

AER declaration: status quo is not an option

Political declaration

Status quo is not an option for the European regions

Adopted by the AER Bureau on 24 October 2016 in Vienna (AT)

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) was deeply impacted by the results of the referendum held on 23 June 2016 on the United Kingdom's membership to the European Union. Although AER expresses major concern over the outcome, it also acknowledges the results of this democratic vote and respect the decisions of the British citizens to leave the European Union.

The outcome of this referendum embodies the numerous problems we are facing in Europe today, from which it can only recover with sound and major changes. The current politically and institutionally stagnant period, which is exacerbated by the economic crisis, has to come to an end. The consequences of the British referendum must therefore be heard, understood and exploited by the political forces to emerge strengthened.

What should be well considered as a difficulty of the European project must now be turned into an opportunity to implement true changes. We are all responsible of breathing life into a new bill for a sustainable, green and inclusive continent, recognising our diversity as a strength. European leaders must focus on policies that will ensure territorial cohesion and the concrete implementation of the principle of subsidiarity, equality for all citizens and generations, and increasingly innovative systems. Europe must bestow a bright future upon its youth.

The whole European continent needs to learn from the current difficulties of the EU and reacts swiftly. The regions of Europe call upon the European institutions, national governments and regional authorities within and outside the European Union to take the following recommendations into account:

Vision and values

We should relaunch the political reasons founding the European integration, based on common and shared values of democracy, human rights, peace, social dimension and rule of law. This should be done first at local level, entrusting citizens and giving answers at all levels, enhancing European identity. We need to improve the effectiveness and the accountability of the political leadership, we need to enhance European vision in education, media, politics. We need an effective management of public affairs, rebuilding trust on our systems, able to respond to the present questions, threats and the opportunities of an emerging future, giving confidence and sense of stability and integrity for candidates and neighbouring countries.

Patterns and institutions

Europe has different types of regions (according to their administrative division), hence it is important to understand the different cultural and administrative differences. Institutions like the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee have a greater role to play in order to represent local and regional interest at the EU level. They should have a more proactive attitude in order to represent local and regional interests at the EU level. Subsidiarity is not just a word but a concept that is really implemented. Tax authority at the local level brings the benefits and costs directly to citizens, and it makes them more responsible by deciding how to use the money,

and being accountable. The institutions at national and EU levels need to be re-evaluated: they should be more accountable, transparent and more focus should be put on economic growth. To have better subsidiarity and accountability there should be more attention to local and regional governments. Growth and social care should be based on a bottom-up approach; as a result, the needs of communities would be better satisfied. AER has the power to act in this field, and to build knowledge and responsibility among its members.

Communicate and promote

In order to better promote the European project and to make it clearer to the citizens, communication should be made on the level where it belongs, therefore the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity is key. Decision-makers should explain how the political process takes place before it becomes a concrete decision, thus enforcing the idea that Europe is also a political project endorsed by political leaders. Peace and democracy are Europe's greatest achievements and should not be taken for granted; all actors are responsible to take responsibility and to exchange with citizens. We need to involve young people in the visions and values of Europe. There is a need for stronger leadership to endorse the European project and to promote its ideas and touch the citizens' emotions. The EU regional policy remains one of the important tools to promote the concrete outcomes of European cooperation.

The European regions take their share of responsibility and will keep on working together, within the European Union, within the Council of Europe, and other forms of cooperation. The Assembly of European Regions will pursue its missions of promoting the regional interests in Europe and fostering an increasing interregional cooperation at all relevant levels. Supporting the idea of a united Europe in diversity, we call upon the European and national bodies to provide the most effective means, such as a strengthened EU regional policy, to meet the needs and concerns of the citizens and revitalise the hope of a democratic, prosperous and peaceful Europe.