



ASSEMBLÉE DES RÉGIONS D'EUROPE
ASSEMBLY OF EUROPEAN REGIONS
VERSAMMLUNG DER REGIONEN EUROPAS
ASAMBLEA DE LAS REGIONES DE EUROPA
ASSEMBLEA DELLE REGIONI D'EUROPA

AER GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SEINÄJOKI, 7TH AND 8TH DECEMBER 2000

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Committee A "Policies and Institutional Problems" activity report 2000

Committee A met on 7th September 2000 in Brussels in order to discuss organisational problems (*see relevant document in annexe*).

Committee members interested in this subject met on 27th October 2000 in Nyon: discussions dealt with the document drawn up by President Willi Stächele concerning the IGC, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Constitution (*document available on Internet*). This document was not adopted at the meeting although its high quality was remarked upon.

In addition, two caravans were organised, one in Győr (H) and the other in Braga (P):

Győr: 120 participants from the Hungarian and neighbouring counties took part in this AER Conference which aimed to introduce the different types of regionalism and regionalisation in Europe.

Braga: This caravan was organised following the "no" vote in the referendum on regionalism in Portugal. The event was very successful on a political and media scale and allowed for a comparative study to be made, on the basis of the French and British experience as well as on the Portuguese experience, in the context of future regionalisation.

Committee A "Policies and Institutional Problems" Action plan 2001

The Committee A Action plan 2001 can be divided into three main tendencies which each repeat the guidelines given in the document "The way ahead":

- I- Three or four main themes which would become the working priorities for the Committee must be chosen. Five Regions, of which two from Eastern and Central Europe, must come forward to draw up the AER positions on each of these themes for approximately 2 years.

The following themes could be selected:

- a) Governance: The institutional left-overs from Nice (method and content, should we head towards a new IGC? a new convention? etc.) Constitutionalisation process i.e. simplification of the Treaties, Status of the Charter.
- b) Enlargement (political and institutional aspects).
- c) Charter on local and regional Self-Government.
- II- Organisation of a large annual Conference on one of these themes, in preference Governance and/or Enlargement.
The idea of large event in the Mediterranean basin and concerning the Regions of Southern Europe should be considered.
- III- The annual organisation of a caravan on regionalism: To date several caravan proposals have been made for 2001: Croatia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and the Baltic countries.

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Organisation of Committee A "Policies and institutional problems"

I remind you that the mandate of the current President will finish at the end of the year 2000, the nomination of the new Committee A President will take place at the General Assembly (Seinäjoki, 7th and 8th December 2000).

Cooperation is currently under the charge of three rapporteurs, each with their respective field. The following list shows these rapporteurs with their respective fields:

- Mr Schausberger (IGC)
- Mr Cuatrecasas (Charter on Regional Self-Government of the Council of Europe)
- Mr Gnauck (Charter of Fundamental Rights)
- One further rapporteur should also be nominated in Seinäjoki in order to cover European Governance.

These rapporteurs have promised to keep the Bureau informed on the evolution of their activities concerning the assignments given by the Bureau.

In accordance with decisions taken by the Presidium (meeting in Brussels on 8th September 2000) on the structure of Committee A, the Committee's Presidency took note of the need to adapt to European current affairs and therefore to their rapid evolution. In consequence the calendar for working group meetings or Plenary sessions will be tightly linked to, and even dependent on, the European calendar.

Therefore, it is a prerequisite that the current President of the Committee (on the basis of the services offered by the four rapporteurs) be fully informed on the various positions taken on the different themes dealt with by the Committee through the activities of various organisations and institutions (for example, the CLRAE, the Committee of the Regions etc.). This also implies a horizontal vision of discussion themes, an academic or doctrinal knowledge of the issues dealt with, in addition to political and "ground" knowledge of the relevant organisations by the current President.

It was also decided that, whatever the priorities of the European calendar are, Committee A must have regular meetings in the future.

Finally, on this occasion, the AER Presidium decided that the Committee would have a permanent "Head" within the AER Secretariat.



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ACTIVITY REPORT 2000 COMMITTEE B

1. Committee B - Working Principle

Over the last 12 months, Committee B has been very active in enlarging its interregional network of regional policy makers, professional institutions, scientists, voluntary organisations and interested citizens in the field of Public Health, Social Cohesion and Social Services.

The work concept of Committee B focused on enhancing discussion and exchange, but also on agreements on concrete projects with the aim of developing common answers and approaches to burning issues in the Health sector and the area of social policies.

2. Committee Structure

The Committee structure, with its Sub-Committees, working groups and pilot projects guaranteed the necessary coherence and coordination, but was also flexible enough to respond to new initiatives and cooperation offers from other existing networks or interest groups.

The structure is as follows

- a) Sub-Committee on Public Health and Safer Communities
Chairman Stig-Erik Westmark (Västmanland)
- b) Sub-Committee on Social Services and Community Care
Chairwoman Cllr Sheila Gruselle (Surrey)
- c) Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion
Chairman Mr Patrick Moriau (Wallonie)



3. The Committee in Europe

The Committee is very conscious of the fact that Public Health and Social Policies, with their links to environmental, employment and industrial issues, are gaining more and more importance on the European political agenda and that this will also imply wider competences for the European Institutions.

