



**Executive Board**

**Strasbourg, 30 January 2014**

Agenda ref

FOR INFORMATION

Original in English

# **AER POLITICAL PRIORITIES**

## **2014**

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Assembly of European Regions

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## FOREWORD

For the second year, the AER General secretariat sends all its members a proposed yearly action plan listing the key priorities and activities for 2014.

This document is based on:

1. The priorities discussed by the Autumn AER Committees and Vice Presidents in charge of transversal issues
2. The political issues that the President and the Executive Board would like to highlight
3. The priorities defined between October and December by the European institutions or any other institutions deemed relevant

The General Secretariat has gathered all the priorities identified by its members and the European institutions (when available) and produced this document listing the key issues that should be worked on.

These issues are not presented per committee topics but per key priorities. This will allow our members to identify possible synergies between committees. For each priority, the document will also mention what the European institutions aim at doing. This will not only encourage us to work on issues that are largely identified as priority issues and recognised as such by various European actors but will also help ensure that EU funding will be available to launch projects and activities.

This year, AER presents 6 rather than 8 priorities and 4 instead of 5 cross cutting issues in order to increase the synergies and make our messages easier to understand.

This document will be sent out to all members on Monday 27 January. Members will have until the 14th of February to send their comments. The amended document will then be presented to the vote of the February Executive Board and Bureau meetings (19th and 20th February). If adopted, the document will become the AER roadmap for the year.

Pascal GOERGEN

General Secretary

Mathieu MORI

Director Secretariat and Thematic Coordination

## **PART ONE**

# **INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPOSED CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND PRIORITIES**



## FOUR CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

In 2014, AER proposes to highlight 4 out of the 5 cross-cutting issues from last year. Indeed, regionalism and subsidiarity which was the first cross-cutting issue of 2013 has now been inscribed as an AER priority.

The following four cross-cutting issues are core to the work of AER and are integrated in the six work priorities. The detail of how each priority will contribute to these cross-cutting issues is presented in PART TWO of this document.

### 1. Equal Opportunities

With a newly elected Vice President in charge of Equal Opportunities (EO) and the mainstreaming of this question across all AER committees and the Youth Regional Network, EO is more than ever high on AER's agenda. Each Committee has now two representatives working on EO and the YRN one, pending two. Inequalities of treatment based on gender, race, religion, disabilities, sexual orientation or nationality are unacceptable. In the current economic climate, with less job opportunities and public funding, the issues of equal opportunities is often considered a luxury than can wait for better times. AER has a long history of fighting to ensure that the same opportunities are given to everyone. With the new EO governance, this topic will be, more than ever, a priority for our organisation.

### 2. Citizens

AER has always strived to build a bridge with European citizens. Not only does the work of AER impact on European citizens through its activities for European regions, but AER works hard at directly showing citizens what Europe can do for them. Through its citizens' forums, Youth Regional Network, Eurodyssey Programme, open conferences and summits, AER can be proud of making Europe more accessible to citizens. Because of this recognised involvement towards European citizens, AER receives a yearly « Europe for citizens » operating grant from the European Commission. 2014 is the year of the European Parliament elections. With the risk of high abstention and the rise of anti-European feelings, AER will work hard to convince European citizens of the need of voting. With less and less trust in political institutions, AER's role in bridging this confidence gap is crucial.

### 3. Youth

With a reinforced Youth Regional Network which has now its own legal personality and a highly motivated President and Presidium, youth will this year again be at the heart of AER priorities. With the Eurodyssey programme to facilitate youth mobility, its work on youth participation in public life, school drop-out or youth employment, AER has always been at the forefront of youth policy. The set up of AER's « Youth and Students' Community » in late 2013 will help young people better understand Europe by giving

them access to the work of AER and its YRN. The 2014 priorities will continue to reflect AER's involvement for the future of our children.

#### 4. Innovation

Europe's added value in the economic world lies in its highly skilled workforce and its capacity to innovate. With worldwide recognised universities and research centres, Europe needs to continue being a world leader in this field if it wants to get out of the crisis. How to do better with less will be the innovation moto for European regions in 2014.

## SIX PRIORITIES

Six priorities have been identified among the conclusions of the AER thematic committees and European institutions work programmes. These priorities will reflect the aforementioned cross-cutting issues and showcase existing synergies between our thematic committees' work. All six priorities are detailed in PART TWO of this document.

### 1. Raising awareness and defending cohesion policy and European funding

Cohesion policy is at the heart of European solidarity and constitutes the main lever for harmonised economic and social development. Together with all the thematic funding programmes, structural funds are essential in these dire times to implement valuable policies for our citizens and impulse economic recovery. AER therefore proposes to work on the following objectives:

- Informing regions on the new developments regarding structural funds and the Common strategic framework
- Organising information cycles on European funding
- Monitoring the first year of implementation of the Common strategic framework
- Continuing to promote the Reichardt report on information and access to European funding

### 2. Developing the regional dimension across Europe and beyond

The essence of AER's work is to promote decentralisation and subsidiarity. All our activities aim at showing that, whatever the policy field, regions do it better ! This battle needs to be constantly fought. Reinforcing the weight of the Regions and working for greater regionalisation in the countries of Europe and beyond will therefore continue to be at the heart of AER's work in 2014. AER therefore proposes to work on the following objectives:

- Pursuing the development of a regional best practice database
- Launching the cooperation platform among academic experts within the AER Academic centre
- Organising the « Regionalisation Days » to enhance the dialogue between all levels of governance and to promote regions
- Organising Training Academies to promote the regional dimension
- Continuing our work on the Eastern Partnership, Black Sea initiative and back the «Carpathian macroregion » initiative.

