

Assembly of European Regions

Strategic Plan

2007-2012

Strengthening the Family of European Regions

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FOREWORD

The Assembly of European Regions is a unique pan-European organisation. It brings together the family of the European regions to address common challenges, formulate innovative approaches to shared concerns and to develop excellence in regional governance.

This Strategic Plan sets out the work of the Assembly of European Regions for the period 2007-2012. It describes the AER's mission, objectives and values, before exploring the organisation's priorities for the coming five years. It also sets out the structures that the AER will develop in order to be able to deliver these priorities successfully.

The Assembly of European Regions was established in 1985, with the aim of enhancing the voice and the position of Europe's regions, and has worked steadily towards this goal for more than 20 years. It has achieved great success over this period, with many European countries implementing regional reforms and with a significant improvement in the role of the regions in European decision-making. Today the principle of subsidiarity and the concept of territorial cohesion are enshrined in the European integration process, and regions are recognised as key partners of the European project.

However, the environment within which the AER operates has changed significantly over the past 20 years. Developments within the European Union, such as enlargement and the debate on the future of the European project, have all created new challenges for the regions. The AER must successfully identify and respond to these new challenges if it is to remain a relevant partner for the regions and the European institutions.

The increase in the importance of the regions in the European arena has led to the creation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe (CLRAE) within the Council of Europe, and the establishment of the Committee of the Regions (COR) within the European Union. The AER works closely with these organisations as we all share common goals and objectives, but at the same time, the AER has to set itself apart from these institutions by developing new activities and programmes which cannot be provided within the European institutions.

The AER has also had to reassess its role as a result of the increased international activity of the European regions. The majority of regions now have their own Brussels representations and often belong to a range of interregional policy-based networks which pursue special interests. Both of these developments have raised new challenges for the AER, which it will address through better integrating such networks and offices into its own structures.

Finally, the AER has to respond to the changing demands of its members towards the organisation. A membership survey conducted in spring 2005 demonstrated the wide-ranging expectations that members have of the AER to undertake policy-initiatives, projects and programmes in a wide range of areas of regional interests. The AER needs to address these wide-ranging demands whilst still remaining very focused in its work.

This Strategic Plan aims to successfully develop the Assembly of European Regions to ensure that it is the foremost European network of the regions and the key partner for the European and international institutions on the core issues of regional competence.

According to the statutes of the Assembly of European Regions, regions are defined as: "*local authorities immediately below the level of central government, with a political power of representation, as embodied by an elected regional Assembly*" (AER Statutes, Article 2.2)

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SECTION 1: AER STRATEGIC PLAN

(a) Who Are We?

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) is an independent network of European regions and the largest interregional co-operation organisation in the wider Europe, representing more than 250 regions from 31 countries and 13 interregional organisations.

(b) Our Vision

The AER's vision is a Europe in which regional authorities, as one of the levels of governance closest to the citizens, play a key role in governing, serving and shaping society. This vision foresees a grassroots Europe in which:

- Regions are recognised as pillars of democracy and key partners in the European project
- Regional governance results in greater autonomy, legitimacy and efficiency and meets the real expectations of the citizens
- The exchange of ideas, know-how and experience between the regions contributes to better mutual understanding and brings the people of Europe closer together

(c) Our Mission

The AER is the political voice of the regions and the key partner for the European and international institutions on the core issues of regional competence. The AER promotes the diversity of the regions and translates this diversity into a strength. It promotes subsidiarity and democratic regional structures and enables the regions to form the essential link between Europe and its citizens.

(d) Our Key Objectives

The AER aims to fulfil this mission through pursuing the following key objectives:

1. To promote the concept of regional democracy and subsidiarity in Europe
2. To promote and lobby for the interests of regional government at the national, European and international levels
3. To promote excellence and develop leadership in regional governance
4. To support regional co-operation in Europe
5. To promote regional diversity in Europe
6. To develop the ability of regions to make Europe relevant to its citizens

(e) How We Work

In order to obtain these objectives we undertake the following activities:

1. Promoting regional democracy and subsidiarity:

- We assess and provide information about regionalism and devolution processes in Europe
- We engender debate on regional democracy and subsidiarity
- We develop recommendations on how to improve regional democracy in Europe and support the development of appropriate instruments
- We work with other stakeholders to promote the concepts of regional democracy and subsidiarity in Europe

2. Promoting the interests of regional government:

- We anticipate, identify and work on key political issues
- We assist the regions in placing issues of importance on the European agenda
- We develop lobbying strategies on a case-by-case basis with the EU and international organisations
- We give political leadership to regional advocacy initiatives
- We establish strategic alliances that will promote regional interests

3. Promoting excellence and developing leadership in regional governance:

- We develop the AER knowledge-base and forge links with experts on key areas of AER competence
- We identify and promote best practice and innovation in regional governance
- We enable regions to develop their own areas of excellence

4. Supporting regional co-operation in Europe:

- We identify common issues on which pan-European exchanges give added value
- We facilitate the development of new links between regions
- We facilitate an exchange of experience between regions
- We enable key individuals active in regional governance to fulfil their potential

5. Promoting regional diversity in Europe:

- We develop and promote the diversity of regions
- We anticipate, analyse and evaluate the implications of harmonisation and globalisation for the regions

6. Develop the ability of regions to make Europe relevant to its citizens:

- We develop key messages for regions to use to promote debate on European issues
- We promote the relevance of Europe to the citizens
- We act as a channel through which citizens' concerns can be expressed at the European level
- We promote the involvement of young people, women and disadvantaged groups in European affairs through the regional level

(f) Our Values

The AER bases all of its work upon a set of organisational values. These values are the guiding principles that help us to structure our work:

- Democratic accountability and transparency
- Regionalism and subsidiarity
- Equality in diversity
- Solidarity and member-orientation
- Innovation and excellence

This section explains how these values help to structure the work of the AER.

(i) Democratic Accountability and Transparency

The AER is a democratic organisation, which actively promotes democratic values, including freedom of choice, accountability and transparency. We work to ensure the full democratic involvement of members in the development of our policies. We act with integrity and follow through on the commitments we have made. We follow the principles of democratic decision-making, the accountable and transparent use of resources and implement all our activities through transparent procedures.

(ii) Regionalism and Subsidiarity

The AER promotes the principle that all those activities best carried out at the regional level should be under the control of regional politicians. It promotes the allocation of sufficient financial resources and competences to the regional level. The AER actively upholds the principle of subsidiarity, fighting for decisions to be taken as close to the citizens as possible.

(iii) Equality in Diversity

The AER demonstrates respect for political, ethnic and administrative diversity. All of our members are equal, regardless of size, legislative powers or economic strength, and each member has one vote. We draw upon one another's strengths to build an organisation that promotes and celebrates diversity and we are committed to the promotion of this diversity in our work. The AER is a non-partisan organisation and does not take party lines in the formulation of positions or in its advocacy work. We do not work through national delegations, but instead operate through a truly multicultural approach to decision-making, with members from all backgrounds bringing their experience and viewpoints together to reach consensus on issues of shared interest.

(iv) Solidarity and Member-orientation

The AER promotes solidarity between the regions of Europe. We encourage regions to co-operate with one another in order to achieve common aims, sharing of resources and experiences. We also encourage stronger regions to show solidarity with those who still require support.

We recognise that our greatest asset is our members and consequently we put the interests of our members at the heart of everything we do. As an organisation, we pride ourselves in building effective relationships with and between our members.