The Committee regards itself as a monitoring body, which takes particular care that in the development of European strategies in the Public Health and Social Policy area the principle of subsidiarity is fully respected and applied. The Committee nevertheless repeatedly welcomed EU programmes and was able to use European funding notably in its projects under the "Safety across Europe" umbrella, i. e.

- "Services and Prevention for the Elderly (SPE)", which has concentrated on the collection of data on elderly people's injuries, the formation of networks and expert working groups and the training and employment of personnel for home care services.
- the SUPPORT initiative (Prevention of Suicide and Life-threatening Behaviour) for which new regions have registered and in which progress, among others in various seminars, has been made on monitoring/registration of suicidal behaviour and the development of regional prevention programmes.
- the Officers Exchange Programme, that assists regions from EU candidate countries, that has held two meetings with more than 20 participants each. Examining the situation of the handicapped and a project on Children's rights have been suggested as new subject areas.

The Committee also undertakes efforts to gain access to EU research funds. Committee B, in collaboration with Committee D, was also successful in gaining access to the EU Committee of Petitions of the European Parliament concerning complaints of the AER in relation to the handling of calls for proposals by the EU Commission.

4. Strategy Papers

In relation to policy papers, the Committee drafted several strategy papers relating to the drafting of the "Charter on fundamental rights" of the EU and on the relationship between Human Rights and Social Rights which have been discussed during its two plenary meetings. As a result, Committee B drafted a resolution which, in cooperation with Committee A, has been changed to the version submitted for the approval of the General Assembly (see separate document).

5. International and interregional events

Committee members assisted meetings and conferences of other international organisations, in particular the WHO. The Committee is represented in the Advisory Committee of the Gastein Health Forum (Salzburg) and at its major annual Conference on Public Health issues.

The Committee Secretary acted as chairman of an international Congress: Comparing European models of the Regions at the Euro-Salute Convention in Milan, organised by the Italian Consortium for Medical Research (CIRM) and the Lombardia Region. Cooperation was also agreed with the European Social Network of high level administrators in cities and regions.

6. New Projects

2000 saw the inauguration of the "Alive" project organised by Noord-Brabant and Jämtland. It develops a set of actions in support of the elderly on the basis of the analysis that the recent demographic developments and the problems created by our ageing societies challenge politicians and communities



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to find innovative solutions and concepts, for example in care models, employment, domotics and forms of integration and participation.

Preliminary discussions have taken place on a project initiated by CIRM/Lombardia on "European Health Building (e-Health) - Cost-Action" which aims for the methodological design of health services in the Regions.

7. Perspectives for 2001 (see also Agenda Ref. 13)

The Committee sees it as a priority to communicate the findings and results of its working groups and projects to a wider audience. Particular attention will be paid to wider participation in projects such as "Alive" and the issue of social protection according to the objectives formulated by the European Parliament and the EU Commission in relation to the following issues:

- work pay and secure income
- making pensions safe and pension systems sustainable
- promotion of social inclusion
- ensuring high quality and sustainability of health care.

In 2001, several conferences will be organised, in particular in Dublin on suicide (Spring or Autumn 2001).

Following its cooperation agreement, the AER will also participate in the Annual Conference of the European Social Network from 6 to 8 June 2001 in Göteborg by cooperating in the preparation of the three planned workshops and preparing presentations.

Strasbourg, 21st November 2000
RK/FS/FS-dm-je



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Committee C
"Regional policies, Territorial planning, Agriculture, Environment and Tourism"

Activity report 2000
Action plan 2001

1. Meetings

Committee C organised two Plenary sessions, one in Florence (I) on 5th and 6th June 2000 and one in Tulcea (RO) on 22nd and 23rd September 2000.

The two Sub-Committees – "Territorial planning" and "Regional communication, environment, agriculture and rural development" – and their working groups¹ met the day before the Committee C Plenary sessions.

2. Main activities 2000 – Action plan 2001

2.1 The future of Regional Policies in the medium term and beyond 2007:

In order to take into account current European affairs in particular and also its activity programme, Committee C gave priority to the future of regional policies.

Thanks to the contribution of its member Regions – of which many attended the meetings² - and on the basis of the work of a group of regional experts, Committee C drew up an opinion on the aims and the management of regional policies in the medium term and beyond 2007. From among the proposals put forward, the following should be mentioned:

- the adoption of a more flexible approach in determining which Regions are eligible,
- the recognition of the active role of the Regions in identifying pertinent evaluation criteria for the efficiency of territorial policies,
- the according of financing and the lightening of formalities and bureaucracy for the implementation of European spatial planning and sustainable development policies (ESDP implementation, development of TENs etc.),
- the development of Interreg III and new Community initiatives.

Bearing in mind the AER Bureau's decision (Nyon, 27th October 2000), the Committee's opinion will represent the basis of future action in this field³.

