



## Editorial

The young of today are the workforce, taxpayers and policy makers of the future. The leaders of Europe are slowly realising that young people are becoming a scarce resource in Europe, with the ageing population meaning that the elderly will soon outnumber the young. Young people are also becoming increasingly mobile and are not afraid to move long distances in order to have the best opportunity to live the kind of life they want. This may not be within their own region, or indeed within their own country or even within Europe. This is of course a good thing, but it does mean that the leaders of Europe will have to work harder if they wish not only to attract more young people to Europe but also to keep those who already live here.

The creation of an AER youth sub-committee is clear evidence of the will of the regions to increase their capacity to attract and keep young people. AER's Committee 3 (Culture, Education and Youth) have launched a series of projects, all with the aim of making AER member regions more youth-friendly. The best known of these projects is undoubtedly the Youth Team, which consists of young people from the member regions and which has been vital to the AER when it comes to broadening the perspectives of the network by including younger people in the decision-making process. The Youth Team alone cannot compensate for the lack of young policy-makers within the AER as a whole, but it is an important step towards widening its perspectives.

Two other important projects that the AER can take extra credit for are the Summer School and the Youth Regional Network (YRN). At the Summer School, politicians and youngsters meet and learn from each other over the course of a week. The YRN, meanwhile, is a new project with the aim of spreading best practice between youth councils and connecting them with each other.

By putting young people and their needs on the agenda, the AER is playing a leading role in making Europe the most attractive region in the world for young people. <

### David Nordström,

President of AER youth sub-committee,  
Norrbotten (S)

## Coming together

THE NEW AER YOUTH REGIONAL NETWORK PROVIDES A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO INTERACT WITH GOVERNMENT AND EACH OTHER, BOTH WITHIN AND BEYOND THEIR HOME REGION



Photo: Jämtland region

AER Youth Ambassadors gathered in Jämtland (S) for the Youth Summer School 2008

**Young** people are the future: a simple statement, perhaps, but one with profound consequences. European politicians are extremely fond of underlining their commitment to making a better future, but it is not the current crop of local, national or European leaders that will achieve this ambitious goal: it is the leaders of the future – the young people of today – who will need the will and the vision to carry European integration through to its successful conclusion. But that vision cannot be taken for granted, especially in a world where young people continue to face a future which appears far removed from the European ideal.

That is one of the reasons why the AER has set up a Youth Regional Network (YRN), a common platform for youth organisations, councils or parliaments on a regional level across Europe. The aim is to give young people from the whole of Europe – not just the EU – a forum to share their experiences of today's Europe and to discuss their views of the Europe of tomorrow, based on the principle that if they are to be the Europeans of the future, it is vital that young people become more involved in the Europe of today. The YRN will not only bring young people together – it will also put them in touch with local and regional government, NGOs and business to help them play a concrete role in policy development.

The aims of the YRN are ambitious – nothing less than the creation, by 2010, of a sustainable regional network, the Youth Assembly of European Regions, a young person's version of the AER, that will, among other things, take responsibility for all other AER youth programmes (the Summer School, Youth Ambassadors and Youth Team). Communicating the network will be a key action – the aim is to involve local newspapers, TV and radio stations, schools and universities in as many activities and events as possible – there is even talk of a book or CD sharing regional best practice among youth organisations drawing on the experiences shared within the YRN. And just to show how serious the AER is about this programme, it will apply for EU funding from the Youth in Action Programme, specifically from the training and networking sub-action.

The future, of course, is impossible to predict, and no-one can foresee whether the ambitious goal of a Europe where people are free to live, work and travel without barriers and free from discrimination will finally be achieved. But one thing is sure: Europe will need a new generation of committed Europeans if it is to succeed, and more programmes like the YRN to encourage them. <

## Getting young people involved

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AN IMPORTANT FOCUS FOR THE WORK OF THE AER, WITH A NUMBER OF PROGRAMMES LAUNCHED IN RECENT YEARS AIMED SPECIFICALLY AT THE YOUNGER GENERATION.



Photo: AER

AER's young people under the slogan "You can't do it without us - We want a hand in the decisions"

**First** launched in 2001, the AER Youth Summer School gives young people from across Europe's regions the opportunity to meet with regional politicians to discuss a range of European issues. The five-day event takes place each year in a different region, and focuses on a different theme: in 2008, the hosts are Jämtland (S) and the theme is youth entrepreneurship in the European regions (see interview).

The YSS is in many ways the breeding ground for other AER youth policy areas. Each participant in the YSS is a Youth Ambassador, tasked with encouraging other young people in his or her region to get involved. After the YSS, the Youth Ambassadors go back to their regions to organise activities based on the topic discussed during the Summer School, and the following year, the best of these activities wins an award. The winner of the 2007 award was Anton Kuzmin from the Olomouc region in the Czech Republic for the 'healthier environment cup' project that he helped coordinate through the region's youth county council.