(iii) Innovation and Excellence

We constantly strive to develop excellence in all that we do. Our work is characterised by new networks, fresh ideas and a dedication to continuous learning. We always strive to innovate rather than just react to the circumstances around us. We have a commitment to excellence in our service to our members and constantly strive to meet our members' expectations, promptly and with the highest quality of service provision. We take pride in our work and in being accountable for our actions.

(g) How We Are Governed

The AER is governed by the following structures:

(i) General Assembly

The General Assembly consists of political representatives of the AER member regions. It decides upon the AER's political strategy, votes on the budget, decides on the creation of committees or specific assignments, ratifies the acceptance of members and decides on exclusions and membership type. It elects the AER President, the members of the Bureau and the Secretary General.

(ii) Bureau

The Bureau makes all the decisions necessary for the smooth running of affairs between General Assemblies and co-ordinates the work of the different committees. It meets at least twice a year. Its members are elected by the General Assembly, after being nominated by the member regions, and include at least one regional representative per country represented with the AER. The members of the Bureau are elected for a period of 2 years.

The Bureau has two Standing Committees, which will report directly to it:

(a) Standing Committee on Institutional Affairs – this committee focuses upon upholding the core principles of subsidiarity, good governance and regional democracy within the AER's work

(b) Standing Committee on Monitoring and Evaluation – this committee ensures that the AER is effectively delivering the priorities set out in the Strategic Plan

The work of these Standing Committees is described in more detail later on in this document.

(iii) Presidium

The Presidium consists of the AER President, two Vice Presidents and the Presidents of each of the AER's committees. In the interim period between Bureau meetings, and by delegation, the Presidium can meet and take decisions that are then submitted to the following Bureau.

SECTION 2: AER KEY PRIORITIES 2007-2012

Introduction

This section outlines the key priorities of the AER for the period 2007-2012. It demonstrates how the AER will work to identify innovative, cutting-edge solutions to the key challenges that Europe's regions will face in the coming years.

AER Key Priorities 2007-2012

(a) Promoting the modernisation and internationalisation of regional governance

(b) Promoting innovation, growth and employment in Europe's regions

(c) Addressing the challenges of demographic change, migration, health and social exclusion

(d) Ensuring sustainable development and combating environmental degradation

(e) Delivering democracy through diversity, and promoting the diversity of culture, media and education

(f) Creating a secure environment for citizens

(a) Promoting Modernisation and Internationalisation of Regional Governance

As a result of ever-quickening globalisation processes, European regions find themselves in a very different context today that when the AER was first created 20 years ago. The liberalisation of world trade, the freeing of capital markets and the development of global governance have all increased the social, cultural and political links between people and societies around the globe. Globalisation has resulted in increased opportunities for Europe's regions, but has also intensified competition. It has been accompanied by great technological advancement, with the development of a new networked economy, in which the Internet is the main driving force, and the creation of a knowledge-based society, of which regions need to learn to take advantage. Globalisation is also often accompanied by liberalisation, which brings with it challenges to the regional political decision-making processes, moving many decisions away from the regional level and challenging the principle of subsidiarity.

Regions can play an important role in harnessing the opportunities provided by globalisation and in combating the negative affects of globalisation. We often hear the expression 'Think global, Act local'. The competitiveness of Europe and the competitiveness of its regions are bound closely together. It is also often said that Europe's strength is in its diversity. The range of cultures, languages and ethnicities in Europe helps to foster innovation and creativity. Regions can play a key role in promoting cultural diversity and ensuring that the potential for creativity and innovation in a global world are maximised.

In order to maximise their potential to address these challenges, the regions need to both modernise and internationalise their services, systems and their ways of working. The AER will work with the regions to develop their role in giving Europe a competitive advantage – not only economically, but also politically, culturally and socially - in the global world. The AER will assist regions in taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the knowledge society and technological advancement. It will also work to safeguard the ability of the regions to design, develop and deliver services to their citizens in the light of liberalisation debates. The AER will promote and ensure respect for cultural diversity and cultural heritage in Europe's regions as assets that help to maximise the potential offered by globalisation. The development of regions globally is intrinsically linked, with individual firms operating from multiple bases across the world. Europe's regions have a great deal of experience in responding to the implications of globalisation that they can utilise to assist their counterparts in developing or transitional countries. The AER will develop decentralised co-operation initiatives that can assist developing regions in third world or transition countries to adapt to the global world.

The AER will also ensure the representation of the European regions and their viewpoints vis-à-vis the organisations responsible for global governance, including the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation and the International Labour Organisation.

(a) Promoting the modernisation and internationalisation of regional governance

Key Tasks for the AER

1. To develop the role of the regions in giving Europe a competitive advantage in the global economy
2. To promote the ability of the regions to design, develop and deliver services to their citizens
3. To assist regions in grasping the opportunities provided by the knowledge society and technological advancement
4. To develop decentralised co-operation initiatives to assist developing and transition regions
5. To ensure representation of the European regions in organisations responsible for global governance
6. To promote interregional co-operation within Europe and beyond

(b) Promoting Innovation, Growth and Employment in Europe's Regions

The European Union's Lisbon Strategy focuses upon the creation of a Europe capable of sustaining economic growth, with more and better jobs, and greater social cohesion. Yet, in the global economy, it is clear that Europe's regions will not gain a competitive advantage simply by continuing to do what they have always done. The phenomenon of 'delocalisation' means that many products are not produced close to their market place, and the provision of some services are also moving away from Europe, with, for example, the creation of call-centres for European companies in developing countries. These factors create enormous challenges for economic development and growth in Europe's regions. Regions must transform these challenges into opportunities and find new ways to remain competitive in the global market place.

In order to remain competitive, regions need to identify competitive advantages and specialisations. They have an important role to play in fostering innovation and creativity. They can encourage greater and more targeted research and development and are key to the creation of a knowledge economy in Europe. Regions can foster partnerships between universities, businesses and regional authorities. They can help to develop human capital through measures to support education, training and lifelong learning and can encourage the acquisition of skills, the development of social capital and effective knowledge management. Finally, growth and jobs need to be inclusive concepts. Regions need to focus upon ensuring that they bring marginalised groups in society into the regional economy and maximise their potential to contribute to competitiveness and growth in Europe's regions.

The role of the AER in this context will be to foster and disseminate innovative approaches to regional economic development and job creation. The AER will promote best practice in developing training and education initiatives that foster innovation and creativity in the regions, that develop research and development potential and that generate employment. For economic development in Europe to be successful, it must be inclusive and cohesive. The AER will therefore promote territorial and social cohesion throughout Europe. Transport also plays a key role in territorial cohesion, and the AER will promote sustainable transport and infrastructure solutions that contribute to regional economic development. The AER will assist regions in the development of inclusive policies for economic development and employment that are based upon equal opportunities for all. The rural economy plays a major role in the European economy and therefore the AER will promote special initiatives to ensure the development of rural areas. Finally, the AER will foster economic links between European regions and their counterparts worldwide.