On this subject, the Committee has already proposed several possibilities for action for next year:

¹ i.e. the working groups "Environment and tourism", "CAP and sustainable rural development" and "Regional Aviation". In addition, two ad hoc working groups were created this year: one in preparation for the seminar in March 2001; another for the drawing up of an opinion by the Committee on the future of regional policies.

² In total, over 120 Regions, from at least 20 different European countries.

³ The document in question is available on the AER extranet in english, french and german (<http://www.are-regions-europe.org>).



- on the one hand, the proposal of possible reforms in European regional policies in view of enlargement, taking into account the positions of the Regions of the EU which risk losing their eligibility according to current objectives,
- on the other hand, the encouragement of Regions in applicant countries to enforce responsible and coherent regional policies which would allow them to adapt to Community assets and to meet the challenges of European integration.

In order to achieve this the Committee has decided to follow the following priority strategy made up of three equal elements:

1. to approach interested and affected Regions, both from inside and outside of the EU,
2. to closely follow and seek to influence decision-making within the EU (including: AER participation in the forum on regional policies organised by the EU for the end of May 2001 and cooperation with the Committee of the Regions – cf Klär and O'Neachtain opinion etc.),
3. to find an equal balance between its activities, which are mostly political, and those of specialist organisations, such as the CPMR in particular, which are mostly technical.

2.2 Specific activities:

Through its working groups, the Committee dealt with several specific aspects of regional policies, i.e. the CAP reform and sustainable rural development, environment and tourism, Trans-European Networks and regional aviation.

- Trans-European Networks and Regional aviation:

Bearing in mind the progress in the activities of these groups, the activities in the field of regional aviation must be mentioned in particular i.e.

- identification of strategies leading to the development of regional aviation in Europe, the encouragement of the recognition of regional airports as factors in economic development and the promotion of connections between the Trans-European Networks and regional airports,
- production of a map of the regional airports in Europe.

In 2001 the Committee will continue this work whilst reinforcing its lobbying action vis-à-vis the EU and its contacts with the ARC (Airport Regions Conference).

- Tourism:

On 8th May 2000, an AER delegation (including Mr De Belder, AER Secretary General, and Mr Hjalmarsson, Committee C Vice-President, Norrbotten Region) met Mr Reinhard Klein, Head of the Tourism Unit of the European Commission.

Following the positive outcome of the meeting (the AER was invited, among other things, to participate in the activities of the EC's Advisory Committee in the field of tourism) and the opinion of Mr De Belder, the Committee decided to further its action in the field of regional tourism and to focus on the following objectives next year:

- continue activities in the field of sustainable tourism (including monitoring and the implementation of European principles in this field at regional level),
- extend activities to other fields which are directly related to the promotion of tourism: culture, agriculture, transport, competition etc.
- strictly take into account activities undertaken at European level in order to ensure constructive coordination with the Committee of the Regions in particular.

Further contact will be made with the European Commission on 1st December 2000.

- Territorial planning and sustainable development:



At the initiative of Mr Conti, Vice-President of the Committee, Tuscany Region, the Committee decided to focus its activities for the year 2001 on the definition of environmentally friendly regional territorial planning policies. Bearing in mind the eminently political vocation of the AER, the Committee will continue to work towards the following priority objectives:

- to promote the recognition of the environmental dimension in all fields of Community policies,
- in this context, to confirm the role of the Regions as a motor in an environmental governance strategy, in collaboration with the EU, States and towns,
- to stress the key role of regional authorities regarding public awareness of environmental rights and obligations.

A certain number of concrete initiatives have already been planned by the Sub-Committee I with this aim:

- on the one hand, to collect information concerning both territorial planning in European countries (at national and European level) and policies regarding specific environmental problems such as, for example, the management of natural resources and waste treatment. In this initiative, the AER will take into account activities undertaken at European level (in particular the information network set up by the European Environmental Agency),
- on the other hand, to encourage the development of interregional cooperation projects in this field.

A seminar on these themes will be organised in Sweden during the Swedish EU Presidency and on the occasion of the next Committee C Plenary session (Jämtland, 16 – 17th March 2001), in cooperation with the European Commission, the European Environmental Agency and the CPMR.

3. Relations with the European Commission: main outcome

Following the meeting with the Tourism unit of the EC, the AER was invited to participate in the activities of a new EC Advisory Committee in this field. In addition, several Committee C members participated in the activities of the two other Advisory Committees, concerning the CAP and environmental protection respectively, on behalf of the AER.



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**ACTIVITY REPORT 2000
COMMITTEE D**

1. General remarks

Committee D, with its 5 Sub-Committees, covers the widest range of policy areas of the four constituent Committees of the AER.

Recent developments clearly indicate that each of the policy areas monitored by one of the Sub-Committees, i. e. Culture, Education and Training, Youth, Media and Information Society and Sport, have become major subjects of European discussion. This also implies the formulation of new strategies by the European institutions and of supporting programmes.

The Committee is very conscious of the fact that traditionally these fields are within the competences of the regional level and therefore demands constant involvement of the Regions at European level.

Some areas refer to specific regional structural and organisational settings, as, for example, in the field of sport where regional federations form the basis of many activities.

