



## The future belongs to us – but how should we handle it?

### *Meeting of Youth from the European Regions Wiesbaden, 23 – 25 November 2008*

#### Report from the Meeting

Sunday, 23 November 2008

Youth Hostel, Wiesbaden

Participants were arriving in Wiesbaden from early in the morning until late at night. After arrival, each participant was registered and received the information package, which included the agenda of the conference, a list of participants, speakers, journalists and AER staff, some practical information, a reimbursement form as well as souvenirs from the Parliament of Hesse. Once registered, participants had some free time for themselves until 17.45, i.e. dinner time.

The ice-breaking event started at 19.00 at the youth hostel – all of the participants who managed to come in time on time had an opportunity to introduce themselves and relax a bit before the conference.

Monday, 24 November 2008

Hessischer Landtag, Wiesbaden

#### 8.15 Transfer to the venue

#### 8.45 Registration of participants (the Parliament of Hesse)

#### 9.00 – 9.15 Opening Session (Plenary Session I)

The Opening Session was held by Malgorzata Kucinska, AER Youth and Citizenship officer. After giving a warm welcome to the participants, Ms Kucinska asked Mr **Norbert Kartmann** (MdL, President of the Parliament of Hesse) to open the first plenary session.

Next the statements by the following guests were made:

Mr **Volker Hoff**, MdL, Minister of the Land of Hesse with responsibility for Federal and European Affairs and representative of Hesse to the Federal Government ;

Mr **Udo Bullmann**, Member of the European Parliament ;

Mr **Klaus Klipp**, the Secretary General of the Assembly of European Regions.

### 10.15 – 10.45 Keynote – why are we here ?

After the mentioned statements, Ms Kucinska held an introduction speech on the conference itself as well as on the main idea behind the Youth Regional Network project. 'The future belongs to us but how should we handle it ?' was to provide not only the title of the conference but also the motto of the event. Ms Kucinska stressed that it was the presence at the conference that provided a strong proof that the participants had already started working for the future of Europe in their regions.

The conference itself was a good starting point for reinforcing and improving their work in order to exchange practice and to represent youth at European level, which provided the main reason for setting up the AER Youth Regional Network. Ms Kucinska referred to the conference as the milestone in the European youth policy at regional level: 'Our place in Europe is important – 24% of the European population are the young people between 15 and 29 years old.'

One sentence from the questionnaire (an answer written by Alexandra from the Youth Council in Schleswig Holstein) was the starting point for the introduction speech:

*I am not concerned about my life in future as long as I can take part in the decision which will affect my personal life and my surrounding. We know the best what is good for our generation.*

Since Europe is not only a continent of countries but also a continent of Regions, certain issues are better solved at different levels of government (local, national or European). Therefore it is crucial to involve young people in the decision-making issues at all these levels. There are definitely fewer organisation acting at regional level than those at national and European ones ; which is inseparably connected with certain national factors, such as history of political participation and civic culture.

However, one has to bear in mind that there are some issues, like environment, secondary education, youth unemployment, social inclusion, gender imbalances, etc. which should remain of the greatest importance to regional governments. What is more, these all issues affect also young people. This is the reason why youth 'should be given an opportunity to have a say on the issues they consider important.' This meeting provides a great challenge for and an opportunity in terms of identification of concerns common to all young people, recognition of their specific problems as well as inspiration to find appropriate ways of solving these problems.

'The AER project 'AER Regional Youth Network' (YRN) aims to create a new opportunity for young people to have a say on issues of their concern at regional level. Even if different sub-regional groupings of youth organisations in Europe exist, the AER initiative is unique.

Why AER? With member Regions from almost all the countries of Europe (not only EU member states) and due to the gained experience and the motivation, the AER potential to foster such a project is real and convincing.

The YRN is meant to be a common platform of the youth organisations/councils/parliaments in the AER member Regions. This platform will become a forum for discussion and exchange of experience between youngsters across all these European Regions.'

It was also added that it is the YRN that can fill in the empty space of cooperation: 'It would help to impose the principle of subsidiarity in the field of youth policy'. Another aim of the YRN is to bring young citizens closer to Europe while encouraging them to acknowledge their regional specificity and give a real meaning to the idea of 'unity in diversity'.

The objectives of the YRN were summarised in the following way:

'Developing the sense of communication:

- by creating a European forum of discussion where specific Regional issues might be acknowledged by young people
- by exchanging the best Youth practices and experiences between the European Regions

Developing education and citizenship:

- by developing a sense of civic and political culture among young people and thus contributing to the consolidation of the Regional participative democracy as well as of a sense of European citizenship

In terms of European dimension:

- by making young people from a Regional platform to enforce the principle of subsidiarity in the field of youth policy at European level
- by working on European projects together and using European funding
- by bringing together young people in the enlargement process: in the AER there are not only EU-member Regions, but Regions from all over Europe such as Regions from Balkans, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine etc... It can be an additional motivation for the young people to be engaged into relations with young people from those Regions
- to make clear that we are AER with county councils in the member regions, thus we can influence European policymaking process (e.g. by lobbying and partnerships). It can also be done by and with young people.'

