



Think global – act regional



Editorial

Globalisation is not a new phenomenon - the European and Chinese explorers of the 15th century all shared the same aim: to explore unknown countries and access different cultures. Nowadays, however, globalisation has taken on an entirely new dimension. Some 15 years ago a new era began as a result of a combination of shared economic interests and closer inter-linking of the countries of the world due to lower transport costs and increased use of modern communications technologies. Why is it that in so many countries the phenomenon of globalisation now causes such concern?

It is frequently perceived as something against which we are helpless – like storms or floods. The spotlight often falls on institutions such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organisation, but nowadays the regions, particularly in Europe – thanks to the Assembly of European Regions – have increased their powers and are in a position to engage with globalisation and benefit from a globalised world.

The task of combating environmental destruction, for example, calls for worldwide coordination, and here the regions can play a leading role and are in the best position to efficiently implement global policy. In the field of migration policy, too, cooperation between regions of origin and destination offers the key to finding a responsible and mature solution to current problems.

In a globalised world the regions have one major advantage: their diversity – of languages, cultures and organisational structures – which gives them an edge over countries like China or the United States when it comes to creativity. That is why it is immensely important to protect the cultural diversity of the European regions – not just because they represent a rich heritage in themselves, but also because they offer a huge advantage, for example in combating the trend towards relocation of companies. Another advantage is that the regions can rely on the AER. The energy that is created through cooperation can give the regions the strength they need to finally take their rightful place in the globalisation process: centre stage. <

Riccardo Illy
President of the AER

Four problems, one answer: more power to the regions!

AT THIS YEAR'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY, THE AER BROUGHT TOGETHER REGIONAL POLITICIANS FROM ALL OVER EUROPE TO EXCHANGE OPINIONS AND DISCUSS SOLUTIONS. A VARIED PROGRAMME INCLUDED DEBATE ON ISSUES SUCH AS CULTURE, THE ENVIRONMENT, MIGRATION PATTERNS AND CORPORATE RELOCATION. AND IN THE BACKGROUND WAS ALWAYS THE PHENOMENON OF GLOBALISATION...



450 regional representatives adopted the Palma de Mallorca Declaration, entitled "Think Global, Act Regional"

Europe is increasingly competing with other continents, nations and regions. The European Union's response to this challenge is a strategy for economic growth and employment – the so-called Lisbon strategy – which aims to establish a strong knowledge-based economy in Europe with the help of sustainable development.

However, this aim will require action at all levels of government – European, national, regional and local. The global competitiveness of Europe as a whole depends on a variety of measures aimed at strengthening the competitive potential of the European

regions, all of which are capable of development but at present are not all using their potential to the same extent. This was why regional politicians used the occasion of the AER General Assembly in Palma de Mallorca on 9th and 10th November 2006 to underline the importance of recognising and understanding the position of the regions in Europe and elsewhere in the world. It is becoming increasingly clear in Europe that global policy or measures to combat global phenomena are best pursued through local actions: global thinking implemented at regional level. *What follows are extracts from the discussions that took place in Palma.*

Photo: AER



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Regional culture and globalisation

Globalisation can today be described as a process of global integration. Barriers are gradually being removed in the fields of politics, economics, social affairs – even currency – and this inevitably has an impact on the development of national and regional cultures. Two trends can currently be identified: cultural “homogenisation”, in which individuals are gradually relinquishing the specific features of their culture and taking on others originating outside their home region; or the opposite, with nations or regions deliberately strengthening local culture and the population increasingly identifying with it. The danger is that, in the one case, globalisation can “suffocate” national or regional cultures, and in the other, individuals can withdraw into their own identity and reject external influences. *“In Europe there is a particularly strong interchange between cultures – they positively influence one another; but we have to beware of the danger of creating a single, homogenised identity.”*

To protect regional identities and cultures, the regions must, of course, have decision-making powers, so that they can set their own priorities. *“Intercultural dialogue, but also a dialogue between ‘cultural elites’ and groups within the population etc. must be made possible and strengthened by an appropriate long-term policy.”* For various reasons, particularly economic ones, not all regions are in an equal position in terms of protecting their cultural heritage. That is why there is a need for complex measures at international and European level aimed at eradicating these inequalities. There is scope for the AER and UNESCO to discuss the development and protection of culture within the regions together with Regional Ministers of Culture or cultural officers. The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Diversity passed by UNESCO in 2005 – against stiff opposition from the United States – *“is a step in the right direction, but we could go even further.”* The European institutions could sign an agreement with the major television broadcasters to ensure more airtime for national or regional cultural programmes.

