



ACTIVITY REPORT 2011



From the Azores islands of Portugal to the Tatarstan region of Russia, from northern Finland’s Lappi region to the Greek island of Kriti, the Assembly of European Regions’ (AER) members govern around 240 million citizens in wider Europe.

Since 1985, AER has grown to become the largest network of regional authorities in Europe by offering members a real voice on the European stage and a dynamic forum for interregional cooperation. This report presents the results of the mandate with a snapshot of AER’s activities and achievements in 2011.

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Michèle Sabban, AER President, Vice-President of Ile-de-France (F)

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Michèle Sabban, AER President

I have had the honour of being the President of AER for three years now. Three years during which time the crisis hit Europe, but also three years of action taken by our regions. In this respect, 2011 was a transitional year for the European regions, which had to cope with the crisis and soften its impact. It was, of course, a transitional year for our Assembly too. Before elaborating on the actions that I deem essential in 2011, I would like to commend the AER General Secretariat for demonstrating professionalism and availability in fulfilling their tasks during this difficult time for the regions. I would also like to praise Klaus Klipp's work, who is now leaving us after ten years with AER. We have collaborated in harmony these last three years, and I would like to express my gratitude. I would also like to welcome his successor, Pascal Goergen, whom we appointed as Secretary General at our last General Assembly. I am certain that he will be committed to strengthening our organisation's presence within the European institutions and will work with each one of our regions to make our voice and convictions heard.

Throughout 2011, the crisis has been one of our main concerns. It has strongly affected our communities' budgets and thus restricted our leeway. However, we have chosen to turn this into an opportunity. Although we are still dealing with present difficulties, we want to look at the long term, at the eventual upturn in the economy and consider how we can invest in our local potential and shape tomorrow's growth. I am personally convinced that we need a better Europe to do so and above all, increased interregional cooperation. Anticipate and Act in Association, these are the three A's of the

AER. I think that in this field, we have proven capable of taking efficient and influential action.

Last October in St-Pölten (A), we held the Summit of European Territories in cooperation with the Land of Lower Austria, focusing on the future cohesion policy. Together with other organisations representing European municipalities and regions, AER expressed its support of the principle of an ambitious regional policy based on a strongly integrated approach to territorial development, which allows our communities to partake in decision-making, as well as in projects carried out in our regions. We have therefore called on the Council of the EU and the European Parliament to involve local and regional partners in negotiations on the future cohesion policy. This issue is crucial to us; our capacity to implement long-term investments and our acknowledgement as full-fledged stakeholders by the institutions is at stake.

This is what we reminded the European Commission, at the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions celebrated in Brussels in December. Multi-level governance, as enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon, should not remain a mere principle but become a *political culture*. Our field of expertise and skills must be recognised and taken into account throughout the entire decision-making process. During the coming year, we will have the opportunity to continue this action. "To ensure cohesion" is my 2012 goal for AER.

What makes the strength of our Assembly is also its ability to gather regions beyond the EU borders. We have

the capacity, through strong interregional cooperation, to contribute to a Neighbourhood policy that supports sustainable development.

Our work over the past 2 years in the Black Sea demonstrates our engagement in this area. Our second summit, organised in Batumi, Georgia, allowed us to bring together the regions surrounding the Black Sea and those in the Danube basin and help them to jointly address the issue of water. This has been a great success! While national governments have stalled, the regions are a driving force and launch concrete projects, addressing the environmental, socio-economic and cultural challenges that the region faces. This is a clear demonstration of AER's expertise as an *action tank*. We are also involved in the Eastern Partnership and Euro-Mediterranean relations.

In this respect, we have paid particular attention to the revolutions of the Arab Spring. Contrary to the Union for the Mediterranean, which was silent on the issue, I wanted us to take action in Tunisia to help the communities of tomorrow rebuild themselves, to support regional development, youth employment and the democratisation of the country. This is the essence of the agreement we signed in May with the Ministry of Professional Training and Employment and the Ministry of Regional Development. AER has made a long-term engagement, starting with a training seminar for regional officers in July in Pescara (I), and by committing to gender parity by training women candidates in September. The opening of a permanent representation in Tunisia will allow us to closely monitor developments there and to facilitate decentralised cooperation.

I also wanted to prove that AER can help tackle global issues by providing international organisations with our regions' expertise and interests. Some of our regions are at the forefront of the fight against climate change, and our peer exchanges in this field are bearing fruit. Our action was acknowledged at the occasion of the R20 General Assembly, where I received an award on your behalf for our contribution to developing the green economy. We are also building ties with NEAR, an association of regional governments in Northeast Asia, which welcomed us as guests of honour at its last international Forum. These bonds will allow us to promote AER's actions throughout the world.

2011 has been a critical year, but also one of hope - hope for strengthened cooperation between our regions to continue developing our continent's territories; hope for a respectful and efficient neighbourhood relationship; and finally, hope for stable and sustainable economic growth in our regions, which shields us against the impact of climate change and constitutes an ambitious growth model for territories.

2012 will most likely remain a year of uncertainty. In order to make it a successful year for regional development, Europe needs AER as much as AER needs each and every one of you.

AER President with the Tunisian Ministers for Regional Development and for Vocational Training and Employment, May



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Michèle Sabban answers the Tunisian press, May



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Michèle Sabban meets with European Commission's President Barroso, June



© CoR

President Sabban and Governor Erwin Pröll hand over the "St. Pölten Manifesto" to Commissioner Hahn and to the representative of the EU Council presidency - Niederösterreich (A), October



© NLK Reinberger



Klaus Klipp, AER Secretary General

© José António Rodrigues

Klaus Klipp, AER Secretary General

Today, I will not present my usual annual report but I want to look back at these ten years as AER Secretary General from a more personal point of view.

