>6</sup> Commissioner Füle recently mentioned the “need for (...) joint work with the Committee of the Regions” in that context but interregional organisations should not be ignored.

development of a country. Therefore, they call upon the European Commission to design the future ENP guarantee and micro-credit schemes in such a way that Regions, which are close to SMEs, are involved, and that these schemes are not too complicated, so that they can really be taken up by SMEs.

### **The operational aspects of the future European Neighbourhood Policy**

Visa facilitation and the provisions for extra loan possibilities are to be welcomed, as well as the intention to deliver financial assistance more rapidly, as they represent an important aspect for successful projects.

But beyond that, much remains to be done to make the ENP territorial programmes more efficient. AER has already formulated clear proposals in this regard concerning specifically the Black Sea Strategy, in its Batumi Declaration of 4 April 2011 attached. The proposals of AER regarding simplification of the Black Sea CBC programme can be used for other similar programmes of future ENP.

AER calls for, in particular:

1. **a simplification of the operational rules for the various programmes** (for instance PraG<sup>7</sup>) developed in the framework of the future ENP, and the better alignment of these programmes with other EU programmes. At present, these multiple constraints hamper rather than facilitate the proper functioning of the programmes. In the case of the Black Sea ENPI CBC Programme, a single fund should be created for all partners, including the Turkish Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds.
2. **a more rapid adoption of programmes, and the speeding up of the evaluation and selection procedures**, which are currently much too long and hamper partners to start working together<sup>8</sup>.
3. **strengthening interregional and cross-border cooperation** in future ENP.
4. **greater support to capacity building and trainings**, as this is a key element – underlined by the European Court of Auditors<sup>9</sup> - which would ensure the more efficient use of funds.

### **Conclusions**

AER is already actively involved in Regions from neighbouring areas:

- it is currently developing targeted training offers for Regions from the Black Sea (Training Academy for the Black Sea) to help them define joint projects and learn from each other
- it has just enlarged its Eurodyssey programme, which allows for young professionals to undertake a 6-month traineeship in a partner region, to Tunisia, to help develop professional mobility of young Tunisians
- AER has undertaken many actions in countries from the Eastern partnership to provide its expertise on regionalisation<sup>10</sup> and is currently involved in similar actions in Tunisia

***AER therefore benefits from very relevant expertise and unique links with Regions from neighbouring countries and is offering its services to the European Commission for the development of the pilot regional development programmes***

<sup>7</sup> PraG: Practical Guide to Contract procedures for EU external actions

<sup>8</sup> If we take the example of the Black Sea CBC programme, the evaluation process of the first call took almost 18 months.

<sup>9</sup> Special report 13/2010 by the European Court of Auditors : « Is the new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument successfully launched and achieving results in the Southern Caucasus ? » (ISSN 1831-0834)

<sup>10</sup> See : [www.aer.eu](http://www.aer.eu) - Regional democracy/ AER Seminars on regional democracy