



As President Van den Brande hoped for when delivering his opening speech, the General Assembly in Linz succeeded in paving the way towards a new AER. Thanks to the positive frame of mind and the quality of the debates, it was possible to find a consensus for a number of specific themes of importance for the future of the organisation.

With the adoption of "Strategy 2000 for the Regions of Europe", the AER will, from now on, concentrate its efforts on the promotion of regionalism and the development of cooperation networks with more pragmatism and efficiency. The reorganisation of working structures to cater for the "Strategy 2000", a balanced budget but also the addition of new colleagues will give the AER added impetus and make it more dynamic on the European scene at the offset of the XXIst century.

## editorial

Moreover, discussions with the representatives of the European institutions who were present at Linz, confirmed that the AER has a key role to play in the application of the principle of subsidiarity and in the European Union enlargement process.

In his closing speech, President Van den Brande thanked, in particular, Landeshauptmann Joseph Pühringer, and the Region of Oberösterreich, who provided the necessary conditions for a smoothly-run event which was of great importance to the AER.

The editors of the "ARE en direct-AER on line-VRE direkt" along with all the members of the General Secretariat would like to take this opportunity to express their best wishes of success for this new AER for 1999 and beyond and a very happy new year to all of you.

The editors

## >What is the role of the Regions in the Europe of the XXIst century?

At the invitation of Dr Josef Pühringer, Landeshauptmann of Oberösterreich, over 500 Presidents and representatives of the AER member Regions, met for a summit in Linz, Austria on 3rd and 4th December 1998. The meeting was chaired by Luc Van den Brande, Minister President of Vlaanderen who was re-elected President of the AER for a second two-year term. The debates were conducted on the role of the Regions in the XXIst century and their representative organisation's "Strategy 2000".

In the presence of Wolfgang Schüssel, Austrian Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, President in office of the European Union Council (EU), the representatives of the Regions highlighted the importance of applying the principle of subsidiarity on the eve of the next millenium; "in order for the Europe of tomorrow to be truly democratic and to take full account of the requests of the citizen, regionalisation and regional competencies need to thrive towards balancing the effects of globalisation" said Mr Manfred Dammeyer, President of the Committee of the Regions, during his speech.

### Putting subsidiarity into practice

"European integration and regionalism are two sides of the same coin: European integration brings together States, structures and economies; regionalism and interregional cooperation bring together communities, cultures and people." stressed President Van den Brande. "Although the subsidiarity issue has come a long way during the Austrian presidency of the EU, it is necessary to give it a new impulse in order to guarantee an institutional balance within the Union and that decisions are made closer to the citizen" concluded Mr Schüssel. The AER member Regions decided to contribute to the debates and work on implementing this principle without limiting themselves to the context of the planned institutional reform for EU enlargement or to the preparation of the next Intergovernmental Conference.

### Developing cooperation to succeed in EU enlargement

Leni Fischer, President of the Parliamentary

Assembly of the Council of Europe, when presenting the experience acquired by the Council of Europe during its enlargement, defined the EU enlargement process as a major political objective in Europe. "It is a political responsibility and a historic requirement to welcome the candidate countries within an acceptable time-scale" said Mrs Fischer. She went on to insist that the key role of the Regions and cooperation was to encourage the understanding and acceptance of the process by the citizen "Instead of introducing new regulations, the EU must support the initiatives which aim at bringing peoples closer together, especially those situated around borders".

