

ACTIVITY REPORT

2002



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I. Report by Liese Prokop, the AER President

At the General Assembly in Seinäjoki in December 2001 a large majority of the delegates expressed their confidence by electing me for a period of two years as President of the Assembly of European Regions. These two years at the head of our movement have passed in no time at all. I hope that this brief overview of my activities during the last twelve months will once again meet your approval.

My working style - and also my understanding of European issues - is shaped by the history and geography of my home region of Lower Austria. I have therefore continued to adopt an informal leadership style, collaborating closely with my Vice-Presidents and the Presidents of our Committees. One new member of our team who has settled in since the start of the year is Klaus Klipp, whose appointment as Secretary General was confirmed at the last General Assembly. At the end of January, the Presidium met at the offices of our General Secretariat in Strasbourg to discuss the work programme and allocation of responsibilities for the year. I have worked to ensure that the AER discussions of issues relevant to our membership receive maximum visibility. The main work of our organisation takes place in our four Committees, and this year they have worked hard to organise three regional ministerial conferences on topics of crucial importance for the regions. The excellent turnout at these recent conferences demonstrates that we have chosen the right means. I would like to express my thanks to all those involved - our Committee Presidents, the host regions and, our Committee Secretaries, their assistants and all the staff involved - for their hard work and commitment. The individual Committees will be providing their own reports on these events.

I would also like to thank those involved in organising the first Youth Summer School, which demonstrated the degree of commitment amongst young people to working together for Europe.

The main political issue on the agenda this year continues to be the work of the Convention on the Future of Europe and the question of the regions' involvement. I was therefore pleased to accept the invitation of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing to join representatives of other inter-regional organisations to discuss the future of Europe at a meeting on 7 March in Valencia. I am proud of the fact that on that occasion the AER was the only organisation to be in a position to present the President with a written summary of its ideas.

The decision in Laeken to set up the Convention ushered in a new era of European history and created the basis for Political Union. From the very outset of this unique process of discussion and reform, it has been clear that two major issues hold the key to achieving tangible results: on the one hand, the question of simplifying existing European treaties and drawing them together into a single constitutional document; and on the other hand the question of the division of powers between the European Union and its member states.

These challenges naturally create high expectations amongst our citizens as well as the governments of the member states. The response to these demands should be to draw up a new plan that enables Europe to successfully develop from an economic community into a community of values.

In this process the regions are also called on to put forward their ideas on a European political order in the Convention. As I have already stated, the regional authorities and we, their representative organisations, put forward our suggestions at an early stage. The primary issue at stake is the role to be allocated to the regional authorities within a European constitution.

The AER is making an important contribution to the work of the Convention. The inter-regional organisations included amongst our founders and present membership have used the opportunity to formulate their ideas jointly with us. Shortly after taking over as President I set the task of strengthening

dialogue with these organisations. Thanks to the efforts of Jens Gabbe, Secretary General of the European Association of Border Regions, and Peter de Martin, General Secretary of the Working Community of Danube Countries, I was able to issue an invitation to a second meeting of Presidents of these organisations at the end of March in Linz, in Upper Austria. Participants included representatives of the Committee of the Regions, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions. At the end of the meeting, participants approved the so-called Linz Declaration.

Since the Convention on the Future of Europe started its work it has become increasingly important for representatives of regional organisations to liaise amongst each other and jointly articulate their opinions. This does not mean that the AER - or I personally - are trying to interfere in the work of these organisations or to speak on their behalf. But at this crucial point in time I consider it is necessary for us to establish common positions and represent these jointly, so that we can make our voice heard and achieve a greater impact. This is the main reason for this collaboration with other organisations, and we intend to continue it.

Last year I also tried to take up contact with as many of our members as possible. For example I had meetings with the Minister for European Affairs in Bavaria, Herr Bocklet, and the President of the Landtag of Thüringen, Frau Lieberknecht, as well as paying visits to the Hungarian Komitat of Veszprem and the Hungarian capital, Budapest. I feel that maintaining close contact with our members, in order to listen to their expectations of the AER and discuss any problems with them is of great importance.

Enlargement of the European Union is now on the horizon. As you know, I come from Austria, a country that shares external borders with four of the accession states - the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia.

In Austria there is at present considerable public debate about European enlargement, the opportunities it offers and its likely impact. Particularly amongst the inhabitants of our border regions there is much talk of the problems enlargement may bring.