Launching the Network, starting the regional cooperation as well as deciding on a shape of the network were mentioned as the reasons for organising the conference in Wiesbaden. 'It is a very challenging task for all of the participants', which had to be accomplished within two days.

Ms Kucinska presented a short agenda of the conference by describing briefly what was to follow within the two-day event :

- Discussing the results of the Wiesbaden questionnaire filled in by the participants (1st day);
- Participating in one of the 5 working groups (1st day);
- Presenting results of the working group sessions (2<sup>nd</sup> day);
- Discussing the shape of the Wiesbaden Resolution, which was defined as the milestone for and the founding document of the AER YRN.

It was stressed that both questionnaire answers as well as conclusions drawn during working group sessions would be taken into account when creating the common network strategy.

Ms Kucinska finished her speech with wishing the participants successful and efficient work.

#### **10.45 – 11.15 Coffee Break**

During coffee breaks the participants could get reimbursed for their travel expenses (Ms Eichenauer, the German Hertie Foundation).

#### **11.15 – 12.30 : Olov Oscarsson and Anton Kuzmin, AER Yoth Team members - Report on the results of the questionnaire : The future belongs to us but how should we handle it?**

Before giving the floor to the AER Youth Team members, Ms Kucinska explained once more that these were not only the participants' ideas presented during working group sessions, but also the results of the questionnaire filled in along with the application form that provided the foundation of the AER YRN. The answers to the questionnaire were presented on 5 pinboards next to the Plenary Room.

Olov and Anton started with explaining the objectives of the the questionnaire. Its aim was to identify youth's main concerns and opinions about their future in Europe and thus set up a basis for the network's cooperation in the future.

The questionnaire itself was composed of 5 sentences that were to be finished by the participants :

1. The biggest concern in my life is...
2. The future of my region in Europe is...
3. If I could change something in Europe, I would...
4. I would like to attend this meeting because...
5. I would like to be a part of this Network because...

110 people submitted their answers to these questions – all of them were interesting and gave a picture of how diverse Europe is.

The answers showed what follows :

1. The biggest concern in young people's life is :
  - finding a good job (more than 30%) - not losing it, where to look for one
  - migration of youth and brain drain
  - climate change (global warming)
  - education – its quality and equal accessibility
  - gaining professional experience
  - fostering active citizenship among young people
  - peace
  - decent living conditions

Irrespective of the diversity of the answers, there was one common denominator for all of them – namely almost all of them called for a change. There for 5 various working groups

were created, as to make young people exchange their opinions and experiences on various issues that affect them directly.

## 2. The future of my region in Europe is :

- participation in international organisations, such as the EU, NATO or AER
- cooperation with neighbouring countries
- '...very optimistic', '...bright', '...prosperous', '...splendid', etc.
- transport
- tourism
- industrial
- connected with a regional university
- connected with business that can keep people in the region
- bad – there were 4 negative answers to the question ('... getting worse and worse', '...unclear because of the political situation of my country')
- connected with sustainable development
- connected with economic development
- active participation of the citizens
- agriculture
- a big challenge
- youth
- investing in young people

The majority of the answers was rather optimistic. Some issues, like agriculture or tourism are typical of regional governance, but most of them stressed the importance of intercultural cooperation at national and international levels.

## 3. If I could change something in Europe, I would...

- diminish the EU red tape
- create a new student exchange programme
- connect all European youth
- support more social cohesion
- bring Europe closer to its citizens
- abolish boundaries
- change/improve my surrounding
- foster recognition of foreign diplomas across Europe
- make Europe more tolerant, act against prejudices
- make English the official European language
- reduce CO2
- change educational system
- provide citizens with more information
- pay more attention to young people
- stop corruption
- simplify visa procedures
- fight against xenophobia
- change nothing – 'I am satisfied with Europe'

There were many different answers depicting diversified perception of Europe among young people.

## 4. I would like to attend this conference because...



- 'I want to meet other young people'
- to communicate
- know more about youth cooperation at regional level
- establish some contacts
- meet people acting in similar youth organisations at regional level
- the topics of the conference are interesting
- develop some skills
- create a new youth body in Europe
- represent my region
- to exchange experiences

According to these answers, the most important objective of this meeting was to meet in Wiesbaden as to exchange views and experiences.

