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Report of the Monitoring and Evaluation Group

Assembly of European Regions

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Introduction

The work of the Monitoring and Evaluation group is stipulated in the Statutes, Chapter 3, Article 4 § 15:

The General Assembly elects three politicians, who shall not be involved in other governing structures of AER and who will form a "Monitoring and evaluation group". The group will notably be responsible for monitoring and evaluating:

- *the implementation of the aims and objectives of the Assembly of European Regions, in compliance with the provisions of the Statute and Rules of Procedure,*
- *the implementation of the programmes and work plans, as established and approved by AER's bodies,*
- *the efficient, sound and (cost) effective use of the financial and human resources allocated by means of the budgetary provisions.*

The group will assess the outcomes of the actions and activities and make strategic recommendations.

One of the politicians will have a coordinating role.

The politicians will be supported by an officer/officers from their region.

The group will have unrestricted access to all AER documents.

The Monitoring and evaluation group 2013/2014.

The group was set up by the General Assembly in Paris 2013, and consist of Thomas Hartman (coordinator), Västerbotten Sweden and Håkan Sandgren, Jönköping Sweden. The third member is still to be appointed by the General assembly.

Since the General Assembly in May 2013 the group has focused on **the AER performance as a lobby organisation and the work of the Committees**. The two objectives in the AER Strategy are fostering interregional cooperation (the committees) and promoting regional interest (lobbying). It is important that these core objectives are well functioning so that AER is recognized as an organisation that brings added value for its member regions.

During the past year, the Monitoring and Evaluation group has participated in the executive board and bureau meetings, as well as committee meetings. The group has conducted interviews with the Secretary General, the Director Secretariat, the

coordinators and policy officers. Surveys were sent and answered by some member regions (random sample).

The information and answers given to the Monitoring and evaluation group are comprehensive and provide a good basis for a report with findings and recommendations for the future.

Performance as a lobby organisation

Questions the Monitoring and evaluation group sought answers to during the past year were:

- What organizations have been the recipients of the influence? Which EU institutions have been courted? Specific people? What position?
- In which ways has the impact been made? (through personal meetings, through letters, etc.) Who has participated and been active in these representations (from the AER)? Has there been any collaboration with other organizations for joint influence? Please enclose lobby plans / activity plans.
- What was the response / reception on the lobbying that AER has done? The result / outcome?
- Is there any shortcomings in AERs performance as a lobbying organization? Are there any thoughts on how opportunities for further influence can be developed?

The questions were put to the Secretary General, to the staff of the Secretariat and within the surveys sent to some of AER member regions, in different extent. Below is a summary of the content:

The Secretary General (SG) indicates that steps towards an improved lobby organization has been taken, such as the introduction of political reports, the change in AER's approach and motto, a stronger visual identity, linking the lobby actions with networking events, training in regional lobby techniques, the reorganization of human resources and assignments within the secretariat, etc.

During the past three years, lobbying efforts have been focused on reaching impact in three areas a) three political reports (information on access to European funding, electric vehicles and rural development), b) three special dossiers (regional airports, the Eastern partnership, the economic crisis and its consequences for the regions), c) three transversal dossiers (structural Funds post -2013, the multiannual Financial Framework, subsidiarity/multi-level governance). Some of these reports and dossiers are well known for the monitoring and evaluation group, while some are unknown.

SG describes that the organizations targeted by the AER as part of its lobbying activities are: (1) the European institutions; (2) the Council of Europe; (3) the Member States; (4) certain organizations (think tanks, various foundations, federations, the media and press, chambers of commerce.). The people met or to be met occupy positions at every level (from civil servant to European Commissioner).

SG describes the different means used by the AER to influence the political decision-making process depend on the tactics decided: they may be direct or indirect, or confidential, by means of targeted letters or via the press (press releases or e-mails). The people involved in this process are either the Committee Coordinators, the elected representatives (chairs of working groups, the President, elected representatives involved in the process, ...), the Secretary General, ...

