



## Europe is enlarging

### Editorial



The enlargement of the Union is an historical opportunity offered to us to guarantee peace on our long-divided continent and to build together a common and prosperous future.

But it is also a challenge and a phenomenal gamble on the future. A winning gamble if we manage to bring this new Europe closer to citizens and to involve Europeans in this far-reaching project. Such is the main lesson of the General Meeting of European Regions organised in Poznan, in the region of Wielkopolska-PL, towards the end of November 2003.

The success of enlargement will, indeed, depend on people's support for it, both in the new and in the older Member-States. And people will support this process, if they visibly benefit from it in their everyday life and if they recognize it as a community of fellow citizens. That is why it is so important, at this turning point of bringing closer nations and people who have such different cultures and experiences, to give a new impetus to the promotion of diversity and intercultural dialogue.

In order to build this new Europe, it is not enough to build new infrastructures and transport routes which are admittedly necessary to the economic development of such a vast territory. We must not forget that Europe is not only a big market but also a society of 455 million citizens who have to live and work together, build common projects for the future and overcome the resentment of the past and today's stereotypes.

In its new cohesion policy and the other policies which have a structural impact, the Union has to affirm its will to participate in the development of this intercultural society, on the basis of the common values stated in the draft Constitution. It has to reinforce its support of citizens' initiatives which develop, through educational and cultural projects, exchanges within the Community and with the new EU neighbours.

In my capacity as President of the AER, which begun its own enlargement before the fall of the Berlin wall and is today constituted of almost 250 member regions which are very diverse, I can assert that, thanks to this intercultural dialogue and to effective projects of interregional co-operation, we have achieved unity in diversity. <

**Liese Prokop**  
President of the AER  
Vice-Minister-President  
of Lower Austria (A)

## The top priority is to build a citizens' Europe

MAKING A SUCCESS OF ENLARGEMENT IS A REAL CHALLENGE FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY, AN EXTRAORDINARY LEAP OF FAITH INTO THE FUTURE. ITS SUCCESS DEPENDS ON US STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES, ENCOURAGING LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FACE OF THE CHALLENGES POSED BY GLOBALISATION AND MOBILISING THE CREATIVITY OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION IN THE INTERESTS OF FORWARD-LOOKING POLITICAL UNDERTAKINGS.

**It's official.** Since the first of May, the European Union has grown to number 25 Member States and 455 million citizens. An unprecedented enlargement in the history of Europe has just taken place, and now Maltese, Cypriots, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes, Hungarians and Poles will be fully-fledged participants in Community decisions. Together with the old members they will be facing the difficult task of breathing new life into this Union in search of a new direction, caught between disunity, an uncertain economic future and the growing Euroscepticism of its citizens.

*"This new Europe cannot be created without the people, and even less against their will",* emphasised Robert Collignon, President of the Walloon Parliament, at the last "Etats Généraux" - General Meeting of the Regions of Europe. A correct and relevant analysis, since the success of this new stage in the evolution of Europe will depend essentially on the popular support it enjoys. European citizens will support this process, but only if they see it as a social undertaking offering better opportunities now and in the future. This was the main conclusion of the sixth "Etats Généraux" - General Meeting of the Regions of Europe held by the AER at the end of November in Poznan, in the Polish region of Wielkopolska and attended by 600 participants from 200 European regions and 33 countries. The same point was hammered home by all, from delegates in workshops to speakers at plenary sessions. The key factors in the future of the Union and of democracy in

Europe will be the ability to listen better to what people want and to adapt public policy to their expectations; this in turn will require a



The flag of the Union now flies over 25 countries

clearer demarcation of powers between the various levels of governance. Plus much greater support for cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, through interregional and cross-border cooperation projects, to give the lie to the accusation that Europe is a bland, centralising force.

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Photo: Jacek Babiak

**600 people gathered in Poznan for the General Meeting of European Regions****Putting people at the heart of politics**

"People want politics to be more relevant to them, is the view expressed by the Polish Prime Minister Leszek Miller after the Poznan conference. *That requires a shift in power from the top down*". A particularly striking comment, coming as it does from the second most powerful individual in a country which still works on centralised lines, though its approach has been changing of late. Bringing people closer to politics means giving them the means to exert control. Who better than local politicians, elected to inform the people and represent their interests, to take on this role and give the word democracy some meaning once again? The draft Constitution drawn up by the Convention headed by the former French head of state Valéry Giscard d'Estaing is an important step forward here. Peter Straub, chairman of the AER's Institutional Affairs Committee (see *Dossier AER-ARE-VRE/autumn 2003*) gave us his analysis of the situation: *"This is the first time in the history of Europe that a text has explicitly recognised the principle of subsidiarity between the Union and the regions. Bearing in mind that until then this link had only been established between the Union and the Member States, this gives you some idea of how far we've come."* Indirectly but importantly, this text which could be adopted by the Heads of State and Government in June, could underline the fact that the Union no longer needs to be the ethnocentric structure that it is today. It could clarify the vital role of the regions as a link in the dialogue between the Union and the people, and that popular support for the development of new European policies will depend largely on the strength and soundness of this link.

