



It was a calm period for Europe during 1998, or at least, that is how it appeared. The ratification process of the Amsterdam Treaty has followed its course within the different member States. Preparations for the launch of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) have greatly advanced. Discussions on the Agenda 2000 have begun, slowly but surely, and partners have finally commenced negotiations on European Union (EU) enlargement.

But appearances can be deceiving. Even if this year seemed to lack spectacular decisions on a European scale, substantial efforts were made to reinforce and deepen European integration. I'll grant you that the most important decisions shall be made over the next few years: the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Structural Funds, institutional changes in the enlarged Union and the functioning of these institutions, enlargement, EU financing, the functioning of EMU... and many more. In all these areas, the foundations are nonetheless already being laid.

editorial

This is why the Regions must be fully involved in the debate. The more European integration is reinforced, the more the Regions and regionalism in Europe will have an essential role to play. European integration and regionalism are two sides of the same coin: European integration unites the States, structures and economies; regionalism and interregional cooperation unite communities, cultures and people.

More than ever, the AER must make this political message heard and contribute to its realisation. This is why we, quite rightly, devoted the year 1998 to reflection and indepth debate on "Agenda 2000" for the AER and the Regions of Europe. The working groups on "Strategy" and "Financial and budgetary issues" allowed the Bureau in Arad to organise a very enthusiastic debate on the AER's future priorities: the political agenda for the coming years and its financing, organisation and functioning of our movement.

I feel, personally, that it is no coincidence if these themes appear at the top of the European Union agenda. The AER and the EU must meet the same challenges, ie, to set up a more appropriate, democratic and efficient system to create a backdrop for a Europe which is growing in the spirit of solidarity and respect of diversity. There are no ready-made solutions to these complex issues. I am, however, convinced that the General Assembly in Linz, taking its inspiration from the proposals put forward by the different Committees and working groups, will forge the way towards a new force for regionalism in the XXIst century. The following words from Paul Valéry could serve as a leitmotif: "Let us thrive in our mutual differences".

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

> The AER in 1998

For the AER 1998 was a year of analysis, of assessment and of reflection but also of political actions and concrete achievements.

Thanks to committed debate, we have become more and more aware of the new political environment - inside and outside the Community - and of the challenges to be met in the EU enlargement process and in the application of the principle of subsidiarity. We have been able to judge better the requirements for the promotion of regionalism and regionalisation in Europe and identify activities to be undertaken to ensure that the AER and its member Regions are involved in the European integration process.

During the General Assembly in 1997, the debates showed that the AER is an organisation in full transition. The AER of today is not the same as that of 1985 where the enthusiasm of the 47 Regions and interregional founder organisations prevailed over the organisational and administrative aspects. Neither is it the AER of the 1990-1994 period; a period marked with major achievements towards the reinforcement of the regional influence and the creation of their representatives within the European institutions: the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe (CLRAE) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR) within the European Union.

The AER of today is a "third generation" organisation. It has recognised the need to redefine its mission by

combining the strengths of the past with the plans for the future to prepare a new start.

With this in mind, the political authorities within the AER - Presidium, Bureau, Committees - have been working on internal issues so as to find a balance between the political activities undertaken and the technical and financial capacities of our organisation. The "Strategy" and "Financial and budgetary issues" working groups were set up and have produced some concrete proposals. The General Secretariat is included in this evolution. Apart from the support it always offers the AER political authorities, it has increased its initiatives to optimise the efficiency and coordination of political activities, it has launched federative projects, developed communications with and for the member Regions but also to ensure a good management of AER resources.

I hope that this Activity Report, published for the first time in the form of a special edition of the "ARE en direct-AER on line-VRE direkt", will show more clearly the work carried out by the AER during 1998 and will allow you to measure the changes needed for our organisation to enter into the XXIst century.

Wolfgang Maier
Secretary General

Presidium and Bureau

The Presidium met three times and the Bureau five during this year. When we assess these two bodies, we can see that 1998 for the AER was a year of introspection and reflection.

