



editorial

The regions of central and eastern Europe have a major role to play in the enlargement process. This role can only be successful if these regions are well prepared for European integration. Consequently, they should have democratically elected and run institutions and benefit from adequate training and information in order to understand better the European mechanisms and to have access to EU programmes.

The EU member regions can offer help and advice in all these areas. Thanks to their experience, they can contribute to democratisation, to the development of cooperation and to the training of regional officers.

The regions of eastern and western Europe must work together to ensure the smooth-running of this process. Exchanges of experience, transfers of know-how, interregional partnerships and crossborder cooperation are vitally important elements for the construction of a Europe of tomorrow which the citizens can accept.

The AER offers a forum, perfectly adapted to encourage European integration through dialogue within its structures, its own training programmes or networks for exchanging experience. Its activities also lead to reinforcing regionalism in the candidate countries as the Europe of the third millennium must be a Europe of the regions.

Luc Van den Brande
President of the AER
Minister-President
of Vlaanderen

>The Regions play an important role in promoting Employment

Luc Van den Brande, President of the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and Minister-President of Vlaanderen, contributed to the debate on "Regions and Employment - Contribution to Social Cohesion in Europe" which took place during the session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (27th May 1998 in Strasbourg). He highlighted the crucial role played by the regions in the field of employment and in socioeconomic development.

Help for SMEs

The work carried out by the AER has shown that, despite the major differences in competencies, the regions carry out active policies and innovative actions in this area, in harmony with the work of the European and national authorities and social partners. In particular, they take initiatives to support the creation, development and continuing growth of SMEs, which are largely dependent on their regional roots, and develop research on labour-market prospectives in order to evaluate better the local needs.

Training programmes

A large number of actions have also been carried out to stimulate the labour-market through the development of services, vocational training tools or programmes (which increase opportunities for professional integration, especially for target-groups such as the long-term unemployed, young people and women) or the promotion of a new organisation of labour and new types of work (social economy, re-integration structures, part-time work or distance working).

President Van den Brande also stressed the importance of exchanging data, information and experience between regions to encourage

job creation in Europe. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the regional authorities have responsibilities in the field of employment and should have relevant data and analyses to reinforce their policies and actions for promoting employment.

Need for a prospective outlook

The AER, which re-groups 300 member regions, from inside and outside the European Union, will pursue the task of collecting and analysing the regions' contributions to the promotion of employment which was launched during the extraordinary Bureau meeting which took place in Bruges in October 1997.

The President invited all the European regions to contribute to this initiative and confirmed the decision, made by the AER, to create a permanent Observation Centre for Employment for the regions of Europe. The task of this centre will be to carry out an analysis on labour-market prospectives in the regions of Europe and to conduct exchanges of experience on a methodological basis.

The AER's complete report on "Regions and employment", a summarised version and President Van den Brande's speech are available in French and in English from the AER information service.

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The Amsterdam Treaty

> *Ratification in progress*

The Amsterdam Treaty is currently being ratified by the member States. Following in the footsteps of Germany (March 98), Finland, Italy and Sweden (April 98), the United Kingdom, Denmark, Ireland, Luxemburg and Austria should ratify the Treaty before the summer and the other Union members during the autumn. In some countries, the Treaty can only be ratified if positive referenda results are achieved.

Involvement of the regions in the ratification process of the Treaty varies from country to country. The regions of federal States are obviously the most concerned but regions from certain centralised States have also made their opinions known.

In Austria and Germany, for example, the chamber representing the Länder must give its approval before international treaties can be ratified. In Belgium, prior approval of the regional and municipal assemblies is needed. The French regions, the Spanish autonomous communities, the Dutch provinces and the local authorities in the United Kingdom do not take part in the ratification process. The Finnish Parliament consulted the Association of Local Authorities for their opinion and the Swedish Government consulted the association which represents the counties in Sweden.

AER Contact: Eric Milesi

The Labour Government, elected in May 1997, came to power committed to wide-ranging constitutional reform. Its programme included decentralisation of power by the establishment of a Parliament in Scotland, an Assembly in Wales, an elected Mayor and strategic authority for London, and, over a longer timescale, devolution of power for the regional level in England.

Highest priority is being given to the creation of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, where the demand for decentralisation is of long standing. The Government's proposals were approved by referenda in Scotland and Wales last autumn. Legislation to create the two institutions, currently being discussed by Parliament, will be enacted during this year. Elections are scheduled for next spring and these institutions will be operational from January 2000.