### **3. Promoting smart and sustainable growth to foster job creation**

Unemployment having become a major challenge affecting regions all across Europe, it is now ever the more important to implement smarter, sustainable and targeted regional policies aiming to support job creation. Education and the environment play a crucial role in promoting growth. An educated and well trained youth is key to ensuring a vibrant economy and the environmental challenges in front of us constitute a big opportunity in terms of employment, economic development and innovation. AER therefore proposes to work on the following objectives:

- Publishing a best practice compedium following the AER « crisis summits » cycle
- Launching the activities of the new Working Group on Investment, business and SMEs
- Organising an AER training academy on funding for education and training
- Continuing the activities of the Working Group on Combating school drop-out
- Organising peer reviews and conferences on energy investments (Interreg IVC project – Regions 4 Green Growth project)
- Organising a Training Academy on geothermic energy

### **4. Advocating a healthier, fairer and more inclusive Europe**

Ensuring the sustainability of regional health and social services as well as making sure that all our citizens, in their diversity, are listened to and treated with respect are key elements of AER's values. An inclusive Europe, whatever one's health condition, age, gender, origin, religion, nationality or sexual orientation is an AER priority. A Europe where all cultures are treated with equal respect is crucial. AER therefore proposes to work on the following objectives:

- Organising activities in the field of youth, culture and equal opportunities
- Organising activities in the field of health, social policy and innovation in the public sector

### **5. Building further territorial cohesion**

In the 28 EU Member States alone, 56% of the population lives in rural areas which represent 91% of the European territory. It is therefore only normal that a large number of AER regions is constituted by rural areas. The links and synergies between rural and urban territories are also crucial. The urban spaces get always closer to rural ones and cities play often a role of economic driving force for a region with, among other things, a high density of research and development centers. For rural and urban territories to live harmoniously together, spatial planning and clear transportation policies are crucial. This is why AER proposes to work on the following objectives :

- Supporting the first Rur@ct edition on rural development
- Continuing the activities of the working group on rural development
- Expanding the mandate of the working group on regional airports to cover all transportation systems
- Defining a position on the Trans-European Transport Network and connecting Europe facility

## **6. Strengthening AER to face the new challenges of the regions in wider Europe**

Since the May 2013 election of the new President and the new governance that went with it, AER has been working hard to strengthen its position on the European stage. If AER wants to be an effective organisation for its members, its messages must be heard, its visibility increased and its positions taken over by the political circles and civil society at large. This is why AER proposes to work on the following objectives :

- Improving AER visibility all over wider Europe and creating links and synergies between the European regions, businesses, youth, thematic partners, medias, EU and international institutions
- Continuing the activities of the working group on rural development
- Continuing to find relevant thematic/geographical/private partners for further synergy and expertise
- Finding tailored sponsorships supporting AER activities
- Facilitating the dissemination of the Committee's / Transversal issues work and actions via the partners
- Raising awareness of key stakeholders such as MEPs, think tanks, universities, foundations about AER activities



## TOOLS AT AER's DISPOSAL

In order to reach these priorities, AER has a list of tools, programmes and partnerships :

### 1. Tools and programmes

- Events such as the European Investments and Business Summits, the Black Sea Summit, the Eastern Partnership Forum and various conferences and workshops throughout the year
- Training Academies : Free two-day seminars on European affairs (seminars on thematic issues ; lobbying, or EU decision-making)
- Information cycle on EU funding : information sessions with a view to offering AER members extensive and detailed information on the funding opportunities for 2014-2020
- European projects: AER is a partner of various European projects (Regions 4 Green Growth, Smart Europe, Smart Care, Engaged)
- Breakfast Briefings : the AER Brussels office hosts breakfast briefings on a given topic in order to help the regional officers in Brussels keep track of some policies they might have missed. This enables also AER to brief them about what AER is doing on these topics and how member regions can get involved
- Regional Peer reviews : Detailed methodology allowing regions to exchange best practices in a structured and in depth manner
- Summer Academy (previously called Summer School): annual forum to exchange knowledge and experience. Every year, politicians, civil servants, experts and representatives of the Youth Regional Network meet in an informal setting to strengthen co-operation on a given topic
- Awards : Innovation Award and Most Youth Friendly European Region Award
- Citizens forum/Tales from Europe : Events allowing for a close exchange of information and debate with citizens across Europe
- Youth Regional Network : Brings together nearly 100 youth who participate in the regional decision-making process and bring their point of view on the policies discussed within AER or the policies they deem relevant. Since May 2013 the President of the YRN is a full member of the Executive Board
- Eurodyssey programme : the AER professional mobility programme offers 3 to 7-month internships abroad to young people aged 18 to 30 who are looking for a first job experience. Every year, 600 young people benefit from this programme
- Rur@ct methodology : supporting the transfer of best practices from one region to another through the technical assistance provided by AER to its members
- Academic Centre : database of experts on regionalism to strengthen the position of AER as a main resource centre on decentralisation
- Political Reports : AER members are encouraged, with the support of the AER secretariat, to draft political reports on topics representative of the interests of AER members. These political reports are useful lobbying tools and facilitate the exchange of good practices

## 2. Strategic Partnerships

AER has also entered (and will continue to enter) a series of partnerships in order to strengthen its expertise in some specific domains and to raise awareness and visibility of the regional dimension (see the chart « World of AER » below – Further explanation [HERE](#)).