Indeed, after having confirmed that the AER headquarters were to remain in Strasbourg (Bureau meeting in February), the following Presidium and Bureau meetings concentrated on in-depth discussions on the future of the AER. Work carried out by the "Strategy" working group rallied the members interest. This group was responsible for drawing up an "Agenda 2000" for the Regions of Europe and aimed at defining what should be the AER's role in the years to come. During the meetings in Strasbourg (June) and Arad (October), the Bureau debated on this issue and adopted a draft resolution "AER Strategy 2000 for the Regions", to be submitted to the General Assembly. Amongst other internal issues which were discussed at length were: the reorganisation of the General Secretariat (Merick report) and the work carried out by the group on "financial and budgetary issues", whose main task it was to look into the management problems of the Pacte programme.

The leading authorities in the AER nevertheless continued to work on two priority themes: employment and EU enlargement. For employment, the Presidium and the Bureau supervised the implementation of the different actions set out in the "Bruges Declaration" (Extraordinary AER meeting on employment, October 1997), ie, initiatives within the governments of the member States for the participation of the Regions when national plans are drawn up for employment, the promotion and distribution of experiences and good practices led at regional level (especially during the CLRAE debate "Regions and employment") and a study on the feasibility of an observatory for employment for the Regions of Europe. As for enlargement, as well as activities carried out for the AER Centurio Programme and the Summer School, the Presidium and Bureau have also stream-lined plans for the conference on the contribution of the Regions in the EU enlargement process which will be a major event for our organisation in 1999. At the kind invitation received from the Voivodship of Lower Silesia (PL), this conference will be held in Wroclaw in September 1999.

Interregional cooperation (Hieder report), relations with Local Authorities (the Niederbremer Group), the reinforcement of relations with the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), the conference on "Women in politics at regional level" (Turin, November) and the reinforcement of the AER Eurodyssey Programme have all contributed to issues discussed and decisions made by the Bureau.

Committee I > *Institutional issues*

Working structure

- Committee President : Claude Ruey (Vaud)
- Working group "Declaration on Regionalism" (Basque Country)
- Working group "Minorities" (Friuli Venezia-Giulia)

Main objectives

- To promote regionalism in Europe, in particular for Regions of central and eastern European countries (CEEC);
- To ensure the distribution and implementation of the "AER Declaration on Regionalism in Europe";
- To reinforce the Regions' position within the European institutions and, to this end, to develop a structured cooperation with the CLRAE and the CoR.

Activities

The Committee has had two plenary sessions this year in Münster-D (June) and in Iasi-RO (September) the latter being a joint meeting with Committee II to reinforce its action in favour of the CEEC Regions. During these meetings, and in liaison with the host Regions (Nordrhein-Westfalen and Iasi), two seminars were held: "The Regions and the Economy in Europe" and "The Romanian Regions and EU enlargement". The "Minorities" group met in Gradisca di Isonzo (March) and in Brussels (November) to fix its programme of activities for 1999.

Main results

- The launch of a campaign for the distribution of the "Declaration on Regionalism in Europe":

100 copies of the Declaration have already been sent to each member region; a survey to find out about the different activities in the Regions for the implementation and promotion of this Declaration was also launched; other activities are planned for 1999;

- Declarations and exchanges of experience in different areas such as the regionalisation in Europe, the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity at regional level or the contribution of the Regions in the next Intergovernmental Conference (IGC);
- Observation and evaluation of the evolution of regionalism and regionalisation in Europe: publication of the 2nd edition of the Synoptic Tables.

Projects underway

The Committee has decided to:

- contribute actively to the AER's campaign for the promotion of regionalism by concrete actions at source (caravans),
- participate in the reform of the CLRAE's Statutes,
- promote the creation of "AER contact groups" within the CLRAE's Chamber of Regions (AER/CLRAE meeting in May) and the CoR,
- develop joint actions with the CLRAE such as, for example, the seminar on regionalism and interregional cooperation in Karelia (RUS) and with the CoR.

The Committee supports plans for creating European information centres for the promotion of regionalism, proposed by several Regions and has decided to look into the feasibility of a cooperation with Committee II in this area.