### Promoting regional and local autonomy

Mrs Fischer also stressed the importance of local and regional autonomy for the success of the Europe of tomorrow. Claude Haegi, former President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE), contributed to the debate by launching an appeal for the Assembly of European Regions and its members to carry out initiatives within their national governments to encourage the swift adoption of the Council of Europe's draft "European Charter for Regional Self-Government", a reference document along with the AER's "Declaration on Regionalism in Europe" to promote regionalism and regionalisation in the European continent. On behalf of the AER, President Van den Brande, promised to provide the necessary support to pursue the adoption of this document, especially within the framework of the AER's "Strategy 2000"



## >Continued

### Europe with a human dimension

As highlighted by Professor Ludo Abicht of the University of Antwerp in his introduction of the debate on the role of the Regions during the next century, European integration cannot be achieved without the full support of the citizen. To avoid Europe being rejected by those who in their day-to-day life do not gain from the added value of unification, or who even resent the lack of democratic control on decision-making or the non-respect of fundamental human rights, it is inevitable that globalisation must be counterbalanced by increased interregional cooperation. "A unified Europe will become a reality of the future if we succeed in establishing a culture of unrestricted communications between citizens or the groups which truly represent them" concluded Professor Abicht.

### Allowing the media to play a linking role

The media play an essential role in European integration as the link between the politics and the citizen. During the debate on "Bringing Europe closer to the citizen: the role of the Regions and the media" which took place during the General Assembly, the journalists representing the diversity of European media, insisted that, at the moment, their task is quite easy in this field. They were somewhat critical of the type of information they receive from the European institutions. According to Mr David Shukman of the BBC, "Those responsible for European affairs must stop waffling in their discussions and take account of real experience at ground level". This kind of change in communications on Europe would, without doubt, allow for a better understanding of the impact of political decisions on the day-to-day issues concerning the citizen and to increase public interest in Europe as a whole.

The Regions, as the political level closest to the citizen, must in turn play the role of efficient spokes-person for their citizens at European level to better inform the people and take account of what they need prior to accepting European integration. "Political organisations such as the AER must concentrate their activities on showing subsidiarity in action and promoting it throughout Europe" concluded Mr Dammeyer.

AER Contact: Barbara Thauront

## >Election results

The General Assembly in Linz and the representatives of the AER's 300 member Regions unanimously re-elected **Luc Van den Brande, Minister President of Vlaanderen (Belgium) as President of the AER for the 1999-2000 period.**

Member of the Social-Christian Party (CVP), Luc Van den Brande (53 years old, Dr of Law) started his political career as a deputy in 1977. Member of the Flemish Parliament since 1980 and Senator (1992-1995), he was Federal Minister for Employment (1988-1992) and has been Minister President of the Flemish Government since 1992. Mr Van den Brande is an active promoter of regionalism and interregional cooperation as he feels they are tools for democracy and modernization. He was elected member of the AER Bureau in 1992, then Vice-President responsible for east-west cooperation in 1994.

During his first presidential mandate at the AER (1997-1998), he involved the Regions of Europe in a debate on the adoption of the new European Union Treaty (Treaty of Amsterdam), and also in the fight against unemployment and the promotion of employment. He also re-centred the AER's mission and reinforced its action with a view to strengthening its position on the European scene. A working group, "AER Strategy 2000 for the Regions" was set up at the beginning of 1998. The implementation of the results of this work, which were approved by the General Assembly in Linz, will be the central axis of President Van den Brande's second mandate: he will be assisted in this task by Otto Kretschmer, Minister of Justice and European Affairs of Thüringen (D), re-elected First Vice-President, and Claude Ruey, State Councillor of the Canton of Vaud (CH), elected Vice-President Treasurer.

Four ex officio Vice-Presidents make up part of the Presidium: Manfred Dammeyer, President of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, Jean-Claude Cauwenberghe, President of the Chamber of Regions of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe in the Council of Europe, Jordi Pujol, President of Catalunya, former President of the AER and Vannino Chiti, President of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR).

The AER also elected or re-elected its Committee Presidents and Vice-Presidents:

- Ivan Jakovcic, Councillor of Istra (HR), Co-President of the Committee on Institutional Affairs and Interregional Cooperation, in charge of East-West relations. The second Co-President will be appointed later by the AER Bureau (Committee A),

- Ragnar Kristoffersen, President of Akershus (N), President of the Committee on Social Cohesion, Public Health and Employment (Committee B),
- Robert Savy, President of Limousin (F), President of the Committee on Regional Policies (Committee C),
- Liese Prokop, Landeshauptmann-Stellvertreter of Niederösterreich (A), President of the Committee on Culture, Education and Training, Youth, Media and Sport (Committee D)
- John McDougall, Convener of Fife (GB), Vice-President responsible for CPMR relations.