### Thematic networks

- Association of Cities and Regions for Recycling and Sustainable Resource Management (ACR+)
- Airports Council International (ACI)
- European Business and Innovation Centre Network (EBN)
- European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN)
- Acting Collectively to bridge Space and Society (EURISY)
- Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA)
- Network of European Regions Using Space Technologies (NEREUS)
- World Health Organisation's Regions for Health Network (WHO-RHN)
- Foundation of European Regions for Education and Training (FREREF)
- European Network of Cultural Administration Training Centers (ENCATC)
- Regions of Climate Action (R20)
- European Association of Regional Televisions (Circom)
- World Investment Conference (WIC)

### Geographical network

- Association of North East Asia Regional Governments (NEAR)

### Business Community

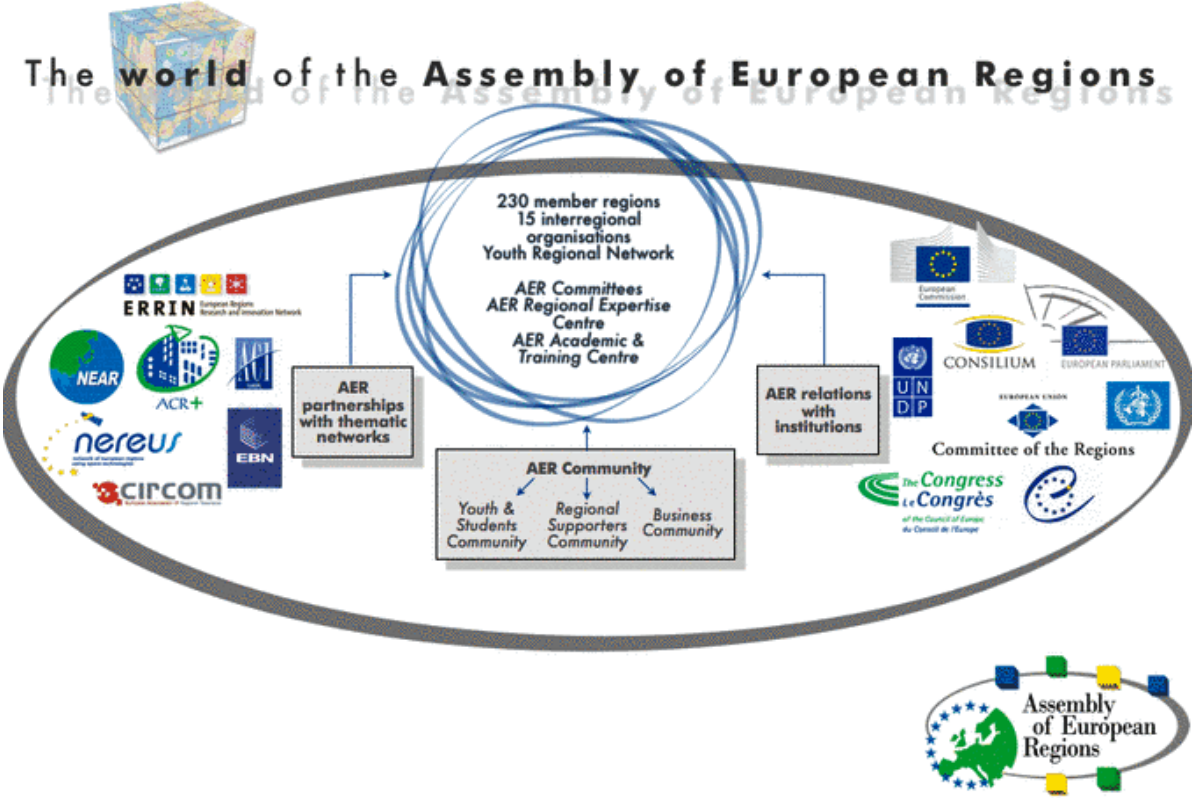
The Business community aims at raising awareness of the regional dimension among business leaders through « win-win » partnerships. This community has been launched in October 2013 and will be composed of a maximum of 20 to 25 co-founders as well as members from different economic sectors. All partnerships will comply with the AER Ethical Charter.

- Brussels Airlines
- Volvo
- Accor
- Unicap

In 2014 AER will set up the « 100 Regional dynamic SMEs » initiative.

### Youth and Students Community

The Youth and Students Community gathers young people from 16 to 30 who are willing to discover Europe's regions, to know more about the main European regional issues and to meet youth and political leaders from all over the continent. The Youth and Students Community is part of the so-called 'World of AER' (see picture below), which is a platform between political leaders, businesses, European institutions and other stakeholders interested in the regional dimension in Europe.



## PART TWO

### DETAILED ACTION PLAN



In this part of the document, the detailed actions under each priority are listed. For each priority, two boxes will also describe the links of each priority with the four cross-cutting issues as well as the links with the European institutions priorities. After each action, you will find the acronyms of the directorate or committee in charge of the implementation :

Directorate for Regional Expertise (DRE)

Director : Estelle DELANGLE : +33 (0)3 68 46 00 82 / [e.delangle@aer.eu](mailto:e.delangle@aer.eu)

Directorate for Academic, Institutional Affairs and Membership Services (DAIAMS)

Director: Agnès CICCARONE : +33 (0)3 88 22 74 32 / [a.ciccarone@aer.eu](mailto:a.ciccarone@aer.eu)

Directorate for Lobbying and Partnerships (DLP)

Director : Regine KRAMER : +32 (0)2 880 95 63 / [r.kramer@aer.eu](mailto:r.kramer@aer.eu)

Directorate for Press and Communication (DPC)

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Thematic coordination is managed by Mathieu MORI under the supervision of Pascal GOERGEN, Secretary General.

## **PRIORITY 1 – RAISING AWARENESS AND DEFENDING COHESION POLICY AND EUROPEAN FUNDING**

### MONITORING AND LOBBYING

- Monitoring EU developments in the fields of structural funds and future funding programmes (DRE/DLP)
- Continuing to promote the Reichardt Report on information and access to European funding (DRE)
- Monitoring the 1st year of implementation of the Common strategic framework in order to assess if the objective of simplification, better coordination and thematic focus are being achieved; (DRE/DLP/DAIAMS)
- Monitoring developments in the field of macro-regional cooperation; (DLP/DAIAMS/Com3)
- Participating in institutional meetings (DLP/DAIAMS/DRE)
- Organising bi- and multilateral meetings with relevant decision makers (Commissioners, MEPs, national representatives) (DLP/DAIAMS/DRE)
- Organising briefings with member regions and institutional representatives; (DLP/DAIAMS/DRE)
- Organising information sessions for Brussels regional representatives and relevant stakeholders (DLP)
- Writing open letters, articles or relevant press actions (DRE/DPC)
- Partnering up with relevant partner networks (DLP)
- Organising promotional and awareness raising events (DLP/DPC)