Committee IV > *Social cohesion, Public health, Employment*

Working structure

- Committee President: Lambert J. J. Van Nistelrooij (Noord-Brabant)
- Subcommittee on "Employment" (Dalarna)
- Working groups: "Prevention of accidents" (Västmanland), "Senior citizens" (Noord-Brabant), "Hospital organisation and management" (Norrbotten)

Main objectives

- To promote exchanges of experience between Regions,
- To develop interregional cooperation projects in the areas of social cohesion, social services, public health and employment,
- To reinforce cooperation with the EU.

Activities

The Committee met twice this year in plenary session, in Székesfehérvár-H (April) and in Turin-I (October).

Main results

- The development of activities in the area of "Partnerships between the Regions and the citizens for social aid and services":

- a seminar on the theme was organised (meeting in Turin),

- concrete projects were launched on the prevention of accidents among senior citizens, public health, the fight against exclusion and the integration of minorities, the prevention of suicides, - cooperation with the NGO was reinforced ;
- Adoption of the proposals for the AER's future priorities concerning the importance of the role and competencies of Committee IV, the creation of an AER foundation for interregional cooperation and the creation of a working group within the Bureau responsible for the implementation of this project.

Projects underway

- The organisation of a conference on "Senior citizens and the information society" (February 1999),
- The organisation of a seminar on "The role of the political leaders in the area of public health" (Trondheim, May 1999),
- The creation of an ad hoc group responsible for developing strategies to influence EU policy and to reinforce direct contacts with the European Commission and Parliament.

Committee II

> East-West relations

Working structure

- Committee President: Ivan Jakovcic (Istra)
- Working groups: "Participation of the Regions in Community programmes" (Mures), "Role of the Regions in EU enlargement" (Essex/Brasov), "Project for an AER conference on the development of regional partners in the framework of pre-accession strategy" (Lower Silesia, Essex, Istra, Niedersachsen, Stockholm, Thüringen, Wien)

Main objectives

- To act as a forum for east-west regional exchanges,
- To look into issues concerning the EU enlargement process and its impact on the Regions from the candidate countries,
- To develop the "Centurio" and "Summer School" training programmes,
- To reinforce the AERs collaboration with the OSCE.

Activities

The Committee met twice this year, in Stockholm-S (May) and in Iasi-RO (September), the latter being a joint meeting with Committee I. This joint meeting was aimed at creating common action between the two Committees to promote regionalism in central and eastern Europe. During this meeting, two seminars were held: "Interregional cooperation in the Baltic Sea area" which provided many examples of good practice and "The Romanian

Regions and EU enlargement" which produced an AER action plan in favour of regionalism.

Main results

- A study was launched on the impact of EU enlargement on the Regions and a reference table was drawn up for the Regions' actions in this context,
- The conception of a "Project for an AER conference on the development of regional partners in the framework of pre-accession strategy"; among the proposed objectives: to promote the transfer of expertise and the realisation of concrete projects in fields such as the environment, health and social services, administrative reform, etc.
- The organisation of the 1998 "Centurio" and "Summer School" sessions (see page IV),
- Participation by the members of the Committee in the OSCE conferences.

Projects underway

- Organisation of an "AER Conference on the development of regional partners within the framework of pre-accession strategy" (Wroclaw, September 1999),
- Conception of a database which will identify the problems met by the Regions from CEEC and to provide information on regional expertise available at European level,
- The elaboration of a handbook of guidelines for European programmes, adapted to the needs of the Regions.

Committee V

> Regional Policy

Working structure

- Committee President: Robert Savy (Limousin)
- Subcommittees "Territorial planning" (Devon), "The environment" (Nordrhein-Westfalen), "Tourism and rural development" (Norrbotten).
- Working groups: "Quality norms in tourism" (Oppland), "Sustainable rural development" (Gloucestershire), "Regional communications" (Norrbotten)

Main objectives

- To maintain and promote the Regions' contribution to European, social, economic and territorial cohesion and planning policies;
- To encourage the implementation of regional development policies in specific areas, such as: the environment, tourism, territorial planning and sustainable rural development;
- To develop a structured cooperation with the EU, especially the European Commission, with a view to reciprocated consultation and setting up interregional cooperation programmes.