A majority of our citizens in Austria are in favour of enlargement of the European Union. With members from across Europe the AER is in a unique position to make an important contribution to this movement for peace on our continent. We must work together to build the European House and achieve our main aim: implementation of our Declaration on Regionalism - passed six years ago but now more relevant than ever before - and application of the principle of subsidiarity. It is we, the regions of Europe, who can provide a guarantee to our citizens that any future problems can be overcome.

II. Report by Claude Ruey, the Vice-President Treasurer

This year I have again taken particular attention in the management of finances and the control of expenditures. The AER financial situation has now been rectified. Many measures, launched at my initiative, were continued in 2002:

- control of expenditure, notably with the need for expenditure of 3 050 and above or not-provided for in the budget requiring my prior authorisation;
- control of subscriptions and reminders being sent to slow-paying Regions: three reminder letters were sent to these Regions in May (subscriptions for 2001 and previous years), September (subscriptions for 2002 and previous years) and October with the documents for the General Assembly;
- monitoring of specific situations: I have insisted that Regions inform me of their specific difficulties in order to find a solution for each particular case and allowing them to meet their statutory obligations;
- expulsion of Regions not having paid their subscriptions for the last three years and not replying to reminders. I feel that it is necessary and fair regarding the Regions which make the effort to pay their subscriptions, to exclude these Regions which do not comply with the provisions in the Statutes;
- the application of the decision taken at the General Assembly in Lyons (1999) to increase the subscription according to the inflation rate in France or in the EU.

This year, I have again overseen the judicial proceedings, in particular the final closing of the Pacte programme. Following a detailed investigation by the Strasbourg judicial police, the judicial complaint lodged by AER against selected members of the project has reached the pre-trial stage. The other complaint lodged by AER against a service provider is currently being judged by the Court of Appeal.

In the principle of transparency, at each Presidium and Bureau meeting, I have presented documents concerning the financial situation of the AER, both in terms of statements of income and expenditure for 2002 and subscriptions for between 2002 and 1998. In addition, my assistant, Mr Laurent Werli has kept in regular contact with the Secretariat, making visits in person on several occasions.

One of the notable events of this year was the arrival of Mr Klaus Klipp as Secretary General. As Vice-President Treasurer, and at the request of President Prokop, I was closely involved in the early days of Mr Klipp's tenure, in particular concerning financial and legal aspects.

Politically I was involved in developing numerous AER positions pertaining to the evolution of regionalism in Europe, and a greater consideration of the regions and their elected representatives in European institutions, particularly within the Convention. I was also involved in the cultural area having participated in the 2nd conference of regional ministers of culture, which took place in Brixen in October 2002. I had the pleasure of hosting the initial conference in my Canton, Vaud, and in my city, Nyon.

It is my responsibility to allow the new Vice-President Treasurer elected at the 2002 General Assembly in Naples to be aware of the financial situation of the AER. After being involved in the AER for over 12 years it is now time that I allow another to take my place as I have left my position in the Canton of Vaud. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their help throughout the years, with particular thanks to past members of the Bureau, the General Secretariat's team and my colleague Mr. Laurent Wehri.

I have had the pleasure to be involved in a cause that I hold dear - the promotion of our regions and Cantons within the idea of regionalism and constructive federalism in our countries and across Europe. Be sure that I will continue this political fight, one which I now carry out of a federal level in Switzerland.

III. Report by Jan Waszkiewicz, the Vice-President

One of the most important AER initiatives – Centurio Programme – successfully continued in 2002. There were 122 participants from most of the candidate countries and even some non candidate (Georgia or Azerbaijan). Applicants came from both political and civil servant. Thanks to the establishment of a Centurio Web Site it was easier to arrange these applications, with the AER Secretariat organising around 30 traineeships offered by Western Regions. The AER also launched a new formula of Centurio work placements in Eastern Europe, following Lower Silesian Region’s successful experience with Ukraine. They also launched new vocational training and regional twinnings. The Centurio programme was expanded to Southern Europe and the Mediterranean Basin as well as to the Balkans.