When I started with AER, relationships with the European institutions, especially the Commission, were not easy. The image of AER was not what it is today and doors were difficult to open. Today

however, AER is a well-respected organisation and all European players are in demand of our input.

I have always considered that the role of AER was that of a service provider. Politicians are in charge of AER: AER is the politicians! AER is cooperation between regions! No bureaucracy, no think tank, no organisation telling members what they shall do. AER is yours, your network. You lead it to success.

I would like to thank all AER members for opening their door and their mind to me. Thank you for our open discussions and for sharing problems and solutions with each other.

I have worked with three Presidents in AER from three different countries, administrative cultures, languages and political orientations. All three presidents have left their mark on AER. I want to thank them for their commitment.

Very positive memories go to the secretariat. The secretariat has an excellent, very professional and highly motivated team, making the success of AER possible. I had great pleasure working with these colleagues. I want to thank them.

Looking to the future, the triad of Influence-Knowledge-Action helps regions get ready for globalisation and move out of crises. Europe needs political leadership. Markets leading European policies is simply not acceptable.

Ancient Greece may serve as a role model. People lived in decentralised Polis, city-states. They were sometimes fighting, but together they were successful in political, economical and cultural terms. So successful, that we refer to this time as the cradle of our civilisation.

Urs Wüthrich-Pelloli, AER Vice-President and Treasurer

AER's difficult financial situation, which I already mentioned in my report last year, is a great challenge that we are ready to take on to ensure the continued good operation of our organisation. The economic and financial crisis affecting many European countries confirms the need for AER's networking activities, concrete help provided to our member regions and successful lobbying. With the help of AER, regions are more and more identified as essential creative political powers.

That is why our Bureau meeting in s'Hertogenbosch in April established an AER "Membership Action Plan". Bureau members agreed to push for the active involvement of their colleagues from other regions. They contacted members who do not participate much – or at all – in the activities of the organisation and got in touch with non-members to convince them of AER's

added-value. The secretariat has supported the politicians' work. All staff members were made responsible for certain countries, working hand in hand with the politicians. This in-depth work has allowed us to get back in touch with several regions throughout Europe.

Of course, we have also followed-up and intensified our EU-supported activities, which results are tangible and positive.

I would like to take this occasion to thank everyone for their contribution and strongly encourage the driving forces to continue their efforts towards an ever-dynamic AER.



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Urs Wüthrich-Pelloli, AER Vice-President and Treasurer, Minister for Education, Culture and Sport of Basel-Landschaft (CH)

AER External Funding

Operating grants

The European Commission renewed its annual operating grant to AER under the Europe for Citizens Programme. AER is also grateful for Alsace Region's renewed support towards its operating costs, and thanks the Land Baden-Württemberg and Alba County, who each provide one collaborator, as well as the Abruzzo Region for hosting the AER Brussels office.

Working Group on European Funding

In February, the group published the results of its Survey into European Funding undertaken in 2010. This study aimed to better understand and provide concrete answers to the challenges faced by regions in the application and management of EU funds. The report was used as an influencing tool in the debate on the next programming period and informed AER positions on the new Multi-Annual Financial Framework.

The Group also maximised synergies and joint working with the AER Cohesion Task Force, which proved very successful. The groups focused on the new European financial engineering tools that are set to take an increased importance in the future EU funding landscape.

The groups jointly organised a Breakfast Briefing and Working session on 'Financial Engineering: what lies ahead and are European Regions ready?' (Brussels, May), which was later followed by a Training



Academy on: 'Exploiting the potential of EU financial engineering at regional level' (Brussels, June).

Projects

2011 saw the successful completion of the INTERREG IVC funded PRESERVE (lead by AER) and MORE4NRG projects, which brought together European regions to exchange and learn in the areas of sustainable tourism and renewable energies. The FLINKMAN project (European Civil Protection Financial Instrument) aiming to improve stakeholders' involvement in flood management, also came to a successful conclusion.

The INTERREG IVC ECREIN+ and YES projects are still in full swing and AER collaborated with the Region of Flevoland in the submission of two new INTERREG IVC projects in the areas of sustainable energy and innovation. The outcomes on these are expected early next year.

Finally, AER secured €156,256 from the European PROGRESS programme to undertake an intensive programme of peer reviews on youth employment policies in 4 regions as part of the PYE project.

AER Brussels Office

In 2011 the AER Brussels office continued to ensure that AER's 3 major objectives of **influence**, **knowledge** and **action** are translated into concrete benefits for its members.

Key activities: 9 breakfast and lunch briefing sessions providing knowledge on topical EU policy developments, e.g. CAP reform, ENP Review, Macro-Regions, Innovation partnership on active and healthy ageing and focused sessions on the Hungarian and Polish presidencies' priorities. These monthly events provided opportunities to speak directly with EU representatives, to network and forge alliances with other regions to influence policy developments. They were attended by 279 people overall. We also continued with our daily monitoring of news articles on relevant policy areas.

The Brussels office plays a key role in liaising with EU institutions to ensure AER is up to date on the latest developments and to promote AER members' views and influence the EU agenda for their benefit. We also meet with others stakeholders in Brussels to discuss possible synergies and to provide members with the latest information and the expertise they need.



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This year, we met with policy officers from across EU institutions and participated in consultations and meetings organised by the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions. We also met a number of stakeholders (Fedarene, European Network for Rural Development, European Disability Forum, etc.).