5. I would like to be a part of the YRN because...

- I want to help to create this platform
- To be a part of a big project
- To exchange experiences with young people from all over Europe
- It is an effective way of creating a new policy in Europe
- 'Only together we can make a difference'
- to discuss some problems
- subsidiarity and regional cooperation are the issues of the greatest importance
- it is a chance to meet young people
- 'I can change something'
- to share ideas and knowledge with other youth organisations
- to create a big European family
- to build together the European identity

The conclusion was that the participants were 'the creators of this meeting, and as the future belongs to us, the shape of this conference belongs to us as well'.

All of the answers were a useful tool for shaping the Network in the future.

After the presentation, the discussion took place about the answers from the questionnaire.

### **12.30 – 13.00 Presentation of working groups**

Ms Kucinska explained that the main objective of the working group sessions was to identify the most important problems that the participants wanted to cope with within the Network, as well as to think of YRN strategy.

When filling in their registration forms, the participants were asked to choose one of the 5 working groups they would like to be a part of, i.e.

1. Our generation, aging societies and migration
2. Our education, employment and youth entrepreneurship
3. Our societies, values and global economy
4. Our worlds, natural resources and modern life
5. Our culture, identities and integration

Next, the moderators were introduced. Ms Kucinska explained that each of the working group should select one 'rapporteur', i.e. a person responsible for taking notes and preparing a 10-minute speech on the results of his or her working group session (and then would present the speech to the rest of the participants during the Plenary Session on Tuesday).

Objectives of the working groups were explained in the following way :

1. Presentation of the topic – included moderators' presentation of definitions and key terms
2. Exchange of best practice and experience – participants' discussion on the topic as to exchange regional experience and choosing the most important issue from their point of view
3. Preparation of the strategy in terms of cooperation in the future – identifying solutions and strategies concerning the Network ; discussing their development within the Network (Results of this part are to be taken into account in the Network Document on Strategy for the years 2009/2010).
4. Contribution to the Wiesbaden Resolution – creating one sentence stating WHAT should be done within the Network and HOW to do it, as to include it in the Resolution.

It was stressed that the main idea behind the working groups is that the participants were creating the Network during the working group sessions.

Next, some practical information was given – Ms Kucinska explained where each of the working groups was gathering. Last but not least, she wished successful and productive work to all and expressed her hope to listen to the results during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Session on Tuesday.

**13.00 – 14.30 Lunch break**

**13.30 – 17.30 Working group sessions**

Tuesday, 25 November 2008
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Hessischer Landtag, Wiesbaden

**9.00 – 9.15 Opening Session (Plenary Session II)**

A draft version of the resolution was distributed among the participants. Their task was to come up with one sentence contributing to the resolution during their working group sessions that had taken place on Monday. The participants received also an extensive document describing the main idea behind setting up the AER Youth Regional Network and explaining both short and long-term objectives of the project. Malgorzata Kucinska,



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AER Youth & Citizenship Officer, read out the draft version, asking the participants to voice their doubts or objections. At this level, however, no changes were made.

Ms Kucinska explained also the next steps and gave a short overview of voting procedures, explaining that before the voting the final presentations of each working group would take place.

### **9.15 – 10.30 Working Groups Final Presentations**

Each of the Working Groups selected one speaker, i.e. a person responsible for presenting the results of its working group session to the other participants of the Conference.

*Working Group 1 – Our Generation, Aging Societies and Migration*  
Presented by Petar Curic (Istarska Zupanija, Croatia)

The starting point was how 'our generation' is to tackle rapidly developing technology, especially when we take into consideration that it affects aging societies as well as migration in both directions, i.e. migration to and from countries. Although regions differ between each other to a great extent, there is one common denominator for our generation living in Europe – namely finding a job. There were three main areas suggested during the working group session :

- education ;
- work opportunities ;
- migration.

The given order is crucial, since it is education that enables finding a job, and these are jobs that provide people with opportunities to move to other countries.

As for the suggested strategy, the group reached a consensus that irrespective of its implementation, it cannot be limiting – an enabling and facilitating strategy is a must.

The next question concerning migration resulted from natural differences between countries – How to find one common denominator for all of the European regions? If we think of Italy in terms of migration, we see that highly skilled people move to the UK, when thinking of Georgia – country of their destination is Croatia, and people from Croatia, on the other hand, move to Italy. It can lead to brain drain. But we cannot perceive migration as a bad thing. Instead, our generation has to think how to deal with this omnipresent phenomenon. Therefore, three steps were suggested :

1. To accept (as opposed to negating) the realms of 21st century societies, i.e. not to neglect aging societies, migration and rapidly developing technology.
2. To take some practical actions ;
  - to call for balancing the educational budget ;
  - to increase the educational budget ;
  - to establish even more homogenous regulations concerning education within Europe ;
  - to call for '10% quota', i.e. the minimum number of young skilled representatives in every institution

- to double governmental budgets for young entrepreneurs, and thus, to facilitate the first step
  - to pay attention to working conditions, which in high-tech societies can damage employees' health
3. To establish regulations at institutional levels  
All practical actions suggested above demand regulations at European level.