### EXCHANGING BEST PRACTICES

- Informing members about the new developments regarding structural funds and the Common strategic framework (DRE)
- Organising Information cycle on European Funding (DRE):
  - Funding Seminar on social entrepreneurship (DRE/Com2/DAIAMS/DLP)
  - Funding Seminar on Education (DRE/Com3/DAIAMS/DLP)
  - Funding Seminar on Culture (DRE/Com3/DAIAMS/DLP)
  - Funding Seminar on SME Support (DRE/Com1/DAIAMS/DLP/AERC)
  - Communicating on European funding opportunities for members to help finance their participation in AER activities, including the technical assistance measures of their Operational Programmes (DRE)
  - Punctual and on-demand assistance for searching European funding sources for a particular project or activity (DRE)
- Carrying out a survey among AER members to assess the programming period and the implementation of the Code of conduct on partnership (DRE)
- Monitoring and financial supervision of European projects in which the AER thematic committees are involved

## Links with the Cross-cutting issues

### **Equal Opportunities**

Equal opportunities will be taken into account in this priority because (1) equal opportunities requirements exist to qualify for European funding and will be highlighted (2) funding opportunities exist to promote projects on equal opportunities and will be identified.

### **Citizens**

Although this priority is very technical and focused on regional authorities and civil servants, knowing where funding can be found will help investments by regions for European citizens. Moreover, with information being disseminated on funding opportunities the visibility of Europe's action will be enhanced for the citizens.

### **Youth**

As already done in 2013, the Youth Regional Network will be invited to training and information seminars to get a sense of what funding can be obtained in their areas of interest.

### **Innovation**

Given the importance of innovation in the EU 2020 strategy and European Commission work programme, a lot of funding opportunities will relate to innovation programmes. AER will closely follow the development of the new INTERREG and Horizon 2020 programmes. The new financial instruments, which represent an innovative approach to EU funding will be looked at in detail.

### Links with the European Commission's priorities 2014

*Promoting the Europe 2020 goals through the European Semester of economic policy coordination;*

#### **Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**

...The new MFF programmes are designed to support the priorities of Europe 2020 and include a wide range of measures to boost investment, promote employment and social inclusion, develop human capital and prioritise reforms with a direct impact on growth and jobs. (...) Maximising the potential of European Structural and Investment Funds will also make a critical contribution to recovery....

### Links with the Committee of the Regions' priorities 2014

#### **Main political priorities for 2014**

*3. calls for a thorough mid-term review of the EU 2020 strategy in 2014, based on the inclusion of: i) a territorial dimension, allowing for sub-national targets according to the different regional situations; ii) adequate governance involving local and regional authorities in setting targets and implementing the strategy; iii) adequate funding for long-term investments, which should not be sacrificed to fiscal consolidation goals;*

#### **Cohesion policy**

*13. calls on the European Commission to promote and scrutinise the involvement of local and regional authorities in the finalization of the Partnership Agreements and the related Operational Programmes, on the basis of the application of the Regulations and of the "Code of Conduct", and requests a report on this matter by February 2014*

*16. urges the Member States and the Commission to assess the development of any new macro-regional strategies in view of the shared challenges and opportunities of the geographical areas in question and their European added value; stresses the importance of streamlining the current governance structures and strengthening the application of the multi-level governance principle.*



## **PRIORITY 2 – DEVELOPING THE REGIONAL DIMENSION ACROSS EUROPE AND BEYOND**

### MONITORING AND LOBBYING

- Monitoring developments in the fields of EU regional policy (DRE/DLP/DAIAMS)
- Monitoring developments of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Instrument, especially on the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy (DRE/DLP/DAIAMS/Com3/AERW)
- Lobbying for AER to get the observer status in the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (Corleap)
- Promoting the AER Rize Declaration on the Black Sea and the AER Dnipropetrovsk resolution on the Eastern Partnership (DRE/DLP/DAIAMS/Com3/AERW/DPC)
- Promoting regionalisation and decentralization in Europe and beyond (DRE/DLP/DAIAMS/All)
- Participating in institutional meetings (DRE/DLP/DAIAMS/All)
- Organising bi- and multilateral meetings with relevant decision makers (Commissioners, MEPs, national representatives); (DRE/DLP/DAIAMS/All)
- Organising briefings with member regions and institutional representatives (DRE/DLP/DAIAMS/All)
- Organising information sessions for Brussels regional representatives and relevant stakeholders (DLP)
- Writing open letters, articles or relevant press actions (DRE/DLP/DAIAMS/DPC)
- Partnering up with relevant partner networks (DRE/DLP/DAIAMS/All)
- Organising promotional and awareness raising events (DLP/DPC)
- Ongoing monitoring of regional political developments in Europe (monitoring of the elections and their impact, monitoring of territorial and administrative reforms affecting the regional level). This activity will enable to enrich the own AER Report on the state of regionalism in Europe (DAIAMS/DRE)

### EXCHANGING BEST PRACTICES

- Pursuing the development of a regional best practice database, in order to achieve extensive referencing of the regional expertise, thanks to the experience and knowledge of AER member regions, the AER Academic and Training Centre, our partner thematic networks and the private sector, via the AER Business Community (DRE)
- Co-editing with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CoE) a report on the impact of the economic crisis on regionalism in Europe (DAIAMS)
- Organising Ad hoc Seminars on Regionalisation (conference on the impact of the crisis on regional democracy in Thessaloniki (GR) at the occasion of ThesisMUN in April (tbc) (DAIAMS)
- Participating in a COST Project about Decentralization (DAIAMS)