European data base of Lower Silesian Personnel – Lower Silesian Voivodeship launched an innovative project for the regional group of candidates for European officers linked with the well-established AER Centurio and Summer School programmes. These projects are aimed at preparing candidates to become Lower Silesia officers for European integration, to compete for positions in EU institutions and to ensure competent preparation of EU structural fund projects in the region. To achieve these goals Lower Silesian officers, graduates of regional universities and students in advanced studies should be taught about European integration issues. The first stage of this project is the creation of data base of candidates (from a few dozen to hundreds) fulfilling precisely defined criteria. Selected candidates from this list could receive training in EU institutions, regional and local administration of EU countries, study tours in Brussels and training courses on European integration in Poland. Several hundred candidates were interested in being part of this database base and meet the programme's criteria and of these more than one hundred persons were selected to be trained. In 2002 several participants took part in the Summer School in Opatija and in Centurio. The European database in the Polish region of Lower Silesia is now fully operational and needs to be promoted through the AER in order to find participants other EU candidate regions.

□ Other initiatives

- “Enlargement from a Local and Regional Perspective” (5 July 2002, Brussels): this conference was organised by the local and regional authorities of Denmark to mark the beginning of the Danish EU Presidency. Key politicians and experts discussed the challenges of enlargement on a local and regional level.
- “GATS and the privatisation of education” - lecture for 2nd European Conference of Regional Ministries of Culture and Education in Brixen (18 October 2002).
- Proposal for the new initiative “Our people in Brussels” - creation of a network of persons representing member regions in European institutions in Brussels – presented during the AER Presidium meeting in June.

IV. Report by Lambert Van Nistelrooij, the Vice-President

□ Institutional regional activities

In relation to several official bodies of the Union I represent the AER in institutional affairs.

• The Convention

The AER completed a position paper on the role of the European regions after enlargement. Representing the AER in hearings of the Convention on the 25th of June and the 16th of October in Brussels, within the Committee of Regions, I expressed the AER position which was well understood, especially by the President of the working group on subsidiarity Mr J.L. Dehaene.

• The CLRAE

As the Vice President of the Institutional Committee of the Chamber of Regions of the CLRAE I had an active role in discussing institutional topics like the Charter of Regional Self-Government. In preparation of the General Assembly I expressed the interest of the AER. The AER network is one of the founding groups to promote powers and influence for the regional Self-Government in Europe.

• The CoR

In the Committee of Regions, I represented our positions in the Social and Economic Committee.

□ Alive, European Challenge to Ageing (initiative of the AER) www.alive-eu.org

- The theme of active Ageing reporting in the Committee of Regions in June 2002.
- Attending the Conference of European Ministers on Migration and mobility on the Council, 16th – 17th September in Helsinki.
- Preparation of the second European Conference of regional ministers for health and social affairs in Milan, 8th November on the Cross Border Care.
- Representation of interests in the conference of the Committee of the Regions, CLRAE and Alive about the challenges of ageing, 13th November in Brussels.
- Alive's European Round Table 20th November in Brussels, planning the programme for 2003-2007.

□ Specific Relations

Romania

As the Vice President responsible for contact with our the Romanian members

- Presentation of the report about an AER Antenna in Romania during the Bureau meeting of the AER, 11th April in Exeter. A definite decision will be taken during the General Assembly.
- As member of the CLRAE reported about the regional development in Romania in April 2002 and attended the seminar of the CLRAE, the Romanian Government and the European Commission on 7th – 8th October in Romania. The AER and the Union will give assistance for regionalisation in Romania for the period 2002-2004.

Greece

Presentation of a report on regional development in Greece, and the preparation of a CLRAE Conference with the regional presidents in 2003.

□ AER 2002 Summer School

Represented the Presidium in the opening session of the 2002 AER Summer School in Opatija (Croatia), 7th – 8th September 2002.

V. Report by Klaus Klipp, Secretary General

This report only describes the support of the Secretariat to the activities of the Committees and Programmes.

□ Introduction

- Team spirit in the political bodies and the Secretariat
Great thanks to my colleagues in the Secretariat for their warm welcome as new General Secretary.
- Diversity of the AER and of its members
AER's topics and activities reflect the diversity of the regions of Europe.
- Involvement of our members
It is the total involvement of the AER members that brings the AER to life.