The closing remark was the question 'How to use talent and experience of young people in an efficient way?'. It was stressed once more that '10% quota' of young people in every single institution is a must and provides a starting point for improving young people's labour situation (institutions mentioned included schools and universities).

Question : What did you learn from other participants taking part in your working group session?

Answer : Many participants come from the countries where a political, economic and mental transitions are taking place, e.g. from Italy, Georgia or Croatia to mention only some of them. What I have noticed is that none of the people present at the Conference is afraid of the transition – they all share one common feature, namely courage. These are people extremely willing to help and to collaborate, which makes the idea of the AER YRN a meaningful and hopefully successful project.

Another thing I have noticed in this building, i.e. during my working group session and during the Conference itself, is that there is no division between Western and Eastern Europe anymore, which makes me very optimistic in terms of the future of the Network, Europe, my country and my region.

*Working Group 2 – Our Education, Employment and Youth Entrepreneurship*  
Presented by Srdjan Mazalica (Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

The majority of the participants of Working Group 2 come from the developing countries. The working group session was divided into two parts – discussing the future strategy of the AER YRN and some tangible actions.

Discussion on strategy focused on sustainability of the network and included the following issues:

- establishing subnetworks / subcommittees on different topics, where it is possible to have a forum with annual meetings for people working at regional level. The participants will report what has been said to the people back home and also, the participants will report to the network/committee on their results in their regions every time they meet.
- establishing a system/working process where good ideas can be implemented in the participating regions
- looking at how the network can be used as a source of knowledge not only for the participants of the meetings, but also for the young people in the regions
- fostering exchange of ideas and spreading the knowledge via media or in schools
- electing ambassadors responsible for spreading the knowledge and involving schools, e.g. in planning conferences

- establishing a fixed structure of the network with a president, a headquarter and some coordinators/officers, which in turn involves choosing one contact person responsible for the contacts with the headquarters, etc.
- making database projects as to help to link partners for interregional projects
- organising competitions in different matters that could encourage the participating organisations
- setting up a digital platform as a means of communication between regions

To discuss actions, Working Group 3 was divided into 3 separate subgroups, with the participants discussing 3 thematic areas of the Group, namely education, employment and youth entrepreneurship respectively :

In terms of education the following issues were mentioned:

- taking into consideration skills needed in the 21st century society
- increasing the number of 'outdoor activities', i.e. fostering non-formal learning
- facilitating the education of children with special needs
- promoting student exchange programmes
- adjusting the education system to the needs of the labour market
- fostering scientific research work
- limiting brain drain
- teaching the process of decision making
- better access to foreign languages learning

Employment :

- fostering formal education
- fostering better recognition of foreign diplomas
- improving education indispensable for a professional career
- facilitating access to information about young people and their educational opportunities
- fighting black market
- educating people how to apply for jobs
- better promotion of internships abroad

Youth Entrepreneurship

- fostering job creators, not job seekers
- including entrepreneurship into school curricula
- providing indispensable technological perks
- perceiving youth entrepreneurship not only as 'starting your own business' but more as a way of acting

There were no questions.

*Working Group 3 – Our societies, values and global economy*

Presented by Olov Oscarsson (Jamtland, Sweden)

The participants agreed that it is the globalisation that provides the common denominator for all the three categories (societies, values and global economy). Therefore, the

session started with the discussion on globalisation – what it is and what it changes in our every-day lives :

- our societies become less distant in all respects;
- our values and traditions change because of the globalisation;
- economic globalisation affects almost every sphere of our lives.

Our values, traditions, societies and economy are affected by globalisation in both positive and negative ways.

After this short and rather general discussion, the Working Group was divided into 3 subgroups in order to take part in a game, the aim of which was to incline the participants to have their say on globalisation and its effects. The game was called 'McCOFFEE Game'. Three subgroups were given 3 various roles to represent contradictory aspects of globalisation. The subgroup 1 was representing the Management Board of the multinational chainstore called 'McCOFFEE', the subgroup 2 – The French Union of Local Coffee Sellers and the subgroup 3 – consumers. Their task was to attempt at establishing the strategy of selling coffee from their point of view, the last group, however, had to decide which way of drinking coffee – a local or global one – is more convincing for them.