Moreover, 50% of the Bureau members were newly elected. The members with special assignments are: Jean-Paul Heider, Vice-President of Alsace (F), responsible for European programmes of interregional cooperation and Lambert Van Nistelrooij, President of Noord-Brabant (NL), responsible for relations with local authorities.

### Other members of the Bureau

Aslan Abashidze (Adjara), Bruno Bracalente (Umbria), Reinhold Bocklet (Bayern), Joseph Chabert (Bruxelles-Capitale), Robert Collignon (Wallonie), Lou Coppoolse (Zeeland), Angelo Raffaele Dinardo (Basilicata), Sandor Endre (Bács-Kiskun), Johannes Flensted-Jensen (Århus), Hans Fünfschilling (Basel-Landschaft), Giancarlo Galan (Veneto), Enzo Ghigo (Piemonte), Ekzam Goubaidullin (Tatarstan), Sergiy Grynevetsky (Odessa), Dan Ivan (Arad), Margaret Johnson (West Sussex), Philipp Johnsson (Värmland), Imgvar Karlen (Uppsala), Antoine Karam (Guyane), Ilkka Karneva (Varsinais Suomi), Audrone Kneizeine (Siauliai), Csaba Kurucsai (Baranya), Christoph Leiti (Oberösterreich), Jaime Matas (Islas Baleares), John McCormack (North of England), José Maria Muñoa (Euskadi), Frank O'Kelly (Donegal), Alexei Paladi (Chisinau), Jean-Pierre Raffarin (Poitou-Charentes), Jean-François Roth (Jura), Gabriele Sikora (Nordrhein-Westfalen), Brian Smith (Wales), Sipke Swierstra (Drenthe), Adrian Taropa (Brasov), Erwin Teufel (Baden-Württemberg), Kristiane Weber-Hassemer (Hessen) and Jan Waszkiewicz (Dolnoslaskie).

In view of the departure of Mr Wolfgang Maier, Secretary General of the AER since 1992, and in the interim period before the formal election of his successor, the General Assembly entrusted Mr Hans De Belder, Plenipotentiary Representative of the AER President and President of the "Strategy" group, with the task of managing the General Secretariat from a political point of view with Mr Eric Milesi, the current Director, managing the day-to-day running and Mr Claude Ruey, Vice-President Treasurer, managing financial issues.

AER Contact: Eric Milesi

## For a Europe with the Regions

### >AER Strategy 2000 for the Regions of Europe

The resolution "AER Strategy 2000 for the Regions of Europe" was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly during the plenary session on 3rd December. This resolution entrusts the AER with two priority assignments: to lead an institutional campaign for the promotion of regionalism in Europe and to stimulate and develop interregional partnerships.

These two tasks aim at accelerating the process of European integration and regionalisation and to achieve the strategic objective of the organisation which is to construct a "Europe with the Regions". In implementing these priorities, the AER will take into account the great diversity of situations and political wishes of its member Regions, which constitutes its basic characteristic as referred to by its Statutes and by its "Declaration on Regionalism in Europe". The AER will also adapt its structures and working methods to carry out its actions pragmatically and efficiently.

#### Promotion of Regionalism

The Institutional Action Plan includes:

- the realisation of a campaign to promote the AER's "Declaration on Regionalism in Europe",
- the active monitoring of the evolution of regionalism in Europe,
- the improved position of the Regions in the European Treaties and organisations of the EU and the Council of Europe,
- leading the debate on subsidiarity,
- contributing to the next Intergovernmental Conference,
- institutional support within the national governments for the adoption of the Council of Europe's "European Charter on Regional Self-Government",
- organising itinerant regional conferences (Regional Caravans),
- giving AER's patronage to partners in regionalism,
- structurally organising AER's cooperation with the other interregional and local organisations.