Scotland would therefore have a Parliament of 129 members, elected every four years by proportional representation.

The Parliament would operate on the Westminster model, electing a First Minister who would head an Executive.

The Parliament and Executive would have responsibility for most aspects of domestic, economic and social policy, and the United Kingdom Parliament would retain control of foreign affairs, defence and national security, macro-economic and fiscal matters, employment and social security.

The Scottish Parliament would be funded by a block grant from the UK Government but would have power to increase or decrease the basic rate of income tax set by the UK Parliament by up to 3 pence in the pound.

It is proposed that Wales have an Assembly of 60 members, also elected by proportional representation. It will have extensive executive powers and may make secondary legislation. It will operate through committees, whose leading members will constitute an Executive Committee. It will be funded by a block grant and will have no powers of taxation. In parallel, local authorities will be given new powers.

In England, the demand for directly elected regional government varies considerably across the country and therefore the Government does not intend to impose a uniform system. In the first instance, it is legislating to create Regional Development Agencies which will cooperate with regional representatives of central government and regional chambers set up by local authorities. In the longer term, the Government will consider legislating to allow the people of England, region by region, to decide in a referendum whether they want a directly elected regional government.

London is made up of 33 borough councils, set up following the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1986. The Government has consulted on proposals to create a strategic authority and a mayor, both directly elected, to take responsibility for London-wide issues (economy, transport, the environment etc.) These proposals will be put to the people of London in a referendum.

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AER Activities : March-May 98

"Declaration on Regionalism"

The General Secretariat sent the Declaration to the European public institutions then a hundred copies were sent to each member region at the end of April. Action proposals were sent with the Declaration to encourage a widespread distribution of this reference text, at regional and national level. In all, 30 000 copies were distributed in the 18 different languages.

Centurio 98

This year's Centurio programme has now been launched. The regions of western Europe are invited to offer placements from within their administrations to political or administrative officers from the regions of central and eastern Europe. The coordinators will then endeavour to match the requests with the offers, naturally taking account of the linguistic aspects. The introduction seminar will take place in Erfurt on 25th July 1998 during the AER Summer School session.

Regional Agenda 2000

The AER "Strategy and perspectives" group met three times since it was set up by the Bureau of 13th February 1998 and was chaired by Mr Hans de Belder. Its task is to draw up a regional Agenda 2000 on the AER's activities for the coming years. This Agenda, presented at the Bureau meeting (11th and 12th June 1998), will be submitted to the General Assembly in Linz on 3rd and 4th December.

Meetings

Three AER Committee meetings:

Committee VI (Exeter, 30th and 31st March), Committee IV (Székesfehérvár, 24th April) and Committee II (Stockholm, 4th and 5th May). See *opposite*

Presidium Meeting (Brussels, 14th May)
Preparation and exchanges of view points on the decisions to be taken by the Bureau (Strasbourg, 11th and 12th June)

Other events

AER participation in the Plenary Assembly of the Committee of the Regions (Brussels, 13th and 14th May).

East-West Cooperation

> *Preparing the regions for EU enlargement*

Committee II met on 4th and 5th May 1998 in Stockholm (S), at the invitation of Mrs Tallberg, President of the region, and chaired by Mr Jakovcic (Istra). Two motions put forward by the working group on EU enlargement were approved by all the participants. These motions were prepared by the regions of Essex (GB) and Brasov (RO), and concern democratisation in the regions of the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) and the role of the regions in the enlargement process. They stress the importance of decentralisation, interregional cooperation, training for regional leaders and information for a successful European integration.

The conclusions of the second working group - reinforcing the CEEC regions' participation in European programmes - highlighted the need to involve the political regional level in the enlargement process and, in particular, in the adoption of Community "acquis". The CEEC regions must be able to obtain information on priority actions

and on successful regional examples. To this end, the working group has proposed establishing two information tools for the regions:

- a data base which would help to identify and analyse the problems experienced by the regions and then provide information on regional expertise;
- a guide/hand-book on European programmes, adapted to the needs of the regions.

The terms of reference for these two projects will be available at the next Committee meeting.

During the meeting, the region of Stockholm presented an example of a successful east-west cooperation around the Baltic Sea. This example shows the diversity of those involved (ie, political and economic bodies, NGOs and citizens) and contributes to the development of local democracy and economy (*a specific article on this will be published in the next edition*).