(b) Promoting Innovation, Growth and Employment in Europe's Regions

Key Tasks for the AER

1. To foster and disseminate innovative approaches to regional economic development and job creation
2. To improve regional education and training policies and to promote initiatives for lifelong learning
3. To assist regions in the development of inclusive and equal policies for economic development and employment
4. To promote territorial and social cohesion throughout Europe
5. To promote sustainable rural development and to support the rural economy in Europe's regions
6. To develop sustainable transport and infrastructure solutions which promote regional economic development
7. To ensure that the European Union provides adequate framework conditions and support programmes for regional innovation, research and competitiveness
8. To foster economic links between European regions and their counterparts worldwide in order to capitalise upon the opportunities provided by the global economy

(c) Addressing the Challenges of Demographic Change, Migration, Health and Social Exclusion

Europe's society is changing. People are living longer and birth rates are falling. By 2030, half the population of Europe will be over the age of 50. At the same time, Europe is undergoing a massive population shift - some say the largest in more than a millennium - with many immigrants settling here. Work patterns and social systems are going to have to change if we are to have a workforce that can bear the brunt of the ageing society and can ensure that the European social model can be maintained.

An ageing society poses a number of challenges for Europe's regions, in terms of healthcare and social welfare systems. Ageing populations boost demand for regional government services, such as healthcare, housing, transportation and benefits. Regions will need to develop new approaches to healthcare and the delivery of social services and to identify new innovative solutions to ensuring that the economic burden of providing for rising healthcare and social costs can be spread more widely.

Increased immigration will make the need for the integration of ethnic minority communities even more pressing than it is today. These ethnic communities enrich the cultural fabric of Europe, but also raise issues in terms of multiethnic education, religious tolerance and social protection. Unemployment rates amongst ethnic minorities are higher than average in societies throughout Europe. At the same time racial pressures make integration an even greater challenge.

Social exclusion does not only affect those from minority groups. It can also be generated by factors such as unemployment, intolerance, violence, alcohol and drug abuse. The regions must identify innovative and effective solutions to respond to these challenges if they are to create inclusive societies.

The AER will develop and disseminate innovative ideas on how regions can adapt their social welfare systems to respond to the challenges of demographic change. It will assist regions in developing sustainable, equitable healthcare and social welfare systems. It will explore the implications of demographic change for regional healthcare systems throughout Europe, and promote the development of models to address the challenges. The AER will promote social inclusion in Europe's regions and will assist regions in developing initiatives to consult and respond to the needs of ethnic minority groups and other socially excluded sectors of society.

The AER will assist regions in combating factors that contribute to social exclusion, such as racism, drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence. The AER will also assist regions in developing preventive healthcare solutions that ease pressures on regional health systems.

(c) Addressing the Challenges of Demographic Change, Migration, Health and Social Exclusion

Key Tasks for the AER

1. To assist regions in developing high-quality sustainable, equitable and innovative healthcare and social welfare systems
2. To identify and disseminate information on regional measures to deal with an ageing society
3. To assist regions in developing policies and programmes which promote multicultural societies
4. To foster intercultural understanding through promoting co-operation between regions within Europe and beyond
5. To assist regions in combating the factors which contribute to social exclusion
6. To assist regions in developing preventive healthcare solutions
7. To promote sustainable labour force mobility throughout Europe
8. To assist regions in responding to the social and cultural implications of asylum and migration
9. To promote the issues of youth and equal opportunities in all aspects of regional governance

(d) Ensuring Sustainable Development and Combating Environmental Degradation

In the last few years, the scale of global environmental decline has been unprecedented. Climate change and global warming are leading to an increase in flooding and forest fires in many European countries; temperatures are changing and droughts are becoming more common. Fossil fuels will not be able to meet our increased demand for energy for much longer and renewable sources of energy need to be produced on a much larger scale. Europe has become vulnerable to fluctuations in the energy market, and European citizens are becoming increasingly concerned about energy shortages, or increases in the price of energy. A much greater emphasis needs to be placed upon sustainable development. We need to re-examine our lifestyles to ensure that they do not contribute to environmental degradation. Transportation systems need to become more environmentally friendly, and emissions from transport and from production activities need to be reduced. New agricultural developments, such as genetically-modified organisms, may pose as yet unidentified dangers to our environment and to traditional forms of agriculture. Mass development and tourism can also contribute to destroying our natural environment.

Most of the problems of environmental degradation need to be addressed at the regional level. Regions therefore have a key role to play in contributing towards sustainable development at the European level. In many European countries, it is the regions that are responsible for environmental policy-making, for example taking decisions about water and waste. Regions are also responsible for education systems and can therefore ensure that citizens are provided with environmental education. They can also work towards changing citizens' behaviour and attitudes, and can set a leading example, for example by promoting efficient energy use in public buildings. Regions can also help to address the challenges posed by congestion and use of transport, for example through improving public transport. Through forming innovative partnerships with universities and the business community, regions can contribute to the development and dissemination of research into new forms of renewable energies, such as hydrogen, wind- and waterpower. Regions can also promote sustainable tourism and traditional forms of agricultural production and can take responsible approaches towards land-use planning.

The AER will assist its members in developing innovative solutions to energy use, through maximising the potential of renewable energy sources, forming innovative partnerships with the scientific and business communities and through promoting energy efficiency. It will promote the sustainable development of Europe's regions through increasing environmental awareness. The AER will promote the development and use of innovative, sustainable public transport systems that serve urban and rural areas. It will advocate for freedom of choice regarding traditional regional agriculture and will raise awareness of the implications of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) for European agricultural production. The AER will promote the production and consumption of quality regional products, as well as facilitating the development of sustainable quality tourism in Europe's regions. Finally, the AER will ensure that environmental concerns are mainstreamed in policy-making process at the regional and European levels.

(d) Ensuring Sustainable Development and Combating Environmental Degradation

Key Tasks for the AER

1. To assist regions in developing and promoting innovative approaches to energy production and energy efficiency
2. To promote environmental awareness and engender positive changes in consumer behaviour
3. To assist regions in combating the negative effects of climate change
4. To support innovative, efficient and sustainable methods of agricultural production
5. To promote sustainable tourism in Europe's regions
6. To ensure that environmental concerns are mainstreamed in policy-making processes at the regional and European levels

(e) Delivering Democracy through Diversity, and Promoting Diversity through Culture, Media and Education

The value of democracy is in the ability that it gives to citizens to choose how and by whom they are governed. Democracy can, therefore, only be effective if citizens participate in it fully. This holds equally true at the European, the national, the regional and the local levels. However, in Europe today, we are increasingly seeing a growing trend of a disengagement from politics at all levels. Voter-turnout is low, particularly at European elections, and citizens feel disconnected from European politics. Recent opinion polls show that fewer and fewer citizens support the way in which the European Union is developing. There is a pressing need to create a citizen-centred Europe.

Political administrations can sometimes be viewed as bureaucratic and cumbersome, and services difficult to access. Political disengagement represents a real threat for the regions. If regional government is not representative of the people, it cannot be truly democratic. Regions need to ensure that what they are doing is relevant for the citizens and addresses their real needs. They also need to improve their communication with the citizens through the media; democracy needs to be communicated effectively, in order for citizens to have the opportunity to really engage in it.

Marginalised groups need to be reconnected with the political process and to be able to influence it to ensure that it meets their needs. Equal opportunity policies must be put into place, which ensure that ethnicity, gender and other concerns are properly represented in political processes. As European societies become increasingly ethnically diverse, democratic bodies need to ensure that they respect and promote this diversity. Culture, media and education are important tools in this respect. Regional politicians need to better understand the needs of their constituents, introducing new methods of communication and decision-making. Regions need to make government more effective through innovative partnerships with civil society, academia and the business community.