The discussion that took place afterwards was again focused on pros and cons of globalisation. Some of the negative aspects mentioned by the participants included :

- the main idea behind takeaway coffee is directly connected with the permanent lack of time, being in a hurry, etc.
- global chain stores sell their coffee in plastic cups, which affects our environment (people often forget about throwing them into litter bins) ; the other thing is that the usage of plastic cups causes global warming
- coffee used by global chain stores is often genetically modified

Some of the negative aspects of global chain stores – mentioned mainly by the French Union of Coffee Sellers – were as follows :

- only coffee sold in small cafés shows the genuinely local colour of the country and region
- smaller cafés are rightly associated with calmness, slow pace of tasting the coffee, meeting people, etc.
- and thus smaller cafés favour socialising with others
- coffee used in local coffee shops comes from more reliable sources (is not genetically modified)

Opinions among the consumers were divided. Nevertheless, they agreed on the main issue, i.e. the choice usually depends on the circumstances :

- chain stores are more favourable always when one is in a hurry (e.g. at the airports),
- however, when going to France, there is no point in buying coffee in global stores, since this coffee tastes exactly the same in every single place on the Earth, and is definitely not representative for the local colour, which at least theoretically is of the greatest interest for people visiting other countries,

A presentation, which took place after the game, showed both negative and positive aspects of globalisation – the negative vision of this phenomenon associated globalisation with an omnipresent factor, destroying everything that is local and regional. Another negative connotations included travel possibilities (e.g. cheap flights enabling people to travel more make them neglect and forget the importance of the local values

and traditions – we try to adjust to the demands of global values, i.e. to act in the same way irrespectively of the place we are in).

The positive connotations, on the other hand, include the fact that apart from destruction of local values, globalisation can also lead to their enrichment. Our cultures mix up, thus creating a new cultural diversity. It is important that we apart from taking from other cultures, we also enrich them with our unique values and traditions.

We have to bear in mind that glocalisation, as opposed to globalisation, has made global chain companies adjust their products to the local needs and demands.

Globalisation provides a huge chance for local sellers and producers – the important thing is that they have to know how to make use of it in a wise way, e.g. by promoting their products via the Internet. They should also remember that it is due to globalisation that more people can come to their regions and taste their local products. Therefore, it was agreed that the most important thing about the globalisation is not to be afraid of it and to make use of its best aspects, such as flow of information, cultures, and values.

A short quotation from D. Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe' provided a closing remark to the session, since it might be perceived as a 17th century version of the modern globalisation – with the main protagonist depicting values typical of the imperialistic UK and trying to impose them on Friday and, on the other hand, with Friday and his 'local' perception of lifestyle, which influenced Crusoe's vision of life to an immense extent. The relationship between 'local' and 'global' has been reciprocal and this reciprocity remains its most crucial aspect.

In order to contribute to the resolution the participants created five different sentences, summing up the most crucial aspects within the subject, i.e.

'To be able to be prepared for our future in globalization and the economy, we would need to know how to adapt to the current situations at hand, and work as a network to provide a stable future, knowing what could affect us.'

'By promoting values, traditions, culture particularities of our regions, we, European Youth can maintain our local identity and at the same time to increase our awareness of the other parts of Europe.'

'In the YRN we want to achieve an international understanding.'

'Globalization is and will be the future of the world, and our generation will manage it in the best way by promoting values and traditions of our individual regions, with the best always in the middle, when money is not on top of everything, and cultural values have never been forgotten, which would be done by the network.'

'To create a new globalization with our values and culture, as European Youth, through education and experiences.'

As a result, a collective sentence was created, representing views of the whole group:

'Globalization is, and will be, the future of the world, and our network will manage it in the best way, by promoting values and traditions of our individual regions, through modern communication means, and the exchanging of knowledge and experience.'

As for the strategy, the Group came up with the following solutions :

- setting up a Facebook forum,
- organising meetings of young people from student exchange programmes (e.g. Erasmus) so that they can take part in a discussion on the differences between the regions they come from and exchanging their opinions.

There were no questions.

#### Working Group 4 – Our World, Natural Resources and Modern Life

Presented by Charlotte Kudé (Ile-de-France, France)

First, an introduction to the topic was made – the moderator told the participants about the place she lived in, namely about a co-housing project (a community where people decide to buy a big living area, where they set up their own water supply, vegetable garden, or attend survival training). It was an example of an eco-lifestyle, showing how to reach a consensus and 'share resources in order to compensate the alienating effects of modern life'.

Next, the group was divided into pairs – each pair had to find a specific problem concerning natural resources and present to his/her partner as a guess.

After this pair work, 3 subgroups were created; each of them was supposed to focus on one particular topic: our world, natural resources and modern life respectively. The issues mentioned in by the participants were as follows:

Our World:

- 'Think global, act local' was a phrase reflecting the main idea behind the group's objectives
- a term 'supermarket world' was used in order to describe our lifestyle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; i.e. people 'act as if we had another spare world in our cellar, which is not the case, and we just take out of it everything we like or need without thinking about giving something back, about preserving our planet.'
- Our world is shrinking also because of the technology (computers, communicating technologies, etc.).
- The conclusion was that we are about to start a transition – we have to promote equality, sustainability and the use of green energy. Only if we act like this, we can live with our world in a peaceful coexistence. Otherwise we will have to face serious consequences.