AER Contact: Franz Josef Stummann

Social and employment affairs

> *The need for interregional action*

Committee IV met in Székesfehérvár (H) on 23rd and 24th April, under the presidency of Mr van Nistelrooij (Noord-Brabant) and adopted the employment policy proposed by the committee's Vice-President, Mrs Palmcrantz (Dalarna). This strategy is based on the follow-up and evaluation of regional policies for employment and the labour market at interregional level. Existing data in this area is either incomplete or disjointed. The regional

authorities which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, have responsibilities in the field of the promotion of employment, must have the relevant data and analyses to back up their policies. The AER will continue to gather statistics and information on good regional practices during 1998. This information will serve as a working basis for the AER's Regional Observation Centre for Employment and will encourage exchanges of experience.

During the meeting, Mr van Nistelrooij stressed the social dimension of unemployment. Despite the structural differences between the regions of Europe, unemployment causes psychological problems for individuals and groups. The regional politicians must offer suitable solutions and a European social action plan, especially for those excluded from society, should be proposed.

AER Contact: Franz Josef Stummann

Education and training

> *Creating partnerships and networks*

Committee VI, met in Exeter (GB) on 30th and 31st March 1998, under the presidency of Mrs Prokop (Niederösterreich), and decided to concentrate on the themes of employment and EU enlargement (the priority actions fixed by the Bureau of Brussels).

Concerning the promotion of employment, the Committee decided to continue its study entitled "Unemployment and employment for young people in the regions of Europe" which should, in particular, help to identify the solutions adapted at regional level. Moreover,

the regions of Istra (HR) and Caras-Severin (RO) were asked to lead work on the theme of "Culture and employment".

In order to contribute to the European integration of CEEC regions, the Committee will be holding a number of seminars, following in the footsteps of the seminar in Miskolc (H) in April of last year. Objective: to encourage the creation of partnerships in the field of education and training and to form networks, in particular in the area of east-west cooperation.

The Committee will also take part in the conference on "Eastern Europe: a strategy

for safeguarding cultural diversity", to be held in Vienna (A) on 12th and 13th November 1998 by the Europe of Cultures 2002 Foundation.

Other decisions made: participation in the Committee of the Regions Colloquium on the establishment of a European cultural policy (26th June 1998) in order to support the AER's position in this field and to prepare a conference of regional cultural ministers in 1999.

AER Contact: Franz-Josef Stummann or Doris Materne

350 years of the Treaty of Westphalia

The Treaty of Westphalia celebrates its 350th anniversary in 1998. The Treaty, which brought an end to the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), stipulated a new peace order in Europe and paved the way for modern times by establishing the precedents for European construction. New ideas appeared, such as the introduction of diplomacy and negotiation.

Peace in Westphalia was based on three fundamental principles: the liberty of religion (recognition of Protestantism alongside Catholicism), pacte policies (the possibility to create alliances between States) and the securing of a peace order in Europe.

This definition of new Community regulations and an outline for international rights are still relevant today for the European continent which relies, now more than ever, on these principles.

The AER gives its full support to this celebration of democracy, notably by holding its Committee I meeting in Münster (D) at the beginning of June.

>Financial aid for candidate countries

At the end of March 98, the European Commission approved the pre-accession regulation concerning financial aid for the ten candidate countries for their integration into the Union. The amount of funds available is 10.92 billion ECU for the period from 2000 to 2006.

Pre-accession financial aid for agriculture

This fund, which will be in addition to the contributions made by the States themselves, is designed to help the candidate countries to modernise their agricultural sector and to integrate Community "acquis" for Common Agricultural Policy issues, at the time of joining. The amount of funds available is 520 million ECU per year for the ten countries (3.64 billion over seven years).

To benefit from this financial aid, each country must provide the Commission with a multiannual plan for rural development, at the latest six months after the regulation has been introduced. This will define actions aimed at improving market efficiency, quality and hygiene norms, measures for protecting the environment and job creation in rural areas.

The Union's contribution will be financed by EAGGF (Guarantee Section) and cannot exceed 75% of public spending. Moreover, the total amount of financial aid for each country will be fixed using strict criteria such as the agricultural population, the agricultural surface, the GDP per inhabitant and the specific territorial situation.