A key mission of the Brussels office is to maintain a dialogue with members' Brussels representations and help ensure that communication channels between the regions' Brussels offices, home regions, AER and EU institutions are exploited to their maximum potential. AER Brussels met 29 regional representatives. The office further developed its role as a meeting place by also hosting Training Academies, Working Groups and project meetings.

Committee 1

Economy and Regional Development



Committee 1 President: Håkan Sandgren,
County Councillor, Jönköping County (S)

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Cohesion policy

2011 has been a crucial year for the future cohesion policy. After publishing its White Paper on the Future Cohesion Policy, AER answered the EC consultation on the 5th cohesion report. In April, the AER Bureau adopted a statement on transition regions, supporting the creation of a new category, provided that it allows for an equitable distribution of resources among all regions. AER acknowledges that the proposals were taken up in the draft regulations and will remain vigilant that the level of funding does not decrease in the course of the 2012 negotiations.

In this reform context, AER believes that united we stand, divided we fall. That is why AER organised a high level summit of regions and cities in St. Pölten (Niederösterreich-A) where a joint declaration of 11 interregional organisations was handed over to Commissioner Hahn and to the Polish Minister of Regional Development.

Finally, aware of a general tendency to increase the use of new financial instruments, AER examined the stakes for regions. After a 9 months investigation, exchange and training among AER members, a report was issued in December, outlining the advantages and shortfalls of these new instruments for European regions.

Innovation and Economic Development

With the current financial and economic crisis, innovation and economy are more than ever at the heart of regional concerns. The newly created working group on Entrepreneurship and Innovation organised two SWOT analyses in Crete and Istanbul to help these regions elaborate sustainable entrepreneurship policies. The AER Regional Innovation Award 2011, was granted to Wielkopolska (PL) for its project "Promoter of Innovation", dedicated to supporting young entrepreneurs at a very early stage of their business' development.

The working group on Regional airports and the region of Østfold (N) commissioned a study on the role of regional airports in the future transportation system to assist regions in establishing long-term perspectives. The group also visited

the Bulgarian region of Ruse to share advice on how to develop its airport and attract investors.

Lastly, AER continued to ensure the dissemination of the ECREIN+ INTERREG IVC project, where 12 regions and organisations share experiences and knowledge to support eco-innovation and make recommendations for improving the legal frameworks at all governance levels.

Environment: climate change and energy

The aim of the 2nd European Regions Energy Day "Investment in sustainable energy – Regions as motors for growth and innovation" was to demonstrate the success of both territorial action and public-private cooperation in the face of the energy crisis. A survey on regional investment in energy projects was published, with the aim to analyse how regional authorities handle energy investments. The report highlights the incentives that are used to increase business involvement in energy projects as well as different factors that hamper or facilitate the deployment of green energy projects in regions. Lastly, 2011 sees the closure of the MORE4NRG project. After three years of collaboration, partners can proudly showcase the results of 5 peer reviews and many good practice transfers on green energy and climate change.



Wielkopolska region (PL), prized with the AER Innovation Award 2011,
Açores (P), November

© José António Rodrigues

"2011 was dedicated to making AER's voice heard in the negotiations for key future EU policies such as Cohesion Policy and the Europe 2020 strategy. These policies play a central role for regions to strengthen their economy and to find a way out of the financial and economic crisis. I am proud that within Committee 1, we could also offer concrete support to our member regions in various policy areas such as entrepreneurship, innovation, energy, common agricultural policy or tourism policy."

(Håkan Sandgren)

Rural development and CAP

Through many briefings, meetings and participation to consultations, AER members voiced their concerns, opinions and recommendations in view of the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) reform, reaffirming in particular the importance of taking an integrated territorial approach to rural development. A seminar was also organised in order to assess the impact of CAP on European non-EU regions and the members of the working group on agriculture and rural development met and discussed the legislative proposals for future CAP and elaborated a first draft reaction.

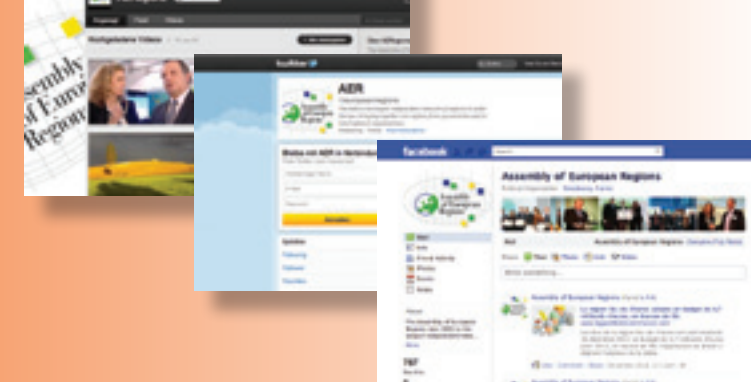
Tourism

After three years of on-going activities and a full agenda, PRESERVE and its 13 partners close their actions on sustainable tourism. Through the final conference and publications, partners proudly share the results of their 6 peer reviews and action plans as well as a wide series of good practices identified.



AER Report widely disseminated at the Energy Days, April

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AER

Press and Communications

In 2011, the Press and Communications department developed and consolidated three essential constituents of the dissemination of information on AER:

Networking elected representatives, youth and citizens

AER made its first appearance on social networks in 2010, namely through Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. This presence was reinforced in 2011, which allowed for a better targeting of European stakeholders and media, and for the building of bridges between citizens and elected representatives. This was the result of a year's work, which highlights were the Summer Schools in Flevoland (NL) and their training workshops for elected representatives. Firstly, these workshops focused on the risks inherent to social networks, i.e. the lack of privacy, financial crimes, harassment and unauthorized spreading of political views. Secondly, the Youth Regional Network has endeavoured to explain the benefits of social networks to the most sceptical ones. To this day, AER boasts more than 750 citizens' contacts on Facebook, 705 Twitter subscriptions and 336 followers.