Regions can play a key role in ensuring that citizens are placed firmly back at the centre of the European integration process. They are closely involved in European decision-making and can act as interlocutors between the citizens and the European institutions. The AER will scrutinise and input into European policymaking processes to ensure they are responsive to the needs of the citizen and that policies made at the European and national level do not encroach on the competences of the regions. The AER will also encourage an effective framework for regional co-operation, ensuring that citizens can engage fully in the process of European integration. For regions to be effective in serving their citizens, they need to be endowed both with competences and financial resources. The AER will monitor and positively influence the development of regional democracy throughout Europe to ensure that regions are provided with a framework that allows them to effectively develop and deliver services for their citizens. It will encourage the engagement of all citizens in regional politics, actively promoting the diversity of culture, media, education and languages.

(e) Delivering Democracy through Diversity, and Promoting Diversity through Culture, Media and Education

1. To promote the development of innovative, participatory and inclusive regional governance
2. To ensure that the optimal framework conditions are provided for the development of regional democracy in all countries of Europe
3. To assist regions in bridging the gap between the European institutions and the citizens
4. To ensure the greater involvement of the regions, and thereby citizens, in European decision-making processes and policy implementation
5. To ensure the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity
6. To promote the engagement of all citizens (including young people, the elderly, women, men, minority groups and the socially excluded) into regional politics and policy-making.
7. To promote the diversity of culture, media, education and languages
8. To promote the communication of democracy to the citizens through regional media channels and all other available means of communication
9. To put into place an effective framework for regional co-operation in order to engage the citizens in European integration

(f) Creating a Secure Environment for Citizens

The nature of the threat to our societies has changed over the past few decades. Europe is no longer at war; we do not have countries that can clearly be viewed as enemies, posing a physical threat to our continent. Instead though, we face news threats to our citizens' security and safety, including terrorism, increased incidences of natural disasters, ethnic unrest, pandemics, and international crime. The regions can be important actors in combating some of the underlying factors aggravating the new security threats; they may be able to introduce measure to protect citizens against some of these threats and will also be in the front line in responding to the impact of both natural and man-made disasters.

The challenges inherent in combating new threats like terrorism are immense. The threat of terrorism has repercussions and implications for the regional level. Terrorists have repeatedly attacked transport systems, viewing them as easily accessibly targets. It is often the regions that are responsible for ensuring safe and secure transport systems and that therefore need to rise to this challenge.

Whilst we no longer have to worry about European-scale warfare, we still have sporadic outbreaks of regional-based unrest in a number of areas of Europe, including Kosovo, Northern Ireland and the Chechnya. In other areas, a very fragile peace still exists. The regional-based unrest that is experienced in some areas of Europe can be combated through the establishment of democratic and representative systems of government. Democratic consolidation and regionalisation can be key to ensuring representation of minority groups and to putting into place a framework to peacefully broker conflicting interests. A proper framework for regional democracy must be put into place, which allows real representation and gives a voice to all groups. Equally, through engaging in decentralised co-operation activities with regions in developing countries, European regions can help to ensure democratic stability beyond Europe's borders.

Europe is increasingly under threat from infectious disease epidemics,. It has become evident how quickly agricultural livelihoods can be destroyed through diseases such as BSE. Regions also have a role to play in responding to the growing threat of diseases and pandemics. The regions can help to alleviate their spread through ensuring effective environmental health systems; regions also need to be prepared to deal with the effects of infectious diseases through the provision of appropriate healthcare. Equally, regional authorities can promote safe agricultural production and protect against the threat of the spread of disease.

The AER will assist regions to address these new challenges and threats, many of which do not lie within the traditional experiences of regional authorities. The AER can enable regions across Europe to develop best practice in these areas. This will include assisting regions to prevent and to respond effectively to manmade and to natural disasters. The AER will promote joint regional actions to respond to disasters such as floods, pollution and forest fires. In addition to assisting regions to respond to these issues in Europe, the AER will help to build the capacities of the regions to respond to such disasters in regions in other areas of the world, showing solidarity and offering much-needed know-how and resources. It will also assist regions in developing preventive strategies towards new threats and in improving community safety. The AER will assist the regions in developing effective responses to these new challenges, enabling the sharing of best practices in terms of emergency planning, healthcare and environmental health, for example.

(f) <u>Creating a Secure Environment for Citizens</u>

Key Tasks

1. To assist regions in developing effective emergency planning procedures and foresight strategies to cope with manmade and natural disasters and with new threats to the regions
2. To promote the role of regions in ensuring stability and democratic consolidation in the European neighbourhood and beyond
3. To assist regions in responding effectively to issues of community safety

A breakdown of all of these tasks, together with their outcomes, can be found in the Operational Plan in Annex 1.

SECTION 3: AER STRUCTURES

(a) Introduction

The AER will deliver this operational plan through a system of committees, programmes and projects, which are outlined in this section of the plan.

In terms of its internal structure, the vision of the AER by 2012 is to:

(i) Have over 350 regions as members, from all Council of Europe member states with regional structures

(ii) Be the umbrella organisation for all other associations and organisations representing regional interests in Europe

(iii) Implement political initiatives through a series of high profile campaigns, led by regional presidents and high-level regional politicians

(iv) Be the premier European hub of expertise on regional issues, connecting policy-makers, academic experts and institutes and industry to promote and advance all aspects of regional democracy

(v) Provide training and capacity-building on regional issues to international, national and regional authorities throughout Europe and beyond

In order to realise this vision, the AER will introduce a series of new structures and working methodologies. These will include:

- Establishment of an AER Committee structure suited to addressing these priorities
- Further development of the AER Programmes
- Creation of a series of new innovative projects over the coming five years
- Identification and utilisation of new sources of funding

Each of these developments is explained in detail in the following sections.

(b) AER Committee Structure

From 2007, the AER is introducing a new committee structure, in order to enable it to deliver the priorities outlined in this document. The new structure builds upon the successes of the previous committees and enables the AER to effectively serve its membership base.

Committee Structure

Committee 1(Economy and Regional Development)

Regional Economic Development, Employment and Knowledge Society, Environment, Energy, Rural Development/Agriculture and Infrastructure, Tourism

Committee 2 (Social Policy and Public Health)

Social Policy, Equal Opportunities, Demographics, Public Health and Emergency Planning

Committee 3 (Culture and Education)

Culture, Education, Youth, Media, International Co-operation and Interregional Co-operation