*"The ability of parties and political leaders to identify with and promote the demands of civil society will be the key to their survival in this century"*, warned the American economist

Jeremy Rifkin, also present at the "Etats Généraux" - General Meeting of the Regions. It is universally accepted that a democratic gulf has been gradually growing between the élite and the general public, and that bridging this gap is now a matter of urgency. Of course, the ongoing construction of the Union is a major historic step; but it has yet to take on a life beyond the rarefied institutional heights, putting people at its centre. It is people who take part in public life, in politics, who have the opportunity, the right and the assurance to do so. But many Europeans, already feeling isolated from their national representatives, are concerned at the establishment of a centralised political and administrative structure in Brussels, believing that they will probably be able to exert little influence on it, just as they feel powerless in the face of economic globalisation. *"European institutions have considerable powers nowadays, which worries people, confirms Marek Maciej Siwiec, State Secretary at the Chancellery of the President of the Polish Republic. More and more supranational organisations are being given additional powers. People believe that they no longer have any influence on politics."*

**(Re)involving the public in the democratic debate**

But this sense of alienation is not irreversible, provided that the regions are allowed to play their natural role in governing Europe. Close to their populations, from a geographical point of view to say the least, local politicians must adopt a higher political profile, acting as the key point of contact between the people and the Union. Their role is not limited to a conduit or intermediary function; they must also get the public - including young people - actively engaged in the democratic debate. On this very issue Liese Prokop, President of the AER, has encouraged a dynamic youth policy within the Assembly (see insert)

and pointed out that *"it is vital for young people to have the chance to develop a political vision for the future and take part in building tomorrow's world"*. The importance of this is brought home when we consider that these young people will have to continue the European project launched fifty years ago.

But re-establishing contact with the people also means getting across what Europe is really all about: clear answers - not spin - to the fears expressed by populations. Any other approach would merely serve to feed the uncertainties and worries of a public increasingly inclined to heed the siren call of Eurosceptic and nationalist parties. *"In an open world dominated by globalisation, people must be aware of what belonging to Europe means for their future. It is vital for us to communicate better so as to strengthen democracy, commented Jozef Olesky, Chairman of the Polish parliament's European Affairs Committee and a member of the Convention on the future of the Union, in a speech to the delegates. And this must start at the regional level, where it is much easier to involve the public than at the national level. This is how we can get people participating in politics again."*

Finally, Europe must get to grips with its differences, true to its motto "Unity in diversity", rejecting all attempts at the imposition of uniformity from above. Peter Straub called for vigilance on this point: *"We are facing liberalisation of services, and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is perhaps the clearest example of this trend. Unlike article 133(5) of the Treaty of Nice, article III-217 of the draft Constitutional Treaty does not require unanimity to liberalise some services such as culture or education. This means that a qualified majority vote would be sufficient to transfer these services into the arena of European trade policy, where the Union has exclusive competence, thereby removing all powers from the regions which until then had legislative prerogatives in this area"*. Accepting this transfer would undoubtedly harm the European project as the public would not understand or support the move. The greatest strength that Europe has is surely its diversity, its acceptance of other points of view thanks to cultural and intellectual interchange, and its "multipolar" approach to a world which is becoming both more uniform and, paradoxically, more fragmented.

**Ensuring local development**

One of the issues on which the success of enlargement will depend is whether the new members are able to develop and prosper without this being to the detriment of existing members; encouraging Community solidarity will be vital.

*"The arrival of the Ten as new members of the Union is a great opportunity but also a great challenge, pointed out Irena Herbst, Poland's Secretary of State for regional deve-*

development. We must encourage the development of transport links and infrastructure, but that alone is not enough. We will succeed in ensuring the development of regions only by exploiting their own potential." Exploiting potential will require simplification of the way structural funds are managed and more involvement of the regions in both defining the criteria by which they are distributed and in their administration. As Stefan Mikolajczak, President of the Wielkopolska and host of the "Etats Généraux" - General Meeting of the Regions of Europe reminds us, "we must remember that the regions are the prime source of new jobs. Only an area that has a dynamic economy will develop, attract new investors and create new wealth for the people living there. So who better than these regional structures to manage the funds granted to encourage their development".