Activities

The Committee met twice this year in May in Strasbourg-F and in Ponta Delgada-P in October. The Subcommittees and some of the working groups met on the eve of each plenary session. Some working groups also met separately at other times. During the last meeting, the Committee organised a seminar on sustainable rural development. In view of the importance of the regional experiences

presented, the Committee decided to widen its analysis by drawing up a list of good practices in this area.

Main results

- The adoption of resolutions on the European Spatial Development Perspective, the revision of trans-European networks and the European Urban Agenda, submitted to the General Assembly,
- The adoption of new resolutions concerning different aspects of the reform of the Structural Funds on the basis of an opinion adopted in 1997 and in reply to the reactions of the European Commission on this document,
- Commitment to the AER future priorities and the adoption of a resolution highlighting the importance of the Committee's competencies and its willingness to contribute to the reform of the AER.

Projects underway

- Elaboration of a report on "Different types of quality norms in tourism",
- Preparation of a report on regional communications (to be presented at the beginning of 1999),
- Following the adoption of the resolution on regional twinning (General Assembly 1997), Committee V was invited by the European Commission to contribute to the implementation of a new European programme on twinning.

Committee III

> North-South Cooperation

Working structure

Committee President: Manuel Chaves Gonzalez (Andalucia)

Committee III did not meet in 1998.

Commission VI

> Culture, Education and training, Youth, Media, Sport

Working structure

- Committee President: Liese Prokop (Niederösterreich)
- Subcommittees: "Culture" (Aargau/Istra), "Education and Training" (Hertfordshire/Borsod-Abauj-Zemplen), "Youth" (Devon/Odessa), "Media, information technology" (Surrey/Arad), "Sport" (Jasz-Nagykun-Szolnok)
- Working groups: "Training" (Hertfordshire), "Regions and books" (Languedoc-Roussillon), "ICON" (Hampshire), "Regional and minority languages" (Catalunya), "Partnerships for education" (Vlaanderen)

Main objectives

- To publicise the Regions as the main representatives of cultural policy,
- To protect culture diversity through legal systems, respecting the principle of subsidiarity,
- To promote a multi-cultural and tolerant society, to encourage young people to take part in political issues.

Activities

The Committee met twice this year in plenary session, in Exeter-GB (March) and in Arad (October).

The Presidency of Committee VI met several times with the European Commission (DGX and DGXXII) and with the members of the European Parliament ("Culture" Committee) this year in order to influence European policy in the areas dealt with by Committee VI.

Main results

- Adoption of two opinions, submitted to the General Assembly, concerning EU programmes on culture and education ("Culture 2000" and "Youth");
- Adoption of resolutions to be submitted to the General Assembly on the prevention of violence in the media, the Regions' participation in EU twinning programmes and regional and minority languages;
- Organisation of two conferences: "Education and training" (Miskolc, April) and "Culture and Democracy" (Vienna, November).

Projects underway

- Conception of a conference and elaboration of projects on the theme "Regional partnerships in education and training",
- Realisation of a study on "Employment in the cultural sector at regional level",
- Implementation of a network of "Writers houses".

> Programme management

Centurio and Summer School

The fourth edition of the AER's Centurio training programme for regional politicians and administrators of Central and Eastern Europe, was held this year. A major information campaign, carried out by the General Secretariat produced 19 host Regions: Salzburg, Wien (A), Vlaanderen (B), Solothurn, St Gallen, Vaud (CH), Baden-Württemberg, Hesse, Saarland, Thüringen (D), Vejle (DK), Catalunya, Islas Baleares, Pais Vasco (E), Alsace (F), Essex (GB), Trento (I), Noord-Brabant (NL) and Norte (P). Fifteen Centurio trainees from Hungarian, Polish, and Romanian Regions undertook an 8-week traineeship in two different Regions during the months of October and November. As was the case in 1997, it was not possible to meet all the demands, even if a number of Regions welcomed several trainees (Alsace, Norte, Vaud, Salzburg, Wien).