□ Reaction to current topics: Convention, Cohesion policy, Sustainable Development

The Secretariat's contribution to the Convention took some of our energies:

- Questionnaire at an early stage (Spring) as basis for a position paper
- Youth discussion Web site: contribution to the Youth Convention
- Contact group 'Regions and local authorities', with Ana Palacio, Presidium of the Convention. The AER was represented by Philip Johnson, with the participation of many member regions (10th June)
- Audition at the Convention, common position with the CoR and the main Interregional Organisations - Participation of Lambert van Nistelrooij – 24th – 25th June
- Audition at the CoR - Participation of Lambert van Nistelrooij – 4th July
- Institutional Committee of the CoR - Participation of Peter Straub – 11th October
- Contact group of the Interregional Organisations with Jean-Luc Dehaene - Participation of Lambert van Nistelrooij – 16th October
- Constant lobbying on this matter, also with other interregional organisations

□ Other initiatives

- Further developing alliances
This started with the Linz Conference and Declaration (Spring) which has proved to have been an important kick-off for cooperation in reference to the Convention. This action will be continued in 2003. CPMR has withdrawn from the AER, but later the new President sent a letter asking for close cooperation.
- GATS: General Agreement on Trade in Services
The GATS Conference motivated a lot of regions less active in the organisation to participate.
- Working Group 'Regionalism'
Support for members involved in national debates about the future of regions with valid arguments and cooperation with research instituts
- Working Group 'Regional Partnership/Cooperation'
Further development of the Council of Europe's activities in favour of regional partnerships and our own proposal on programmes of the EU concerning cooperation between regions should be organised
- AER Brussels Office
We have our own Office in Brussels, human resources and the offices are supplied by our Wallonia member whom we would like to thank for this assistance: On December 17th we

had our first meeting with the Brussels offices of our member regions in order to establish closer cooperation.

- **Organisational development of the Secretariat**
Ongoing organisational development of the Secretariat to adapt it to new demands of our members.
- **Budgets for Committees**
An old policy has been reintroduced by creating budgets for the Committees.
- **Website**
The use of our Web site has doubled this year and the statistics tell us that we are reaching our target audience.
- **Political focus for meetings**
The agendas of the Presidium, Bureau and General Assembly are increasingly focusing on important political issues.

VI. Reports from the Committees

Committee on Institutional Affairs

□ Documents

- Contribution to the work of the European Convention
- The future role of the regions in the European Union
- Position on the European Commission's communication on "Better Lawmaking"
- Resolution "2005, European Year of local and regional Partnership"

□ European Convention

- Draft Constitutional Treaty presented by the Presidium of the Convention in October 2002
- Principle of subsidiarity
- Principle of limited empowerment
- Principle of proportionality
- Principle of Community Loyalty

□ Main issues of the AER contribution to the European Convention

- Respect of the territorial organisation as a part of the national identity of the Member States
- Integration of the regional level into the principle of subsidiarity
- Clear division of competencies in the future constitutional Treaty
- In the framework of the "Early warning system" the second chamber of bicameral parliaments should have the right to use its ex-ante control
- Role of the regional parliaments to be taken into account
- Committee of the Regions to be strengthened
- Clear distinction to be drawn between the legislative functions and executive tasks of the Council
- Improvement of the European Parliament's Right of co-decision
- Right of the regions to bring proceedings before the European Court of Justice

□ Role of the regions in the future European Union

- Regionalisation is the only way to ensure the cultural and political diversity of Europe
- The EU has to pilot efficiently, democratically and close to the citizens
- European Institutions should consider the role of the regions as guarantors of an economical and territorial balance
- Regions can act as "mediators" between the Union and its citizens and make the Community legislation understandable

□ European Governance: Communication of the European Commission on "Better lawmaking"

- Comprehensible exercise of the right of initiative vested in the Commission
- Reinforced hearings in the sense of a "culture of dialogue and participation"
- Systematic use of impact assessments

□ **Main issues of the AER contribution to the European Governance**

- The transfer of tasks to so-called “European regulatory agencies” could lead to an erosion of regional competencies in applying European legislation
- The conclusion of “tripartite contracts” should not have direct influence on the execution of legal acts by the sub-national entities
- The European Commission should take into account the particular role of regional and local authorities and not put them under the broad heading “civil society”
- When it comes to impact assessment of legislative initiatives, the consequences for the budgets of regional and local authorities should also be taken into account
- The Commission has to make clearer, when new consultation procedures apply in its decisions-making processes
- The voice of regional authorities should be heard within the framework of a “reinforced culture of dialogue and consultation”