Bureau

(a) Standing Committee for Institutional Affairs

(b) Standing Committee for Monitoring and Evaluation

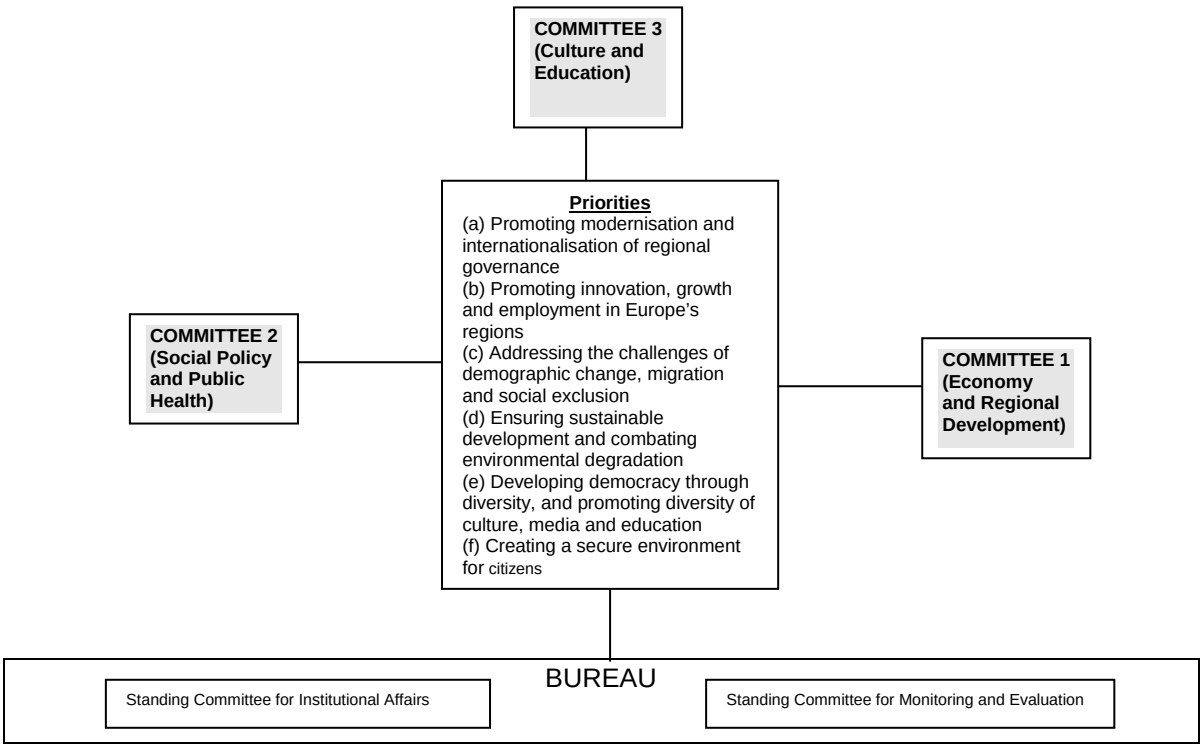
Definitions

Sub-committee – the President of the Committee is responsible for establishing the sub-committees deemed necessary to deliver the committee's work throughout his/her term of office. Sub-committees thus exist for a minimum of two years.

Working group – working groups are temporary bodies, formed on an ad-hoc basis, to deal with new issues that arise within the work of the committee and require additional attention.

Rationale

The committees are designed in such a way as to allow the AER to address the new priorities that it has defined for the period 2007-2012. Each of these priorities is designed to be 'cross-cutting' priority, which means that it would be dealt with in more than one committee. By adopting a cross-cutting approach, the work of all the committees can be seen to be mutually supportive, as they are working together to address common themes and concerns. The Committees work together on key campaigns, based around the AER priorities. This is demonstrated in the diagram below:



The issues of youth, equal opportunities and interregional co-operation are considered to be of high importance for the work of all the AER committees and are therefore mainstreamed throughout the organisation.

The Committees work together on key campaigns, focusing upon one or two key issues per year. Each campaign concerns one of the key priorities. The campaigns bring together the work of the committees into a coherent whole, with each committee working on their own aspect of the common theme. The campaign of the year culminates in the General Assembly, which presents the key conclusions. The General Assembly also officially decides upon the theme of the campaign(s) for the coming year.

The AER Committee Structure is described below. The Committees' main tasks are listed first. The cross-cutting issues, which are dealt with by a number of committees, are then listed in *italics* for each Committee.

COMMITTEE 1 – Economy and Regional Development

Key areas of activity:

Cohesion policy, economic development, innovation and research, employment, new technologies and e-government, knowledge society, GMOs, rural development, agriculture, public transport and transport corridors, renewable energies and energy efficiency, environment, regional produce, tourism

Priorities for 2007-2012:

- To develop the role of the regions in giving Europe a competitive advantage in the global economy
- To foster and disseminate innovative approaches to regional economic development and job creation
- To promote sustainable labour force mobility throughout Europe
- To promote territorial and social cohesion throughout Europe
- To ensure that the European Union provides adequate framework conditions and support programmes for regional innovation, research and competitiveness
- To assist regions in grasping the opportunities provided by the knowledge society and technological advancement
- To develop sustainable transport and infrastructure solutions which promote regional economic development
- To assist regions in developing and promoting innovative approaches to energy production and energy efficiency
- To assist regions in combating the negative effects of climate change
- To support innovative, efficient and sustainable methods of agricultural production
- To promote sustainable tourism in Europe's regions
- To promote sustainable rural development and to support the rural economy in Europe's regions
- To promote environmental awareness and to engender positive changes in consumer behaviour
- To ensure that environmental concerns are mainstreamed in policy-making process at the regional and European levels
- *To assist regions in the development of inclusive and equal policies for economic development and employment*
- *To foster economic links between Europe's regions and their counterparts worldwide in order to capitalise upon the opportunities provided by the global economy*
- *To promote the ability of the regions to design, develop and deliver services to their citizens*
- *To assist regions in grasping the opportunities provided by the knowledge society and technological advancement*
- *To promote the issues of youth and equal opportunities in all aspects of regional governance*
- *To promote interregional co-operation within Europe and beyond*

COMMITTEE 2 – SOCIAL POLICY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Key areas of activity:

Social cohesion, social services, equal opportunities (men and women, disabled, minorities), migration and mobility of workers, domestic violence, Demographic change, public health, hospital management, drugs and alcohol abuse, natural disaster response, , emergency planning

Priorities for 2007-2012:

- To promote the ability of the regions to design, develop and deliver services to their citizens
- To assist regions in the development of inclusive and equal policies for economic development and employment
- To assist regions in developing high-quality sustainable, equitable and innovative healthcare and social welfare systems
- To promote the engagement of all citizens (including young people, the elderly, women, men, minority groups and the socially excluded) into regional politics and policy-making
- To assist regions in combating the factors which contribute to social exclusion
- To assist regions in responding to the social and cultural implications of asylum and migration
- To assist regions in developing preventive healthcare solutions[1] that ease pressures on regional health systems
- To identify and disseminate information on regional measures to deal with an ageing society
- To assist regions in developing effective emergency planning procedures to cope with manmade and natural disasters
- To assist regions in responding effectively to issues of community safety
- *To assist regions in grasping the opportunities provided by the knowledge society and technological advancement*
- *To promote the issues of youth and equal opportunities in all aspects of regional governance*
- *To promote interregional co-operation within Europe and beyond*
- *To assist regions in developing policies and programmes which promote multicultural societies*
- *To assist regions in grasping the opportunities provided by the knowledge society and technological advancement*
- *To promote territorial and social cohesion throughout Europe*

[1] For example, responding to issues of drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence

COMMITTEE 3 – CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Key areas of activity:

Culture, education, training, youth, media, cultural heritage, GATS, cultural diversity, regional languages, Regional Partnerships Instruments (ENPI, EGCC, Madrid Outline Convention), Southeast Europe, Southern Mediterranean, decentralised co-operation, co-operation with international organisations

Priorities for 2007-2012:

- To promote the diversity of culture, media, education and languages
- To improve regional education and training policies and to promote initiatives for life-long learning
- To promote the communication of democracy through regional media channels and all other available means of communication
- To assist regions in developing policies and programmes which promote multicultural societies
- To ensure representation of European regions in organisations responsible for global governance (*such as WTO – GATS negotiations-, or UNDP),*
- To develop decentralised co-operation initiatives to assist developing and transition regions
- To promote the role of the regions in ensuring stability and democratic consolidation in the European neighbourhood and beyond
- To put into place an effective framework for regional co-operation in order to engage the citizens in European integration
- To foster economic links between European regions and their counterparts worldwide in order to capitalise upon the opportunities provided by the global economy (e.g.links with Southern Mediterranean regions)
- To foster intercultural understanding through promoting co-operation between regions within Europe and beyond
- To promote the issues of youth and equal opportunities in all aspects of regional governance
- To promote interregional co-operation within Europe and beyond
- *To promote the ability of regions to design, develop and deliver services to their citizens*
- *To promote the engagement of all citizens (including young people, the elderly, women, men, minorities and socially excluded groups) into regional politics and policy-making*
- *To assist regions in grasping the opportunities provided by the knowledge society and technological advancement*
- *To ensure that the European union provides adequate framework conditions and support programmes for regional innovation, research and competitiveness*
- *To assist regions in responding to the social and cultural implications of asylum and migration*

