



The 14th AER General Assembly, hosted by the Rhône-Alpes Region (Lyons) in France, ended with a political debate on the subject of the next Intergovernmental Conference and with the adoption of a message for young Europeans.

The ambitious action plan, drawn up by the thematic Committees of the AER, was adopted; the implementation of this plan would require multi-disciplinary cooperation between all of the AER bodies, coordinated action with other interregional organisations in order to produce the essential synergism and increased involvement of the members in both position-taking and current projects.

editorial

As the new Secretary General of the AER, for as long as I am in office, I hereby promise and commit myself to reinforcing the role of the Assembly of European Regions in the preparation of the future of our continent, to contributing to the development of our member Regions through cooperation networks and our training programmes, to continuing, with determination, the modernisation of our movement and to turning its attention towards clear and realistic directives. Indeed, I commit myself to making all AER activities accessible and available to the peoples of Europe.

Best Wishes to the AER, and to all of you, for the year 2000.

Hans De Belder
AER Secretary General

AER General Assembly > For a Europe with its Regions

Following the AER General Assembly in Lyons (2-3 Dec 1999) the AER President was asked to send a political message, in collaboration with the Presidents of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), on behalf of the member Regions of these organisations, and to transmit this message to the European Council in Helsinki (10th and 11th Dec 1999).

In this letter, the Presidents of the three interregional organisations bring the European Council's attention to the need, in the general interests of Europe, to recognise the role that Regions must play in the unification process, in particular regarding the full application of the principle of subsidiarity. Subsequently, they plead in favour of a correct legal definition being included in the Treaty in order to allow the Regions of an enlarged Europe to work together in the construction of Europe, with all of their diversities.

Participation of the Regions in the current reforms

As the new Treaty, which will emerge from the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), will be the first in a series of successive treaties which will profoundly influence the lives of our peoples, regional authorities wish to be informed and have a direct impact on the elaboration of these important international instruments. In any event, the Regions of Europe feel that the Intergovernmental Conference Agenda is too limited and too focused on procedures: The Agenda does not allow for the preparation of the new European society which will follow enlargement. A vision which conciliates this general perspective with respect for the diversities of Europe is necessary, in order that the reforms

underway on the continent and, above all, the Union's enlargement, may contribute to the development of its economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Finally, the European Regions hope that the changes to Union institutions will not compromise the transformation of the Committee of Regions into a true Regional Assembly.

Involvement of young people in politics

In view of the construction of a new dimension in the enlarged Europe, the Regions of Europe, AER members, aim to involve young people, to a greater extent, in public affairs.

The Regions are aware of young people's expectations, hopes and aspirations, but also of their increasing lack of confidence in the capabilities of elected representatives and the political system to solve the problem of unemployment and to meet the challenges of a globalised economy. They, therefore, wish to create the appropriate bodies, such as the "Youth Assemblies" to enable them to actively participate in public affairs and to make their voices heard in the elaboration of policies regarding young people. The AER, for its part, will create a specific body representing young people.

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> Main issues and debates

"The progress of regionalism represents an opportunity for the Europe of today, a Europe which is often seen as being too distant from the European citizen, when it should meet the people at their level. The solution to this problem lies in the Regions, the ideal level for concrete action, experience and a better understanding of Europe on a day to day basis. The way to approach the European citizen is, in particular, through the development of cross-border and interregional cooperation which would remove the barriers which exist in people's minds." said A. M. Comparini, President of the Rhône-Alpes region (F), which hosted the 14th AER General Assembly whilst recognising the progress achieved by the AER and other interregional organisations working in the same field.

The Region's institutional role

Mr R Barre, former French Prime Minister and Mayor of Lyons, stressed that centralisation was preventing the necessary changes from being made in the modern world. "Decentralisation could be a efficient tool, without wishing to cause the disappearance of states, and the Region an functional concept which could contribute to the smooth running of the Union" he stated.

Mr W Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, underlined the importance of the regional dimension when confronted with globalisation and in the European Stability Pact. He insisted on the importance of AER support in view of the adoption and ratification of the Charter on Regional Autonomy. The AER has supported this project since its creation.

Mr J da Camara listed, on behalf of the portugese Minister of Foreign Affairs, the priorities of the future portugese Presidency, in particular: enlargement and preparation for the IGC, two areas where the future presidency will take the AER's proposals into account.