□ **Regional Partnerships: Resolution “2005, European year of local and regional partnership”**

- Drawing attention to the fact that regional and local authorities are “natural mediators” between the Union and its citizens
- Considering that local and regional partnership substantially assists in enhancing mutual understanding between the cultures
- The European Union is requested to declare the year 2005 “European Year of local and regional partnership”

Committee on Social cohesion, Social Services and Health Affairs

□ Major events

- Organisation of the 2nd Conference of European Regional Ministers for Health and Social Affairs (Milan-I, 8th November), two Committee Plenary Sessions (Timis-RO, 23rd-24th May and Milan Lombardia-I, 6th-7th November) and the seminar on Domestic Violence (Timisoara-RO, 23rd May)
- Participation in the European and international conferences “Shaping the Future of Social Services in Europe” - European Social Network (Barcelona-E, 5th-7th June), “Dependant Persons - Regions - European Union” (Polkowice-PL, 25th September), “Poverty and Social Exclusion” organised by the Danish EU Presidency (Århus/DK, 17th-18th October)

□ Dialogue with European bodies

- Health Policy Forum / European Public Health Forum
- European Social Platform / European Social Network (ESN)

□ Work of the sub-committees projects & actions

- Suicide Prevention (SUPPORT)
- Services and Prevention for the Elderly (SPE)
- Alive & Cross-border Care (CBC)
- Safety Across Europe (SAE)
- Domestic Violence
- EurHealth

□ Main results

- Conclusions of the 2nd Conference of European Regional Ministers for Health and Social Affairs “Raising Standards of Qualifications for Elderly Care Professionals”
- Resolution on Domestic Violence

Committee on Regional policy, Spatial Planning, Infrastructures, Environment and Tourism

□ Major events

- Organisation of the 1st AER Conference of regional Presidents and Ministers on the future of EU regional and cohesion policy (Pécs, Baranya-H, 14th-15th November), two Committee's plenary sessions on the regions contribution to sustainability (Bodö, Nordland-N, 14th June and Pécs, Baranya-H, 15th November, a workshop "Regions and sustainable development", (Florence, Toscana-I, 19th April), a workshop "How Regions get access to EU funding" (Brussels-B, 5th July) and the Committee Presidium meeting (Naples, Campania-I, 29th November).
- Participation in external events such as: the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg (August-September), Mini-session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (Strasbourg-F, 22nd March) and Meeting of its Committee on sustainable development (Strasbourg, 28th-29th November), Conference on future EU regional policy, (Plymouth-UK, 20th September), Preparatory meeting for the creation of a Global Network of Regional Governments for sustainable development (London, 9th December), Seminar on "Airport Regions : facing the challenges of sustainable development" (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 28th-29th November).

□ Main topics

- The Regions contribution to sustainable development – Key role of the regional level in the implementation of the Johannesburg plan of action.
- The Regions involvement in the future of EU Cohesion and structural policy in an Enlarged Europe – How to make this future policy a more flexible tool for the regions policies of spatial planning and regional development?
- The impact of CAP review on the Regions agriculture and rural development. The added value of regional policies of sustainable rural development.

□ The Regions contribution to sustainable development

- Statement "regions and sustainable transport": the application of the European transport policy must in any case be tailored to meet the particular circumstances of geography, economy and settlement patterns within the Regions in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.
- Declaration "how can Regions ensure a sustainable future for their citizens ? Regions prepare themselves to the Johannesburg Summit": 41 Regions committed themselves to the implementation of the WEHAB measures (Water, Energy, Health, Agricultural productivity, Biodiversity).
- AER in Johannesburg : Presentation of concrete regional actions in favour of sustainable development (report by Thomas Hägg, Jämtland, and the AER).

❑ **The Regions involvement in the future EU cohesion and structural policy in an enlarged Europe**

- 1st AER Conference of Regional Presidents and Ministers on the future of EU Cohesion Policy in Pécs, Baranya (H),
- Final Resolution on the “Regions” project for a new European Cohesion Policy “the Regions contribution to sustainable development in tomorrow’s Europe”.

❑ **The impact of cap review on regions agriculture and rural development**

- Organisation of a enquiry on “the European Regions” Opinion on CAP mid-term review and report on the outcome of this survey.