This year, 2 reports on the completion of 2 INTERREG IVC projects (MORE4NRG and PRESERVE), 3 videos advertising events and 22 interviews of projects managers were posted on the internet.

Visual identity

We have developed a new visual identity for each AER Committee. Several tools were then adapted to this new reality, such as new e-mail banners: invitations sent by the Committees, press releases and internal communications. We have also started to update several pages on the AER website. The AER thematic dossier has also been modified.

Results and new targets

- 53 press releases have been issued.
- Over 600 articles covering the initiatives taken by AER and its members have been published, of which: more than 500 through the print media, 47 broadcasted through the audio-visual media, 7 broadcasted through radio and 11 posted on blogs.
- AER has crossed the European frontiers and has had media impact in Africa, namely in Tunisia, in the U.S.A. as part of the R20 and in South Korea. Total media impact: 21 European countries, 3 African countries, 1 Asian country and, of course, the "Brussels bubble".

AER and Committee 2 wish to thank
Vladimir Kosc (Friuli Venezia Giulia, I), who has
resigned from his political mandate, for his
leadership – his vision and personal commitment
have enriched our work.



Committee 2 President: Vladimir Kosc, Minister for Healthcare and Social Protection, Friuli Venezia Giulia (I)

Committee 2 Social Policy and Public Health

2011 has seen us further consolidate our position as a key representative of the regions in health and social policy. We have organised 26 events, of which 6 Committee network/plenary meetings, presented the Committee's activities and positions at 33 external events, held 23 meetings with external stakeholders and improved our connections in Brussels with the EU institutions, in particular the European Commission.

Our approach has been two-fold: monitoring and contributing to European policy developments and building capacity in the regions, helping them learn from each other.

Innovation in health and social policy

We have contributed to the work of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing, an EU initiative aimed to link all relevant stakeholders and increase the deployment of innovation in health and social policies. AER was successful with its request that this initiative supports capacity building in the regions, so that innovation becomes an integral part of how regions organise and deliver these services.

AER is developing a capacity-building programme for regions interested in introducing innovation in health and social policies, demonstrating the changes that need to be made in procedures and policies to allow for sustainable innovation. The AER e-he@lth network piloted this initiative with a first event, looking at how to get started in e-health.

The AER e-he@lth network was invited by the European Commission to organise a regional forum at the occasion of the 2011 e-Health Ministerial Forum. Our session showcased how regions are working with telemedicine tools to improve the quality and efficiency of the service offered to patients suffering from chronic diseases.

Committee 2 has also been innovative in the way we function. We organised a joint meeting with AER Committee 3 around the theme of culture and health. This event was successful in 2 ways: it was an opportunity for members to meet

and further develop their policy horizons and networks; and it proved that innovation is also found in the simple things in life and that culture can revolutionise the way we perceive and deliver healthcare.

UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities

The "Equal Europe for People with Disabilities" network has continued to support regions in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. This year's focus has been on equal access to employment and on developing regional strategic implementation plans, with a seminar organised on each theme.

Funding health and social services of the future

We have also engaged in the debate on the future of cohesion policy. In the current period, only 20% of the funds allocated to health have been absorbed to date. AER has been associated to projects assessing the levels and quality of investments in health and encouraging the health sector to identify and use the opportunities offered by cohesion policy funds. A full-scale information campaign will be launched for 2012, as health is a secondary priority for post-2013 and regions need to be made aware of how they can use funds for health-related investments.



Culture and Health: Children with disabilities offer a memorable live show, Istanbul (TR), September

Supporting interregional cooperation

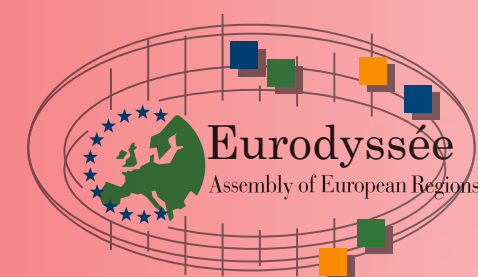
We have also supported member regions to develop a project that will support training and awareness-raising around disability and the Convention in the regions. Following 2 half-day workshops facilitated by AER, the regions are now drafting an application to be submitted for EC co-financing.

2011 sees the end of the FLINKMAN project and therewith the AER Emergency Planning network. AER members Hessen (D), Decentralised Administration of Kentriki Makedonia-Thraki (GR) and Noord-Brabant (NL) developed expertise on how to involve all relevant stakeholders in the development of flood risk management plans.



Conference 'Investing in Health Systems of the Future', Budapest (H), May

© Per-Olof Egnell



AER Programmes

Eurodyssée

This year again, 500 young people were given the opportunity to acquire their first professional experience in a foreign country. These opportunities will be multiplied with the entrance in the programme of Královéhradecký (CZ), Guria (GE) and Kärnten (A) as new members as well as Asturias (E), Dolnoslaskie (PL), Donegal (IRL), Lombardia (I), Toscana (I) and Istanbul (TR) as candidates.

The successful Eurodyssée Forum in Valle d'Aosta (I) was the occasion for the European Commission to recognize the potential of Eurodyssée and to say that the programme was highly valued by the Commission, which wants to help make it grow. AER and the Eurodyssée general secretariat will follow-up on this.