The introductory seminar was held, for the first time this year, jointly with the AER Summer School (Thüringen, end of July). This was due, on the one hand, to the complementarity of the two initiatives and,

on the other, to a search for a greater synergy and efficiency of the AER programmes. Participation in the Summer School hit a record level this year, with over 120 participants from twenty European countries attending conferences and debates led by politicians and experts in interregional and cross-border cooperation, cultural management, protection of the environment and transport.

Thüringen, the host Region had prepared a programme of high quality, which included fieldwork visits. The General Secretariat provided technical assistance to the organising Regions (Essex, Istra, Krakow, Pest, Stockholm, Thüringen, Vlaanderen) in order to obtain co-financing by the European Commission (DGla).

The evaluation seminar for the Centurio programme will take place at the end of November in Strasbourg. This experience will be repeated in 1999. Particular attention will be given to more interactivity between the speakers and participants (Summer School) and to the aspects of reciprocated exchanges of experience (Centurio).

Eurodysssey

This Programme, managed jointly by the Region Franche-Comté (F) and the General Secretariat, is aimed at improving young people's chances to integrate the labour market by offering them the possibility to gain a first work experience in a foreign country.

In 1998, a large number of exchanges were carried out, involving 341 young people from 21 European Regions. Under the impetus of Jean-François Humbert, new President of Franche-Comté, an important work has been undertaken to redefine the relations between the different parties involved in the management of the Programme. The result of this work is the new rules of procedure, submitted to the General Assembly. The ways of increasing the number of annual exchanges, in particular with the CEEC are currently being examined. In order to spread the information about this programme and facilitate access to it, a Web site has been created: www.eurodysssee.org.

The Forum of Eurodyssée Regions (Ovifat, October 1998) has decided to place the exchanges in 1999 under the theme "New technologies". Approximately 10 new Regions are involved in this programme, and in particular Lombardia (I), Rhône-Alpes (F) and Andalucia (E). The Region of Borsod-Abauj-Zemplen (H) will host a regional office for the CEEC Regions.

Pacte

This year, there were three main fields of activity in the framework of the management of the Community interregional cooperation programme PACTE.

Closing of the Pacte II Programme (1996-1998) run by the EIG (AER/CEMR)

The 29 projects supervised by the AER submitted their final reports at the end of 1997. An evaluation, a control of conformity and an authentication of all the supporting documents then followed, prior to the establishment of a report for the European Commission (February 1998). A financial control was carried out throughout the year. The strict management has produced positive results: 81% of the projects are satisfactory, of which 25% are excellent. On the financial side, the programme has been well mastered. The accounts and the documentary evidence of the Pacte II projects have been re-examined by the Statutory Auditor (KPMG), which concluded that "the running of Pacte II does not constitute a financial risk for the AER".

In April, the European Commission accepted the EIG's request to widen the Pacte II contract to carry out a global

assessment of EEP - Pacte (1989-1998).

The following were carried out in this framework:

- final Pacte conference (Brussels) with DG XVI, experts from the Assessment and Follow-up Committee for the Pacte/Ecos-Ouverture programmes and representatives from regional authorities which had asked for this Initiation Programme;
- a statistical assessment over 10 years, with cartographical illustrations;
- two publications: "Success stories" (the 10 best projects) and "What has become of them?" (10 projects which developed remarkably well);
- a Web site - the history of the programme - which shall shortly be integrated into the Inforegio server of DG XVI

Management of the previous years (EEP I to V and Pacte I)

The closing of the EEP V and Pacte I programmes has been suspended owing to certain irregularities in the financial documents submitted to the AER. These are mostly missing documentary proof of expenditure, supported in the framework of the projects. The Programmes Unit has provided technical assistance to the AER

group "Finances and budgetary issues" and has maintained contacts with the European Commission and KPMG. The AER has, on the basis of the analysis and conclusions, asked the CEDRE, previous manager of the programme, and certain regional authorities, to reimburse sums from the previous years. It has also asked the project leaders to supply the missing documentary proof of expenditure. The activities of the Programmes Unit were subjected to VAT. A request for reimbursement has been made to the French fiscal authorities, which have responded favourably: (approximately 425 000 FF for the years 1995-1996); the 1997-1998 files are still being examined.