BUREAU

The Bureau's main task is to carry out its statutory responsibilities. It also has two Standing Committees, which allow it to take on additional tasks key to the AER's work:

(a) Standing Committee for Institutional Affairs

The core activities of the AER in the fields of good governance, regionalism and susidiarity are led by the AER Bureau, and do not fall under the responsibility of a specific committee. These include regionalism, the European Constitutional Treaty, the future of Europe and institutional relations. A Standing Committee on Institutional Affairs advises the Bureau on these issues; all members of the AER (irrespective of whether they are members of the Bureau) are able to join this Standing Committee. One of the Vice Presidents of the AER takes overall responsibility for the Standing Committee and individual members of the Bureau take the lead on each of the issues, in order to ensure political accountability. The priorities that fall under the direct responsibility of the Standing Committee of the Bureau are:

- To promote the development of innovative, accountable, participatory and inclusive regional governance
- To assist regions in bridging the gap between the European institutions and the citizens
- To ensure the greater involvement of the regions, and thereby citizens, in European decision-making processes
- To ensure the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity
- To ensure that the optimal framework conditions are provided for the development of regional democracy in all countries of Europe
- *To promote the issues of youth and equal opportunities in all aspects of regional governance*
- *To promote interregional co-operation within Europe and beyond*

The Standing Committee holds regular meetings immediately before each Bureau meeting and reports directly to the Bureau. This allows immediate political affirmation of the actions to be taken and thus improves the ability of the AER to act in this area.

(b) Standing Committee for Monitoring and Evaluation

In order for the AER to be able to effectively assess whether it has successfully addressed the identified priorities, it is necessary that the organisation successfully monitors and evaluates its work.

The AER has established a Standing Committee for Monitoring and Evaluation within the Bureau. This group is responsible for providing oversight to the implementation of the AER's strategic plan and ensures that the committee and programmes are all developing in line with the agreed strategy. The Committees and Programmes provide the Standing Committee with information about their activities and outcomes, in order that the Standing Committee is able to make an accurate assessment. The Standing Committee reports directly to the AER Bureau. This Standing Committee is open to participation for all AER members, irrespective of whether they are members of the Bureau.

(c) AER Programmes

The AER has four core programmes, which it will develop further over the coming five years:

- Summer School
- Youth Summer School
- Eurodyssey
- Centurio

This section describes the main focus of these programmes for the coming period.

(i) Summer School

The concept of the AER Summer School evolved in 1996 as a response to the increase in AER member regions coming from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. These regions often had different needs to the traditional AER members from the countries of Western Europe. In particular, these new regions were trying to introduce new approaches to their work in order to prepare themselves for eventual EU membership. The regions of Western Europe had a great deal of relevant experience that they could share with their counterparts in the pre-accession countries. The Summer School was therefore designed as a tool to facilitate the exchange of experience and information to assist in the preparations for future EU membership.

The Summer School has since evolved into an annual forum for exchange of experience in the area of regional development in Europe. The aims of the programme today are:

- To facilitate an exchange of experience and best practice between regions on issues of common interest
- To provide an opportunity for regional representatives to build networks with their counterparts from throughout Europe
- To provide the regions from the new EU Member States and pre-accession countries with first-hand experience and information on the implementation of European policies and the necessary tools for effective regional development
- To promote regional democracy in Europe and the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity
- To foster East-West interregional co-operation

Each year, the AER Summer School is organised by an Organising Committee of AER Member regions, which each make a financial contribution to the event and provide speakers. The host region is responsible for the logistical organisation of the event, under the guidance of the Organising Committee.

For the period 2007-2012, the AER will develop the Summer School into a targeted training event which provides participants with a set of concrete skills in a different area each year. The Summer School theme will relate to the main campaign theme of the AER for that year, and will directly contribute to addressing the priority issues identified by the AER. Furthermore towards the end of this period, following the establishment of the European Regional Training Institute (see point (d) below), the Summer School will serve as a foundation course for some of the taught degrees and modules.

(ii) Youth Summer School

The Youth Summer School was introduced in 2001 to allow young people with an interest in regional politics to meet together to share experiences and to have the opportunity to exchange ideas with regional politicians and officials attending the main Summer School. It brings together young people between the ages of 18 and 24 from across Europe to exchange experiences on issues of common interest. The aims of the programme are:

- To improve the ability of, and opportunities for, young people to make a positive contribution to regional politics
- To provide young people from throughout Europe with an interest in regional politics with an opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences
- To allow young people to make contacts with regional representatives and with other young people with similar interests

The target groups for the AER Youth Summer School are young people involved in local/regional youth councils, young officers and politicians, members of political youth associations, active members of NGOs and young people with an interest in regional politics. The participants of the Youth Summer School are nominated and sponsored by their regions.

The Youth Summer School runs in parallel with the AER Summer School, providing a useful opportunity for the participants of the two Summer Schools to exchange experiences with one another.

For the period 2007-2012, the Youth Summer School will focus on engaging young people in regional youth councils and NGOs into the priority issues identified by the AER. Like the main Summer School, it will focus on the annual campaign issue of the AER and will ensure the full engagement of the young people in the regions into the campaign.

The Youth Summer School will also be one of the main instruments for delivering the AER's Mainstreaming Youth initiative and will host the annual elections to the AER Youth Team.

(iii) Eurodyssey

Eurodyssey was the first exchange programme for young people to be established at the European level, and today it is a particularly effective tool for regional promotion of vocational training and employment. The programme gives young people aged between 18 and 30 the opportunity to acquire professional European work experience through a three to seven-month work placement in another country and to improve their foreign language skills.

The AER will aim to extend participation in the Eurodyssey programme, with the goal of doubling the number of participating in the programme by 2012. It will also focus specifically on promoting the involvement of the following target groups:

- Young people with vocational qualifications
- Young people from ethnic minority backgrounds

(iv) Centurio

The AER Centurio programme enables an exchange of experience and best practice between AER member regions in areas of common interest. From 2004-2006, the Centurio programme received financial support from the EU's Interreg programme. The Interreg project consisted of a network of 49 Regions from throughout Europe, with the Assembly of European Regions as the Lead Partner. The programme had three thematic priorities: (i) sustainable quality tourism, (ii) environmental protection and (iii) sustainable economic development. It aimed to:

- Encourage social, economic and territorial cohesion in Europe, supporting regions' participation in EU cohesion policy, in particular as regards objective 1 and 2 policies, and interregional co-operation
- Improve regions' sustainable development by providing its partners with ad-hoc knowledge and methodology tools, and foster a sustainable development approach by promoting close co-operation with experienced organisations such as the International Council of Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI)

For the period from 2007-2012, the AER will apply for further European Union funding, in order to develop this network further.