*"I first got the idea about this particular project at the last Youth Summer School in Devon, UK," Kuzmin said. "In my region I was already involved in a lot of different youth projects, the most successful of which focused on young people debating different topics, so I decided to do something similar. Through the youth county council, we decided to contact all the schools in the Olomouc region and ask them to take part – a quarter of them did so. The day the tournament started we had more than 25 schools participating with more than 120 participants aged between 16 and 20. Students from the youth county council were the judges in the debates."*

*"This event was really interesting, because we heard a lot of different ideas and opinions on regional and global environmental problems - and most importantly we persuaded people that came to this event that even*

*young students care about their surroundings. The youth county council has now decided to hold this event twice a year, in spring and autumn. Winning the prize from the AER enabled me to convince the youth county council that their work, and their co-operation with the regional authorities, was well worth the effort."*

Youth Ambassadors also elect the members of the AER Youth Team, a group of eight young people who are representatives on youth issues within the AER and meet regularly in Europe to coordinate their activities. The Youth Team promotes AER projects at regional level, including helping to organise AER events, but it also works across Europe, by encouraging young people from European regions to participate in projects and working with youth programmes run by other institutions such as the EU or the Council of Europe. It also works with all the AER committees to ensure that young people's issues are taken into account. <



Photo: AER

**AER: Why is it important for you to be an AER ambassador, and how important is it that the school was held in Sweden this year?**

**Olov Oskarsson:** For me to become an AER youth ambassador was an opportunity to do a lot of things. Suddenly I could talk to other people around Europe and, through this dialogue, we have all been able to improve and develop our ideas and our youth work. I think that it's great that the Summer School was held in Jämtland. It feels great to show my home region to all the guests that came here. Since I've grown up here, it's hard to say whether it's more important that it was here rather than in some other region, but based on what I have experienced, in my region we are quite good at entrepreneurship in different areas like schools, courses etc.

### Interview

#### Olov Oskarsson

Olov Oskarsson is AER Youth Ambassador and member of Youth Team. He was involved in the organisation of the 2008 Summer School in Jämtland (S)

**AER: What did the Youth Ambassadors at this year's event learn about Europe - and about Sweden/Jämtland?**

**OO:** This year's event was about youth and entrepreneurship in Europe's regions, a topic I find very interesting. When talking about entrepreneurship it's easy to just talk about business, but it's also necessary to show that it's a way for young people to create their own possibilities. I think learning about Europe is very important, and meeting other young people from different regions is a great opportunity that can inspire and encourage a greater commitment from us all. I hope the participants enjoyed Jämtland and Sweden and we wanted to show them the countryside of Sweden and what our region has to offer.

**AER: What did you personally get out of this year's event?**

**OO:** There are several things. I was really excited to meet all the people coming to Jämtland and it's also all the friends and connections you get from this event. It's fun if you are working with a youth project or maybe out travelling. And of course I also had a good time!

## Do you speak European?

### Breaking down the barriers

YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ACROSS EUROPE'S REGIONS ARE TAKING PART IN A COMPETITION EXPRESSING THEIR VIEWS ABOUT EUROPE – AN AER INITIATIVE THAT WILL HELP TO BREAK DOWN NATIONAL BARRIERS AND IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT IS TO BE EUROPEAN.

**European** integration is now more than 50 years old, but as the recent problems surrounding the Lisbon treaty have shown, the process is still far from complete. In part, the problem is that for all its achievements, European integration has failed to instil a notion of 'Europeaness' in many of the people living there: the old barriers between the countries of Europe have been broken down in many ways, but they still exist in people's minds.

The founding fathers of Europe understood from a very early stage that if Europeans were to avoid the divisive conflicts of the past, they needed to understand more about each other, to appreciate their similarities and rejoice in their differences, rather than falling back on tired racial stereotypes. To do this, they understood the need to focus on the younger generations – those that had never experienced the conflicts that divided Europe so bitterly in the past. Through giving them the opportunity to share their experiences with other young people from across the continent, hopefully they would come to understand the shared heritage of Europeans.

Fifty years on, and despite the creation of programmes such as the European Commission's Erasmus scheme or its predecessor, AER's Eurodissey programme, which have given young people the opportunity to live, work and study in countries other than their own, that sense of 'Europeaness' can often seem as elusive as ever. That is one of the reasons why the AER decided to launch its 'Do you speak European?' competition, a public speaking and personal expression contest which gives teams of young people between the ages of 14 and 18 the opportunity to prepare and present their views on the question: 'What does Europe mean to you?'

The competition works on three levels: regional, national and European. Each participating region organised its own regional-level competition, which took place in the spring, with the winners going on to represent their regions at the national event held in the summer. The winners of these 12 national competitions will then compete against each other in the grand final hosted by the Brussels Capital region (B) on 3 December. The aim of the competition is to get young people talking about what it means to be European, and to do so in an original and informative way as possible through a presentation of around five to seven minutes. The winning presentation will be decided by a panel of prominent Europeans and policy-makers from different countries.