Mr R Kaliff, Vice-President of the Committee of Regions (CoR), emphasised the complementary nature of the CoR and the AER action in favour of enlargement: a joint report will be submitted to the Commission in view of discussions with the Parliament. The preparation for the IGC will receive the same treatment. L Van den Brande, the AER President, confirmed his wish to continue this fruitful collaboration with the CoR and other interregional organisations regarding both enlargement and the IGC.

Mr Ried, Vice-President of the scottish Parliament, made a remarkable speech on the constitutional "devolution" process underway in the United Kingdom (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and shortly London with the election of a Mayor). Mr Ried also stressed the 40% of women in the scottish Parliament and the creation of a Youth Assembly. Finally, he underlined the importance of a new Island Council, cooperation agreement between Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

The General Assembly also received Mr G Morkel, Prime Minister of the Western Cape Province (South Africa), at the Annual Assembly for the second consecutive year, and Mr D de Donegal, General Delegate for Quebec (Canada) in Brussels, who were both very interested in the regionalisation process underway in Europe and in AER activities. The status of special guest was accorded to both Regions.

The future of young people: a major challenge

The debate on young people, co-chaired by Mr F Levy, Vice-President of the Rhône-Alpes Region, and Mr S Spencer (Devon-GB), Secretary of the AER subcommittee "Youth", involved many regional representatives of various countries as well as Centurio and Eurodysssey programme trainees. The main reponsibilities of elected regional representatives, in the imple-

mentation of strategies and policies aiming at reducing the current problems facing young people (unemployment, suicide, drugs, crime...) and in tackling the doubt that politicians are capable of solving these problems and planning the future, were discussed.

However, the young people of today will be the motor of a future united Europe. Elected representatives must, therefore, listen to the voices of these generations and offer them solutions which are adapted to their needs and priorities (creativity, innovation, rapidity, new technology...). The young President of Västra Götaland, Mrs C Videgren (26 years old), also suggested restricting the renewal of political terms on a national, regional and local level and in all of Europe and therefore encouraging young people to take on political responsibilities today.

Part of the debate focused on the training of young people and the Region's role in guaranteeing equal opportunities for everyone. M S Berdat (Jura-CH), speaker for the Eurodysssey pilot Committee, fervently spoke in favour of this programme which aims to give young europeans the opportunity to gain their first professional experience abroad. Only 22 out of the nearly 300 AER member Regions participate in this programme, and yet Eurodysssey offers an excellent cost/benefits ratio and total independancy regarding the running of the programme, which is not the case for programmes subsidised by the EU. Mr Bernat requested AER members to set their objective at, as a minimum, double the number of Regions participating in Eurodysssey for the year 2000.

The AER would like to thank the Rhône-Alpes Region for its excellent organisation over these two days of activities and debates. The next AER General Assembly will be held the 7th and 8th December 2000 in Seinäjoki (FIN) and the AER would like to thank Etelä-Pohjanmaa (South Ostrobothnia) for their kind invitation.



Meetings

General Assembly

(Lyons, 2nd and 3rd Dec)

Bureau (Lyons, 2nd Dec)

Committees and Working Groups:

- Committee D Presidium (Rothenburg ob der Wümme, 12th Nov)

- Advisory group (Arad, 8th Nov)

- Equal opportunities between men and women (Morpeth, 18th Nov)

- Centurio programme - evaluation session (Lyons, 1st Dec)

Communication

AER Web site on line in French and Extranet also currently on line.

AER activities: November-December 1999

Distribution of promotional items to member Regions, the media and others.

Participation in other events

- Plenary Assembly of the CoR and Forum on the Information Society (Brussels, 17th and 18th Nov)

- European Parliament hearing on minority languages (Strasbourg, 18th Nov)

- CLRAE Bureau (Strasbourg, 22nd and 24th Nov)

- CoR hearing on community initiatives (Brussels, 30th Nov)

- Meeting on the Stability Pact (Strasbourg, 6th Dec)

> AER Action Plan 2000

The General Assembly in Lyons adopted the "Action Plan 2000" which aims at implementing the two main objectives of our organisation: promoting regionalism and developing interregional cooperation in Europe, through various suggested activities and means.

