



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

**(Original in English)**

**FINAL DECLARATION FROM SOPRON**  
(Unanimously adopted on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2001)

We

the elected political representatives of 250 European Regions

have gathered here today in Sopron, Hungary, for the General Assembly 2001 of the Assembly of European Regions.

The choice of the Hungarian County of Győr-Moson-Sopron as the venue for our General Assembly in 2001, the first General Assembly in an accession country from Eastern and Central Europe, reflects the importance we attach to the enlargement of the Union and the debate on Governance in Europe. Careful preparation of our meeting and the great hospitality of our hosts, represented by President Ferenc Ivanics, made an important contribution to the success of this year's General Assembly.

We have considered and discussed:

- the enlargement policy of the European Union and its effects on European Regions,
- the contribution of the "Europe of the Regions" for a transparent and legitimate European Governance,
- the need to strengthen regionalism especially in Eastern and Central Europe,
- the role of the Regions in ensuring stability and peace in an interconnected world.

## **1. Enlargement of the European Union**

By implementing the *acquis communautaire* in the enlargement process, Regions in accession countries have to cope with the challenges of social, economic and territorial cohesion and ecology in EU membership. Regional transport, spatial planning, waste management; agricultural policy, youth policy or the integration of minorities are just a few areas where Regions are effected by EU policy.

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Against this background, we:

- ask for the accession process to be pursued in a way which is acceptable for peoples both within the EU and in the accession countries. Thus we argue that the Regions need to be included in the enlargement process and consider that the AER has a decisive role to play in the success of enlargement by preparing all Regions in Eastern and Central Europe for integration in the European Union. We express our strong will that we - as the pan-European representation of Regions - extend our relations with Regions in countries which are not yet involved in the enlargement process,
- propose putting specific emphasis on the future European Union peripheral Regions in order to encourage political, economic and cultural cooperation and exchange with and within these Regions,
- are convinced that a similar approach is necessary with countries in the Mediterranean Basin and invite the European Union to pursue the Barcelona process,
- consider it as important to debate cooperation with non-European Regions, in particular with those in federal States.

## **2. Transparent and legitimate European Governance**

In its White paper on European Governance, the European Commission commits itself to the principles of openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence. The application of these principles would reinforce those of proportionality and subsidiarity. The Commission commits itself to close dialogue with the Regions.

In line with the above statements of the Commission, we:

- propose a code of conduct in which the Commission commits itself to cooperation with the Regions and their representative bodies in order to take their expertise into account at early stages of the decision-making process when decisions or communications are being prepared,
- stress that this would lead to greater transparency in decision-making in the European Union and would keep the necessary clear definition of competences for each government level,
- appeal to all member States which do not already do so, to further associate their Regions in national debates on the future of the Union, by consulting them in all fields relating to their competences,
- pursue greater involvement for European citizens than was the case with the Intergovernmental Conferences in the past, in particular via their elected political bodies, such as the Regions, and via referendums,
- call for the direct representation of the Regions within the Convention on the reform of the EU and for their association in the definition of the future institutional framework of the European Union,
- demand that this association take place with the European organisations, as direct representatives of the European Regions, such as the AER, and are convinced that the proposed code of conduct would be an important step towards a viable procedure for ensuring proper dialogue between the EU and the Regions.



### **3. Strengthening regionalism especially in Eastern and Central Europe**

The current decentralisation process in Eastern and Central Europe should take into account the Charters on Local and Regional Self-Government of the Council of Europe and the Declaration of Regionalism of the Assembly of European Regions.

In this context and on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity, we

- encourage the organisation of information seminars in European Regions with the aim to strengthen regionalisation and decentralisation,
- propose the elaboration of progress reports and the implementation of benchmarking on the decentralisation process,
- call for the creation of coordination networks which can be viewed as an efficient tool for the strengthening of regionalisation.

### **4. Stability and peace in an interconnected world**

The increased terrorist activities culminating in the attack of September 2001 demand the mobilisation of all imaginable energies and appropriate actions in our connected common world to destroy the very basis of terrorism.

We therefore:

- stress the importance of sustainable development for Governance, no matter in which country,
- stress that, in particular in the global crisis which the world is currently undergoing, regionalism and federalism may serve as a long-term solution to ensure peace between peoples of different culture and religion,
- commit ourselves to the due integration of minorities,
- consider activities that will keep people away from fanaticism by working for equality between Regions and tolerance between cultures and religions,

Assembly of European Regions  
Sopron, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2001