The general trend towards a stronger accentuation of the regional dimension, as observed in sport, presents a challenge to policy makers at regional level and provides new opportunities to forge stronger links with the civil society.

The Committee closely monitored the discussion on important matters, such as the controversy concerning fixed book prices and the possible scope of public subsidies and funding for cultural productions with regard to the application of the existing EU legislation on competition. Another important issue to be taken up by the Committee in culture is the future regulation of the audiovisual sector in the light of the ongoing WTO negotiations. The Committee pressed for new legal instruments, which safeguard cultural diversity.

The Committee responded, at a very early stage, to the challenge of the information society by stimulating interregional discussion on matters such as E-learning and new models of communication between citizens and public administrations.



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The ongoing discussion on the reform of the EU institutions was closely monitored in terms of defending the competences of the regions and their interregional cooperation, in particular in culture and education, as a prerequisite for the formulation of dynamic and progressive European strategies.

The Sub-Committees and working groups developed new initiatives in their fields of action, such as a youth network in the regions, surveys of regional and local residences for writers or the promotion of the use of lesser used and regional languages.

The Committee took much care to work closely with professional organisations and interest groups in the different fields.

2. Meetings and events

The Committee held two Plenary meetings (Odessa, 18 May and Nyon, 24 October) and two Conferences.

The Presidency of Committee D, including the Chairpersons of the Sub-Committees and working groups, met twice between the Plenary sessions in order to guarantee the necessary follow-up and coordination.

Another event was the 2nd Festival of Traditional Folk Games and Sports in Jasz-Nagykun-Szolnok in August.

- **The First AER Youth Conference**

One of the highlights of Committee D's activities in 2000 was the First AER Youth Conference on 19 May in Odessa, with a high participation of youth representatives from Central and Eastern Europe. Participants resolved, among others, to propose that the AER General Assembly organise - in preparation of what might become a future AER youth board - a Young People's summer school, run in parallel with the AER Summer School.

- **First European Conference of Regional Ministers of Culture**

The second half of the year was highlighted by the First Conference of Regional Ministers of Culture on 25 and 26 October in Nyon. It is regarded as an exemplary approach in order to show the ability of the AER to respond to the need to involve the different layers of regional government in interregional discussion and action. 150 high-level politicians from over 70 regions attended this event.

3. Political lobbying

The Committee President continued the strategy of arranging high-level meetings with representatives of the EU institutions. The President had an extensive meeting with the EU Commissioner for Culture and Education, Mrs Vivian REDING. The meeting focused on the promotion of greater involvement of the regions in EU programmes and on critical issues such as transparency in EU decision making and the reduction of bureaucratic procedures. The Commissioner underlined the importance the Commission attaches to increased cooperation with the regions. The EU Commissioner and the Committee President agreed on the need to develop new initiatives in assisting regions from Central and Eastern Europe.



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The Committee President also met the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Council's administrators in charge of culture. Agreement was reached to intensify cooperation through permanent liaison and exchanges.

4. Policy statements

The Committee drafted a Youth policy document which will lead to a new AER strategy for promoting networking between youth groups and councils at regional level.

The Committee succeeded in getting three documents approved by the First Conference of Regional Ministers of Culture. The Final Declaration of the Conference states the opinion of the Regions with regard to the EU decision-making process, where the regions - with the objective of maintaining cultural diversity - speak in favour of keeping the principle of unanimous voting on matters of culture. The Final Declaration also formulates the major objectives of the cultural policy of the regions, dealing with issues such as cultural production and trade regulations or the promotion of regional languages.

5. Programme 2001 (see also Agenda Ref. 13)

The Committee will continue its work within the established structure of Sub-Committees and working groups.

In response to the decisions taken in the year 2000, the Committee will treat the following issues with priority:

- Putting into practice the conclusions and proposals of the youth paper, above all the use of modern media in support of a regional youth network.
- Organisation of a multi-level conference on "Regional languages - Towards understanding in a global world" joining politicians, representatives of language groups, language educationalists, university researchers, writers and various NGOs.
- Monitoring the issue of "cultural diversity and trade" with drafting of an AER position.

Strasbourg, 21st November 2000
LP/FS-dm



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ACTIVITY REPORT 2000 BY THE AER SECRETARY GENERAL

In all of my activities in the course of this year I always worked from the mandate given to me by the General Assembly in Lyon. Not only was I put in charge of the management of the Secretariat according to the Statutes, but I always kept in mind the political responsibility which was explicitly given to me: I was asked to contribute to the analysis of the crisis situation in which I found the AER when I was appointed. The most important target however was to enable the AER to react against the ongoing tendencies.

The philosophy behind my activities was laid down by the President in the document "The Way ahead". The action plan was partly set out in the document "The action plan 2000", approved by the General Assembly. Finally, the first Presidium meeting in 2000 gave me the responsibility for taking political action, at my level, in view of contributing to the Renaissance of the AER in the course of this year.

As a result of all this I will have the honour to present a draft action plan for the years 2001 – 2002, at the end of this report.

Six areas of activity

When I look back at this year of intense activity I see six areas in which I have developed special action.