- Launching the cooperation platform among academic experts within the AER Academic Centre (DAIAMS)
- Preparing a report about subsidiarity in Europe (DAIAMS/DRE)
- Setting up the working group on Eastern Partnership within Committee 3 to pilot the exchange of best practices in this field (Com3)
- Organising a seminar on decentralised cooperation focusing on the Eastern Partnership or organising a seminar to identify potential threats to the democratisation and regionalisation process in wider Europe (Com3)
- Organising the 5<sup>th</sup> AER Black Sea Summit (DAIAMS)
- Following up the situation in the Southern Mediterranean via AER's President involvement in the Euro-Med Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) (Com3/AERW)
- Organising a study visit to Quebec to learn from their best practices (AERW)
- Organising Training Academies to promote the regional dimension:
  - How to lobby the EU institutions: 1 training per semester organised in Brussels (DAIAMS/DLP)
  - Structural Funds management: best practices and recommendations from experts organised in Strasbourg in cooperation with the European Pole of Public Administration and the Alsace region (DAIAMS/DRE)
  - How to use funding tools for interregional cooperation with/in the European neighbourhood (DAIAMS/Com3)
- Launching the cooperation of youth parliaments across borders, especially between EU and non-EU members states (Com3)

## Links with the Cross-cutting issues

### **Equal Opportunities**

The EO messages AER has carried out for years will be shared with regions outside Europe. With the intense work carried out in the Eastern partnership, Black Sea and Southern Mediterranean regions, there is a large potential for EO best practice exchange.

### **Citizens**

AER's role is to promote the regional dimension across Europe but also to make citizens sensitive to the importance of a decentralised Europe, a Europe of regions is a Europe closer to its citizens. AER will make sure that its message is carried out to the first protagonist of the regional revolution: Europe's citizens.

### **Youth**

The Youth Regional Network will contribute to the setting up of a strategy to develop cooperation between youth parliaments within Europe and across European borders.

### **Innovation**

The most decentralised countries are the ones with the highest level of innovation. Sharing the need for more regional dimension in Europe will have an impact, if done properly, on innovation throughout Europe.

### Links with the European Commission's priorities 2014

#### **External action**

*(...) Following the accession of Croatia, the Commission is keeping its engagement with Western Balkans and Turkey(...)Our Neighbourhood Policy pursues the same objectives beyond our borders in our immediate neighbourhood, east and south. Of particular importance in this context is the signature of agreements with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in the East, as well as support for the democratic transition process in the South(...) Global challenges, including promoting stability, sustainable development and political reforms require united action to protect and promote our interests and values. In this context, our external economic relations are an important instrument to reinforce our position in the world(...)*

### Links with the EU Council Conclusions

#### **Eastern Partnership**

*The European Council looks ahead to the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 28 and 29 November. The EU hopes to be able to take important steps, in particular to sign the Association Agreement with Ukraine, provided there is determined action and tangible progress on the EU's benchmarks*

### Links with the Committee of the Regions' priorities 2014

#### **Europe as a global actor**

*36. will continue the effort to empower the local and regional authorities from candidate and potential candidate countries within the accession process; draws the attention to the work and opportunities offered by the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) and the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) in strengthening democracy through economic, social and territorial cooperation in Europe's neighbourhood*

*37. welcomes the Commission's reiterated commitment to support the democratic transition process in the Mediterranean partner countries and recalls that ownership on all levels is needed for a successful transition; stands ready to support efforts of decentralisation as a tool for the formulation and implementation of local and regional public policies to increase economic growth, social and territorial cohesion*

## **PRIORITY 3 – PROMOTING SMART AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH TO FOSTER JOB CREATION**

### MONITORING AND LOBBYING

- Monitoring EU developments in the fields of economic development, employment, education and environment (Com1/Com3/DLP/AERC)
- Promoting educational and professional mobility for all (Com3)
- Continuing to promote the Kendal Report on the harmonisation of rules for electric vehicles (Hampshire-GB) (DRE/Com1)
- Participating in institutional meetings (DLP/DAIAMS/Com1/Com3)
- Organising bi- and multilateral meetings with relevant decision makers (Commissioners, MEPs, national representatives); (DLP/DAIAMS/Com1/Com3)
- Organising briefings with member regions and institutional representatives (DLP)
- Organising information sessions for Brussels regional representatives and relevant stakeholders (DLP)
- Writing open letters, articles or relevant press actions Organising bilateral discussions with MEPs and National representatives (DLP/DAIAMS/Com1/Com3/DPC)
- Partnering up with relevant partner networks (DLP/DAIAMS/Com1/Com3)
- Organising promotional and awareness raising events (DLP/DPC)

### EXCHANGING BEST PRACTICES

- Publishing a best practices compendium following the “crisis summits” cycle in 2012- 2013 (DRE/DAIAMS/Com1/Com2/Com3)
- Launching the activities of the Working Group on Investment, Business and SMEs. The aim is to make it easier for entrepreneurs and SMEs to access credit and help their internationalisation (Com1)
- Connecting the AER Business Community with Committee 1 Working Group on Investment, Business and SMEs (Com1/AERC)
- Launching the project “100 Regional dynamic SMEs” (Com1/AERC)
- Organising a Training Academy on funding for SME support (DAIAMS/Com1)
- Organising a Training Academy in March 2014 in Edirne (TR), on entrepreneurship. Main themes: how regions could promote the enterprise spirit among their citizens? How could they promote innovation among SMEs? (DAIAMS/Com1)
- Organising a conference on entrepreneurship on the occasion of the Committee 1& 2 joint spring plenary meetings in Edirne (TR) (Com1/Com2)
- Organising a Peer Review for the Smart Europe project (innovation) in Manchester (GB) (Com1)
- Organising the Smart Europe Project Final conference (Com1)