Committee on Culture, Education and Training, Youth, Media and Information Technology, Sport

□ Major events

- 2nd Conference of European Regional Ministers for Culture and Education (Brixen, 18th October)
- Plenary Sessions in Kielce (Swietokrzyskie, 28th February – 1st March) and in Brixen (Bozen-Südtirol), 17th October)
- Seminar: Culture, Education & Training - Project Conception and Community co-financing (Kielce, 1st March)

□ Main topics

- GATS and WTO: The implications of liberalising public services in the areas of culture and education
- Helping the Regions to gain better access to EU programmes
- Appraisal of the EU Commission's educational and cultural programmes
- Key points: Information Transparency, Application Procedures, Deadlines, Financial Share of the EU, Selection of Projects

□ Objective & Concerns

- Formulating the Common Position of the European Regions on ongoing GATS negotiations with regard to commitments, requests and offers
- Globalisation of markets
- Unlimited access for private providers to public services in culture, education and the media (schools, universities, public radio, libraries, archives)
- The impact of comprehensive liberalisation and private competition on services under government authority
- Erosion of competences
- Limiting the Scope of Actions

□ Results

- Resolution of the Regional level to keep culture, education and the media out of GATS
- Insistence on the participation of the Regions in the EU "Ad hoc Article 133 Committee (Services)" in areas of their competence (culture, media, education, training, health)
- Exhaustive documentation of GATS related literature on the AER website
- First analysis in Europe of GATS from a regional perspective
- Cooperation with non-European regional governments on a global scale (Australia, Canada)
- Involvement of NGOs, universities, cultural, educational and media organisations in the work of the AER
- Agreement to monitor GATS negotiations on a permanent basis (Working Group on GATS)
- Support for the Quebec/Canadian Initiative for an international instrument governing cultural diversity

VII. Report from the AER Programmes

Centurio, Summer School, Eurodyssey

□ Centurio

In total 31 work placements were given. Thanks to the new Centurio web page which allows the AER Secretariat to better meet applicant's expectations as well as those of future host regions the placement were more easily accorded than in past years.

With regard to applications 11 were received from Polish representatives. Furthermore host regions were enthusiastic toward applicants from the Czech Republic with 4 out of the 5 candidates being accepted by a host region.

Co-operation between the AER and the Local Democracy Agencies of the Council of Europe has also helped bring Centurio into regions the Balkans. Three applicants have been accepted from these regions (Macedonia, Voivodina, Belgrade), which can be considered a success given the major linguistic difficulties faced by candidates from the Balkans.

Finally, this year's Centurio programme included the first ever trainee from a Mediterranean region – the region of Sfax in Tunisia. Centurio was opened up to regions on the South Mediterranean coast due to the growing importance of the north-south dimension in the construction of Europe (Barcelona process). The region of Brussels-Capital, which has privileged co-operation agreements with the regions of Morocco and Tunisia, accepted this first ever "Euro-Mediterranean" trainee.

We would like to thank the 17 regions having chosen to organise work placement, most of which are regular Centurio participants (Bern, Catalunya, Salzburg, Aarhus, Alentejo, Fyns, Wien, Vejle, Thüringen, Trento, Yorkshire & Humberside, Ringköping, Veneto, Bruxelles-Capitale, Centre, Västernorrland, Kärnten).

We have unfortunately taken note that, despite the commitment of these regions and the reminders sent out to European institutions such as the CoR and the CLRAE, we have been unable to meet all requests for work placements. In this situation, and bearing in mind the overwhelming motivation of Centurio applicants, the AER Secretariat has decided to organise the Centurio Forum in Wien on the 13th of December 2002 – a training seminar is organised for all participants (co-ordinators, trainees, and applicants) and many participants have already registered. This seminar will focus on the e-governance techniques and interregional co-operation.

□ Summer School

Edition 2002 of the Summer School was organised by 4 Adriatic Regions □ Primorsko-Goranska, Istarska, Dubrovacko-Neretvanska (Croatia) and Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Italy), with the support of Brussels-Capital (B), Gloucestershire (UK), Noord-Brabant (NL), Thüringen (D), Wien (A) and Wallonie (B). The AER Summer School 2002 was also supported by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

Roughly 200 participants from 50 Regions in 19 European countries – from both inside and outside of the European Union – attended the Summer School 2002, along with high-ranking representatives from European and Croatian national authorities. Mere days after the Johannesburg Summit (26 August - 4

September), this year the Summer School focused on concrete implementation policies for sustainable development at the regional level. The Summer School encouraged the exchange of concrete experience and know-how among participants in various fields such as environmental protection and sustainable social and economic development.

