

Assembly of European Regions

Strategic Plan

2007-2012

SUMMARY

1. **Strategic Plan**
   a. **Who are we?**
   b. **Our Vision**
   c. **Our Mission**
   d. **Our Key Objectives**
   e. **Our Values**
   f. **How we are Governed**
2. **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, Health, Migration 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**
3. **AER Structures**
   a. **AER Committee Structures**
   b. **AER Programmes**
4. **The Way Ahead**

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.

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).

(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) Our Values

The AER bases all of its work upon a set of organisational values:

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

(f) 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.

(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

The AER's key priorities for 2007-2012 are:

(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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION 3: AER STRUCTURES

(a) 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.

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

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. A number of other issues are also dealt with by more than one committee; only the lead committee is shown below (further details available in the full strategic plan).

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

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

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
- 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

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

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. The 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. 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

(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 Standing Committee for Monitoring and Evaluation 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:

(i) Summer School - the Summer School is an annual week-long forum for exchange of experience between regional officers and politicians in Europe. It facilitates an exchange of experience and best practice between regions on issues of common interest and provides an opportunity for regional representatives to build networks with their counterparts from throughout Europe.

(ii) Youth Summer School - The Youth Summer School brings together young people between the ages of 18 and 24 from across Europe to exchange experiences on issues of common interest and to improve their abilities to make a positive contribution to regional politics. 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.

(iii) Eurodyssey – the Eurodyssey 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.

(iv) Centurio - the AER Centurio programme enables an exchange of experience and best practice between AER member regions in (i) sustainable quality tourism, (ii) environmental protection and (iii)

sustainable economic development. 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

By 2012, the AER intends to complement the work undertaken in the committees and programmes through the implementation of a number of new projects:

(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.

(ii) Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP) - the Knowledge Exchange Platform will allow the AER members to use new technologies to form online working communities on issues of common interest, to search for project partners and to exchange information on issues of common interest.

(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 a European Quality Standard for Regional Performance, the European Regional Benchmarking Initiative and the European Peer Review Scheme:

(iv) AER Business Development Unit – the Business Development Unit (BDU) will allow the AER to better access European 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.

(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, which would be responsible for undertaking country-based initiatives within the framework of the AER.

Further Information

For further information on the AER Strategic Plan 2007-2012, please contact:

Klaus Klipp
Secretary General
Assembly of European Regions
6, rue Oberlin
67000 Strasbourg
Tel: +33 3 88220707
Fax: +33 3 88756719
Email: k.klipp@a-e-r.org