- Providing a framework for best practice and knowledge sharing on economic development and innovation through the implementation of the '*Best-In regions*' project (Com1)
- Creating a Regional Intelligent Platform together with the implementation of the IDEal Index (Vonlanthen Political Report) and a tool for investors to act as a partner for regional growth (DRE/Com1)
- Organising a conference on ICT /digital agenda (Com1/Com3)
- Awarding the Regional Innovation Award 2013 (DRE/Com1):
  - Organising a high-level awarding ceremony in February 2014, in presence of the winners, the jury and high-profile European figures;
  - Following-up with the winning region by promoting all year long its awarded project (media actions, communication to the European institutions and among AER members and network)
- Organising an AER Training Academy on funding for education and training (DAIAMS /Com3)
- Organising 2 working group meetings on « Combating school drop out » : one on prevention and the other on intervention (Com3)
- Supporting the implementation of peer reviews and conferences on Energy investments in the context of the INTERREG IVC project Regions for Green Growth (Com1)
  - Peer Review Regions4GreenGrowth ( Västernorrland – SE)
  - Organising a conference on Regions4GreenGrowth (December, tbc)
- Co-organising information events and activities in the field of Renewable Energy Sources and Energy Efficiency, climate change adaptation; funding opportunities for energy (Com1)
- Organising a Training Academy in September/October 2014 in Vojvodina (RS): training on geothermic energy. How could regions develop projects in this field? What about the financial and legal obstacles, and how to overcome them? (DAIAMS/Com1) - TBC

## Links with the Cross-cutting issues

### **Equal Opportunities**

Equal opportunities will be at the heart of our discussions on access to jobs and education especially on the important issue of men/women salary gap and balancing work and family life.

### **Citizens**

All European citizens should be entitled to have a good education, a job and to live in a prosperous and sustainable Europe. By giving citizens a voice at the occasion of our conferences and peer reviews, AER will ensure that they are part of the European decision making process.

### **Youth**

The Youth Regional Network and the youth of Europe will be invited to take part in our discussions on these issues.

### **Innovation**

Innovation should be the core of our employment, environmental and education strategy. AER will look at the job creation potential of innovative sectors (culture, green jobs...). Innovative education policies in terms of mobility or school drop out to name a few will also be looked at.

### Links with the European Commission's priorities 2014

*Promoting growth and jobs will remain at the heart of the European Commission's work programme for 2014.*

#### **Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**

*"Growth is the key to creating more and better jobs and stronger social cohesion. Combatting youth unemployment is a key priority (...)*

*"It is essential to invest in education and skills and increase labour mobility, including by means of reinforced cooperation between public employment services and by removing unjustified or disproportionate obstacles to access to and free movement of regulated and professional services"(...)*

*Additionally, drivers for boosting education, training, skills, employment and social cohesion will be reinforced through the implementation of EU wide programs such as Erasmus+, the Programme for Employment and Social Innovation, the European Globalization Adjustment Fund and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.*

*As part of the Commission's work to boost competitiveness across all policy sectors, and particularly to assist SMEs, the REFIT programme is of particular importance.*

*The reformed Common Agricultural Policy will also be implemented in order to generate more jobs in rural areas and to build strong foundations for a green economy (...) Reducing adverse environmental impacts will be critical to a sustainable future. Greater resource efficiency should contribute to growth, jobs and enhanced competitiveness particularly through reduced costs for business, as well as bringing significant benefits for health and the environment, lower energy bills and new opportunities for innovation and investment.*

### Links with the European Council's priorities 2014

#### **Economic and social policy**

##### **Youth unemployment**

*"Fight against youth unemployment remains a key objective and that the Youth Employment Initiative needs to be fully operational by January 2014".*

##### **Financing of the economy**

*- Efforts should continue to restore normal lending to the economy and facilitate financing of investment, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).- The European Structural and Investment Funds should be used to significantly increase the overall EU support from these funds to leverage-based financial instruments for SMEs - An agreement on COSME and Horizon 2020 programmes has been reached which should increase the competitiveness of EU's SMEs. Their implementation is considered to be a priority.*



## Links with the Committee of the Regions' priorities 2014

### **Growth, jobs and inclusion**

*9. acknowledges the role of labour mobility and its contribution to combatting unemployment and to the promotion of sustainable and inclusive growth, and therefore welcomes the Commission's focus on better coordination between social security schemes across Member States*

### **Environment, climate change and energy**

*21. calls on the European Commission to deliver an ambitious new climate and energy framework for the period up to 2030, including legally binding targets for greenhouse gases, energy efficiency and renewable energy*

*23. expects the European Commission's initiative on resource efficiency and waste not only to set resource efficiency indicators, but also targets based on these indicators; reiterates its call upon the European Commission to propose mandatory targets for green public procurement;*

### **ICT**

*29 (...) will continue to be actively involved in the Smart Specialisation Platform and related projects in the regions and will follow up on the next phase of designing and implementation of the smart specialisation strategies in the regions.*

### **Education, culture and tourism**

*30. places great importance on ensuring that the future Erasmus + provides adequate support and equal opportunities for all target groups from previous programmes and will continue to follow the aspects of funding distribution and programme management.*

## **PRIORITY 4 – ADVOCATING A HEALTHIER, FAIRER AND MORE INCLUSIVE EUROPE**

### MONITORING AND LOBBYING

- Monitoring EU developments in the fields of health, elderly people, youth, social policy, culture, equal opportunities (Com2/Com3/EO/DLP)
- Adopting, disseminating and following-up the Merabet report on youth participation (Com3)
- Continuing the dissemination and lobbying related to the “Promoting Youth Employment” and “Youth Entrepreneurship Strategies” European projects (Com3)
- Promoting the AER LGBTI declaration (EO/Com3)
- Launching an AER Political report on fighting health inequalities in the regions (tbc). Organising an event on health inequalities (tbc), promoting e-health as a tool for territorial cohesion (bridge urban/rural divide) (Com2)
- Continuing to promote the Vonlanthen Report on the Ideal Index (DRE)
- Lobbying institutions for a European Health Policy Forum and European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (Com2/EO/DLP)
- Participating in institutional meetings (Com2/Com3/EO/DLP)
- Organising bi- and multilateral meetings with relevant decision makers (Commissioners, MEPs, national representatives) (Com2/Com3/EO/DLP)
- Organising briefings with member regions and institutional representatives (Com2/Com3/EO/DLP)
- Organising information sessions for Brussels regional representatives and relevant stakeholders (DLP)
- Writing open letters, articles or relevant press actions (Com2/Com3/EO/DLP/DPC)
- Partnering up with relevant partner networks (Com2/Com3/EO/DLP)
- Organising promotional and awareness raising events (DLP/DPC)

