



ASSEMBLÉE DES RÉGIONS D'EUROPE
ASSEMBLY OF EUROPEAN REGIONS
VERSAMMLUNG DER REGIONEN EUROPAS
ASAMBLEA DE LAS REGIONES DE EUROPA
ASSEMBLEA DELLE REGIONI D'EUROPA

WTO/GATS
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Press Release

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) calls for increased transparency in WTO negotiations and for Parliamentary vote on GATS

At the initiative of the AER, 150 regional Ministers and political representatives of culture and education from all over Europe and Canada looked at the consequences of negotiations in the framework of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) on public policies and services in the fields of culture, education and the media. They unanimously demand the organisation of wide public consultation and deliberation by national and regional Parliaments before opening up these sectors of major importance for the protection and promotion of cultural identities and diversity to privatisation and competition.

"Important decisions on the future of public services in our countries and regions are gradually being taken by GATS negotiators without prior consultation or the agreement of elected representatives selected by the citizens to manage public affairs and defend their interests at either national or regional level" stated Liese Prokop, AER President and Vice-Minister President of level (A). "We cannot let the experts in international trade and Economic Interest Groups decide on the future of public service policies for us, particularly in fields such as education and culture. On behalf of the AER, I solemnly call upon all political representatives to act and to participate in later GATS negotiations. I hope that the messages in the Final declaration of the 2nd AER Conference of Regional Ministers of culture will be heard by governments at all levels and that, together, we will manage to make politics the priority in trade talks" added the President.

Bruno Hosp, President of the AER Culture and Education Committee and Minister of Culture for Bozen-Sudtiroil (I), host of this Conference, insisted on the importance of protecting national and regional sovereignty in both of these fields. *"We do not feel that privatisation in several sectors of culture and education be the right reaction to the needs of individuals and society as a whole. We are particularly against a change from the current education system, subject to the approval of public authorities and acting in the general interest, to a system meeting the needs of the market and of interest groups" stressed Dr. Hosp.*

Whilst liberalisation in certain public markets may have a positive effect on global economic development and the future of public finance in general, culture and education are the sources of cultural identity and diversity and therefore represent highly delicate fields. For this reason, in the Declaration adopted at this Conference, the AER calls for both these sectors to be excluded from future GATS negotiations until clear agreement has been found for the inclusion of representatives from regional governments, particularly regions with exclusive or shared (with national government) legislative competences, in later negotiations. Article I-3a on GATS member status must be re-considered in this light.



The AER also warns the European Commission, main EU negotiator within GATS, against following a unilateral strategy for the promotion of privatisation and reiterates its opposition to further modification of the EU Treaties which would allow the transfer of competences in education and culture to European level.

All speeches, particularly those by important guests at the Conference - Diane Lamieux, State Minister for Culture and Communication of Quebec (Canada) or Fritz Pleitgen, Director of ARD (German public television channel) as well as the final Declaration are available on the AER web site: www.a-e-r.org (Brixen Conference).

Created in 1985, the AER is a political organisation of the Regions of Europe and the speaker for their interests at European and international level. Its mission: to bring the Regions of Europe together and to allow them to be, together, actors in the construction of Europe and European integration. The AER currently has 250 member Regions from 26 European countries and 12 interregional organisations.

AER Contacts:

Franz-Josef Stummann or Doris Materne, Culture, Education & Training Committee

Tel. +33 3 88 22 74 47 or 43, E-mail: f.stummann@a-e-r.org or d.materne@a-e-r.org

Barbara Skoczylas-Thauront or Francine Huhardeaux, Press & Communications service

Tel. +33 3 88 22 74 46 or 49, E-mail infopresse@a-e-r.org

Web site: www.a-e-r.org