SECTION 4: THE WAY AHEAD

(a) AER Projects

By 2012, the AER intends to complement the work undertaken in the committees and programmes through the implementation of a number of new projects. These projects will require intensive planning and implementation, as well as additional financial resources. However, their realisation will help to give the AER a competitive advantage and to enable it to attain its key objectives. They will help to make the AER an innovative, cutting-edge organisation, leading the way in the development of regionalism and regional democracy in Europe.

AER Projects
(i) European Regional Training Institute (ERTI)
(ii) Knowledge-Exchange Platform (KEP)
(iii) Centre for Regional Excellence (CRE)
(iv) Business Development Unit (BDU)
(v) Regional Project Management Units

(i) European Regional Training Institute (ERTI)

The European Regional Training Institute will link together public administration institutes across Europe to offer European-wide training in all aspects of regional public administration for civil servants and politicians from AER member regions. It will provide training in a diverse range of skills necessary for delivering effective regional governance. These will include:

- International work – EU policies and funding programmes, skills for international work
- Regional public administration – project management, human resource management, strategic planning, financial management
- Sector specific skills - drawing in particular upon the European legislative and programmatic aspects, as well as providing general subject-based knowledge, in areas such as transport, environment and emergency planning

The European Regional Training Institute will be accredited through its contributing universities and institutes and will be able to offer modular diplomas and degrees at all levels. Courses would be taken over time, in order to allow regional civil servants to complete their studies alongside their employment. The courses will be taught through distance-learning, online working groups, weekend and residential courses. The AER Summer School will gradually be integrated into this new institute, and will serve as a foundation course for some of the modules and diplomas. The AER will seek European and other donor funding in order to establish this institute and will build upon the experiences of its member regions in training design and provision.

(ii) Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP)

The AER will increasingly need to make use of new technologies and to develop new ways to deliver its services. It will build up electronic databases and web portals specialising in its areas of expertise. The AER website will become an interactive tool and will provide a web portal connecting together online resources on regionalism globally. The Knowledge Exchange Platform will allow the AER members to form online working communities on issues of common interest, to search for project partners and to exchange information on issues of common interest.

Within the Knowledge Exchange Platform, the AER will also establish a European policy-tracker, which will provide real-time information about EU legislative developments of relevance to the regions.

(iii) Centre for Regional Excellence

The AER Centre for Regional Excellence will promote good practice and excellence in all dimensions of regional policy and governance. It will develop a range of schemes and projects to promote these best practices. Key innovations will include the European Beacon Awards, the European Regional Benchmarking Initiative and the European Peer Review Scheme:

European Quality Label for Regional Performance

The European Quality Label will operate as a recognition of excellence for regional governance in Europe, and would be recognised throughout the European continent. It would enable the identification of regional authorities demonstrating best practices in key areas of regional responsibility. It will build upon existing AER initiatives such as the Most Innovative Region, Most Youth-friendly Region, Most Sustainable Region, and the Youth Entrepreneurship prize.

The European Quality Label scheme will operate as an annual competition, each year making awards to regional authorities that were able to demonstrate innovative and successful approaches in selected areas of regional responsibility. It will acknowledge and reward the best performing regions in key areas of regional government responsibility, in order that they can act as centres of excellence from which other authorities can learn. The scheme should increase the number and quality of exchange of best practice activities between AER member regions and enable them to develop better public services, higher standards of service delivery and improved regional government.

European Regional Benchmarking Initiative

The AER will work with its member regions to develop sets of indicators in a range of regional services, by which regional authorities can measure their own performance. This scheme will be based upon the principle of 'excellence in diversity'; it will not try to establish a single way of designing, managing and delivering services, but will identify indicators for best practice which can enable regions to perform their own assessments as to how well they are operating in comparison to the benchmark in a specific area of their work.

European Peer Review System

The idea of the peer review was launched by the AER in a pilot project on regional economic development in Southeast Europe in 2006. The peer reviews will enable multinational review teams of regional experts to undertake study visits to other regions and provide advice on enhancing policies and practices. The AER will develop a peer review methodology that will use the regional benchmarks as a base to help regional authorities to improve their policies and programmes.

(iv) AER Business Development Unit

There are many untapped funding sources of interest to the AER, of which at present it does not take advantage. These include funds from the European Union, from national donor bodies and from international organisations. The Business Development Unit (BDU) will allow the AER to better access these funding sources, as well as to respond to calls for tenders and take up consultancy tasks in capacity-building in matters of regional administration globally. The BDU would work together with AER member regions and other organisations to bid for donor funding to assist in the process of regional administration reform. The AER would be able to build upon the expertise of those members who already run EU and other donor-funded tenders.

(v) Regional Project Management Units

At the initiative of groups of regions in one country or geographic area, it could be envisaged that regional project management units could be formed (similar to the existing AER Alba Office in Romania), which would be responsible for undertaking country-based initiatives within the framework of the AER. These would be responsible for using donor funding to run capacity-building projects for regions in that geographic area.

(b) Identification and Utilisation of New Forms of Funding

It will only by possible for the AER to develop all the activities identified in this strategic plan if the organisation is successful in identifying and tapping new sources of funding. At present, most of the AER's funding comes from the fees paid by its members. The organisation will actively seek new sources of funding for its activities which can supplement these fees.

Potential sources of funding include:

- European Commission grants
- Grants from foundations
- Grants from international NGOs (e.g. Soros Foundation, Central European Initiative)
- Support for joint activities with international organisations (e.g. UNDP)

It is important that such funding does not in any way compromise the AER's political neutrality or its ability to lobby effectively for its causes.

SECTION V: CONCLUSIONS

This strategic plan builds upon the successes of the AER during the past 20 years and puts into place a framework to ensure that these foundations are used to build a common vision of the future of Europe's regions.

In order that the AER can be at the heart of that vision, it will need to take some steps to expand its membership, both in terms of geographical coverage, but also in terms of acting as an umbrella to other organisations and structures. The AER will therefore undertake a pro-active membership drive over the coming five years. It recognises the untapped potential for membership in a number of key countries, including Russia and Turkey and will take steps to ensure that regions from these countries are able to join the AER as soon as possible.

There is significant overlap at present between the work of the AER and a number of other smaller policy-based and geographical-based interregional networks, whose focus coincide with some of the areas of the AER's work. The AER will therefore work towards integrating these organisations into the umbrella of the AER, to ensure that co-operation takes the place of competition, and that economies of scale can be achieved in the field of interregional co-operation in Europe.

Over the coming five years, the AER will also explore the possibility of affiliating other types of structures and levels of governance within its bodies. A number of sub-regional structures have shown an interest in the AER's work, and the organisation will work to explore how effective co-operation with these structures can best be ensured.

These measures, together with the new initiatives and structures set out in this strategic plan, will help to ensure that the AER is not only the core body promoting the principle of regional democracy in Europe, but also the main instrument through which European regions can exchange experiences, develop innovative ideas and achieve excellence.

Annex 1 : AER Operational Plan, 2007-2012

In the following document, the Committees' main tasks are indicated by means of a shaded box. The cross-cutting issues, to which the Committee can make a contribution, are indicated by means of a striped box.

