

Executive Board Meeting 7 February 2023

Proposal to create AER Focus Group to support Ukrainian members

Background:

The AER currently comprises eleven Ukrainian members and one applicant member. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the AER and its members have shown solidarity with Ukraine from the political, humanitarian and economic perspective.

Purpose:

Given their highly specific needs in view of the war, the Secretariat proposes to create a Ukraine Focus Group led by the Secretariat for tailored, needs-based support, onboarding into AER's structures, networking, and capacity-building for these regions over the longer term.

Structure & Goals:

Facilitated by the Member Relations Coordinator under the political guidance of the Executive Board, this Focus Group will provide a space for Ukrainian members to exchange requests and perspectives on needs with AER members directly. It will be an opportunity for regions across Europe in the network to ask questions to Ukrainian regions on how they can support regions directly. In the initial stages, a simple function could be requests for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, material, etc (where possible).

The AER Secretariat will serve as the connection point and facilitator between members. In the early stages, this will be to provide meetings and contacts with regional partners and other relevant stakeholders in our wider network. Close cooperation is therefore envisaged with the European Alliance for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, the European Commission and AER's partners in the Council of Europe, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to multiply efforts, share insights, and ensure effective ongoing support.

Capacity-building for local and regional governments in European Union accession countries is at the core of AER's mission since its inception. Over time, the Ukraine Focus Group aims to build internal capacities within the AER network and Secretariat to assist Ukrainian regions in implementing the reforms required on a regional level to assist them on their European path. This will initially consist of providing guidance on European funding opportunities, networking with members and partners, etc, while looking towards longer-term assistance from AER on political reforms, perspectives from member regions on investment opportunities, reconstruction and enterprise development.

Next steps:

The Focus Group would meet once per quarter starting in March 2023. It is proposed that this would be launched formally and hold its first meeting during the AER upcoming project event in Cluj-Napoca, Romania on 28 and 29 March following approval by the Executive Board.