Cohesion policy objectives will also have to be reformed following enlargement. "The new cohesion policy must cover issues such as maintaining public services, better access to the most remote regions, supporting innovation, but also exchanges between all groups in society - the private sector, universities and

schools, associations - to encourage integration and meet the expectations of people living in towns and in the countryside" emphasised Brian Greenslade, Chairman of the AER's Regional development Committee. "It must also give a fresh boost to interregional cooperation with the regions on the edges of Europe, like those of the countries now bordering on the enlarged Union, as their steady development is vital to the stability of our continent".

#### Local mobilisation to exert influence on globalisation

Enlargement is not the only challenge facing Europe: globalisation was another issue extensively discussed at the recent "Etats Généraux" - General Meeting of the Regions of Europe as both regional politicians and the general public expressed their feeling of impotence vis à vis the decision-making processes of bodies such as the WTO and GATS. "The question that regional politicians are asking is whether there can be regional life outside globalisation, and whether regions are condemned to compete, was the comment from Robert Collignon, President of the Walloon parliament. Another question is whe-

ther the stateless forces of the market will achieve a checkmate over geography and history. It seems obvious to me that only local mobilisation will allow us to exert influence on globalisation." But such an undertaking would have to give more decision-making autonomy to the regions, as only they can act as intermediaries between the Union and the States - the last political decision-making forums that can still bring pressure to bear on the international economic scene - on the one hand and the public, most immediately affected by the decisions taken there, on the other hand.

The regions have a constructive role to play in this process. "Building globalisation will be the essential answer to doubts about globalisation", as Armatya Sen, winner of the Nobel prize for economics, pointed out recently. That is the real issue: finding a middle way "between two dualist and exclusive attitudes, one of which condemns the new world order unreservedly while the other sees it as the universal panacea", went on Robert Collignon, before adding: There have been relatively few times in history when human societies lost control over economics. As for capitalism, it is most beneficial when it goes hand in hand with a political plan. This observation must act as a wake-up call for our evolving Europe and our regions to be inventive".

#### More inventive ideas needed

Europe and the regions will have to become more creative in the face of the challenges posed by globalisation. According to a report published on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March by an American consultancy firm, by 2010 some 25% of technology jobs in developed countries will be relocated to emerging markets, including India and China. The firm expects 30% of the major European companies in the technology sector to set up sites abroad as early as next year. Jobs lost to Europeans. If we add to this the liberalisation of public services which Europe is starting to introduce, we can see that the Union is facing an economic upheaval if the regions are not given the chance to maintain or develop their socio-economic dynamism and bring their expertise to bear at Community level so as to anticipate the world of tomorrow.

Participating in the building of globalisation as a group of twenty-five will be no less difficult than as a group of fifteen, but is still better than simply sitting back and accepting events. This is particularly true if the regions, the only political structures able to contribute real practical expertise, are involved in the search for common solutions to tomorrow's challenges, including the demographic challenge, the survival of public services and the energy issue (see interview with Jeremy Rifkin). <

## Getting young people involved in politics

YOUNG PEOPLE OFTEN SAY THAT THEY ARE FED UP WITH SPEECHES. THEY WANT ACTION, AND JUDGE BY RESULTS. A CALL HEARD AND FOLLOWED BY THE MANY EUROPEAN REGIONS THAT TOOK PART IN THE COMPETITION TO FIND THE MOST YOUTH-FRIENDLY AER REGION. WE TURN THE SPOTLIGHT ON THE WINNING REGION, LANCASHIRE, WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LEARNING ABOUT AND ARE TAKING POWER.



The Youth of Lancashire celebrate their success

businesses are just some examples of how modern technology can benefit democracy. All these factors convinced the jury made up of the President of the AER (Liese Prokop), the Chairman of the Culture Committee (Bruno Hosp) and the Chairman of the Youth Subcommittee (Jörgen Hedberg).

Lancashire (United Kingdom), the 2003 winner of the prize for the most youth-friendly region, cares deeply about its young people. For many years young people in this region have been involved in defining public policy through the Youth Council. Lancashire has taken on board the views of its young residents in areas as diverse as encouraging people to learn foreign languages, exchange programmes, waste recycling, cheaper public transport fares for the under-sixteens, support for the homosexual community and participation in the legislative process. This region also scores very highly on its strong encouragement of new technology, very popular as a communication tool among the young. An online library, video streaming of regional council meetings on the Web, direct email contact with all councillors and electronic links between Web surfers and local