Future prospects

Even if its activities have been mainly turned towards the past, the Programmes Unit nevertheless wishes to orientate itself towards the future in order to help member Regions build partnerships. Contacts have been made with DG I concerning a feasibility study for the launching of a training programme in the Phare Regions. Support has also been given to the work of the Region of Alsace on the setting up of an interregional cooperation programme.

> *Working groups*

AER strategy

President : Hans De Belder (Vlaanderen)

The "Strategy" group was set up in February and met several times during the year. Its report and recommendations were presented to the Bureau in Arad. After indepth discussions, the Bureau adopted a draft resolution to be submitted to the General Assembly. This draft resolution and the revised report were sent to all member Regions for consultation. The group will meet again for the last time on 27th November to conclude its work. In view of the evolution in European affairs, the regionalisation underway in many countries and the internal situation of the organisation, the working group and the Bureau recommend that AER activities concentrate on its priority task - the promotion of regionalism in Europe - and propose an action plan to this end for the short and medium terms.

Finances and budgetary issues

President : John MacDougall, Vice-President Treasurer

This group was set up by the General Assembly in 1997. Its task was, in particular, to look into the problems concerning the management of the Community programme, Pacte. Reports and recommendations were regularly forwarded to the AER Presidium and Bureau. These two bodies discussed and made decisions on the work carried out by the group. The working group also submitted

several budgetary and financial suggestions of a more general nature.

Local authorities

Group leader: Günter Niederbremer (Bremen)

The "Local authorities" working group was invited by West Yorkshire to hold a meeting in Leeds at the end of November. The issues dealt with by this group include: the "added value" of local authorities in the European integration process, east-west cooperation at local level and the complementarity of the local and regional levels. The latter shows the value which the Regions attach to the cooperation with local authorities in the correct application of the principle of subsidiarity.

Interregional cooperation

Group leader: Jean-Paul Heider (Alsace)

The Region of Alsace, in liaison with the AER General Secretariat, and with the support of the Bureau and the Committees, based its reflection on the results of a survey carried out in 1997 from among the member Regions on the feasibility of a programme for the promotion of interregional cooperation. At first, special attention was paid to the EU enlargement process (east/west). The programme's objectives include: to encourage partnerships between the Regions of the EU and those of the candidate countries; to support the transfer of know-how and exchange of experience projects in order to encourage regional development, to transmit the principles of regionalism and to reinforce local and regional autonomy.

> *General Secretariat*

Supporting political action

The General Secretariat is the service centre for all the AER's different bodies and its member Regions. It has participated actively in the preparation, implementation and follow-up to the political decisions made by our organisation. It has made a number of important contacts and exchanges with the European institutions, national governments, cooperation organisations, European foundations etc. The Secretariat was, specifically, involved in the preparation and organisation of working meetings with the leading figures of the European Commission (DGla, DGV, DGX, DGXVI, DGXXII) as well as with members of the European Parliament. It has regularly represented the AER at working sessions of the CoR, CLRAE and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. It was within this framework that the AER President made a speech during the debate on "Regions and employment", organised by the CLRAE in May. Through these contacts the AER was also involved in the reform of the Statutes of the Chamber of Regions within the CLRAE (preparatory AER/CLRAE meeting) and made the first

contacts for organising the AER conference on the role of the Regions in EU enlargement (September 1999). The AER would like the main European institutions to be involved in this event.

External relations

The General Secretariat represented the AER at several conferences, seminars and events of a European nature. The Secretariat took part in the OSCE conferences on the role of the Regions for maintaining peace in Europe and the Ecos-Ouverture Partnership Convention organised by the DGla and DGXVI (June, Budapest). It has also represented the AER during the events of its member Regions, for example, on the jury of the Kaiser-Maximilian Prize organised by the Region of Tyrol (the prize was won by President Jordi Pujol, former AER President) and the festivities organised by the Georgian Region of Adjara on the occasion of its membership of the AER. Moreover, the General Secretariat has welcomed, at its headquarters in Strasbourg, a large number of delegations and visitors who wished to find out more about the AER.