Natural Resources :

- this group's task was to think of the definition of 'natural resources'. The result was as follows: 'A natural resource is a basic material you find in nature and you can use without changing it, like for example oil, gas or water. In opposition to that, unnatural resources are artificial materials one doesn't find as such in nature, but has to make out of natural resources, like plastic or GMOs'.

- Next, a crucial role of science was mentioned - science is often perceived as a negative phenomenon, the one that is 'killing us, even if we live longer and longer.' Two examples were given to prove this theory – the first one being plastic, which 'has a good side because it's useful and we need it in everyday life, however, if we burn it or drop it in nature, it is extremely polluting' and the second one – GMOs that when it comes to 'medical research, they can be extremely useful, but as soon as used for economic or political reasons, then can cause health damage through food or threaten biodiversity'. In the end it was agreed that science has also positive sides – with medical progress being one of them.

#### Modern Life:

- This group made a distinction between two categories: the reality of modern life and our wishes for it.
- As for reality – we live in the society of pollution, egoism, high consumption, computer technologies, alternative energy resources and water scarcity.
- As for our wishes, they include world without discriminations, world of tolerance, more than just a multicultural society, namely an intercultural society, i.e. a society in which every single culture would be judged equally without any prejudices. Another wishes included: a wish for more mobility, for taking care of others, of our families and children, and a wish for a fair world without egoism.

Finally, some global concerns were identified, such as:

- educating people from an early age in order to change mentalities,
- using modern technology to reduce our consumption of energy,
- promoting renewable energy resources,
- and last but not least – being convinced that we are able to change the world.

The group came up with the following sentence:

'We are the change: we must educate people from an early age to change consumer mentalities in order to promote sustainability and renewable energy resources, using technology and changing mindsets to reduce general consumption, and therefore, we should give ourselves common guidelines and apply them individually in our regions.'

Question 1: What do you exactly understand by common guidelines - do we need more laws and regulations or does it boil down to the education?

Answer: Young people think together about the common guidelines, and first of all they have to think how to make them applicable to certain issues. Depending on the issues, it has to be decided whether it has to take place at legislative or educational level. However, these are laws that can be used to change people's mentality. On the other hand, it is the mentality that comes with the laws. We have to begin with changes and legislature is the first step to do so.

No laws mean no results, and thus no changes in mentalities. We have to begin with making people sensitive to certain issues. Beyond a doubt it is a slow process, but it has to go on.

Question 2: How does the Group perceive the role of the AER Youth Regional Network?

Answer: The AER Youth Regional Network is a starting point for exchanging the ideas and practices. In order to make the YRN a successful platform of communication, we have to continue meetings and participate in them actively. The already mentioned common guidelines have to be promoted by every single participant locally.

*Working Group 5 – Our Cultures, Identities and Integration*

Presented by Michael Wood (West Sussex, England)

This working session was divided into two steps – both of them were to deal with issues of the greatest importance to the subject of the working group.

Step 1 : ‘What does Culture, Identities and Integration mean for us?’

By answering the question, the participants were to find and identify solutions to the problems concerning culture , identities and integration respectively.

Culture – in terms of this notion it was agreed that culture comprises such elements as : language, customs, art, music, religion and values.

On one hand, it is culture that brings us together and helps to create a meeting sphere by building intercultural bridges. On the other hand, it can also can divide people.

Therefore, we have to identify what we want as far as culture in our life is concerned.

The participants called for :

- conserving our regional culture ;
- having say in what our culture is ;
- coexisting with people that have a different cultural background.

Identities – they are formed by a patchwork system. They consist of both internal (‘What am I ?’) and external (‘How am I seen by others ?’). An important feature of identities is the fact that they are a developing, ever-changing phenomenon (a non-static one).

The participants called for :

- finding their own identity and being true to themselves.

Integration – was defined as not a two-way street. The notion itself includes a struggle to overcome stereotypes. It was stressed that only if we feel at home away from home, integration can be perceived as successful.

According to the participants, a successful integration requires :

- a platform to facilitate exchange ;
- active participation ;
- a common language.

Step 2 : ‘What are the most pressing problems ?’

After defining the notions, the participants started to deal with problematic aspects of a highly complexed notion of integration.

It was agreed that integration is not working properly when :

‘young people with a migration background are in many instances not properly integrated. Often they do live in parallel societies, are not able to speak the language of the host society and are struggling to perform well in schools and to gain access to the labour market.’