The “Adriatic Agenda 21”, launched by the 4 organising regions in the Adriatic, was the first concrete outcome of our work. This initiative aims to establish a permanent co-operation network between Adriatic regions and towns on sustainability issues in order to stop degradation of the environment within the Adriatic basin and to improve quality of life.

The AER was determined to support the process begun in Opatija and therefore co-signed the Opatija Declaration. *“We indeed believe that with joint efforts, such as the Adriatic Agenda 21 initiative, we can preserve remaining European areas of unspoiled nature and areas with specific culture which are both threatened by dominating development trends”* explained Paul Diemel, Co-ordinator of the AER Summer School Organising Committee.

A major outcome of the Summer School 2002 was the parallel organisation of the 1st AER Youth Summer School on Environmental sustainability. This combination allowed more than 40 young people from all over Europe to discuss their proposals for a more sustainable future directly with regional experts and politicians.

□ Eurodyssey

Eurodyssey is a programme of professional exchanges that allows hundreds of youths from across Europe to deepen their knowledge, to gain new skills and to learn other social, linguistic and cultural realities. Based on passed experience the Pilot Committee established the a goal for 2002 to further develop and to improve the running of the programme:

- Taking note of the programme's strengths and weaknesses in order to develop a clear strategy
- End administrative and financial problems of the regions of Central and Eastern Europe
- Revamping of the web site to highlight the three participant groups of the programme (regions, Young people and enterprises) in order to be more effective. This initiative is currently underway.

Driven by the enthusiasm of the Eurodyssey youths, and from Young people who were unable to participate in the programme due to the non membership of their regions, those responsible for the Eurodyssey programme took the opportunity to invite their counterparts to take part in the programme.

In 2002, the Eurodyssey programme had 28 member regions and 11 others that will soon join the Eurodyssey team. The figures that state the numbers of placements granted in 2002 have yet to be finalised. In 2001, 777 Young people participated in the Eurodyssey programme.

In accordance with the new status of the Eurodyssey programme adopted in 2001 the term for the Presidency and the General Secretariat, held from 1985 until today by the Franche-Comté Region (F), expires at the end of 2002. Eurodyssey members, as well as the whole AER team, would like to thank the region of Franche-Comté for its involvement and support during all these years.

Following a review of the applicants from Wallonie (B) and Açores (P) to succeed Franche-Comté, the AER Bureau in consultation with the region members of the programme, after an intense debate, has selected Wallonie for the 2003-2004 period. Thus the Wallonie candidature will be submitted for adoption to the General Assembly in Naples.

VIII. AER key priorities and specific initiatives 2003-2004

I. Key priorities

- ❑ **Organise a dialogue between the European regions in order to prepare their common positions for the next Intergovernmental Conference**
 - Monitoring the European Convention's work and proposals for amendment to the draft European Constitution, with the goal to promote the principle of subsidiarity and the preservation of cultural diversity as founding values of a new Europe;
 - Dialogue with the members of the European Convention, in coordination with other interregional organisations;
 - Participation in the debate on the future of representative democracy and the role of regional parliaments;
 - Organisation of the General meeting ("*Etats généraux*") of European regions (Poznan/Wielkopolska-PL, 27th-28th November 2003).

- ❑ **Influence the debate on the Cohesion and Structural Policy in an enlarged EU**
 - Establishing a consultation process between the regions, as well as national and European bodies on the management and simplification of structural funds (establishing a Working Group);
 - Contributing to the debate on the simplification of structural funds by organising the 2nd Conference of Regional Ministers and Presidents on future EU Cohesion Policy (Santa Anna di Isola Capo Rizzuto/Calabria-I, 5th-6th June 2003);
 - Increasing the visibility of the regions by co-organising or participating in major conferences and seminars at the European level (e.g. CoR Conference, Leipzig/Saxen-D, 5th-6th May).

- ❑ **Protection of cultural diversity and the debate on the future of public services in Europe**
 - Monitoring of the WTO on GATS, defending the exemption of culture, education, media and health care from GATS rules and negotiations;
 - Safeguarding the exclusive competences of Member States and regions in these sectors within a future European Constitutional Treaty;
 - Monitoring of the elaboration of the EU Commission Green Paper on public services in Europe.