Over the year 2000 the AER will focus its institutional activities on:

- the European Union - the Intergovernmental Conference, enlargement, implementation of subsidiarity, the EU Charter of fundamental rights and the idea of a European Constitution,
- the Council of Europe - the adoption of the Charter on regional autonomy, the monitoring of regionalisation and cooperation between regions, minorities and the evolution of the situation in Kosovo.

Regarding regional cooperation, the AER commits itself to developing interregional partnerships in the context of European enlargement and promoting regional twinning programmes; the AER will continue its training programmes and its experience exchanges such as the Summer School, Centurio and Eurodyssey or the networking of member Regions, in particular through Internet.

Taking into account the general priorities outlined above, each AER Committee has established an action plan.

• Committee A

- Organisation of the promotion of regionalism in Hungary and Portugal
- Organisation of Centurio 2000 which will pay special attention to participants from South-East Europe and Kosovo in particular
- Support for the organisation of the Summer School (6-12th August 2000 at Vilnius)
- Creation of an interregional partnership project pool on the AER Web site
- Creation and association of a network of experts in Committee activities

• Committee B

- Participation in the drawing up of the EU Charter of fundamental rights (multi-disciplinary group)
- Development of new initiatives and of a strategy in the field of education and training in the care of senior citizens
- Follow-up of the civil servant exchange programme in health and the integration of Eastern and Central European partners
- Organisation of working groups:

Preventative medicine and efficient financial solutions, Rehabilitation and medical care for senior citizens, Promotion of the possibilities offered by the community to children and families

- Promotion of equality between men and women

Two meetings planned: 30-31/03/2000, in Açores (P) and Västerbotten in the autumn.

• Committee C

- Organisation of a hearing with the "Regional politics" Committee of the European Parliament on regional twinning and the implementation of an action plan in this field
- Creation and distribution of a directory of good practice in the field of sustainable rural development
- Setting up of working groups: Regional airports and North/South relations
- Drawing up of a report on "Urban regions"
- Reinforcement of expertise within European Institutions
- Reflection in view of the organisation of an interregional conference on the environment

Two meetings planned, one of which will be in Tulcea (RO) in the autumn.

• Committee D

- Organisation of the First European Conference of Regional Ministers of Culture
- The determination of a joint position for the IGC on culture and education
- Setting up of interregional actions for the protection and the promotion of regional languages
- Development of interregional policies regarding young people and the promotion of Regional youth councils
- Extension of the interregional network of cultural partnerships "Culture 2000"
- Observation, on a regional level, of developments in the "Information society"
- Promotion of greater regional participation in partnership programmes in the field of education
- Creation of an interregional cooperation network in the field of "Golden Age Universities"
- Promotion of the interregional presence in book fairs and the

> Other adopted resolutions

The General Assembly in Lyons adopted the resolutions drawn up by the Committees and aimed at the relevant European Institutions:

- A resolution on territorial planning in the EU and another on the Common Agricultural Policy, in particular in view of enlargement, which brings the EU's attention to the need to bear in mind the diversity of territories and their economic development, in particular in rural, agricultural and peripheral areas and the region's responsibility in both of these fields.
- A resolution on regional communications which stresses the interdependency which exists between regional politics and transport policies and, therefore, brings the EU's attention to the importance of regional authorities involvement in European transport policies. This resolution also calls for the setting up of European co-financements in favour of the development of intermodal and public transport, in particular in view of connecting rural and peripheral areas of the EU and improving links with candidate countries for EU membership.
- A resolution on the EU Charter of fundamental rights, for which the preparatory process has already begun, which obliges all EU partners to be consulted, regional authorities included, in the drawing up of this Charter.

organisation of an interregional "literary cafe"

- Promotion and enlargement of the Eurodyssey programme
- Promotion of the Games festival and the Region's traditionally popular sports (19-21 August 2000 in Jasz-Nagykun-Szolnok-H)

Two meetings planned in parallel with the Conference on "The involvement of young people in regional affairs", Odessa (UKR), April 2000 and the First European Conference of Regional Ministers of Culture, Vaud (CH), October 2000.

AER Contact:

Hans De Belder or the relevant Committee

> Election Results

At the General Assembly, the AER elected Mrs Liese Prokop (58 years old), Vice-Minister President of Niederösterreich (A) and President of AER Committee D "Culture, Education & Training, Youth, Media and Sport" since 1996, as First Vice-President and Hans De Belder (61 years old), Flemish (B), former senator and diplomat, First Director General of the Flemish Office for Foreign Trade, as Secretary General.