Finally, the regions represented in Palma emphasised the importance of a policy to protect cultural heritage and underlined the need to find an appropriate strategy, to create a database of historic monuments, to provide a new impetus for cultural affairs by expanding cultural professions and services and to introduce cultural studies as a subject taught in schools...

Initiatives such as these could change current trends and make sure that globalisation strengthens regional cultures, to the enrichment of all concerned.

Delocalisation: a threat to regional competitiveness?

Like culture, the economy is constantly evolving. Over the course of history, economic structures in individual states and the world as a whole have undergone radical changes on several occasions. We now have global economic structures in which chain reactions can easily occur. For example, as soon as companies engage with the economic giant that is China, large



Photo: AER

Interview

Danuta Hübner, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy

“We must make full use of the regions’ potential”

Member States you will see how much money has flowed into refurbishment of our cultural infrastructure. I don't think we need a change of approach in order to preserve our cultural heritage ...

Let me add something: we are increasingly appreciating the influence of culture on the task of building Europe. Many new Member States were afraid that accession to the EU would endanger their cultural identity. After a while, though, it emerged that their experience was the same as that of the 15 existing EU states – cultural identity was actually strengthened by collaboration.

N. S. : The regions are constantly calling for more powers, and some would like these to be laid down in the Constitutional Treaty. Do you think that is a good idea?

D. H. : The Draft Treaty mentions ‘territorial cohesion’ for the first time and lists the territorial elements in the structure of the EU (cities, islands, sparsely populated regions etc.). I hope that one day this cohesion will be anchored in the Treaty. The EU has to commit itself to furthering this territorial cohesion and helping the regions. But the political weight given to the regions or

local authorities will be determined at national level. Some regions in Europe have legislative powers, but some states are so small that they do not have any regional structures at all. That is the great thing about Europe – its diversity – and what counts is what regional policy can offer: decisions of importance for the citizens must be made by the regions in partnership with the local authorities.

N. S. : What do you see as being the AER's role in the future?

D. H. : Our advantage in Europe is the added-value offered by co-operation: exchanging ideas, learning from each other, presenting success stories. European regional policy offers an irreplaceable added-value in the form of interregional co-operation. Institutions like the AER, which includes the majority of the EU regions but also neighbouring regions as well, can help us to breathe life into this process of co-operation. I hope that we can make full use of this untapped potential, and the AER is an ideal body to support this process: we really need it if we are to implement a comprehensive policy of regional development.

Nicolas Schirrer : During the round-table discussion on ‘Culture’, the suggestion was made that *“new ways to organise the distribution of money for cultural affairs should be found so that the regions can determine their own priorities ...”* What do you think of the idea?

Danuta Hübner : To preserve culture and use the scope that exists for collaborative activities, people first have to be involved. There are resources available for protecting our cultural heritage and we have already invested a lot. If you travel to any of our



Photo: AER

The General Assembly participants gathered for an AER family photo

numbers of jobs are lost in certain regions. Delocalisation of companies is one of the most tragic impacts of globalisation in human terms, leading to great professional and personal insecurity... But here the regions have a key role to play, particularly within Europe.

Those regions worst hit by delocalisation often display similar characteristics: *"A mainly 'traditional' economy, a closely regulated labour market and a high burden of taxation"*. On the other hand, those regions with the highest growth rates appear to be very different: *"Combating delocalisation of companies and strengthening the competitiveness of the regions requires a willingness to adapt and an openness to change"*. There is also a need to invest huge amounts in research and development of existing and new technologies and in infrastructure, and to promote co-operation between economic players and universities. Incentives for entrepreneurs, particularly young ones, are required in the form of attractive levels of taxation. The creation of centres of excellence or competitive 'clusters' is an excellent way of preventing companies from moving out of a region.

The example of Nokia in the Finnish region of Uusimaa is a case in point. Founded in 1966, the company originally manufactured television sets, but changed its focus during

the boom in the telecommunications sector in the 1990s. By adapting to economic change and deciding to concentrate on leading-edge technologies, both the company and the region of Uusimaa benefited enormously: Nokia is today the world's largest producer of mobile telephones and the second biggest employer in its home city (following the local authority and ahead of the Technical University). The great strength of the regions is their ability to react swiftly to change and ensure that they remain innovative and competitive. This is how they can resist the trend towards delocalisation.