A) AER membership

My first priority went to personal contacts with the members of the AER. Special attention was given to those who seemed to have difficulties with the question of their membership. In other cases I gave information on the political possibilities of the AER and the added value it was able to give to its members. These contacts were generally bilateral ones, but in some cases I had the privilege of meeting groups of members, for instance, with the French, Swedish, Romanian, UK, Portuguese and Italian delegations. (For next year it could be a good idea to take the initiative to bring together the national associations of regions).

Annexe 1 gives a general overview of the contacts that I have made.

Interregional cooperation and the networking of members

Throughout the year, a real effort has been made to encourage dialogue and interregional cooperation via Internet and our Web site <http://www.are-regions-europe.org> in particular. Since September the site represents a genuine source of information and means of exchange both in an interregional context and for the society in general. A page for communication and exchange of experience for the members, a discussion forum, an interregional partnership pool, a data base, subscription services.... have all been introduced on line. Today, our Web site is trilingual, and gives information on the AER (and is constantly being added to), its activities and its member Regions.

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In just one year our site has had over 20 000 visitors and their number is constantly growing (1200 in January, 3900 in October 2000). Our extranet (members only) has become an irreplaceable tool within the AER for the diffusion of documents. Thanks to our site being recognised by the international research motors, we hope that these figures will continue to increase, making the AER and its member Regions better known not only in Europe, but in the rest of the world as well.

B) Political themes

A second chapter of my activities dealt with various political themes to which the AER had given political priority. For example:

1. The Intergovernmental Conference

In this context I was in regular contact with the European Commission, with French presidency and the Belgian presidency (on 25/09, on 13/11, on 21/11) and I followed the activities of the Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament on this matter.

2. The Charter of Fundamental Rights

I have very closely followed the activities of the Convention and I represented the AER in a Committee of the Regions' hearing on 27th April.

3. Enlargement

Following the AER Conference in Wroclaw I represented the AER position to the European Commission on 12th April and 11th October. I was in touch with Commissioner Verheugen on 19th April and represented the AER in a hearing of the Committee of the Regions on 25th September.

4. Governance

Since President Prodi spoke to the European Policy Centre on 8th February, I have given top priority to this issue. I represented the AER interests in a meeting of Union Camere of 17th and 18th July, in Salzburg on 22nd September and I attended the Committee of the Regions Conference in Lille on 9th November. I was in regular personal contact with Mr Jerome Vignon and his team (Mr De Rynck).

5. Regional policies

The future of European Regional policies after enlargement and beyond 2007 has kept my attention and I attended the regular briefings given by Commissioner Barnier on 10th March, 13th April, 9th May, 25th September.

6. Mediterranean

The Barcelona process and the lessons AER can draw from it brought me to Marseille on 4th and 5th October and to Barcelona where I represented the AER's possible activities in this field on 5th October.

7. Other themes were social policy, environment (San Marino, November), tourism and culture (Europe of the Cultures in Porto, July and in Innsbruck on 11th and 12th December).

In all these cases I took the floor and explained to the audience or to the authorities the nature of the AER and our activities in these particular fields.



C) Contacts with institutions and sister organisations

a. Institutions

Committee of the Regions (CoR)

The institution to which I gave absolute priority is the Committee of the Regions. The main result of my contacts has been a formal agreement of cooperation between the Committee of the Regions on the one hand and the main interregional organisations on the other (AER, CPMR, CEMR and AEBR, and perhaps RETI). This agreement is about to be formalised and it will cover our direct relations with the Committee of the Regions on the one hand and interorganisational relations on the other. I see this as a major breakthrough in the organisation of regionalism and the best preparation for a re-edition of the declaration of Vienna of 1995. There is a very great need in cooperation and agreement on mutual support. In addition to my personal contacts with the President of the Committee of the Regions and of its Institutional Affairs Committee as well as with the new Secretary General and his team, I attended six plenary sessions, three hearings, one conference in Lille and one in Dublin and I tried to be present at every meeting of the Institutional Committee of the CoR.

One of the first things I will do in 2001 is to arrange for a briefing of the Secretariat staff concerning the structure and the working of the Committee of the Regions in Brussels. The four AER Committees will then be able to better follow the issues that are relevant to AER activities.

European Commission

The first contact with the European Commission was related to our immediate interests, e.g. Pacte (31st March)¹, Centurio, Summer School, the organisation of our Conference of European Ministers of Culture in Nyon (contacts with the Commissioner and her cabinet), European Governance (contacts with the cabinet of President Prodi, with Mr Vignon and his team, with Mr Stefani, private adviser to the President, with Director General Landaburu on 11th October), twinning between Regions (Seminar on 23rd October), environment (13th November). Finally, I contacted Commissioner Barnier and Verheugen and former Commissioner Peter Sutherland on 20th September and Van Miert on 20th September and 5th December. For the first time EU co-financing was received for some of our activities.

European Parliament

From 2001 onwards I will follow the activities of the European Parliament, in particular the Institutional, Regional and Budget Committees, since I feel that our profile in the European Parliament is too vague for the moment.