Pre-accession Structural Instrument

Financial aid will be made available through a pre-accession structural instrument - PSI - aimed at improving

infrastructures and transport and the integration of Community "acquis" on environmental issues (7.28 billion ECU between 2000 and 2006). This fund will be available for projects with a minimum investment of 5 million ECU and cannot exceed 85% of public spending. The available financial aid (1.04 million ECU per year) will be shared between the ten countries using three criteria: the population, the GDP per inhabitant and the countries' ground surface.

The key role of the Phare programme

These two instruments are a financial complement to the Phare programme. The total amount available through Phare is 10.5 billion ECU for the period from 2000 to 2006, ie, 1.5 billion ECU per year for a period of ten years. This programme, which was reviewed by the European Council of Luxembourg (December 1997), will follow two main objectives: To reinforce the administrative and legal potential (approx. 30% of the total amount), and to reinforce investments linked to the application of the Community "acquis" (approx. 70%).

The Commission also approved the draft regulation on the coordination of the three pre-accession instruments in order to avoid overlapping with the work carried out by the other European and international institutions (EIB, EBRD, IMF...).

The pre-accession instruments will be implemented through accession partnerships, signed at the end of March 1998 with each candidate country. These instruments define the priorities for each country, the objectives to be pursued in the short and medium terms and the conditions for aid from the Union.

AER Contact: Barbara Thauront and Brigitte Fiorucci



internet

<http://ue.eu.int>

The European Council's site allows you to obtain up-to-date information on the Council's decisions, especially in the areas of the enlargement of the Union and the work schedule of the Presidency in office.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg1a/enlarge/access_partnership/index.htm

This site, on the European Commission's Europa server, provides documentation on the establishment of accession partnerships between the European Union and the ten candidate countries: Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg1a/phare.html>

This site on the Europa server provides information on the Phare programme: principles, objectives, priority areas, organisation and management. Specific developments have been assigned to three types of programme: crossborder cooperation, multilateral cooperation and horizontal programmes, with the presentation of eligible actions, selection criteria, application forms and selection tables.

http://www.inforegio.org/future/regul_fr.htm

This DG XVI (regional policy and cohesion) Commission site provides information on proposed regulations for the Structural Funds (2000-2006).

>Ecos-Ouverture: Call for proposals - 1998 to 2000

The European Commission (DG 1A) launched a call for proposals at the end of April 1998 for the Ecos-Ouverture programme (1998-2000). The eligible projects should be based around three themes:

- Working methods and tools used by local and regional authorities (evolving strategies for developing a local or regional area, with particular reference to the enlargement process, improving urban or rural services by using computer technology...),
- Modernisation and development of small and medium-sized enterprises (setting up support services, women entrepreneurs...),

- Protecting and enhancing the environment (management of natural areas, pollution control, management of waste disposal and disposal of used water, energy saving...),

- Economic improvement of the urban or rural community with a view to creating or maintaining long-term employment.

The funding available for this programme, for the above mentioned period, amounts to 45 million ECU (30 million from ERDF and 15 million from Phare).

The deadline for submitting projects is **15th November 1998**. The DG 1A has set up a partnership convention aimed at helping project leaders to improve the

distribution of information, and make it easier for them to meet with Commission officers and members of the technical offices. This should facilitate the process of validating and controlling projects and the search for partners.

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> *The reform of the Structural Funds is launched*

On 18th March 1998, the European Commission tabled its proposals for Structural Fund Regulations applicable from 2000 to 2006 which are fully in line with the ideas specified in the "Agenda 2000". These proposals were sent to the EU Council and the European Parliament, for their adoption in the beginning of 1999.

The Commission plans to consolidate the budgetary effort in favour of a political structure of up to 218.4 billion euros (1999 prices).

Concentration of aid

The seven current objectives will be reduced to three in the year 2000.

Objective 1, which concerns the regions whose development is lagging behind (GDP per capita is less than 75% of the Community average), now to include the outermost regions or those with extremely low population density, will receive two-thirds of the total structural funds and will cover approximately 20% of the total population of the Union.

Objective 2, which supports the regions in economic and social conversion (industrial and rural areas), will now include urban areas in difficulties and fisheries areas (approximately 18% of the population of the Community of which 10% is industrial). Eligible areas must meet certain criteria, such as: an unemployment rate above the European average, low population density, a high level of poverty etc. The eligible areas will be submitted by the member States on the basis of population ceilings then

the Commission will draw up a list for each State.

Objective 3 supports the adaptation and modernisation of education, training and employment systems throughout the Community and is to serve as a reference framework for all human resources operations in the Union.