Successful gathering at the Eurodyssée Forum, Valle d'Aosta (I), September

© EUBAGE - Aosta (I)



YRN members embody AER

Summer Schools

70 members of the AER Youth Regional Network and 70 politicians and regional officers met from 22 to 26 September in Almere (NL) for the AER Summer Schools on the theme "Youth in a changing society". Sessions alternated between plenary meetings, workshops and study visits and involved regional experts and guest speakers from the academic world, the European Parliament and the European Commission.

The topics of the debates covered education, training and employment, equal opportunities and youth participation. Best practices in the field of youth policies were exchanged in a young region as Flevoland celebrated its 10th anniversary this year. There could be no better place than a young innovative region to celebrate youth!

© Daniel Zawarczynski

"In these difficult economic times, investing in education and youth has never been more important in order to prepare our societies' social and economic future. Investing in international relations and culture is also fundamental as economic downturns are dangerously favorable to the emergence of nationalism and racism. I am therefore proud of the work that has been undertaken in our committee this year and more will

be achieved, with your help, in 2012 !"

(Hande Özsan Bozatlı)



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Committee 3 President: Hande Özsan Bozatlı, President of "EU and International Relations" Committee of Istanbul Provincial Council (TR)

Committee 3

Culture, Education, Youth and International Cooperation

Culture

This year has seen the outcome of the working group on culture and health's hard work. Committees 3 and 2 have indeed organised a successful conference on this topic in Istanbul in September with 100 participants. Experts and regional practitioners from all corners of Europe shared best practices with AER members. A declaration, which was adopted by participants, demands that the European Union starts working in partnership with AER on the issue and recommends that AER member regions promote culture and health initiatives.

The value of cultural labels such as the "capital of culture" one was debated at our Autumn plenary meeting with representatives of past and future cultural capitals such as Istanbul (TR) and Umeå (S). A new innovative tool to promote regional cultural heritage called "Topic Topos" was also presented at this plenary meeting and the promoter of this initiative is currently helping interested regions implement it.

Education and Training

In the framework of the Youth Entrepreneurship Strategies project which is aimed at promoting entrepreneurship education we have now finalised the questionnaire to be sent out to all AER members. Responses to this questionnaire will help identify best practices among our members and will be the basis of a guide to be published in 2012.



Culture and Health: from theory to practice - AER members enjoy the show, Istanbul (TR), September

Professional youth mobility was at the honour during our Spring plenary meeting with representatives from AER, Youth Regional Network (YRN) and the Eurodysey programme explaining how mobility can help fight unemployment.

International Cooperation

Following the Jasmin revolution in Tunisia, President Sabban led an AER delegation to Tunisia in May and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Minister for Regional Development. Developing decentralisation, training territorial civil servants, setting up a programme to facilitate mobility of young Tunisian professionals, developing commercial links are the key cooperation areas underlined by this MoU.

Following that visit, AER participated in a seminar on decentralisation for Tunisian regions and organised a two-day seminar targeted at Tunisian women who were candidate at the October elections. On the occasion of this visit, a representation of AER has been inaugurated.

Apart from the Mediterranean zone AER developed cooperation with North East Asia. At the invitation of the Association of North East Asian Regions, an AER delegation participated in their annual meeting in Seoul (South Korea) as guests of honour representing Europe. Transport policy, energy and the environment were identified as areas for cooperation.



AER delegation takes part in NEAR annual meeting, Seoul (South Korea), November

© Hong Jang-Ho

Youth

AER launched its Promoting Youth Employment project and organised two of the four peer reviews on this topic, in Vojvodina (SRB) and the Azores (P). Recommendations on how to implement successful policies in this field and improve the employability of young people will be disseminated in 2012.

Committee 3 and YRN organised the Most Youth Friendly European Region (MYFER) competition. The topic was "social inclusion of youth with disabilities". The two regions with the best policies in this field were Catalunya (E) who won the competition and Lower Silesia (P) who was awarded the Special Prize.

Committee 3 continued to support the Youth Regional Network.

Cross-cutting issue : Roma inclusion

Given the concerning situation in the treatment of Roma people in various European countries, some AER members asked us to promote action for better inclusion of these populations. At our Autumn plenary meeting discussions on this issue took place

with NGOs and member regions representatives. An action plan for Roma inclusion has been adopted and AER has joined the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities' Core Group responsible for setting up the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion.



Catalunya (E) receives MYFER Award, Açores (P), November

© José António Rodrigues

AER's Youth Regional Network (YRN)

Fighting together for the issues that matter most for the youth of Europe



© José António Rodrigues

The re-elected YRN President, Olov Oskarsson, Jämtland (S)

"We aim at influencing policymaking at European level and politicians from different parts of Europe, but also to give tools to young people to make a difference at a local level. Today's youth are decision-makers of tomorrow. If we care about the future of Europe, we cannot exclude young people from political life." (Olov Oskarsson)

2011 was a stepping-stone for YRN since its establishment in 2008: It gained greater recognition at European level and within AER; elected its Presidium and for the 1st time identified and worked on concrete synergies with the AER committees, bringing young people's perspective and dynamism to the 3 pillars of AER activities:

Influence: Membership in the European Commission's Expert Working Group on EU Youth Indicators and applying for the membership in the Council of Europe's Youth Advisory Council.

Knowledge: Questionnaire on Youth Participation identifying good practices in involving young people in public life.

Action: The following activities were developed thanks to the ideas and with an active involvement of YRN members:

- Peer Review Promoting Youth Employment (PYE)
- Most Youth Friendly European Region Award 2011 on Social Inclusion of Youth with Disabilities
- Summer School "Youth in a changing society"
- Seminar on the Eastern Partnership in the context of the Polish EU Presidency: "Youth Mobility – Going East!"