# “Jeremy Rifkin: Take control of energy”

THE "ETATS GÉNÉRAUX" - GENERAL MEETING OF THE REGIONS OF EUROPE HELD IN POZNAN WAS HONOURED TO RECEIVE MR. RIFKIN, AN AMERICAN ECONOMIST AND PRESIDENT OF THE FOUNDATION ON ECONOMIC TRENDS. HE PREDICTED AN UNPRECEDENTED ENERGY REVOLUTION WHICH COULD GREATLY BENEFIT THE REGIONS

Photo : Foundation on Economic Trends



**Jeremy Rifkin, President of the Foundation on Economic Trends**

### What is this energy revolution that you are predicting?

It is the hydrogen and fuel cell revolution. These will become the foundation of our lives. Fuel cells will give us practically as much power as our computer does. When you log on to the Internet from your PC you generate your own information: you produce information that you share with millions of other users. Similarly, fuel cells which use hydrogen allow you to create energy which belongs to you and which you can share with others. We will eventually have an energy network, just like the computer network we have today.

### Isn't this in the realms of science fiction? It's not a realistic proposition, surely?

It is entirely realistic. The revolution has already started. Over the next two years you will see

Japan producing unimaginable quantities of fuel cells and hydrogen. California is another case in point. It has passed a law requiring all cars sold from 2009 onwards to run on a fuel cell. I would be willing to bet that in a few years time there will be as many fuel cells on the planet as there are computers today.

### That would smash conventional power networks. But doesn't the production of hydrogen need raw materials to which only consortiums have access?

No, though George W. Bush would have you believe otherwise. He wants you to remain dependent on his oil, natural gas and nuclear energy. He wants to produce black hydrogen. But nobody in the United States is thinking about producing green hydrogen, which is much more accessible, from renewable energy sources like solar energy, hydraulic energy, geothermal energy or biogas. And this is where Europe and its regions can really make their mark, taking a leading

role in the energy sector and encouraging profound social change. All you have to do is invest in the production of green hydrogen.

### This would be very expensive...

Of course we realise the cost involved in encouraging renewable energy, but it is simply a matter of reallocating available resources. And the investment would certainly be worthwhile as it would allow you to become self-sufficient and less dependent on external energy sources.

### Leaving aside the economic aspects, you emphasise the unprecedented sociopolitical impact that this energy revolution would have. You claim that everything would change. Could you expand on this?

The ability to create your own energy means that international political organisations will become

decentralised. Energy will no longer circulate from the top down, as in the oil era, but from the bottom up. Energy will be local, regional, with all that this implies for the transfer of power.

### Do you mean that decentralising energy would be good for democracy?

This new energy is regional, local. If, as I believe, fuel cells become massively popular then monopoly control over energy will come to an end. Of course the current energy giants can still produce fuel cells, but so can regions and individuals. This is an essential point, because though we aspire to political democracy at present we are living a lie because we are trapped in a system where energy comes only from coal, gas or oil. All these materials are in the hands of a tiny elite. That's the contradiction: between trying to live democratically and having centralisation and top-down control. Democracy is a fine thing in political terms, but it will work only if you take control of energy. <

All readers are encouraged to view the AER website (<http://www.a-e-r.org>) for current information.



**AER - ARE - VRE Dossier**  
Europe is enlarging  
Spring 2004

Thematic Dossier by the Assembly of European Regions (AER)

**Managing Editor** - Klaus Klipp

**Editor** - Barbara Skoczylas-Thauront

**Editorial advisors** - Dr. Franz J. Stummann

**Journalist** - Christophe Nonnenmacher

**Assistant Editor** - Francine Huhardeaux

**Translation** - Ursula Gerstenmaier (GB & D)

**Design and layout** - Agence Contexte - Strasbourg (F)

**Printing** - OTT - rue Pins - 67310 Wasselonne (F)

Published (in three languages): 4,500 ex.

Reproduction authorised with mention of the source

May 2004

AER - General Secretariat - Bureaux Europe - 20, Place des Halles  
F- 67000 Strasbourg - [www.a-e-r.org](http://www.a-e-r.org) - Tel.: +33 3 88 22 07 07  
Fax: +33 3 88 75 67 19 - E-mail: [infopresse@a-e-r.org](mailto:infopresse@a-e-r.org)

**The Wielkopolska Declaration, unanimously adopted by delegates attending the Sixth "Etats Généraux" - General Meeting of the Regions of Europe, along with resolutions on the draft Constitutional Treaty, protecting cultural diversity, the future of Services of General Interest in Europe, the new cohesion policy, transport and consumer-friendly agriculture adopted by the General Assembly of the AER, can be downloaded from the AER website: <http://www.a-e-r.org/COMMUN/A22-AG2003.html>**