**do you speak european?**

**What can Europe do for you(th)?**  
03/12/2008 ★ 9h – 18h

Poster of the international final of the AER event "Do you speak European?"

Marieta Georgescu was responsible for organising the regional level competition in Romania, and a school from her own Dolj County region – the NV Karpen Cultural Scientific Foundation from Carol I National College in Craiova – will represent Romania in the December final. She welcomed the idea behind the competition. "We totally agree that young Europeans have an important message to spread within the community. Romanian teenagers are open about Europe, a fact that can be easily noticed in both their increasing self-awareness – when questioned, they seem to know a lot about the European Union and the integration of Romanians – and in the way they live their lives, taking advantage of the increased mobility that Europe brings and focusing in ever increasing numbers on key growth areas such as information technology and communication."

And the competition has revealed that there is a genuine optimism about Europe among Romanian teenagers – a growing sense that

they are part of something special. "Euro-optimism among high school teenagers is growing, especially as far as their optimistic expectations about the future prospects for travelling, studying and working in other EU countries is concerned," said Georgescu. "This optimism stems from the disappointments they encounter in their own country, and makes young people see Europe in a positive light. They are not bogged down by the political concerns of government – they prefer to see the opportunities that Europe brings, not the apparent threats."

Georgescu said that the Romanian teenagers were looking forward to competing on the European stage in December, and that they considered it "a real honour to represent a nation that is as European as any other", an indication, perhaps, that those barriers between national identity and 'Europeaness' are finally beginning to break down. <

## Eurodissey, Citizens' Forum, MYFER Award, AER Scholarship

## Off to a good start

YOUNG PEOPLE OFFER A WORLD OF POTENTIAL FOR THE FUTURE – SOMETIMES ALL THEY NEED IS A HELPING HAND TO GET THEM STARTED, AND SEVERAL AER PROGRAMMES DO JUST THAT.

The AER's Eurodissey programme was launched in 1985 by Edgar Faure, then president of the Regional Council of Franche-Comté in France, and gives young people from 18-30 a taste of the working environment through placements of three to six months in a business based in another country. In most cases, the placement also allows the young people to learn a foreign language as well, either through an intensive course ahead of the traineeship or 'on-the-job', or both. The process is highly rewarding for the students and businesses alike (see interview below). More and more AER member regions are joining the scheme – several new arrivals were presented at the Eurodissey forum on 11-13 September in the Portuguese Azores region – and the theme of this year's meeting – how professional mobility can help reinforce regional identities – underlined the key role that Eurodissey plays in the wider European policy arena. "The Eurodissey programme demonstrates how the European regions can play an important role in the development of public policies for qualification and employment," said Carlos César, president of the Azores and current Eurodissey president.



While Eurodissey is all about helping young people get some general experience of work, the AER Scholarship is all about helping one lucky individual looking to develop a potential career in regional policy. The €11,500 scholarship is awarded to a student from an AER member taking a Masters course in a topic related to regional democracy at a university in another AER region in a foreign country. The 2008 recipient is Laila Tobler from the Thurgau region in Switzerland, who will study at the University of Kent in Brussels (Brussels School of International Studies).

Besides these more overtly work-related initiatives, several other AER programmes are designed to help young people get off to a good start. The Most Youth-Friendly European Region (MYFER) Award, for example, a competition launched in 2001, highlights the European region that is doing the most to help young people in key areas such as improving living conditions, integrating young people into society and increasing their participation in public life. The 2007 competition focused on equal opportunities and intercultural dialogue, with the Romanian region of Vrancea emerging as the winner. And the Youth European Citizens Forums is a means of helping young people and regional



MYFER Award

politicians discuss EU wide issues with representatives from the European Union – a process that both informs youngsters about Europe and allows European politicians to hear what young people want and expect from European integration. Three youth forums were held in 2007, in West Sussex (UK), Alsace (F) and Silesia (PL), while a fourth, in Lower Silesia (PL) this year featured both young people and adults. Among the subjects discussed were the Lisbon treaty and EU enlargement. <

Photo: Antepirina

## Interview

## Diana Simoes

Diana Simoes is a student from the Azores taking part in the Eurodissey programme in Valencia, Spain

**AER: What are you doing as part of your placement?**

**Diana Simoes:** I had the opportunity to take part in something that I really like. I'm working for Europocket TV, a web-based TV channel. In June I started by presenting the news in Spanish each day, and in July I took part in various marketing and public relations activities, such as promoting the channel in other countries.

**AER: How has this placement been linked to your home region?**

**DS:** During my holidays I returned to the Azores and did a report on the islands for Europocket TV. This was really great, as it gave me a chance to promote my country and my islands to a wider public.

**AER: Would you recommend other young people to take part in Eurodissey?**

**DS:** I would recommend that every young person take part in this programme, because it is a great way to learn about work and about people from other countries. The work placement programme at Europocket TV was excellent, and I hope that I will be able to work with them again in the future.



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