Membership in 1998

The AER - the organisation and political movement of the Regions of Europe, committed since 1985 to the promotion of democracy, solidarity and the development of interregional cooperation - currently has 300 member Regions from 26 different countries.

Out of the 280 (approx.) Regions in the European Union, 182 were members of the AER in 1998: 10 in Germany (out of 16), 9 in Austria (9), 4 in Belgium (5), 8 in Denmark (14), 3 in Greece (13), 17 in Spain (17), 14 in Finland (20), 24 in France (26), 2 in Ireland (20), 22 in Italy (22), 9 in the Netherlands (12), 7 in Portugal (7), 24 in Sweden (24) and 29 in the United Kingdom (-).

From outside the European Union, the AER has 108 members, 4 in Bulgaria (9), 1 in Croatia (23), 19 in Hungary (20), 1 in Moldavia (42), 10 in Norway (19), 16 in Poland (49 - restructuring underway), 26 in Romania (41), 7 and 1 observer in Russia (58), 1 in Georgia (4), 22 in Switzerland (26), 1 in the Ukraine (25) and 5 observers in Lithuania (10).

During the year, 14 new Regions have requested membership of the AER (situation as at 15/11/1998): Primorje-Gorski kotar (HR), Imerety (GEO), Kaunas, Siauliai, Tauragė, Utena, Regions which have been observers up to now (LT), Nordland (N), Botosani, Ialomita, Maramures, Mehedinti, Olt, Teleorman (RO) et East Riding of Yorkshire Council (GB). Eight withdrawals have been noted: Berlin, Brandebourg (D), Sønderjylland, Ribe (DK), Lorraine (F), East-Sussex, Orkney and Shetland (GB).

Coordination

The General Secretariat has also played the role of coordinator and/or co-director for AER's own programmes (Eurodisney, Centurio, Summer School) and the Community programme, Pacte. It has developed communications with the services of the member Regions and ensured press relations for the main internal events. The Secretariat has provided the technical and logistic support necessary for the activities of all the AER's different bodies (material organisation, interpretation, translation of documents, management etc.) often in liaison with the host Regions. It has also ensured a good overall financial and administrative management. You will find additional information on these activities in the specific chapters of this report. As a conclusion, it should be noted that the General Secretariat has 15 members of staff, working under the authority of the Secretary General.



Press and Communications

Internal communications

In accordance with the "Communications guidelines 1997-2000", the priority for this department has been to set up an efficient communications service for the member Regions: to inform them regularly on AER activities and to encourage exchanges of know-how and experience, to involve them in federative projects, to reply to requests for information, etc. In this context, the introduction of the newsletter was a priority action. New editorial guidelines were finalised and the realisation of the first edition was published in January. Thanks to the teamwork of the General Secretariat, the participation of the different political bodies of the AER and the member Regions, "ARE en direct-AER en line-VRE en direkt" has been published once a quarter. A special edition "Activity Report 1998" has been published for the General Assembly and another edition, devoted to the contents of the latter, will be published in January 1999. The department has received requests for additional copies of the newsletter from member Regions and from the general public which is a sign of its success.

Other activities include:

- Launching the re-edition of "Visiting Cards" (the member Regions' directory) More than 200 members have already returned their form for up-dating data; this project has been carried out with the help of the AER office in Brussels and student trainees and should be finalised during the second quarter of 1999;
- Distribution of the "Declaration on Regionalism in Europe" At the end of April, the department organised the campaign for distribution among the member Regions;
- Development of electronic communications A network of communications officers from within the member Regions receive press releases from the AER by E-mail; a lot of information for the "Visiting cards" was also transferred via the internet;
- Management of requests for information and the database Close to 100 specific requests from the member Regions have been answered this year. The internal database has been continually up-dated.

External communications

The department organised, or took part in the organisation with host Regions, press relations during the meetings of the Bureau and General

Assembly, the debate on "Regions and employment" (CLRAE), the Centurio programme and Summer School, the Conference on "Culture and democracy" and has taken the leading role in the organisation of the debate with the media (General Assembly 1998). The different media in Strasbourg and Brussels (50) have regularly received copies of the "ARE en direct-AER en line-VRE en direkt" newsletter. The department has also taken part in the Pressclub of Strasbourg activities.