Transitional support and reinforced efficiency

The reform envisages a transitional assistance mechanism for regions still eligible under Objectives 1 and 2 but will no longer be in 2000 (6 years, in general for Objective 1 and 4 years for Objective 2).

10% of the total budget for the Structural Funds will be kept in reserve until 2003, then allocated to programmes with a satisfactory level of performance.

Funds will be divided as follows:

- Objective 1: ERDF, ESF, FEOGA-O, FIGG (future structural funds)
- Objective 2: ERDF, ESF, EAGGF-G (which is not a structural fund), FIGG,
- Objective 3: ESF.

Simplified and decentralised implementation

The programming will start on 1st January 2000. A mid-term evaluation has been planned with, should the case arise, a possible allocation of the performance reserve. For Objectives 1 and 2, the Commission recommends the implementation of one programme or one

single programming document (SPD) per eligible region, for Objective 3, one SPD per member State. Procedures will also be simplified to guarantee a clearer division of responsibilities between the national, regional and local authorities and the Commission.

Several member States, where the regions will no longer be eligible under Objectives 1 and 2, have asked the Commission to provide efficient transitory measures. In the United Kingdom, for example, if the new criteria is correctly applied, 80% of the population currently covered by assistance for industrial and rural areas, risk becoming uneligible under the new Objective 2.

Flexibility in the definition of eligible areas

Mr Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission has assured member States that a "safety net" will be envisaged to avoid a large number of regions from one member State becoming uneligible under the new Objective 2: the reduction should not exceed 30% in any member State. Furthermore, the definition of eligible areas will be flexible and the regions which are no longer eligible will benefit from a transitional period of six years under Objective 1 and four year under Objective 2.

For further informaton: Internet site http://www.inforegio.org/future/regul_fr.htm or Fax: +32 2 230 49 15.

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European Structural Funds today Reminder

There are currently three different structural funds:

- the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which assists regions whose development is lagging behind, mainly concerns productive investment, infrastructures and SME development;
- the European Social Fund (ESF), which concentrates on professional training and facilitating integration into the labour market;
- the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF-Guidance) which supports agricultural conversion and rural development actions; includes also the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIGG).

These are intended for the following objectives:

- **Objective 1:** restructuring regions whose development is lagging behind,
- **Objective 2:** converting regions seriously affected by industrial decline,
- **Objective 3:** combatting long-term unemployment and facilitating the integration into working life of young people and of persons excluded from the labour market,
- **Objective 4:** facilitating the adaptation of workers to industrial changes and changes in production systems,
- **Objective 5a:** adjustment of agricultural structures and fisheries,
- **Objective 5b:** facilitating the development and structural adjustment of rural areas,
- **Objective 6:** promoting the development of regions with an extremely low population density.

The total allocation for the period 1994 to 1999 is 163 billion ECU. This is over double the allocation available for the previous

period (64 billion ECU between 1989 and 1993). The same goes for the 1997 budget when the structural funds allocation came to 28.620 billion ECU, or 34.75% of the total European Union budget (82.365 billion ECU). This was therefore the second highest budgetary item, after the common agricultural policy (40.805 billion ECU or 49.5% of the total budget).

The increase in financial means available through the structural funds can be seen as a strong commitment to the cohesion policy. It remains to be seen whether the EU is capable of continuing, beyond 1999, along the same lines with increasing needs and in view of the enlargement towards the east. There is a need for an indepth reform of all the EU finances. Its orientations have been presented by the Commission in the "Agenda 2000" (July 1997) as well as a proposed reform of the structural funds.

commentary

Enlargement and decentralisation

Csaba Kurucsai

"It was on 31st March 1998 when the accession negotiations started between Hungary and the European Union. Eight years after the political changes this event is of historic importance as the accession negotiations, together with the signing of the pre-accession Partnership contract, represent the greatest historical challenge of modern Hungarian history. The experts of the central government and those of the counties have been preparing for these discussions for years. The Agenda 2000 mentions Hungary as one of the most developed democracies of central and eastern Europe. This favourable opinion, however, does not make us immodest.

For me, the most important areas of the accession negotiations are regionalism and regionalization. The present Self-Government Act has conferred the basic principles of self-governing onto the municipality level and, in contrast with European practice, has assigned weak competencies and powers to counties, the level immediately below central government. Therefore the presidents of the Hungarian counties were more than glad that the European Charter of Regional Self-Government has been accepted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and supported by the Parliamentary Assembly.