© AER

Lively debate at the YRN Plenary session, Wrocław (PL), October



Standing Committee on Institutional Affairs President: Roy Perry, Deputy Leader, Hampshire (UK)

© Arno Fougères

Standing Committee on Institutional Affairs

2011 was a year of immense challenges for Europe and the European Union.

A changing Neighbourhood

The events in Europe's Southern Neighbourhood in the spring shed new light on the EU's review of its Neighbourhood policy.

AER lobbied for an effective European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), based on the principles of multilevel governance and partnership, with regions as key actors. This policy should, in our eyes, target the South and the East, and foster the process of decentralisation in relevant countries.

The overthrow of certain regimes has opened the door to discussions on new constitutional and territorial architectures in the affected countries. Tunisia, in particular, showed great interest in the AER's expertise on regionalisation. To provide them with concrete examples of decentralisation processes, our Committee organised a seminar with experts from across Europe on 6-7 July in Abruzzo (I).

Interregional cooperation, besides regional democracy, is also a key element for stability: this is why we asked for a strengthening of regional programmes in the future ENP. In challenging areas such as the Black Sea Basin joint projects among regions can help to promote dialogue and foster cooperation. The major Conference organised on 5-6 April in Batumi, Ajara a.R. (Georgia) helped to identify concrete axis of improvement regarding the next generation of ENP programmes. Held a few days before the

Black Sea regions strengthen their ties in Batumi (GE), April



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"The British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in the 1960's, who lodged Britain's first application to join the EEC, when asked what concerned him most, replied "events". 2011 saw events such as the Arab Spring and the Euro crisis. The EU's ability to help democracy and European economies to flourish is immeasurably supported by strong democratic regions. AER is a positive force in helping regions be more effective."

(Roy Perry)

call of the EU Cross-border Cooperation programme for the Black Sea was released, this event allowed 150 stakeholders from the area to learn more about this notoriously complex programme and to meet potential partners.

The Polish Presidency of the EU was an opportunity for our Committee to deal with another aspect of future ENP - the issue of youth mobility under the Eastern Partnership. The Conference hosted by Dolnoslaskie (PL) on 28 October was a unique occasion for our members and Youth Network to get first-hand information on EU opportunities to promote youth exchanges, and also to make their own demands on this topic.

A global economic and financial crisis

The global economic crisis has shook the foundations of the EU. Many Member States are unwilling to contribute more to the European budget, and the proposals made by the European Commission in June regarding the Multi-annual Financial Perspectives for 2014 – 2020 are still largely debated.

The AER believes that the EU needs to be adequately equipped to help Member States and their citizens face the challenges of globalisation, which have been intensified by the crisis. We therefore welcomed the Commission's proposals for a result-oriented, simplified and more focused budget and will continue to lobby for a rapid adoption of a strong EU budget.

The economic climate also influences how public money will be distributed in the future. As the Commission endorses financial engineering as a key tool of future financial assistance, AER organised a Training Academy to provide regions with practical know-how and advice on these tools.

Better Europe needed

At a time where renationalisation trends and distrust with the EU are growing, communicating the benefits provided by a strong and unified Europe is increasingly necessary. The Regions have a central role to play in providing the knowledge for citizens to better understand how Europe works and why it is needed. The Citizens' Fora organised this year in Republika Srpska (BiH), Istanbul (TR), Centre (F) and Østfold (N) delivered this objective, and we hope to repeat this in the coming years.



Standing Committee on Equal Opportunities President: Monica Carlsson, County Councillor, Norrbotten (S)

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Standing Committee on Equal Opportunities

The AER Standing Committee on Equal Opportunities (SCEO) has a special place within the AER institutional structure. It reflects the values that our organisation is built on: solidarity among regions, equal opportunities and rights for all, voicing the concerns of all our citizens and all Europe's territories. And it sits in the middle of all the AER bodies, as its mission is to raise awareness and mainstream equal opportunities across all AER's bodies and work.

During 2011 we have had the opportunity to cooperate with the AER Youth Regional Network and with AER Committees 2 and 3.

Cooperation with Youth

During the 2011 Summer School, SCEO co-organised a workshop on equal opportunities. The exchange of views with the youth participants was fascinating and reflects a true commitment to equal opportunities among young people today. We have agreed to jointly organise an event on equal opportunities for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in 2012.

Cooperation with Committees 2 and 3

SCEO contributed to the joint meeting of these Committees this fall and identified areas for closer cooperation.

There are a number of existing synergies with AER Committee 2 that we will continue to foster, such as the working group on disability issues that is supporting regions to guarantee equal rights and equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The AER e-he@lth network also supports the implementation of policies and tools for equal access to quality healthcare for all. We have moreover agreed to continue our good cooperation with Committee 3, in areas such as access to culture and education as a tool for combating discrimination and stereotypes. We also have a role to promote our values globally, so there is opportunity for close collaboration in the field of international cooperation.

Concerning the issue of Roma integration, which is a true equal opportunities issue, we discussed the proposals for an

"It is our mandate, as elected regional politicians, to ensure that each and every one of our citizens gets an equal chance to thrive in our societies and benefit from all our services and policies. And it is the AER SCEO's mandate to build bridges across AER, work with all the AER organs and members and ensure the respect of equal opportunities principles across the board."