The AER secretariat presents many tasks and missions. These are performed in combination with a very limited budget. Efficiency, prioritization and concentration of tasks are requested in order to achieve increased quality and improved outcomes. The secretariat would like to involve the politicians in the committees in a better way in order to spot the debate beforehand.

The monitoring and evaluation group has noted that there is an increasing division in the secretariat's work between the AER's thematic work and the AER's lobbying. There are concerns that the lobbywork in Brussels is growing, with increasing human and economic resources, while focus on committee work, content and message is reduced. Some find it difficult to contribute to the lobbywork when it isn't built on strong content and message.

The survey, sent to the member regions, tells that lobbying in some areas is good but can be improved. Despite increasing resources in Brussels, AER is too invisible there. AER sometimes work with the wrong partners, and often appear too late to influence. AER lacks a clear strategy for lobbying. If we have a clear bottom-up approach from the beginning, we can succeed. There is a desire to strengthen the strategic lobbying on the issues processed by the Committees - more position papers, white papers, green papers.

The organization is considered to be inefficiently organized in terms of rapid communication. The system is too slow. A piece of news has to pass through too many persons/positions concerned.

Work of the Committees

A questionnaire was sent to 35 active regions from as many nations as possible. The Monitoring and evaluation group designed the questionnaire in order to evaluate the task and work of the committees.

Fifteen regions from Committee 1 had the possibility to answer and ten from Committee 2 and also ten from Committee 3.

Only 14 regions answered, despite a lot of reminders. The greatest number of answers came from the Nordic countries.

Questions and answers

The Monitoring and evaluation group started by asking if the committee works on the right topics and if the work in the committee proceeded in the right direction. The answers were generally quite positive. "Overall - we are moving in the right direction".

The question concerning the president of the committee, that is if he or she is a good leader or developer, was more difficult to handle. By the time of the questionnaire, there had been a shift of presidents many of the answers referred to the former president.

The third question "Can the committee be organised in a better way? (subcommittees, vice-presidents, thematic work etc.) gave a more wide range of answers. This is evidently something that the committees have to tackle.

The fourth question was a question on democracy and full involvement in the work of the committee. Fortunately enough there was a majority of positive answers.

The answers to question five, which asked if the committee should work with more "ad hoc" groups with tasks limited in time, also gave a wide range of opinions which indicates that this question ought to be discussed further in the committees.

The Monitoring and evaluation group also presented a question on the social benefit of being an active member of a committee. "Have you made new acquaintances/friends through the committee, which are important to the regional work of your region? There were several affirming answers and a special highlight on the working groups and Summer Academy, Eurodyssey, Ruract etc.

There was also a question regarding the relation between the secretariat and the committees. "Do you find that the committee is suitably supported by the secretariat." One quotation reflects very well all the answers. "Given the number of staff members they do as much as possible. They have a lot of work."

The last question before the two open questions was on lobbying. "Do you believe that your committee has some impact on the lobbying that is carried out by the AER?" There were a lot of proposals on how to improve the lobbying. "We can do better," but on the other hand no crushing criticism.

The first of the two open questions was on what is good/working well in the committee today. It was generally much appreciated that the meetings are well and effectively organized and that the working groups reflect the challenges we are facing.

The second open question asked if there is a way that the committee could perform better in the future. The answers pointed out that there is a way to success by engaging members regions to be more active in the work of the committees and that lobbying

always should be carried out in relation to the needs and decisions taken by the committees.

The very last question gave the regions the possibility to put forward general suggestions and remarks. It is very clear from the answer that the regions consider the work of the committees to be fundamental for the political work and the overall engagement in the AER. It must be possible to see the continuous thread of the treatment of a political question, that is it must be able to easily follow how it is handled all the way from the working groups to the subcommittees and then further on to the committee, finally to the Bureau and to the General Assembly.

Conclusions:

There are ambitions on developing a good lobbying organization. But the monitoring and evaluation group considers that the lobby-work is conducted broad and not always systematic. The lobbying activities, the recipients of the influence and the methods described by the Secretary-General, is more general than specifically highlighted. All communication (both internally and externally), efforts to obtain information and provide information, agreements with private sponsors, networking, pressreleases, breakfast meetings, seminars, etc counts as lobbying. The impression is therefore that lobbying often is conducted to influence and demonstrate what the AER makes /wants in general. The specific impact (based on content from the committees and members) are partially missing. The examples of specific impact are few and it is difficult to see what the AER produces and what it provides for the members benefit / added value. The Monitoring and evaluation group has no indication that the results of lobbying is reported back to the organization and to its committees.