Therefore, it was agreed that it is education that provides the key to integration.

The Group suggested the following sentence to the Resolution :

'We therefore want to fight and overcome prejudices, inequalities, xenophobia and segregation by improving migrant education and participation as well as by facilitating the exchange of views and opinions regarding culture and identities among young people throughout Europe.'

Question : How can you unite culturally within such a diversified continent like Europe?

Answer : First of all, we have to communicate – communication is crucial in this respect. Secondly, let's not forget that we cannot and should not change various cultures. What we can and what we have to do is to educate people so that they understand other cultures and respect them.

### **10.45 – 11.30 Discussion on the final version of the Resolution and Voting**

Ms Kucinska commented on the main idea behind the Wiesbaden Resolution . First, she explained to the participants that it was the document officially founding the AER Youth Regional Network. Secondly, she explained the strategy that was to be adapted during the next meeting (that is to take place in Wroclaw, Dolnoslaskie, PL).

The name of the Resolution refers to the place where it was created. Each working group was asked to come up with only one sentence in order not to make the Resolution one page long, as to keep the document explaining the main ideas and objectives of the AER YRN short and clear.

Ms Kucinska commented on the sentences by the working groups: 'All of your sentences were extremely interesting. We will use all your ideas to set up the YRN, but what we need in the Resolution are only major guidelines'. She assured the participants that all of the original sentences, however, would be included in the follow-up report.

Before the voting, the Resolution was read out once more. There was only one objection concerning its first part, namely deleting 'best' from the following phrase : 'exchange the best practices'.

As for its second part (starting with the sentence 'Therefore, it is hereby resolved that the AER Youth Regional Network is to...') the following changes were made :

- '*in an ever-changing society*' was added to the first sentence (created by the Working Group 1), resulting in: '*influence regional policy on jobs, health and education to stop brain drain in Europe and keep young people healthy in an ever-changing society*';

- deleting 'early' from the second sentence: *'support early education to encourage young people to be entrepreneurial, take initiative, and participate in regional policy making'*;
- instead of using the word 'educate' in the fourth sentence (*'educate young people from a regional perspective, and change consumer mindsets by promoting technology, sustainability and the use of renewable energy'*), the phrase *'instigate change by educating'* was used. Also *'technology'* was shifted towards the end: *'instigate change by educating young people from a regional perspective, and change consumer mindsets by promoting sustainability, the use of renewable energy and technology'*;
- after a long and fiery debate concerning the last sentence (*'fight and overcome prejudices, inequalities, xenophobia and segregation by improving migrant education and participation, and by facilitating exchange among the cultures and identities of all young Europeans'*), the word *'fight'* was replaced by *'take action against'*. Also a modifier *'migrant'* was shifted from *'education'* to *'participation'*. The final version is: *'take action against and overcome prejudices, inequalities, xenophobia and segregation by improving education, and migrant participation, and by facilitating exchange among the cultures and identities of all young Europeans'*.

The next part was voting. The participants were asked if they did agree with the suggested version of the Wiesbaden Reslution. 100% of the participants raised their hands when asked 'Who is for?'. No one was against.

### 11.30 – 12.00 Presentations

After the voting on the Resolution, two presentations were held. The first one by **Barbara Gessler** – Head of the Regional Representation of the European Commission in Bonn, the second one by **Richard Medic** – AER Spokesman, who explained to the participants the main idea behind one of the 'Subsiadirity is a word' AER project. The participants were shown a short movie promoting this project and were invited to take some actions to support the usage of 'subsidiarity' word (e.g. by joining the Facebook group).

### 12.00 – 13.00 Conclusions

The first of the closing speeches was held by **Martina Johansson**, representing the Department of Regional Development, County Council of Norbotten (a moderator of the Working Group no. 2). She referred to Ms Kucinska's Monday speech and stressed once more that young people 'are always seen as the future of Europe'. However, Martina continued, nowadays young people 'are being left outside from the decision-making processes'. The most serious problems mentioned at this point included: unequal accessibility to the job opportunities offered witihn Europe, as well as growing enemployment among youth in the European Union ('In some countries the unemployment rate is as high as 30% among young people in the age of 18-24.'). Next,

Martina referred directly to the young participants of the conference and their answers given in the questionnaire, which clearly showed that their biggest concerns were the job question and labour market.

Martina added that except for the fact that young people shared concerns about their future, there was one more thing common for all of them, namely optimism. This optimistic attitude resulted from the awareness that their common co-operation was crucial to their position in Europe. Young people believe in long term initiatives and recognise the main problem, which is 'the lack of platforms'. Another important thing is making policymakers listen to young people's needs.