(Monica Carlsson)

AER Action Plan on Roma Inclusion. In 2012, SCEO plans to develop an AER Strategy on Inclusion, that will be grounded on all AER members' experience in equal opportunities and will set out the steps AER members and the organisation itself should take to achieve inclusion.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is still very much a part of SCEO's work. At the initiative of AER President Michèle Sabban, a 2-day training event was organised in Tunisia in preparation for the October elections, to support women there to actively engage in politics and civil society and ensure that gender parity did not remain a dead letter in the electoral law. Several women politicians, active in AER, shared their experience with Tunisian women on the difficulties of mounting an electoral campaign, gaining the respect of your party and of your electorate as a credible candidate and winning an election.

Equal Opportunities for SCEO

Since the non-replacement of the Secretariat staff member working on SCEO early this year, we have not been able to fully implement our mandate and work programme for 2011. We hope the necessary Secretariat resources will be granted to us in 2012, thus reflecting the commitment of AER's General Assembly to Equal Opportunities for all.



Monica Carlsson's activity report at AER's General Assembly, Açores (P), November

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AER – Events 2011			AER – Events 2011		
DATE	LOCATION	EVENT	DATE	LOCATION	EVENT
13 January	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Breakfast Briefing: Hungarian Presidency priorities in the field of Regional policy	18 April	<i>Orléans (F)</i>	European Citizens´ Forum “Youth Entrepreneurship education”
18-19 January	<i>Flevoland (NL)</i>	Summer School Organising Committee	19 April	<i>Orléans (F)</i>	Conference on mobility (Committee 3 & Youth Regional Network)
20-21 January	<i>Paris (F)</i>	Presidium meeting	19-20 April	<i>Orléans (F)</i>	Youth Regional Network Plenary Session
28-29 January	<i>Agadir (MA)</i>	ARLEM 2 nd Plenary meeting	20 April	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Committee 2 Presidium meeting and meeting with MEP Danuta Hübner
1 February	<i>Bracknell (UK)</i>	Study visit GE Smart Grid Demonstration Center, meeting of Working group on climate change and energy	28-29 April	<i>Noord-Brabant (NL)</i>	Bureau and Standing Committee meeting
1 February	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Joint meeting of AER’s Task force on Cohesion Policy and Working Group on EU funding	10 May	<i>Budapest (H)</i>	e-he@lth Regional Forum - European e-health Ministerial Conference – regions and telemedicine
2 February	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Working group on agriculture and rural development and CAP	11 May	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Breakfast Briefing on financial Engineering “What lies ahead and are regions ready?” organized by the Cohesion Task Force and Funding Working group
2-3 February	<i>Opole (PL)</i>	YES project - Youth Entrepreneurship education Strategies: Steering & Analysis Working Group meetings	11 May	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Working group on Cohesion policy: best practices in the field of financial engineering
7-8 February	<i>Paris (F)</i>	Eurodysey Steering Committee	11-12 May	<i>Tallinn (EST)</i>	YES project: Steering & Analysis Working group meetings
8 February	<i>Novi Sad (SRB)</i>	Peer Review in Vojvodina; debriefing meeting	11-13 May	<i>Tunis (TN)</i>	Post-revolution visit and signature of cooperation MoU
15 February	<i>Strasbourg (F)</i>	Committee 3 Presidium meeting	16-20 May	<i>Hampshire (UK)</i>	Peer Review Promoting Youth Employment
21-22 February	<i>Strasbourg (F)</i>	Youth Regional Network Presidium meeting	17-18 May	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	PRESERVE: Action Planning Workshop
22 February	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Launch of AER Regional Innovation Award	17 May	<i>Udine (I)</i>	Conference on Alcohol and Youth
22-23 February	<i>Bratislava (SK)</i>	Training Academy: “How to best work with the AER and how to make the most of AER membership?”	17-18 May	<i>Lyon (F)</i>	Eurodissey Steering Committee
24 February	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Breakfast Briefing: Explore what regions do on bio-economy	18 May	<i>Udine (I)</i>	Committee 2 Plenary Session
28 February – 1 March	<i>Hradec Kralove (CZ)</i>	Training Academy: “Understanding the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation”	19 May	<i>Ruse (BG)</i>	Meeting of the Working group on regional airports
3-4 March	<i>Hessen (D)</i>	FLINKMAN: project partners meeting	19 May	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	PRESERVE project Action planning workshop
22-23 March	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Training Academy: “Introductory course - European decision making and lobbying”	24 May	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Summer School Organising Committee
24 March	<i>Østfold (N)</i>	Committee 1 Plenary Session and meeting of the working groups on agriculture and rural development, regional airports and entrepreneurship and innovation	27 May	<i>Ponta Delgada (P)</i>	Study visit on renewable energies in the Azores “Sustainable development perspectives for ultra-peripheral regions”
24 March	<i>Østfold (N)</i>	Seminar “The impact of CAP on third countries´ agriculture and rural development“	31 May	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Breakfast Briefing on Greening Innovation in the framework of the ECREIN+ project: “Does the EU have what it takes?”
25 March	<i>Østfold (N)</i>	European Citizens´ Forum: “Youth entrepreneurship education: a stepping stone to regional innovation?”	9-10 June	<i>Strasbourg (F)</i>	FLINKMAN Project Partner meeting
28 March	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Tales from Europe on Innovation	9-10 June	<i>Flevoland (NL)</i>	MORE4NRG project Final Conference
29 March	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	PLATFORMA final conference (period 2009/10)	16-17 June	<i>Valencia (E)</i>	Conference on Employment and disabilities and meeting of the Working group on Equal Europe for people with disabilities
29 March	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Breakfast Briefing: Regions and the Innovation Union	21 June	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Breakfast Briefing on CAP Reform: “Empowering regions through information”
30 March	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Assises on Decentralised Cooperation	21-22 June	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Training Academy organised by the Cohesion Task Force and European Funding Working Group: “Exploiting the potential of EU financial engineering at regional level”
5 April	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Tales from Europe on Energy	30 June	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Working group on climate change and energy; E-mobility - Fighting climate change - Restructuring our regions: what challenges and opportunities of electric cars
5-6 April	<i>Batumi (GE)</i>	Promoting Interregional cooperation around the Black Sea	30 June	<i>Tunis (TN)</i>	AER contribution to regional democracy development Tunisia
11-12 April	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	2 nd European Regions Energy Day			
18 April	<i>Orléans (F)</i>	Committee 3 Plenary Session			