AER Priorities and Tasks	Outcomes	Key Responsibility			
		Standing Committee of the Bureau	COMM 1	COMM 2	COMM 3
1. Promoting the modernisation and Internationalisation of regional governance					
1.1 To develop the role of the regions in giving Europe a competitive advantage in the global world economy	European regions are able to maximise the potential of the opportunities offered by the global economy		■		
1.2 To promote the ability of the regions to design, develop and deliver services to their citizens	Regions have full responsibility to take decisions which affect the regional level, without interference from other levels of government		▨	■	▨
1.3 To assist regions in grasping the opportunities provided by the knowledge society and technological advancement	Regions take full advantage of new technologies in developing and delivering services to the citizens Regions promote the uptake of new technologies in businesses and industry		■	▨	▨
1.4 To develop decentralised co-operation initiatives to assist developing and transition regions	Developing and transition regions are able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the global economy				■
1.5 To ensure representation of European regions in organisations responsible for global governance	Global governance institutions take into account the needs and interests of the European regions in their policy-making processes				■
1.6 To promote interregional co-operation within Europe and beyond	Regions learn from one another, develop best practices and thereby improve regional governance and policies	▨	▨	▨	■

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AER Priorities and Tasks	Outcomes	Key Responsibility			
		Standing Committee of the Bureau	COMM 1	COMM 2	COMM 3
2. Promoting innovation, growth and employment in Europe's regions					
2.1 To foster and disseminate innovative approaches to regional economic development and job creation	Regions develop new approaches to economic development and job creation and best practices are disseminated				
2.2 To improve regional education and training policies and to promote initiatives for lifelong learning	Regions develop education and training policies tailored to the needs of their economies				
2.3 To assist regions in the development of inclusive and equal policies for economic development and employment	Marginalised groups are able to access employment opportunities and to play a full role in the regional economy				
2.4 To promote territorial and social cohesion throughout Europe	Regional development throughout Europe improves and differentials between regions decrease				
2.5 To promote sustainable rural development and to support the rural economy of Europe's regions	Regions identify and implement new approaches to regenerating the rural economy				
2.6 To develop sustainable transport and infrastructure solutions which promote regional economic development	Innovative solutions are identified to developing sustainable regional public transport and transport infrastructure				
2.7 To ensure that the European Union provides adequate framework conditions and support programmes for regional innovation, research and competitiveness	European Union policies and programmes for regional innovation, research and competitiveness reflect the needs and interests of the European regions				
2.8 To foster economic links between Europe's regions and their counterparts worldwide in order to capitalise upon the opportunities provided by the global economy	European regions form new partnerships and linkages worldwide, which provide opportunities for regional economic development				

AER Priorities and Tasks	Outcomes	Key Responsibility			
		Standing Committee of the Bureau	COMM 1	COMM 2	COMM 3
3. Addressing the challenges of demographic change, migration, health and social exclusion					
3.1 To assist regions in developing high-quality sustainable, equitable and innovative healthcare and social welfare systems	Regional healthcare and social welfare systems are adapted to respond effectively to the challenges of demographic change				
3.2 To identify and disseminate information on regional measures to deal with an ageing society	Regions are in a better position to be able to introduce new policies to meet the needs of the older generation				
3.3 To assist regions in developing policies and programmes which promote multicultural societies	Regions successfully integrate minority communities and develop vibrant multicultural societies				
3.4 To foster intercultural understanding through promoting co-operation between regions within Europe and beyond	Citizens' exposure to other cultures increases and tolerance and mutual understanding improve				
3.5 To assist regions in combating the factors which contribute to social exclusion	Regions successfully address the root causes of social exclusion and create inclusive societies				
3.6 To assist regions in developing preventive healthcare solutions that ease pressures on regional health systems	Regions successfully tackle issues that place a strain upon their healthcare systems, such as drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence				
3.7 To promote sustainable labour force mobility throughout Europe	Employees and employers benefit from the creation of a Europe-wide labour market				
3.8 To assist regions in responding to the social and cultural implications of asylum and migration	Regions develop policies to effectively address the challenges associated with asylum and migration				
3.9 To promote the issues of youth and equal opportunities in all aspects of regional governance	Regions ensure respect of equal opportunities principles, and involve young people in the design, development and delivery of their policies				

AER Priorities and Tasks	Outcomes	Key Responsibility			
		Standing Committee of the Bureau	COMM 1	COMM 2	COMM 3
4. Ensuring Sustainable Development and Combating Environmental Degradation					
4.1 To assist regions in developing and promoting innovative approaches to energy production and energy efficiency	Regions increasingly work together with the scientific and business communities to develop new clean energy sources and to improve energy efficiency				
4.2 To promote environmental awareness and engender positive changes in consumer behaviour	Regional administrations employ environmentally-friendly policies internally and introduce effective measures to promote environmental awareness amongst their citizens				
4.3 To assist regions in combating the negative effects of climate change	Regions play a key role in addressing the challenges posed by climate change and contribute towards reducing the adverse effects of global warming				
4.4 To support innovative, efficient and sustainable methods of agricultural production	Traditional regional agricultural methods are promoted and developed, and knowledge and awareness of the effects of genetically-modified organisms are increased				
4.5 To promote sustainable tourism in Europe's regions	The tourism potential of Europe's regions is increased in a way that is sustainable and promotes the development of quality-tourism				
4.6 To ensure that environmental concerns are mainstreamed into policy-making processes at the regional and European levels	Both the European Union and the regions take into account environmental concerns when drafting policies in all their areas of competence				
5. Making Democracy Work, and Promoting Diversity through Culture, Media and Education					
5.1 To promote the development of innovative, accountable, participative and inclusive regional governance	Regions introduce tailor-made new innovative methods of policy-making, consultation and service delivery which respond more effectively to the needs of their citizens				

5.2 To ensure that the optimal framework conditions are provided for the development of regional democracy in all countries in Europe	Every European country in partnership with its regions puts into place an administrative, legal and financial framework that guarantees adequate finances, competences and powers for the regional level				
AER Priorities and Tasks	**Outcomes**	**Key Responsibility**			
		Standing Committee of the Bureau	**COMM 1**	**COMM 2**	**COMM 3**
5.3 To assist regions in bridging the gap between the European institutions and the citizens	Citizens understand the relevance of Europe to their lives, and European institutions listen to the concerns of the citizens, channelled through the regions				
5.4 To ensure the greater involvement of regions, and thereby citizens, in European decision-making processes and policy implementation	Regions are represented effectively at all stages of European decision-making and policy-implementation				
5.5 To ensure the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity	All decisions are taken as close to the citizen as possible				
5.6 To promote the engagement of all citizens (including young people, the elderly, women, men, minorities and socially excluded groups) into regional politics and policy-making	Regions ensure that all citizens are involved in developing and delivering policies				
5.7 To promote the diversity of culture, media, education and languages	Regions respect and actively promote diversity in all fields of regional competence				
5.8 To promote the communication of democracy through regional media channel and all other available means of communication	Citizens receive accurate information about democratic processes, allowing them to engage fully in democratic life				

5.9 To put into place an effective framework for regional co-operation in order to engage the citizens in European integration	European legislation and programmes governing territorial co-operation reflect the real needs of regions and citizens				
AER Priorities and Tasks	**Outcomes**	**Key Responsibility**			
		Standing Committee of the Bureau	**COMM 1**	**COMM 2**	**COMM 3**
6. Creating a secure environment for citizens					
6.1 To assist regions in developing effective emergency planning procedures to cope with manmade and natural disasters	Regions are better able to respond effectively and quickly to manmade and natural disasters, and are able to come to one another's aid in such emergencies				
6.2 To promote the role of the regions in ensuring stability and democratic consolidation in the European neighbourhood and beyond	European regions implement co-operation projects to help develop democratic practices at the regional level in the European neighbourhood and beyond, creating a secure environment for citizens living in those regions				
6.3 To assist regions in responding effectively to issues of community safety	Regions develop new approaches to addressing community safety issues and become secure places for their citizens to live				