- ❑ **Contribute to sustainable development of the regions by building regional partnerships and multilateral cooperation projects**
 - Active involvement of the regions and their citizens in discussion and execution of theme oriented and multilateral projects;
 - Increasing the experience exchanges by launching the INTERREG IIIII Centurio Programme with a specific focus on regional developments policies;
 - Promoting the best interregional and trans-border projects and initiatives;
 - Development of a spirit of multilateral cooperation.

- ❑ **Improving co-ordination with other interregional organisations in Europe**

II. Specific initiatives (by Committee)

❑ Institutional Affairs

- Contribution to the major European current events: European Convention, IGC, Enlargement;
- Compilation and publication of ‘Reference Guide’ of forms of regional partnership across Europe, on the basis of a questionnaire addressed to all AER member regions (Working Group “Regional Partnership”);
- Publication of document entitled “Regions-The Crucial Role of Sub-National Governance in the Success of Europe” (Working Group “Regionalism Across Europe”);
- Organisation of seminar for the Baltic States (Kaunas, Lithuania) on the themes of ‘Regionalism’ and ‘Interregional Cooperation’;
- Evaluation and development of legal and institutional framework for interregional cooperation (Working Group “Regional Partnership”);
- Organisation of joint Conference AER/Bertelsmann Foundation on the themes of Regions within the European Constitution and the Intergovernmental Conference.

❑ Regional development

- Regional and cohesion policy: improve regional access to EU programmes and funds;
- Sustainable development: implementation of the Johannesburg World Summit proposals - Global regional network on sustainable development and AER Forum on sustainable development (Gera/Thüringen-D, 9th-10th October);
- Environment: Competition for the first Most Environmentally Friendly Region Award;
- Tourism: Forum on sustainable regional tourism (Porec/Istria-HR, 26th-27th June);
- Agriculture and rural development: further developing the Regions’ position on CAP mid-term review;
- Transport: regional perspectives and contribution to a future Common Transport Policy - Workshop on “Regions and sustainable transport“ (Lyon/Rhône-Alpes-F, 11th April) – Implications of No-frills airlines for regional airports.

❑ Healthcare - Elderly Care

- Conference of the European Regional Ministers of Health;
- Representation of the regional level in the European Public Health Forum;
- Implementation of "Safety Across Europe" findings;
- Setting up professional standards for those who care for the elderly;
- “Alive“, “Cross Border Care“, and “Services and Prevention for the Elderly“ projects;
- Supporting a European Data Collection and Information System on pension and insurance systems and specific programmes for the elderly.

❑ Equality between men and women

- Role of women in economic development at the regional level (conference, Venice/Veneto-I, 17th-18th November);
- Violence against women: prostitution, unequal opportunities - the role of the Regions (seminar, Paris/Ile-de-France-F, last quarter 2003).

❑ Social Inclusion

- Monitoring the National Action Plans and participation in the European Social Platform (network of the four European representative organisations of local and regional authorities);
- Prevention of domestic violence (Working Group) and of suicide (interregional network).

❑ Culture, Education & Training

- Protection and promotion of regional and minority languages;
- Interregional networks of Writers Residences and "literature cafes";

- Interactions between a modern economy and cultural education – “Homo Economicus versus Homo Ludens?” (conference, Budapest-H, 23rd-25th October);
 - Education for migrant groups and ethnic migrant minorities in Europe;
 - Promotion and enlargement of the Eurodyssey programme.
- **Youth**
 - Youth Summer School (Naples/Campania-I, September);
 - Cooperation with Regional Youth Councils;
 - Competition for the Most Youth Friendly Region Award.
- **Media & Information Technology**
 - Monitoring of information technology developments in relation to public administration.
- **Promotion of regionalism and multilateral partnerships**
 - AER Summer School (Naples/Campania-I, September);
 - Providing members with comparative analysis of regionalism trends in Europe;
 - Organisation of seminars on regionalism;
 - Interregional cooperation (INTERREG IIII, Centurio, Alive...).
- **Information & Communication**
 - Improve the spread of information to AER members: “*AER Weekly Review*” (by e-mail) and “*Quarterly Dossiers*” to prepare topics on the AER Agenda.