

## INTERVIEW WITH PASCAL GOERGEN, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ASSEMBLY OF EUROPEAN REGIONS

# Partnership contracts: Getting ready now

By Amandine Gatelier in Ponta Delgada, Azores

*Pascal Goergen succeeds Klaus Klipp as secretary-general of the Assembly of European Regions (AER). After serving as the diplomatic representative of the Brussels-Capital Region to EU-REGLEG (network of EU regions with legislative power) for ten years, he was designated secretary-general at the AER's General Assembly, on 25 November in Ponta Delgada in the Azores, and will take up his duties in Strasbourg in January.*

### What is your vision for the AER for the next five years?

As soon as I take up my duties, I will ask for 100 days to take stock of the assembly's situation and propose a management strategy for two or three years based on thematic priorities. It is clear that by 2013 the negotiations on cohesion policy and on the terms of implementation of the 2020 strategy, as well as the negotiations on the EU's multi-annual financial framework will represent a large part of our work. The Commission's proposals go in the right direction but it is important to fight over the issue of macroeconomic conditionality. I don't know whether we will succeed, but in case the AER will have warned that if there are problems at the level of the state, we do not see why the regions should be penalised in the tangible projects that affect citizens. We are determined to have this conditionality reduced to zero. I will also be outlining the AER's strategic vision in a few weeks, at the next bureau meeting. I am determined to bring the regional dimension into all European policies by means of acts. For the partnership contracts (each state would conclude an agreement with its regions and the EU, choosing a limited number of priority projects), the regions have to be attentive. Our member regions have to start getting

ready now to propose concrete projects in line with the 2020 strategy. These projects will be sent to their respective member states and to the



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European Commission. The regions will thus be involved in the content of the partnership contracts.

### What are the challenges ahead for the AER?

I hope to ensure that the AER is recognised through its actions, not just through its commitments. That is the only way to be credible in the eyes of citizens and the EU and international institutions. This approach will also ensure that the AER keeps its current members and attracts new ones. In addition to the themes related to the EU's 2020 strategy, the AER will face other short and long-term challenges in the area of organisational and financial management.

### What purpose does the AER serve?

The AER is the voice of the regions in the EU. With its 25 years of experience,

the AER is in contact with the entire European regional-level economy and implements projects with tangible results for citizens and SMEs. The AER's approach is totally different from the top-down approach. Rather than being proponents of 'regionalism', we are an association that champions regionalisation and decentralisation. The European regions are not equal: some have legislative power while others are autonomous or have vague administrative boundaries. We strive to bring them together while promoting this idea outside the European Union and within the Council of Europe. We are also asked to share our experience of regionalisation outside the EU. There has been discussion of a partnership with Tunisia in the wake of the Arab spring in order to put in place training programmes in the area of institutional capacity. I think that the AER will be taking on an important mission in the coming years.

*Some members that are considering pulling out of the AER are divided between what they see as a lack of "political transparency" in the agenda and the hopes they place in the work of committee...*

At the risk of repeating myself, a region is a region and I will be tuned in to each and every one. Of course, we cannot have 270 projects: at some point we will have to set priorities. In my opinion, a project or a service to members can be as simple as organising a meeting of a regional delegation in Brussels with the right people at the Commission or Parliament. This is a small service that can later increase in scale for the regions at political or administrative level. Though this may seem obvious, this type of initiative is not highlighted enough. The regions pay fees and have to be able to count on getting a return on their investment. ■