#### Developing interregional cooperation

The AER will promote regionalisation wherever it affects the citizen's life in the Regions through networking. To do this, the AER will offer its services through a well equipped system of databases; it will also organise transfers of experience, knowledge, information and skills by working increasingly with self-financing initiatives. This formula of self-management and self-financing partnership projects will be coordinated by the AER General Secretariat and will be promoted in all priority areas of sectoral activities of the Regions.

These activities will include:

- institutional issues and EU enlargement, Agenda 2000 and basic current political issues. The AER will encourage cooperation between its members as well as the necessary involvement of them in European policy so that the impact thereof can be taken into account more effectively;
- networking between AER members and all regional aspects of life in the XXIst century.

#### Taking part in the enlargement process

The AER will defend the interests of the Regions (and of AER itself) in the framework of the EU enlargement process, paying special attention to the contributions as well as to the needs of the Regions therein. In this framework, the AER shall:

- operate as an efficient system for the transfer of know-how and information to its members,
- upgrade its Summer School and make sure that more western European Regions participate in its future development,
- extend and intensify the Centurio programme by taking care of appropriate follow-up measures,
- encourage all forms of partnership projects between Regions from eastern, central and western Europe and EU programmes,
- organise, in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions, the conference on "The contribution of the Regions to the EU enlargement process" (see *article opposite*).

#### Adapting the structures of the AER

In view of the established priority assignments, the AER will adapt the structures as necessary, ie:

- Committees I and II will merge to deal with the promotion of institutional regionalism and EU enlargement;
- Committees IV, V and VI will continue on their present remits;
- the General Assembly, through the Bureau, will at times give political priority to important issues,
- an intensive use of the "working groups" formula (with a variable composition, operating on the basis of a specific mandate, calendar, budget,

### "The Regions' contribution to EU enlargement" - AER Conference -

The General Assembly confirmed the AER Bureau's intention to organise a conference on the role of the Regions in EU enlargement. This conference could take place over two days in Wroclaw, in September or October 1999 (*to be confirmed*). In accordance with the proposals presented by the AER Presidium, it will deal with the following themes:

- Regions and the principle of subsidiarity,
- Evolution of regionalism in candidate countries,
- Participation of the Regions in pre-accession and accession,
- Creation of east/west partnerships within the AER.

Workshops on specific themes will be organised to target debates and involve participants; their conclusions will then be discussed during the plenary session.

The organisation of an exchange forum will increase existing partnerships and encourage the creation of new networks. The objective is to support the enlargement process and to reinforce the AER's role in interregional cooperation. The AER member Regions, senior EU (Commission, Parliament, CoR) and Council of Europe (Parliamentary Assembly, CLRAE) representatives as well as NGO and representatives from the economic and social sectors will also be involved in this event.

Contacts are currently being made with the CoR, CLRAE and the CEMR who have expressed their wish for this to be a joint initiative.

**AER Contact:** Laura de Rose

self-financing and with preliminary agreements on the use of languages and of staff);

- a concentration of staff and budgetary resources on the top priorities established in the "Strategy 2000";
- the optimisation of political activity of the Presidium, Bureau and General Assembly;
- streamlining cooperation between the Committees and the Bureau so that fruitful political dialogue can develop within the AER itself;
- improving internal structures and working methods of the AER General Secretariat.

**AER Contact:** Hans De Belder  
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*This article is based on the resolution "AER Strategy 2000 for the Regions of Europe" which is available on request from the General Secretariat.*



## > Other resolutions

The AER General Assembly unanimously adopted the resolutions and opinions put forward by the different Committees:

### Committee on Institutional Issues

- Resolution on the creation of European information centres for the promotion of regionalism,
- Resolution on minorities.

