



Cooperation agreement between the Congress of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of European Regions

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***Draft speech by Urs Wüthrich-Pelloli
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Dear colleagues, Dear friends,

I am very pleased to be here today to present to you the details of the agreement signed yesterday by Congress President Van Staa and AER President Hande Özsan Bozatli.

As you know, I was until last year Vice-President Treasurer of the AER and I am member of the Congress, and as such, I am happy to see the steps undertaken by AER and the Congress to get closer to each other. Indeed, the exchange we had yesterday for instance on the events in Ukraine showed how important the issue of identity, national and regional identity, still is in Europe. A sound cooperation between AER and the Congress will bring, in that context, a crucial contribution to the promotion of the regional identities throughout Europe.

What concretely do we intend to do?

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As you know, the Agreement is completed by an Action Plan, which identifies for 2014-2015 three main thematic priorities for common actions:

- promoting regional self-government and supporting devolution and decentralisation processes in Europe;
- responses by regions to the political, economic and social crisis that Europe is facing;
- the participation of young people in political, economic and social life.

As for the promotion of regionalism, whilst the Congress celebrates its 20th Anniversary this year, the Assembly of European Regions will celebrate its 30th Anniversary next year. In that context, we intend to invite you, dear colleagues, to contribute to a study and a political report we are preparing on the state of regionalism in Europe and the implementation of the multilevel governance principle. Our objective is to avoid to double our efforts, but to work in synergy and share each other's expertise. We also propose to take use of this forthcoming Anniversary and publication to promote the Reference Framework on regional democracy. We indeed consider this document as an important tool to guide countries in their territorial reforms, and there are a number of such reforms going on at the moment or announced for the near future, as you know (in Albania, Croatia, France, etc.).

With regards to the responses by regions to the crisis, AER organised a number of activities in that context in 2013, and benefits from an important data-base of good practices, which we would be happy to share with the Congress. Maybe a common publication on such good practices could be envisaged.

As for the third thematic priority, the participation of young people in political, economic and social life, this is a sector where AER is particularly active, through its Youth Regional Network (YRN). You will have the pleasure to listen to a contribution by the YRN President, Mr Rohner, later on today.

Concretely, AER has already invited the Congress Secretariat to take part in the Jury of its Most Youth Friendly Region, which every two years rewards Regions which are particularly active and open to young people. We very much count of course on the involvement of the Congress to disseminate the information about this Award and celebrate with us the rewarded Regions. In the same line, we will share with you the AER Political Report on Youth Participation, which shall be adopted at our General Assembly in May.

Beyond these three thematic priorities, our Action Plan foresees the strengthening of the contacts between the AER and the Congress throughout all their activities. The Congress will be invited to Novi Sad to open with our members the Summer Academy which will be held there In August, on the issue of multiculturalism. We of course count on you to contribute to the AER Black Sea Summit, which shall be held this year early October in Romania. Last but not least, we look forward to welcome you at our General Assembly end May in Poland.

Be sure that AER President Bozatli and AER members will make their best to fill in this agreement with life.

I thank you for your attention.