It is our fundamental interest that the Charter be adopted widely and that it become a Convention. We are convinced that this will accelerate governmental

centralisation, not only in Hungary but also in the new democracies of eastern Europe, and would guarantee the institutional development of a Europe of the Regions.

I began writing with my thoughts related to the Euro-Atlantic accession of my country. You might ask me what the connection between the adoption of the European Charter of Regional Self-Government and the Hungarian accession is. First of all, it is our strong belief that at the beginning of the new millennium we could become a member of a Union characterised by regionalism. Therefore, I would like to take this chance to initiate - together with all the European regions - a movement aimed at the quick adoption of the Charter and its integration into the national legislation of the member states."

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Employment and the regions

> Creation of a data base

Four regions which have experienced the severe restructuring of their economic activities - Tampere (FIN), Haute-Normandie (F), Knowsley and Merseyside (GB) - took part in an "Employment Policies in European Regions" (EPERE) project through the Pacte programme. The aim of this project was to compile a list of innovative regional actions in favour of employment and to find solutions to enhance the regions' capacity to set up the necessary strategies.

This exchange of information, ideas and experience has resulted in the publication of a report. This document presents the

problems linked to employment, met by the regions concerned, and the consequent solutions and outlines the results of the project for the whole of Europe.

The subsequent development of this interregional cooperation has led to the creation of an interactive site on the Internet - <http://www.reg.fi/epere/> - which makes the results of the project accessible and encourages regional exchanges of experience in the field of employment which could become a veritable electronic data base.

Contact: <http://www.reg.fi/epere/>

The Mediterranean

> Action for the prevention of fires

The regions of Sicilia (town of Catania), Gelderland (town of Apeldoorn), Catalunya (town of Manresa), Ionioi Nissoi (town of Poros) set up a network for the exchange of experience on the theme of forest fires. Its objective: to increase the security of the inhabitants, reduce financial losses and prevent destruction of the environment.

The participants of the network exchanged information on their respective organisational structures as well as the means of communication available, which were evaluated for efficiency. New coordination and

communication techniques were taught to the Mediterranean partners.

A demonstration was carried out on the use of an instrument which measures inflammability, on fire prevention and surveillance methods using aeroplanes and on methods for measuring risk factors. With current technical and human resources a forest fire can be stopped in approximately 10 minutes.

This is a perfect example of concrete technical cooperation where the local and regional authorities work together to find common solutions.

Contact: Brigitte Fiorucci

The Danube Delta

> The need for greater cooperation

In February 1998, in Ismail (Ukraine), a colloquium was held following a joint initiative of the region of Odessa and the Council of Europe, on the development of crossborder cooperation between the local and regional authorities of the Republics of Moldavia, Romania and the Ukraine.

The different delegations present recognised the need to set up a cooperation between the regions of the lower Danube, in the areas of economic development, social affairs, education, culture, sport, tourism and the environment, especially in view of the European integration process.

In the Final Declaration of this meeting, they asked their respective governments:

- to initiate action aimed at implementing a trilateral protocol for cooperation, signed by the three countries,
- to reinforce the rights of ethnic minorities and crossborder regions in accordance with national and European legislation,
- to improve infrastructures, to establish common policies to aid the circulation of populations and to encourage the creation of free zones.

Moreover, an appeal for assistance, for the promotion of the regional cooperation of these three countries, was sent to the Council of Europe.

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> Progress report on interregional cooperation between the AER member regions

The region of Alsace (F), responsible for "interregional cooperation" within the AER, has just published the results of a study carried out in 1997 among the member regions which are active in this area. A progress report has been drawn up using the results of this study to determine the difficulties encountered and to present the members' opinions on their specific needs.

After analysing these results, we can see that, in current cooperation projects, the emphasis is in four areas:

- cooperation with regions of central and eastern Europe (Phare, Tacis Twinning City, Ecos-Ouverture);
- education and training (Leonardo, Socrates);
- exchange of experience (Pacte);
- crossborder cooperation (Interreg).

The priority areas of interest for the development of this cooperation are: agriculture, culture, social affairs, energy, the environment, the economy and the exchange of experience.

The regions of central and eastern Europe have expressed their strong commitment despite difficulties in implementing the projects. Several problems have been highlighted concerning EU programmes, such as the complexity of procedures, the late allocation of funds, the deadlines for submission being too short, the lack of transparency or information on the financial mechanisms, lengthy decision-making etc.