The department represented the AER at the Convention of Local and Regional media in Europe (Trento, February), at the debate on "Regions and employment" and at the Seminar "France-Poland-Europe" (Strasbourg). Moreover, it has received delegations (10), sent newsletters to the institutional contacts (100), helped with university research projects (20), replied to requests for information (200) and ensured an AER presence in European guides (20).

Other activities

Conception, financial study and research for self-financing for communications projects planned for 1999. These new proposed projects include: up-dating and re-editing the Map of the Regions of Europe and the installation of an AER Web site.

Project groups

Telephony

The "Telephony" group was entrusted with the task of studying the offers proposed by the different telephone companies, especially in the area of international telephone calls. Indeed these calls represented the majority of expenditure from the General Secretariat's "Telephone" budget heading. The new telephony company which was chosen and has been in place since August, has allowed for a total economy of 35% on this budget item.

Information Technology

The move in 1999 of the AER headquarters, but also the technical problems of the current computer network, were the reasons behind creating this group. After drawing up preliminary terms of reference, a study was carried out by a service in this field. The recommendations from this company have been included in specific budgetary headings for 1999.

Personnel

In 1998, the AER had fifteen members of staff at its headquarters working under the authority of Wolfgang Maier, Secretary General:

Eric Milesi, Director
 Laura De Rose, Secretary of Committees I, III, V
 Franz Stummann, Secretary of Committees II, IV, VI
 Barbara Skoczylas-Thauront, Head of Press & Communications
 Brigitte Fiorucci, Head of Cooperation Programmes
 Stéphanie Evans, Assistant for Committees I, III, V
 Doris Materne, Assistant for Committees II, IV, VI
 Francine Huhardeaux, Press & Communications Assistant
 Yolande Simon, Accountant
 Sally Hurley, Secretary-Translator (GB)
 Claudia Meschede, Secretary-Translator (D)
 Araceli Gómez, Secretary-Translator (E)
 Nicoletta Nappa, Secretary-Translator (I)
 Régine Kastner, Secretary
 Catherine Hommel, Secretary

Other departments

Translation

Made up of four part-time translators, this department has translated approximately 450 pages in each of the five AER working languages (French, English, German, Spanish and Italian). These translations were mainly working documents for the meetings of the Presidium, Bureau, Committees and various working groups as well as miscellaneous documents and correspondence. During the year, the department also translated the "ARE en direct-AER en line-VRE en direkt" newsletter. For economic reasons but also to ensure the best quality, translations carried out by external translators have been strictly limited.

Technical secretariat

Four people (full-time) ensured the organisation of the different AER meetings (approx. 40), the preparation and mailing of working documents for participants (approx. 520 000 photocopies), as well as daily correspondence and telephone enquiries.

Accounts and management

To meet the requests of the management bodies of the AER, the General Secretariat has produced regular information on the AER finances. This department has ensured the correct use of finances and regular income through subscriptions. Apart from the daily accounts, this department also produced monthly income and expenditure accounts, sent out reminder letters for non-payment of subscriptions to the member Regions concerned and set up a new system for requesting subscriptions in 1998. This year also saw the installation of a clocking-in system for the 15 members of the General Secretariat.

AER office in Brussels

Following an agreement between the Regions of Vlaanderen and Wallonie (Arad, October), both Regions are looking, together, for new premises in Brussels for the AER office. The rental will be covered by the Region of Vlaanderen and the personnel costs will be covered by Wallonie. Thanks to the support of these two Regions, the AER will benefit from an improved service for member Regions from this European capital.



ARE en direct - AER on line - VRE direkt - Winter 1998/1999
 The Assembly of European Regions' newsletter
 Special edition "Activity Report 1998"

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Translation: Araceli Gómez (E), Sally Hurley (GB), Claudia Meschede (D), Nicoletta Nappa (I)

Design and layout:
 Agence Contexte - Strasbourg (F)

Printing: OTT - Strasbourg (F)
 Published in five languages: 4500 copies

December 1998