



ASSEMBLÉE DES RÉGIONS D'EUROPE
ASSEMBLY OF EUROPEAN REGIONS
VERSAMMLUNG DER REGIONEN EUROPAS
ASAMBLEA DE LAS REGIONES DE EUROPA
ASSEMBLEA DELLE REGIONI D'EUROPA

Strasbourg, 27th October 1999

Press release

"The Regions' contribution to the Enlargement process"
AER's Conference -21st October 1999 - Wroclaw - Woj. Dolnoslaskie (PL)

Over 250 representatives from 64 Regions in 20 countries took part in this Conference which gave speakers from the European institutions, interregional organisations, EU and CEEC Regions the opportunity of giving their point of view on the role that the European Regions can or must play in the enlargement process.

Chaired by L. Van den Brande, President of the AER, and J. Waszkiewicz, President of Woj. Dolnoslaskie, the host Region, the conference proved that the issue of Enlargement and European integration arouses great interest in all European Regions. This was made clear by the very high participation rate and the commitment shown by many speakers from the East and West during the debates. The speeches presented sought answers to three key questions: how the territorial units within the applicant countries can be involved in this unprecedented historical process and contribute to its success; what role the EU Member Regions should play to sustain the initial impetus; and how the Regions from East and West can work together to prepare the future of an enlarged Europe.

In the East: pursuing decentralisation, developing training and cooperation

The Regions of the applicant countries believe it is absolutely essential to broaden and reinforce the democratisation process in their countries. Regionalisation and democratisation must be actively pursued in the perspective of Enlargement. The Regions of these countries must also convince their national Governments to involve them or their representatives in the negotiation process at a national level, since, in many fields (especially the domestic market and agriculture), the success of Enlargement will depend on regional policies implemented to smooth out restructuring problems and help economic actors in difficulty.

Priority must also be given to training: regional political and administrative representatives must become more familiar with the EU's principles, operating methods and programmes in order to implement them, but also to be capable of assessing the impact of resulting changes at the regional level.

Developing cross-border and interregional cooperation with the EU regions, and even a constructive exchange of experiences with those who have recently experienced accession (e.g. Sweden and Austria), constitute the keystone to the success of Enlargement and should be actively supported, especially through stepping up personal exchanges. Regions in these countries must also become more involved in communication on European integration. Their very proximity means they can convey the import of an enlarged Europe, reassure people and foster the spirit of membership.



ARE-AER-VRE

In the West: sweeping stereotypes aside and promoting enlargement

In hundreds of EU Regions, many people perceive Enlargement as a threat to their current prosperity. These Regions must learn to get to know and understand the situation of the CEECs so that they may sweep lingering stereotypes aside and provide reasoned support for accession. But above all, they must fulfil their role as advisors and experts in the field of regional development, and avoid repeating past mistakes, by fostering the transfer of know-how and exchanging experience not only before, but also after, accession.

Preparing the enlarged Union together

On this point, the representatives from Eastern and Western Regions stressed the importance of the forum for dialogue, experience exchange and training offered by the Assembly of European Regions in the run-up to EU Enlargement, through their theme-based Committees, European training programmes (Centurio and the Summer School), Internet network and initiatives such as the Wroclaw Conference. They also showed their determination to work together, within the AER, on the perspectives of regionalism in the enlarged, reformed Europe and developing relations with non-EU European regions.

The AER is since 1985 the political movement of the Regions of Europe, which are committed to the promotion of regionalism in Europe and to the development of interregional cooperation.

The Proceedings of the Conference will be available on AER's Web site - www.are-regions-europe.org - as soon as they have been translated.

AER contact:

- AER Press & Communication Service: Barbara Thauront and Francine Huhardeaux, Tel. +33 3 88 22 07 07, Fax +33 3 88 75 67 19, E-mail infopresse@are-regions-europe.org
- AER office in Brussels: Stéphane Cools, Tel. +32 2 421 85 12, Fax +32 2 421 87 87, E-mail s.cools@mrw.wallonie.be