The regions also stress the lack of support, especially financial, on the part of the State and the difficulties in finding partners. Among other shortcomings the following were also mentioned: the diversity of administrative, legal and fiscal structures, the complexity and lengthy administrative steps and customs formalities, linguistic and financial problems in general.

To improve this situation, the members suggest that a more precise definition of the competencies of the institutions which manage interregional cooperation be introduced. They also suggest that there be fewer formalities and more exchanges of experience. Great importance is attached to improving access to information on cooperation and on EU programmes. It is also felt that instruction procedures for the dossiers should be clarified and the decision-making process should be shorter.

Members see the AER's role as a forum for diffusing information in this area and for providing assistance for setting up projects and seeking partners. A project of this type, which envisages the implementation of an experimental phase on east-west cooperation to be carried out within Committee II, has just been submitted to the AER Bureau.

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notebook

Regional Election Results

Austria

Mrs Liese Prokop, President of the AER's Committee VI, was re-elected Vice-Minister President (Landeshauptmann-Stellvertreter) of Niederösterreich, during the March 1998 elections.

France

The French elected their new regional councillors for a six-year term. These councillors then went on to elect the Presidents of the 26 French regions.

Re-elected Presidents:

Alsace : Adrien Zeller
Auvergne : Valéry Giscard d'Estaing
Basse-Normandie : René Garrec
Corse : Jean Baggioni (Executive Council)
Guadeloupe : Lucette Michaux-Chevry
Guyane : Antoine Karam
Languedoc-Roussillon : Jacques Blanc
Limousin : Robert Savy
Lorraine : Gérard Longuet
Picardie : Charles Baur

Poitou-Charentes : Jean-Pierre Raffarin
Rhône-Alpes : Charles Millon

Newly elected Presidents

Aquitaine : Alain Rousset
Bretagne : Josselin de Rohan
Bourgogne : Jean-Pierre Soisson
Centre : Michel Sapin
Champagne-Ardenne : Jean-Claude Etienne
Corse : José Rossi (Assembly)
Franche-Comté : Jean-François Humbert
Haute-Normandie : Alain Le Vern
Ile-de-France : Jean-Paul Huchon
Martinique : Alfred Marie-Jeanne
Midi-Pyrénées : Martin Malvy
Nord-Pas-de-Calais : Michel Delebarre
Pays de la Loire : François Fillon
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur : Michel Vauzelle
La Réunion : Paul Vergès

Switzerland

Mr Claude Ruey, President of the AER's Committee I, was re-elected as State Councillor for the Canton of Vaud during the March elections.

Safety across Europe

The Committee IV working group on "Safety across Europe" has decided to concentrate its activities on the projects listed below. Any member regions interested in taking part are invited to contact the project coordinators concerned as soon as possible. Some of these projects will be putting forward requests for Community funding (deadline:15/9/98).

1) Officer Exchange Programme "Accident prevention, health care, conflict mediation, etc."

Contact: Paul Phillips (Hertfordshire)
Tel: +44 1992 55 56 11
Fax: +44 1992 55 56 14

2) Accident Registration and Health Profiling

Contacts:
Rustan Ekeroth (Skaraborg)
Tel: +46 501 623 71
Fax: +46 501 623 50

Arvid Wangberg (Østfold)
Tel: +46 69 117 000
Fax: +46 69 117 061
E-mail: arw@adm.ostfold.f-kommune.no

3) Accident Prevention among the young

Contact: Bo Simonsson (Västmanland)
Tel: +46 21 174 538
Fax: +46 21 174 509
E-mail: bo.simonsson@ltvastmanland.se

4) Conflict mediation and Violence in the Home

Contact: Arvid Wangberg
(see point 2 above)

5) Assistance for the elderly and Prevention of accidents, etc.

Contact: Jef Mostinckx (Vlaanderen)
Tel: +32 2 507 33 24
Fax: +32 2 507 34 19
E-mail: jozef.mostinckx@vlaanderen.be

6) Suicide

Contact: Jörgen Eriksson (Västerbotten)
Tel: +46 90 785 71 72
Fax: +46 90 713 65 70



> *Oberösterreich to host the 1998 General Assembly*

Following the invitation of the Landeshauptmann Dr Joseph Pühringer, the region of Oberösterreich (Austria) will be hosting the 1998 AER General Assembly on 3rd and 4th December. This Assembly will elect, notably, the AER President and the Bureau for the next two years. As well as institutional and statutory issues, the member regions reunited at this summit, are invited to discuss the important issues of: "The Challenges for the Europe of the XXIst Century". Two workshops or round tables, specifically concerning the problems linked to the enlargement process and employment, could help to prepare interesting exchanges with our institutional partners and representatives during the plenary session. This idea is currently being discussed within the AER Committees. The objective is to make this Summit not only a venue for gathering ideas but also a forum for exchanges and debates with the decision-makers of the European Union and the candidate countries.