Our environment: a rude awakening

Nowadays we are starting to realise that economic activity has an irreversible impact on the environment. We are using up non-renewable sources of energy (oil, coal etc) and destroying the quality of our environment (agricultural land, marine resources) as a result of our failure to take into account the need for regeneration. Gradually, people are waking up to what is going on. It is not too late, but only if we take action immediately. *"We have to continue to educate the public and provide them with the necessary information for them to realise the impact of their own behaviour, for example on global warming."* The regions have a crucial role to play in this process – changing people's awareness and

proving that responsible environmental behaviour can result in significant savings.

However, measures such as taxing products with a negative impact on the environment have proved to be a two-edged sword and should only be resorted to as part of a comprehensive policy aimed at changing people's behavioural patterns. And it is important that any new policies adopted should not create new forms of social marginalisation. *"We must continue to have proper transport choices in rural areas and offer credible alternatives in our cities."*

The regions can also join forces to protect areas that transcend political borders – for example along the Danube River. The Romanian regions have proposed an interregional project entitled "DIRE – Danube, European Eco-River", as current problems with water pollution affect several European regions. Protection of the environment can also go hand-in-hand with social quality criteria. *"In the region of Rhône-Alpes, for example, an area receives regional subsidies only if it adheres to both environmental and social criteria (e.g. involvement of civil society in projects)."*

Migration flows: improved dialogue, better information

The arrival of "boat people" on the southern coasts of Europe – in Italy, Spain and Malta

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– has clearly shown that European countries can no longer turn a blind eye to the incoming flow of new migrants. Immigration is not a new phenomenon – indeed, it could be said that “Europe itself is the result of centuries of migration.” Nowadays, regions and their inhabitants have to recognise immigration as a fact of life. In Palma, representatives of those regions from which migrants originate and those to which they move had an opportunity to discuss their day-to-day problems. It emerged that communications policy on immigration in the regions needs to be improved. “The regions are responsible for informing their inhabitants about immigration and should be putting across a positive picture in the media.” Above all, there is a need to publish accurate statistics, accompanied by the reasons (economic and democratic) why these migrants

should be welcomed. “It would be very helpful to have reliable regional statistics in order to better understand the flows of migrants and better coordinate our policies.” Language teaching for migrants should also be promoted, as linguistic competence is the key to social and professional integration.

“We need better cooperation between countries of origin and countries of destination in order to have a sustained exchange of labour.” In regions wishing to benefit from immigration in order to compensate for local inadequacies “there needs to be better information about the labour market and better communication between the regions so as to inform migrants about the benefits on offer.” <



Participants in the discussion table on migration in the middle of a brainstorming session

Photo: AER

Overview of the situation with the President of the AER

THE REGIONS FACE MAJOR CHALLENGES, NONE OF WHICH ARE INSURMOUNTABLE. HOWEVER IT IS IMPORTANT NOT JUST TO SOLVE TODAY'S PROBLEMS - WE ALSO HAVE TO LOOK TO THE FUTURE. AND THAT IS THE MOST DIFFICULT THING TO DO... CO-OPERATION AND DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE REGIONS OF EUROPE ARE GOING TO BE THE KEY TO ANSWERING TOMORROW'S QUESTIONS.

Photo: AER



Commissioner Hübner and President Illy had the opportunity to exchange views in Palma

The newly re-elected President of the AER, Riccardo Illy, is clear: “We need a more vigorous Europe - a European market that is as strong as possible. But we also need to strengthen the regions in order to improve competitiveness. That is why, in my opinion, powers need to be redistributed. Some of them should go to the states and others to the regions, according to the principle of subsidiarity.” The regions are, indeed, best placed to enhance Euro-

pe's competitiveness, drawing on the diversity that they represent. “When it comes to creativity, this is Europe's advantage.” As Mrs. Hübner also emphasised, Europe's other great advantage is the ‘added-value’ offered by co-operation and interregional dialogue.

The AER's Centurio and Eurodissey programmes are examples of close collaboration between regions. Centurio promotes sustainable development and economic and social cohesion by enabling an exchange of knowledge and collaboration within specific projects. It has enabled French, Czech and Bulgarian regions to exchange experience and optimise their transport infrastructures so as to offer credible alternatives to private car use. Eurodissey, which was developed on the basis of co-operation between regions, companies and young people, helps young Europeans establish a foothold in the job market by offering them work experience abroad.

“We must persuade the European states to implement the Lisbon Strategy so as to develop knowledge and improve infrastructure. Unfortunately this is not happening yet...” The Lisbon Strategy has ambitious goals, and there is a risk that we will not achieve them. But if we give the regions

further powers – “responsibility for health services for example,” – the Lisbon goals may one day become a reality. <



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