CLRAE

The second institution that I gave priority to was the Congress of Local and Regional authorities in Europe (CLRAE). I had two meetings with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (2nd February and 24th May), I had regular and formal contacts with the Secretary General, Mr Locatelli, on the 15th February and 13th June and with other members of the Secretariat (regarding our NGO status, on 5th April).

Finally, I represented the AER at the meetings of the Bureau of the CLRAE in January, February and September and I took the floor on behalf of the AER on the occasion of the CLRAE's plenary session on the 23rd – 25th June.

¹ The settlement of Pacte (EEP V, Pacte I and II) will take place in December 2000.



b. Contacts with our sister organisations

I have started an intense period of contacts with the CPMR, their Presidents and in particular with my colleague the Secretary General. These contacts took place on a regular monthly basis. I participated in the Conferences in Lisbon on 22nd-24th June on Governance and represented the AER in the CPMR's General Assembly on 11th and 13th October. Finally, a formal contact took place on 27th November in view of the preparation of a formal agreement on cooperation between the two organisations.

CEMR

Personal contact with my colleague Secretary General from the CEMR has taken place at regular intervals. The CEMR was also present at the meeting with the Committee of the Regions on 20th September where a principle agreement on cooperation was entered into.

A formal agreement of cooperation with the CEMR is now in preparation.

AEBR, RETI and AREV

The cooperation with the AEBR is developing equally well, but lacks formal coverage. Contact with the RETI is limited to my participation at their General Assembly on 13th November but will be formalised soon. Finally, contacts with AREV took place on 28th October.

c. Constitutional regions

This chapter is perhaps the most important new element in the life of regionalism in the course of the year 2000. I represented the AER in two spectacular new developments.

- a. The Conference of Presidents of the European Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe (CALRE) met in Santiago de Compostela on the 30th and 31st October. At this occasion I proposed a formal agreement for cooperation with the AER. This has been accepted and is now underway. It is particularly in the areas of the activity of our Committee A that this structural cooperation can be of great help for both organisations.
- b. On 23rd and 24th November I attended a meeting of the Regions with Legislative powers organised by the CLRAE in Barcelona. It is obvious that the stronger regions prefer a new organisation, closely linked to the elaboration of their specific interests. I represented the AER in the preparation stages in July and September. It is equally clear that the stronger regions are less interested in their AER membership and that this tendency is growing.

For the time being structural cooperation between the group of regions with legislative powers on the one hand (Governments) and the CALRE (Parliaments) on the other seems unlikely. The Governments will meet again at the beginning of March at the invitation of the Region of Vlaanderen and the CALRE will be presided by Madeira in 2001.

The documents approved at these two major events are at the disposal of the members of the General Assembly and I ask the advisory group to urgently follow-up the development of these two initiatives.

D) AER activities

The Statutes state that I am responsible for the organisation of AER meetings. I have made it a policy to personally attend every meeting, at all levels.



This General Assembly was prepared in Seinäjoki on the 19th and 20th June and I had meetings with the President and with Committee Presidents on 27th June, 5th September, 20th September, 14th November and 27th November.

The Presidium met on 18th February and 8th September in the office of Niederösterreich in Brussels. The Bureau met in Stuttgart on 5th May and 27th October in Nyon.

The Advisory Group met on 18th January, 17th February in Brussels, 10th and 11th April in Arad and 7th September in Brussels.

The members of Committee A met in Brussels on 7th September and the Committee had a formal meeting in Nyon on 26th October.

I attended the preparation of the Committee B session in Wallonie.

Committee C meeting was prepared on 31st January, 25th April and took place on 5th and 6th June.

Committee D was prepared on 5th September and took place in Nyon on 24th October.

I attended the EURODISSEY meetings: I went to Besançon on 26th June and attended the meeting of 10th July. Eurodissey is the AER programme aiming at the training of young people. It is the perfect example of regional autonomy and the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity. This programme has attracted the interest of several new Regions and has obtained nearly one thousand exchanges.

Regarding CENTURIO I participated in the meetings of 20th July, 6th October and 6th December. Edition 2000 of Centurio led to the organisation of around 30 traineeships in twenty Regions in Western Europe for candidates coming from Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. We are delighted with this outcome, however, we regret that many candidatures had to be refused due to a lack of hosts. The interest shown for the initiative "Centurio for the Balkans" launched by the AER for the first time this year, for its action in favour of stability and democracy in Central and Eastern Europe should be noted. Nine out of the ten candidatures received from Bosnia-Herzegovina were accepted. It is also important to stress that co-financing was accorded by the European Commission (at 80%) for the organisation of introductory and evaluation seminars.

As far as the Summer School is concerned, I attended meetings on 28th March, 13th April, 29th June and the meeting itself in Vilnius between 6th and 9th August. The Summer School 2000 was attended by around 120 participants. This edition not only received financial contributions from the organising Committee, but also from the Council of Europe and the European Union, which confirms its importance as a European project.

I was present at one of the two caravans of the year 2000: the one in Braga, Portugal between 14th and 16th June. The first was held in Győr (H) at the beginning of the year.