Perhaps this is partially due to the fact that a lobbying plan, with goals and stakeholders analysis, implementation strategy and outcome evaluation, have not yet been implemented in the organization. It is also a strong indicator that AER needs to work with the contents of its impact, in which the committees have a key role. It is important that the content of the lobbying is driven by the political needs of the committees, not only by what happens to be on the European agenda. A third implication is the increasing division between the AER secretariats thematic work in Strasbourg and the lobbywork in Brussels. This division could complicate the work for a common cause.

The employees of the AER Secretariat are engaged, good at developing ideas and to see opportunities. AER would benefit from better listening to and make use of views expressed by the director secretary, the coordinators and policy officers. In this context it is important to support diversity within the Secretariat. To strive for gender balance among the personnel and support varied educational and professional backgrounds, when recruiting. It is also vital that staff have functioning support system for their work. Improvements on the IT system is desired.

The low number of answers on the survey and the difficulty in receiving them gives in a way also a confirmation of the fact that few members are really active in the

committees, which was one of the most evident outcomes of this questionnaire. Many of the answering regions underlined the importance of active regions!

It has been stated that the cooperation between the President, the Secretary General and the Director secretariat does not always work as it should. It is important in a politically driven organization, such as the AER, that there is a trusting and respectful partnership between politics and civil servants, so that activities are developed in accordance with provisions and decisions.

Recommendations:

1. The monitoring and evaluation group recommends the Bureau to **develop a lobbying strategy**, that is to be adopted by the General Assembly in 2015. A strategy built on the work of the committees and the political body, on strong content and message. This will enable a common picture of what lobbying is about in order to share the same expectations on delivery. Lobbying plans for different thematic areas can be adopted by the Bureau.
2. The limited resources within the secretariat increases the **need for priorities and concentration**. It is necessary to concentrate on fewer priorities in order to increase quality and results that bring added value to the member regions. The monitoring and evaluation group recommends the Bureau and the committees to review the AER Strategy and the AER political priorities, with this in mind.
3. Resources need to be devoted to committee work in order to build **lobbying on a specific and strategic content**. Committee work requires improved active dialogue on the thematic content and the lobbying must be based on the members' demand in order to provide added value. The monitoring and evaluation group recommends the Bureau and Committees to discuss and decide on this issue.
4. The monitoring and evaluation group recommends the Bureau and Committees to discuss and decided on how to **develop better arenas for political dialogue within the committees**. (eg Roundtable). It is important to capture common issues in order to develop joint projects, reports, new seminars, positions, etc.
5. The monitoring and evaluation group recommends the Bureau and Committees to discuss and decide on how **to upgrade the AER's meeting design**, make better use of technology of communication and lobbying, webcasts, social media, etc, is one way to make the organization more effective and attractive.
6. The monitoring and evaluation group recommends the Secretary General to **prepare meetings further in advance** and to send out invitation, meeting documents, venue, etc . earlier than has been the case in recent years. Preferably establish a meeting calendar one year in advance. This enables a more active and prepared participation from the member regions.



7. The Monitoring and evaluation group recommends that the ongoing expansion of **the office in Brussels** must be discussed and decided in the Bureau.
8. AER must become **better at listening to and make use of views expressed by the director secretariat, the coordinators and policy officers.**
9. The monitoring and evaluation group recommends the Secretary General to works out a **recruitment policy** that can be adopted by the Bureau and which supports diversity and gender equality within the Secretariat. It is also necessary to evaluate current support and IT systems used by the Secretariat. This provides the Bureau with information to discuss and decide on.
10. It is very important for the success of the organization that **the President, the Secretary General and the Director secretariat have a close and trusting cooperation.**

/ The Monitoring and evaluation group, 2014-05-16