The region of Oberösterreich proposes to issue a "Job Award" during this General Assembly. This award will be given to a region which has set up an exemplary policy for the promotion of employment and the fight against unemployment, especially for young people. Selection procedures for this award are currently being studied.

The General Assembly will be held in Linz, the capital of Oberösterreich (approx. 250 000 inhabitants) in the Linz Design Center. The City is situated close to the Czech Republic and German borders, in the Danube Valley. The Danube is indeed largely responsible for the growing economy of the city. Today Linz is an industrial metropolis, with good European and international air and rail links, which has managed to safeguard its charms of yesteryear.

An event to be noted in your diary!

The finalised programme for the General Assembly has just been discussed and adopted by the AER Bureau, meeting in Strasbourg on 11th and 12th June 1998, and will be sent to you shortly.

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E-mail: erich.haager@ooe.gv.at
AER Contact: Eric Milesi and Barbara Thauront

A "Que sais-je ?" on the CoR

"Que sais-je ?" (What do I know?), published by "Presses Universitaires de France", is an extremely popular French encyclopedic collection. In March 1998 a new booklet was published in this series on the Committee of the Regions (CoR), compiled by Pierre-Alexis Féral, legal advisor and President of the Personnel Committee of this European Institution.

This 100 page booklet attaches great importance to the growing role of the territorial authorities in the construction of Europe and the political recognition of the regional level by the European institutions. It also confirms the decisive contribution made by the associations which represent local and regional authorities - the

Assembly of European Regions and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) - in the creation of the Committee of the Regions. These associations are now privileged partners of the CoR in its role as guarantor for the principle of subsidiarity.

This publication will undoubtedly contribute to informing the public of the role of the territorial authorities in the construction of Europe and the evolution of the regional level in the European Union of tomorrow.

Ref: "Que sais-je ?" N°3369/1998 (PUF/Paris)

AER Contact: Francine Huhardeaux

diary

JULY

- Wednesday 1st
Beginning of the Austrian Presidency of the European Union
- Wednesday 1st and Thursday 2nd
European Parliament, Plenary Session Brussels (B)
- Thursday 2nd and Friday 3rd
European Commission DG XVI ESDP Seminar - Water management Thessaloniki (GR)
- Thursday 2nd to Saturday 4th
East-West Economic Forum Bucharest (RO)
- Monday 13th to Friday 17th
European Parliament, Plenary Session Strasbourg (F)
- Wednesday 15th and Thursday 16th
Committee of the Regions Bureau and Plenary Assembly Brussels (B)
- Monday 27th to Friday 31st
AER, Summer School Erfurt-Weimar (D)
- Monday 27th to Friday 31st
AER, Centurio Programme Introduction and selection Seminar Erfurt-Weimar (D)

SEPTEMBER

- Monday 14th to Friday 18th
European Parliament, Plenary Session Strasbourg (F)
 - Wednesday 16th and Thursday 17th
Committee of the Regions Bureau and Plenary Assembly Brussels (B)
 - Thursday 17th to Friday 18th
European Commission/DG XVI ESDP Seminar - Knowledge as a factor for development Manchester (GB)
 - Friday 18th
AER, Presidium Bremen (D)
 - Monday 21st to Friday 25th
Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Strasbourg (F)
 - Thursday 24th and Friday 25th
AER, Seminar on Regionalism in the countries of central and eastern Europe Meeting of Committee I Iasi (RO)
- AER Contact:** Francine Huhardeaux



AER on line - en direct - direkt - Summer 1998
The Assembly of European Regions' newsletter
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Translation: Sally Hurley (GB) and Claudia Meschede (D)
Design and layout: Agence Contexte - Strasbourg (F)

Printing: OTT - Strasbourg (F)
Published in three languages: 6000 copies
The Editorial Committee would like to thank the regions of Baranya and Vlaanderen for their kind cooperation.
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JUNE 1998