I attended the meeting in 's Hertogenbosh on 2nd November on relations between Regions and Cities and participated in the First Conference of European Regional Ministers of Culture in Nyon on 24th and 25th October.

As a conclusion I was unable to attend one caravan and one meeting of Committees B and C. For the rest I have been able to witness the enormous amount of energy that is developing within the AER structures.

E) Civil society



When I look back at my activities in 2000, I cannot forget the contacts I have had with civil society all over Europe and in particular in my own region. I attended every monthly meeting of the Rubens foundation in which the Flemish business community, universities, civil servants, press, cultural and social organisations come together. I have contacts with institutes who study federalism, regionalism and attended lectures organised by the European Policy Centre, TEPSA, IEA and the European movement. I gave several speeches myself on 25th February in Flanders, 9th June in Porto, 13th July in Rome, 17th October in the EPC regional state of the union briefing and the 18th December in Antwerpen. Finally, I attended the Kaiser Maximilian ceremonies in Salzburg and represented the AER in the European Cup of Regional Flavours event.

Finally, I produced various press articles and radio interviews. I regularly wrote articles concerning regionalism in the weekly publication WIJ.

In between I naturally received a great number of visitors and I paid special attention to the students who came to see me regarding their university theses or the books they were writing. Several students have found their way to the European institutions via the Secretariat.

Finally, I followed debates in the Royal Institute of International Relations in Brussels (31st May about the US elections on 13th September etc.).

Finally, I was in regular contact with Prof. Charles Ricq who represents the AER in several Council of Europe authorities (23rd May, 7th June, 24th October).

F) The AER secretariat

The improvement in the financial situation continues thanks to the joint efforts of Mr Claude Ruey, Vice-President Treasurer, and his assistant, Mr Laurent Werli, and all the members of the Secretariat in view of a strict control on expenditure and the encouragement of slow-paying members to cover their subscriptions.

From the very beginning I organised an all out brainstorming session with my staff in Strasbourg and Brussels and since then this process has never stopped. I spent 41 days in Strasbourg.

The general lines of the results of my activity as manager of the Secretariat have been laid down in a confidential document that was presented by me to the Bureau in Nyon. The process of adaptation and transformation of the existing secretariat in Strasbourg, and of the increasing activities of the AER Bureau in Brussels, is still underway and will, in the future, be more closely subordinated to the action plan that I hope will be agreed upon by the General Assembly.

Conclusion : Action plan 2001 – 2002

All this has led me to the following conclusion. There is nothing wrong with regionalism in Europe. If only it could be better organised. As far as the AER is concerned I see only one way to make our Renaissance become real and that is the Action plan 2001-2002 that I had the privilege to present to the AER Bureau in Nyon. We will probably discuss it at the end of this General Assembly, but let me state the following now:

1. The AER's survival and development depend on the full commitment of the 4 + 1 Committees (and may I add my experience).
2. We need clear and formal agreement on the priority activities of AER from now on. I therefore suggest that three priority items per Committee be identified. The AER will concentrate on and limit its activities to the area covered by these political themes. On the basis thereof formal agreements will be entered into with a certain number of members who declare themselves



prepared to develop a specific activity in these areas. In order to elaborate specific activity projects, agreements have to be entered into with our sister organisations in order to avoid overlapping with them.

3. A clear timing for this formal set of activities has to be agreed upon (2001-2002). The structure and the activities of AER will be adjusted in accordance with this specific action plan. Personally I see this kind of action plan as a condition sine qua non for the renaissance of our organisation. This, of course, is the ultimate objective of my activity as Secretary General.



Annexe 1

1. Belgium

Brussels government - 11th May

Wallonie : Minister-President – 13th September

Vlaanderen : Minister President – 16th November

German Speaking Community

2. France

ARF Paris – 17th May and 19th September

CESR – 19th December – Strasbourg

Alsace – 11th July

Franche Comté – 26th June

Ile de France – 16th October

French Presidency of the European Union – 8th June

3. Italy

Cinsedo – 14th June

Corte de Conti – 13th July

Lombardia – 12th May

Toscana – 3rd July and 13th October

San Marino – 10th and 11th November

Attending several regions

4. United Kingdom

Wales – 5th September and 30th November

Scotland – 3rd and 4th July, 26th July

United Kingdom delegations : 2nd October

5. Germany

Baden-Württemberg : Minister- President – 4th April and 23rd October

Berlin – 14th September (Frau Wulf Mathies - Belgian Ambassador + Flemish Representative)

6. Austria



Salzburg : Minister-President – 12th April and 22nd September

Nieder-Österreich : Minister-President – 20th September

7. Switzerland

Delegation of Vaud – 8th September (address to delegation)

8. Sweden

30th May and 9th October

9. Norway

18th December

10. Finland

15th February and 22nd February

12. Hungary

February

13. Ukraine

26th September

14. Russia

18th July

15. Poland

6th October, 21st November, 27th November

16. Netherlands

Noord-Brabant – 2nd November

17. Croatia

14th February

18. Georgia

Adjara – 26th April

19. South-Africa

Cape Town – 20th March



20. Ireland

No dates

21. Spain

25th February



ASSEMBLÉE DES RÉGIONS D'EUROPE
ASSEMBLY OF EUROPEAN REGIONS
VERSAMMLUNG DER REGIONEN EUROPAS
ASAMBLEA DE LAS REGIONES DE EUROPA
ASSEMBLEA DELLE REGIONI D'EUROPA