Demographical challenges provided another important aspect affecting young people in Europe: 'With the aging society – and the costs connected to this issue – the next generation will have to find solutions for the problems of today and of the future'. Also global warming, bureaucracy when starting up a business, a lack of engagement in political organisations were mentioned. Martina stressed the importance of the question raised by Klaus Klipp in his Monday speech : 'What can be done in your region to create a political interest among young people and how?'

Since 2009 is the European Year of Innovation and Creativity, it is extremely important to focus on both innovation and creativity within the Network in the following year.

Next Martina commented on the uniqueness of the Network – it is well known that working at regional level is important and 'now we are given the opportunity to be active at European level, with a regional focus.' This is the best opportunity to exchange experience with people from all over Europe, to find partners in projects and to have a say in the decision-making process at European level.

Some important questions raised by Martina included :

'How can we make Europe a part of our regions?' She expressed her hope that Monday working sessions would be helpful in finding the answer to this question. Some of the solutions mentioned included: cooperation projects, networks on more concrete topics (e.g. for business incubators), voting via Internet, conferences, network for young people under the age of 18, electing coordinators at regional level in every member region, cooperation with media, etc.

It was also stated that all of the participants already have some experience connected with acting in various types of networks: 'now – let's use this knowledge!'

'It is a fact that regions have to attract young people – but how?' First of all, they have to ask and listen to young people. 'In other words, the responsibility for youth involvement is not only a matter for the youth itself but also something that the adults need to work with'. She also stressed that one cannot forget that at the same time young people 'have to dare to step into politics, organisations, strategic work and general engagements.'

'How can we encourage young people in our regions to make a difference?' Financial support was mentioned as a solution for this problem, especially in terms of the EU funding programmes.

'Why should we, the young people, be involved?' The answer was: 'Because it gives you, us, the opportunity to change our life'. The network might be priceless for young and active people.

Creating a new opportunity and platform for young people was mentioned as one of the general objectives of both the Network and the conference itself. The aim of the platform, in turn, is to provide its members with the opportunity to have their say on issues of their concerns 'at regional level, but in the European context', which according to Martina, had already been accomplished in Wiesbaden: 'Now it is the time to put the youth issues up on the regional agenda'.

One of the achievements fulfilled during the conference was the resolution. The only objective still to be fulfilled was answering the question: 'The future belongs to us, but how should we handle it?'. 'Do you know why we have not been able to answer it?', Martina asked, 'because it's endless. The future will always belong to young people, and different ways of handling it will be born every day.' She ended her speech with a short quotation of Olov Oscarsson and Anton Kuzmin (commenting on the results of the Wiesbaden questionnaire on Monday) – 'When we know what we want – let's work towards it!'

### **Klaus Klipp – AER Secretary General**

Klaus Klipp gave his speech on behalf of Michèle Sabban, President of the Assembly of European Regions, who could not be present at the Conference.

Mr Klipp expressed his satisfaction from the Founding Meeting and assured full AER Member Regions' support to the development of the Network.

He also expressed his gratitude to the German Hertie Foundation and the Parliament of Hesse, since it was their contribution that enabled young people to meet in Wiesbaden.

### **13.00 Lunch break**

A lunch break was followed by transfers of the participants to the Youth Hostel and to the Railway Station.

<b>Final Text of the Wiesbaden Resolution</b>
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**RESOLUTION**

**AER Youth Regional Network**

**Noting** that young people are directly affected by the decisions made by governments at European, national and regional level;

**Recalling** that young people have the right to affect what happens around them;

**Understanding** that young people are the future of Europe;

**We, as members of regional youth councils, parliaments and organisations, and on behalf of all young people living in Europe, hereby establish the AER Youth Regional Network, a initiative of the Assembly of European Regions, which will:**

- provide a common European platform of youth organisations acting at regional level;
- exchange practices and experiences of youth organisations in the European regions;
- put into practice the principle of subsidiarity in the field of youth policy;
- bring young citizens closer to Europe while acknowledging their regional identities, and thus give real meaning to the idea of “unity in diversity”.

Therefore, it is hereby resolved that the AER Youth Regional Network is to:

- influence regional policy on jobs, health and education to stop brain drain in Europe and keep young people healthy in an ever-changing society;
- support education to encourage young people to be entrepreneurial, take initiative, and participate in regional policy making;
- manage globalisation by promoting the values and traditions of our individual regions and by exchanging regional knowledge and experience;
- instigate change by educating young people from a regional perspective, and change consumer mindsets by promoting sustainability, the use of renewable energy and technology;
- take action against and overcome prejudices, inequalities, xenophobia and segregation by improving education, and migrant participation, and by facilitating exchange among the cultures and identities of all young Europeans.

Adopted, in recognition of the needs and concerns of young people, during the Youth Regional Network Founding Meeting in Wiesbaden held on 25 November 2008.