### EXCHANGING BEST PRACTICES

- March 2014, Edirne (TR): Training academy at the occasion of Committee 2 meeting, training on Leadership as part of the Leadership Programme in health and social affairs, launched by Committee 2 (DAIAMS/Com2)
- Spring 2014: Training academy on Leadership in health and social affairs (DAIAMS/Com2)
- Autumn 2014: Toolbox on Fundamental Rights for regional representatives. Training Academy on this new tool in cooperation with the European Agency for Fundamental Rights. Proposed theme: how regional elected and officials can promote the human rights of people with disabilities in their territories? (DAIAMS/Com2)
- 4-5 February 2014: Contributing to the organisation of the “The co-creating patient” Conference on E-health ALEC 2014 in Norrbotten (SE) (Com2)
- Participating in the SmartCare project on integrated care (Com2)
- Participating in the Engaged project on active and healthy ageing (Com2)

- Implementing the AER Leadership Programme together with the Academic Centre. Objective: Build capacity in AER member regions on strategic planning for health, strategies for deploying innovative health solutions and training health leaders (Com2)
- Organising an event on health inequalities (Com2)
- Organising an event on chronic diseases / integrated care (Com2)
- Developing activities in the field of community-based prevention, for instance healthy nutrition and multi-resistant patients (Com2)
- Organising a funding seminar on social entrepreneurship (DRE/Com2)
  
- Organising the 2014 Summer Academy (17-23 August 2014) in Novi Sad, Vojvodina (RS). Topic: Multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual regions (Com3)
- Launching activities related to culture and creative jobs/entrepreneurship with a link to Sub-Committee “Youth” (Com3)
- Organising a seminar on “Culture for seniors” linked to Committee 2’s topic of healthy and active ageing (Com3/Com2)
- Organising a funding Seminar on Culture (DRE/Com3)
- Accompanying the working group “Combating school drop-out”; (Organisation of two working group meetings - prevention & intervention) (Com3)
- Preparing a “tool-box” for regions willing to establish youth councils or parliaments (Com3)
- Setting up a Community of more than 1,000 Youth and Students coming from as many European regions as possible (Com3/AERC)
- Launching the Most Youth Friendly European Region (MYFER) award 2014 (DRE/Com3)
  - Promoting the 2014 edition of the MYFER award among AER members
  - Organising the review of all the candidacies and the meeting of the jury
  - Organising a high-level awarding ceremony in Spring 2014, in presence of the winners, the jury and high-profile European figures
  - Following-up with the winners and promoting all along the year (media actions, communication to the European institutions and among AER members and network)
- Updating AER members on Equal Opportunities throughout the year at the occasion of each committee plenary meeting and governance meeting (EO)
- Autumn 2014: Organising an Equal Opportunity conference on the topic of the European year for combining work and family lives (EO)
- Launching an EO campaign on the AER website (EO)

## Links with the Cross-cutting issues

### **Equal Opportunities**

Probably the most important priority in terms of equal opportunities, the AER expertise in this field will be key to the success of our activities.

### **Citizens**

Making sure that no citizen is being left behind during these difficult times is the key objective of this priority. AER will ensure that a wide selection of members of the civil society will be involved in the activities of this priority.

### **Youth**

Defining how regions can best involve their youth in their civic and political actions will be the key aim of the political report led by Alsace in this priority. Very sensitive to inequalities in our societies, the Youth Regional Network will be encouraged to contribute to the various activities of this priority.

### **Innovation**

Innovative practices in the health and social sectors will be shared in this priority. Great steps have been taken in many countries to adapt these sectors to new paradigms (ageing population, need for further integration of some parts of the population...).

### Links with the European Commission's priorities 2014

#### **Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**

*Tapping into the potential of key growth sectors, such as the green economy, ICT and health and social care, should be a particular priority.*

*Additionally, drivers for boosting education, training, skills, employment and social cohesion will be reinforced through the implementation of EU wide programs such as Erasmus+, the Programme for Employment and Social Innovation, the European Globalization Adjustment Fund and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.*

### Links with the Committee of the Regions' priorities 2014

#### **Growth, jobs and inclusion**

8. (...) *The Committee of the Regions calls on the Commission to include local and regional authorities in its proposals for stimulating youth employment; welcomes the key priority in combatting youth unemployment; notes the importance of Youth Guarantee;*

9. *believes it is also essential to better coordinate work accreditations and education systems*

12. *welcomes the foreseen European Accessibility Act and highlights that the accessibility of goods and services is a key factor for the quality of life of persons with disabilities.*

#### **ICT**

29. *welcomes the focus placed on the digital economy, innovation and services, and calls on the Council and the Commission to take forward this agenda so as to incentivise investments in this field, complete the Digital Single Market by 2015, and launch measures to improve skills and reduce the digital gap among Member States regions. Commits itself to promote the modernisation of local and regional public administrations in the provision of services such as e-government, e-health, e-invoicing and e-procurement.*