AER GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SEINÄJOKI, 7TH AND 8TH DECEMBER 2000

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Activity Report by President Luc Van den Brande

Now that I am taking leave of the Assembly of European Regions, I remember the first activities I undertook in this organisation. I remember chairing the East-West Committee at the time when Mr Pujol presided over our Assembly. I took over from him in December 1996. This was in the immediate wake of the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties, and we were scarcely beginning to feel the effects of the establishment of the Committee of the Regions, which we ourselves had called for. Moreover, important decentralisation processes were starting to emerge (for instance in Poland and the United Kingdom). It was a time of difficult relations with our sister organisations, and we were encountering some organisation and financing problems. The "Pacte" issue suddenly arose in a worrying way.

Now, dear friends, I am proud to present to you a very different "state of the Union". While we cannot say that the AER has already arrived safe and sound in port, at least it can be stated that it is no longer heading straight for the rocks. A lot remains to be done, both for the members and for the General Secretariat.

In December 1996 you entrusted me with the responsibility for the organisation. Please remember that I sent the ball right back into your court almost immediately by underlining the great political responsibility of the standing committees. The recovery and Renaissance we are now witnessing are in fact the result of the efforts of our members themselves. This has become clear from the activity reports by our Committees, and the news of our revival has spread to the outside world.

In this respect I would like to underline the great merit of our treasurer, Mr Ruey, and his assistant, Laurent Wehrli. Their intense, almost daily and very conscientious contributions have been absolutely decisive. I would like to ask you to express your gratitude by applauding warmly our two Swiss friends who have turned our balance sheets around and put our finances on a sound footing.

In a few moments you will have an opportunity to listen to the first activity report by our new Secretary General. Having had a glance at the text he has produced, I can see that his first year of work has not exactly been a picnic. I will give the floor to him in a moment.

As for me, I think that I can summarise the approach we must adopt to prepare the future of our organisation by referring you to the note entitled "The Way Ahead". The main lines of this document were welcomed by the Stuttgart Bureau. Since then, political developments mean that certain parts of this document are no longer valid, and must therefore be updated as

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soon as possible. The essence of the message I set down is that we must take our courage in our hands and focus on the two fundamental services our organisation offers to its members.

Firstly, we are once again the political forum par excellence for democratic debate on regionalism. Here we can directly and freely exchange views on our political experiences. In addition we are the biggest and richest network of Regions. That is our second *raison d'être*: in everything that we do, we are a precious network of contacts, exchanges and sharing of experience through our Assemblies, our Bureau meetings and above all through our four main Committees.

We recovered following the establishment of the Committee of the Regions which, indeed, for some time profoundly influenced the very basis of our organisation. We feel that European regionalism is increasingly based on our members in Central and Eastern Europe. Now, in the era of enlargement, we are the only organisation which, due to our structure, can claim that for us enlargement has been a fact of life for a long time. My hope is, therefore, that our friends in Central and Eastern Europe, and in the Regions around the Mediterranean, will very soon take up their rightful place in our structures, in our Committees and in our political management.

That is why I strongly recommend the approach suggested by the General Secretariat regarding the action plan for the coming two years. I will no longer have the same responsibility, but I believe that on the basis of my experience as President for four years, there is no other way, but to intensify our activity exactly along the lines prescribed by the Secretary General.

I would, dear friends, have preferred to continue working among you, but as you may have seen, political events in my country have taken a different turn. This has not prevented me from representing the Assembly on several occasions in the Committee of the Regions and above all in its Institutional Commission in San Sebastian, Lille and recently again in Valence and Paris, where I had the privilege of meeting President Giscard d'Estaing on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the CEMR.

I also welcome the considerable rapprochement that is developing between the AER and the CPMR, whose President did us the honour of personally attending our General Assembly. Our improved relations with the CPMR, the AEBR, the CEMR and RETI are also, in my view, another positive factor which has emerged during my Presidency.

The memory of my Presidency will remain with me for the rest of my life. I will remain fully at the disposal of the AER which, more than ever, will be the organisation whose task it is to defend regionalism in Europe. Regionalism, as our Secretary General often says, is a form of faith. We must therefore believe in it.

My old catechism in Malines, where I come from, said that faith was nothing without works: "without works, faith is dead". I therefore commit myself to continue working for the Assembly of European Regions, and I would like to wish it every success under its new President, my successor. Now, as I hand over the mantle, my feeling is that, during the four years of my Presidency, I was able to prevent our boat from sinking. Now we can raise the sails together, because I feel that that our vessel is gaining speed along a politically sound and realistic route. I wish it good luck. Good luck to my successor, good luck to you, my friends and members of the Assembly of European Regions, good luck to our sister organisations, to the Secretariat General and to all: good luck with your work.