AER – Events 2011

DATE

LOCATION

EVENT

4-5 July	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Peer Review Promoting Youth Employment (PYE) - Kick-off meeting for the partners
5 July	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Breakfast Briefing: Polish Presidency Priorities
6-7 July	<i>Abruzzo (I)</i>	Sharing best practices on regional democracy and beyond
22-27 August	<i>Almere (NL)</i>	Summer Schools
25 August	<i>Almere (NL)</i>	Meeting of the Youth Regional Network's representatives in the youth pre-selection committee: AER Most Youth Friendly European Region Award
31 August	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Meeting of the jury of the AER Regional Innovation Award
5 September	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	FLINKMAN project partner meeting
8 September	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Peer Review Promoting Youth Employment Steering Group meeting
8-10 September	<i>Aosta (I)</i>	Eurodissey annual Forum
12-16 September	<i>Vojvodina (SRB)</i>	1 st Peer Review Promoting Youth Employment (PYE)
15 September	<i>Banja Luka (BiH)</i>	Committee 1 Plenary Session
15 September	<i>Banja Luka (BiH)</i>	European Citizens Forum: "Europe is waiting for you - are you ready for Europe? International youth exchanges"
15 September	<i>Banja Luka (BiH)</i>	Working groups on agriculture and rural development, entrepreneurship and innovation, regional airports and energy and climate change
15-16 September	<i>Tunis (TN)</i>	Standing Committee on Equal Opportunities: Training event for women candidates in Tunisia
16 September	<i>Banja Luka (BiH)</i>	Conference: future EU funding; regions get ready for financial engineering
19 September	<i>Istanbul (TR)</i>	Committee 3 Plenary Session and Sub-Committees
19 September	<i>Istanbul (TR)</i>	European Citizens Forum: "European integration: myth or reality?"
20 September	<i>Istanbul (TR)</i>	Committees 2 and 3 joint conference: Culture and Health
21 September	<i>Istanbul (TR)</i>	Committee 2 Plenary Session
29-30 September	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Bureau meeting and Standing Committee on Institutional Affairs meeting
29-30 September	<i>Murcia (E)</i>	YES Analysis working Group and Steering Group
6 October	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Jury meeting - AER Most Youth Friendly European Region Award
20-21 October	<i>St Pölten (A)</i>	Summit of the Presidents of interregional organisations on future cohesion policy
20-21 October	<i>La Rochelle (F)</i>	Seminar and working meeting of the AER group "Equal Europe for People with Disabilities"
20-21 October	<i>Siena (I)</i>	PRESERVE project Final Conference: "Innovation and Sustainability in tourism"
27 October	<i>Wroclaw (PL)</i>	YRN Plenary Meeting

AER – Events 2011

DATE

LOCATION

EVENT

28 October	<i>Wroclaw (PL)</i>	Seminar on Eastern Partnership: "Youth mobility - going East!"
1-2 November	<i>Seoul (South Korea)</i>	AER participation in the General Assembly of the North East Asia Regional Governments Association
3-4 November	<i>Covasna (RO)</i>	Seminar of the E-He@lth network
3-4 November	<i>Kiev (UA)</i>	AER participation at the the 17th session of the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Local and Regional Government in Kyiv
7 November	<i>Barcelona (E)</i>	Eurodissey Steering Committee
7 November	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	PRESERVE seminar: "Hidden treasures"
7-9 November	<i>Malopolska (PL)</i>	ECREIN+ dissemination Conference
9-10 November	<i>Barcelona (E)</i>	Eurodissey Steering Committee
14 November	<i>Frankfurt (D)</i>	Working group on Entrepreneurship and innovation
15 November	<i>Frankfurt (D)</i>	ENTREDI Final Conference and meeting of the AER Working group on entrepreneurship and innovation
17 November	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Breakfast briefing: Europe's macro-regions - trend or real added value for the regions?
20-24 November	<i>Ponta Delgada (P)</i>	2 nd Peer Review Promoting Youth Employment (PYE)
23 November	<i>Ponta Delgada (P)</i>	Summer School Organising Committee Meeting
23-25 November	<i>Ponta Delgada (P)</i>	General Assembly + Bureau meeting
28 November	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Working group on agriculture and rural development
29 November	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	REALM project launch and AER lunch briefing active and healthy ageing
8 December	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Peer Review Promoting Youth Employment (PYE) - mid-term steering group meeting
8 December	<i>Montpellier (F)</i>	Working group on energy and climate change
8-9 December	<i>Thessaloniki (GR)</i>	FLINKMAN Project final Conference
9 December	<i>Strasbourg (F)</i>	Participation in the first Core Group meeting of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities dedicated to the setting up of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion
13 December	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Breakfast Briefing: European Neighbourhood Policy
13 December	<i>Brussels (B)</i>	Working group on regional airports "What is the role of regional airports in the future transportation system?"