## **PRIORITY 5 – BUILDING FURTHER TERRITORIAL COHESION**

### MONITORING AND LOBBYING

- Monitoring and reacting to EU developments in the fields of spatial planning, rural and urban development, agriculture and transportation policy (Com1)
- Continuing to promote the Denanot Report on a multi-level integrated approach to rural development (Limousin-F) (DRE/Com1)
- Supporting the 1st RUR@CT edition on rural development (DRE/Com1)
- Participating in institutional meetings and conferences (Com1/DLP/DRE)
- Organising bi- and multilateral meetings with relevant decision makers (Commissioners, MEPs, national representatives) (Com1/DLP/DRE)
- Organising briefings with member regions and institutional representatives (Com1/DLP/DRE)
- Organising information sessions for Brussels regional representatives and relevant stakeholders (DLP)
- Writing open letters, articles or relevant press actions (Com1/DLP/DRE/DPC)
- Partnering up with relevant partner networks (Com1/DLP/DRE)
- Organising promotional and awareness raising events (DLP/DPC)

### EXCHANGING BEST PRACTICES

- Organising a session of best practices sharing in the context of the working group on regional airports (Com1)
- Expanding the mandate of the working group on regional airports to cover all transport systems and include issues related to multimodal transport, intelligent and sustainable transport systems (Com1)
- Meeting of the working group on Transport to discuss the Trans-European Transport Network and connecting Europe facility (Madeira –PT) (Com1)
- Meeting of the working group on Transport and Regional Airports to discuss the intelligent transport systems (Gelderland, November, tbc) (Com1)
- Continuing the activities of the working group on rural development (Com1/Com2)

## Links with the Cross-cutting issues

### **Equal Opportunities**

Representatives of the public affected by Equal opportunities' policies will be taken into account in the first edition of the Rur@ct edition on rural development. Many issues dealt with by EO are of interest to rural areas of Europe (i.e. role that migrants can play in rural areas, role of women in rural communities, policy towards disabled people in rural areas etc...)

### **Citizens**

Citizens' voice will be listened to in the first edition of the Rur@ct edition on rural development as well as in the work of the transport working group.

### **Youth**

Maintaining the presence of young people in rural areas is a challenge for some regions. Many Youth Regional Network members come from rural communities and should be involved in discussions/projects on this issue as well as on the issue of transportation policy.

### **Innovation**

The Rur@ct project has shown the wealth of innovative initiatives in the rural world. New technologies, IT and innovative economic models are more needed in rural areas than anywhere else. Our various projects will no doubt showcase the innovation potential of rural regions. Innovation is also crucial in terms of transportation solutions especially in times of economic constraints.

### Links with the European Commission's priorities 2014

#### **Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**

*A fully integrated and interconnected single market covering telecoms, energy and transport requires affordable, accessible, efficient and secure network infrastructure. This in turn requires the mobilisation of private and public investment, a clear regulatory framework, the development of skills, and investment in innovation, research and development. The implementation of the Connecting Europe Facility will mobilise the EU budget to catalyse private sector investment in strategic network infrastructure. The Commission will continue its work to promote and develop the EU's potential for tourism.*

*In transport, citizens should enjoy more efficient networks and be able to switch easily between different modes. The adoption of proposals in areas like rail, airports, air traffic management and ports will both open up new opportunities and support a more competitive infrastructure.*

### Links with the Committee of the Regions' priorities 2014

#### **Growth, jobs and inclusion**

*11. welcomes the efforts to modernise state aid policy with a view to better match it with the Europe 2020 Strategy and cut red tape. Reiterates however its request to the European Commission to be formally consulted on further draft guidelines on EU state aid rules and in particular on those currently under preparation in relation to infrastructure;*

#### **Cohesion policy**

*14. notes the increase of various uncoordinated EU initiatives affecting urban development policy; calls for the preparation of a White Paper on an integrated urban agenda for the EU and indicates its intention to be involved in this process*

*15. commits itself to following closely the implementation of measures under the rural development pillar of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy, especially as regards the diversification and modernisation of economic activities in rural areas, and to support close cooperation between rural and urban municipalities through territorial functional partnerships.*



## **PRIORITY 6 – STRENGTHENING AER TO FACE THE NEW CHALLENGES OF THE REGIONS IN WIDER EUROPE**

- Improving AER visibility all over wider Europe and creating links and synergies between European regions, businesses, youth, thematic partners, medias, EU and international institutions (All)
- Partnering up with new relevant networks and continue to strengthen AER's relationships to its member and partner networks in order to find further synergies and collaboration activities (All)
- Increasing the visibility of AER's member regions through cooperation with UNICAP television, Aqui Europa, CIRCOM (the European association of regional televisions) for instance (DPC/DLP)
- Increasing AER visibility on social media networks (facebook, twitter, youtube) (DPC)
- Establishing the final list of the co-founders for each of the 25 identified partner sectors for AER (AERC)
- Launching the project of 100 Regional Dynamic SMEs (AERC/Com1)
- Connecting the AER Business Community with Committee 1 Working Group Investment, Business and SMEs (AERC/Com1)
- Finding tailored sponsorships supporting AER activities (AERC)
- Involving the thematic and institutional partners in AER daily work (DLP)
- Participating in the dissemination of the Committee's / Transversal issues work and actions via the partners (DLP/DPC)
- Launching the AER Friends and Regional Supporters' Community (AERC)
- Raising awareness of key stakeholders such as MEPs, think tanks, universities, foundations about AER activities (DLP/DPC)
- Deepening AER's participation in European institutions' activities (European Commission, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, Congress of local and regional authorities...). Active AER participation in their meetings when possible and systematic presence of an AER stand for instance at the Congress plenary meetings (DAIAMS/DLP and All)
- Organising information events about AER at the occasion of the Committee plenaries and at the Congress plenary meetings (DAIAMS)
- Organising information sessions for Brussels regional representatives and relevant stakeholders (DLP)
- Organising two Annual Networking Receptions in Strasbourg and Brussels (tbc depending on sponsorship) to raise visibility of AER and to provide a platform of exchange between all AER partners and members (DLP/DPC)

Mathieu Mori

With the support of all the members of the AER Management Team and the General Secretariat Staff.

23/12/2013