> New Members

At its meeting on 2nd December in Lyons, the AER General Assembly accepted eight new member Regions: Medimurje (HR), Vilnius (LT), Woj. Dolnoslaskie, Malopolskie, Opolskie and Zachodnio-Pomorskie (PL), Prahova (RO), L'Viv (UKR).

The General Assembly took note of the following changes:

- The Assembly of Northern England is now called the Association of North-East Councils (UK),
- The Region of Skåne (S) includes the former counties of Malmöhus and Kristianstad and the Region Västra Götaland includes the former counties of Bohus, Älvsborg and Skaraborg and the town of Göteborg.

The General Assembly took note, with regret, of the withdrawals of Rheinland-Pfalz (D), Cornwall and the East of Scotland (GB). In accordance with article 2-3 of the statutes, the General Assembly decided to exclude the Regions of Mari El (RUS) and Marijampolė (LT) which can no longer, according to the statutes, continue to enjoy observer status as well as the member Regions not having paid their subscriptions since 1996: Burgas, Haskovo, Plovdiv, Varna (BG) - these regions have been broken down into smaller units following regional administration reforms in Bulgaria -, Cork (IRL), Leningrad and Moscow (RUS).

> General Assembly Follow-up

All of the resolutions adopted were forwarded to the relevant European Institutions immediately after the General Assembly.

The minutes from the Bureau meeting (Lyons, 2nd December) and the General Assembly are available on the AER Extranet: www.are-regions-europe.org/extranet.

Presidents of member Regions and AER contacts who were not able to attend the General Assembly in Lyons will receive the promotional goods distributed at the meeting at the end of December/early January.

New out

• **"Tabula Regionum Europae - 1999"**
The Assembly of European Regions (AER) has just produced its "Tabula Regionum Europae - 1999". This map of the Regions of Europe shows the progress of regionalism since 1995 (previous edition). The map demonstrates, in particular, the changes that have occurred in Finland, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Regarding the Great Britain in particular, but also Georgia, it has not been possible to depict the situation on a regional level due to a lack of reliable cartographic information. As of today, we ask the member Regions of these countries to send us up to date maps, as soon as they are available, for the next edition of the map which is planned for the year 2001.

For the first time, this map has been produced in the form of a computer file (Illustrator 8.0) which means that it can be updated more easily and quickly and new editions can therefore come out more frequently. The cartographic preparation was carried out by Prof. J B Kormoss of the

Collège de Brugge (B), and the computer science was handled by the Graphi-Ogre/Géotlas Society (F). This map is available from the AER General Secretariat in Strasbourg or from its Bureau in Brussels. The map can also be found on the AER Web site: www.are-regions-europe.org

• "Visiting Cards of the European Regions - 1999"

The Assembly of European Regions has also just republished its "Visiting Cards of the European Regions". This bilingual French/English directory presents 280 European Regions as well as the inter-regional organisations which are AER members. Key figures, interregional cooperation agreements and useful contacts in this field are presented for each region. In the year 2000 the "Visiting Cards of the European Regions" will be available in the form of a data base on the AER Web site.

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diary

JANUARY

Friday 14th
CLRAE Bureau - Strasbourg (F)

Tuesday 18th
AER Advisory group
Brussels (B)

Friday 21st
CPMR Bureau - Kastoria (GR)

Thursday 27th
Seminar on AER regionalism
Győr-Moson-Sopron (H)

FEBRUARY

Tuesday 15th
CoR Bureau - Brussels (B)

Wednesday 16th and Thursday 17th
Plenary session of the CoR - Brussels (B)

Wednesday 16th
RETI Bureau - Brussels (B)

Friday 18th
AER Presidency - Brussels (B)

Monday 21st and Tuesday 22nd
"Public Health" subcommittee of the
AER Committee B - Västmanland (S)

Thursday 24th and Friday 25th
Mini session of the CLRAE
Strasbourg (F)

MARCH

Monday 20th and Tuesday 21st
CEMR Executive Bureau - Sintra (P)

Thursday 30th and Friday 31st
AER Committee B - Ponta Delgada (P)

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