### Committee on Regional Policies

- Resolution concerning European Commission proposals for consistency between Structural Funds and state aid areas,
- Resolution on the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP),
- Resolution on the reform of trans-European networks,
- Resolution on the European Urban Agenda,
- Resolution on sustainable rural development.

### Committee on Culture, Education and Training, Youth, Media and Sport

- Opinion on the "Culture 2000" programme and "Youth"
- Resolution against violence in the media,
- Resolution on twinning between the regions of central and eastern Europe and Regions of the EU,
- Resolution on regional and minority languages,
- Resolution concerning decision-making on European Commission projects.

On the proposal of the Region of Oberösterreich, the General Assembly also adopted a resolution against the death penalty.

All these resolutions and opinions were sent to the European institutions concerned.

**AER Contacts:** Laura de Rose and Franz-Josef Stummann

## > Stop press

The Internet site for EEP-Pacte has been up and running since the middle of December 1998. This site is accessible to all who wish to find out more about the experience exchange projects which have been carried out over the last ten years through the European programme run by the EIG Pacte (AER and CEMR). This site can be found under Inforegio, the European Commission DG XVI site: <http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/pacte/>

**AER Contact:** Brigitte Fiorucci

## Progress report on regionalism in Europe

At the end of 1998, the AER Committee on Institutional issues produced the 2nd edition of the Synoptic Tables on "The progress of Regionalism in Europe". This new edition, which was introduced in the preface by Mr José Maria Muñoz-Ganuza, President of the working group "AER Declaration on Regionalism in Europe", includes seventeen countries: Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Spain, France,

Hungary, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom and the Ukraine. These tables help us to understand and compare the different regional systems which exist and to evaluate the progress of regionalisation. It also gives information on recent or on-going reforms in a certain number of countries.

**AER Contact:** Laura de Rose or Stéphanie Evans

## "Visiting Cards" 1999

Preparations for the re-edition of the AER directory "Visiting Cards" will be finished during the first quarter of 1999. Over 200 Regions have already returned their completed forms for this purpose. Any members who have not yet returned their forms are requested to do so as soon as possible. It will be extremely difficult to integrate any additional changes after 31st January 1999. As we informed you previously, this edition will include publicity for the first time offering Regions and their

economic partners the opportunity to put forward their institutional messages. The company "Recherches et Communication" which has been entrusted with this task, is currently in the research stage of its work to find potential advertisers. We would like to thank all members in advance for helping to make this project a success.

**AER Contact:** Barbara Thauront or Francine Huhardeaux



## diary

### FEBRUARY

**ARE, Committee A (Institutional affairs and interregional cooperation) Working group on Minorities Harghita (RO)**  
(date to be confirmed)

Monday 8th to Friday 12th  
**European Parliament, Plenary session**  
Strasbourg (F)

Friday 12th (afternoon)  
**AER, Presidium**  
Brussels (B)

Wednesday 24th and Thursday 25th  
**European Parliament, Plenary session**  
Brussels (B)

### MARCH

Monday 8th to Friday 12th  
**European Parliament, Plenary session**  
Strasbourg (F)

Wednesday 10th to Thursday 11th  
**Committee of the Regions, Bureau and Plenary Assembly**  
Brussels (B)

Thursday 18th and Friday 19th  
**AER, Committee C (Regional policies, territorial planning, infrastructures, the environment, tourism)**  
Västerbotten (S)

Wednesday 24th and Thursday 25th  
**European Parliament, Plenary session**  
Brussels (B)

### APRIL

Monday 12th to Friday 16th  
**European Parliament, Plenary session**  
Strasbourg (F)

Monday 19th and Tuesday 20th  
**AER, Committee D (Culture, education and training, youth, media, sport)**  
Nyborg-Fyn (DK)

Monday 26th to Friday 30th  
**Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, 2nd part of the session**  
Strasbourg (F)

**AER Contact:** Francine Huhardeaux



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