



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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EUROPEAN INTER-REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

In April 2002, the Committee of the Centre published the report of its 'Inquiry into the Approach of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Devolved Government on European Issues'. The report highlighted *'that informal networks and inter regional alliances could complement the formal channels to London' as 'important tools in influencing policy at an early, discussion stage in Brussels'*. This briefing note provides information on four European inter-regional associations:

- The Assembly of European Regions (AER)
- Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE)
- The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
- The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR)

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SUMMARY

- In April 2002, the Northern Ireland Assembly - Committee of the Centre published the report of its 'Inquiry into the Approach of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Devolved Government on European Issues'.

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/centre/report2-01r.htm> The report noted that:

The degree to which Northern Ireland can influence EU policy depends primarily on its links with London. However, most of the evidence shows that informal networks and inter regional alliances could complement the formal channels to London. These are important tools in influencing policy at an early, discussion stage in Brussels.

- The question of how inter-regional organisations and the institutions and bodies of the European Union should be interlinked forms part of the ongoing Future of Europe debate which is due to culminate in and Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) in 2004.
- This briefing note provides background information on four significant European Inter-Regional Organisations:

The Assembly of European Regions (AER)

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE)

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR)

- The information contained in the paper is drawn largely from these organisations' websites and links to these and other relevant sites are contained in the briefing note.

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EUROPEAN INTER-REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

In April 2002, the Northern Ireland Assembly - Committee of the Centre published the report of its 'Inquiry into the Approach of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Devolved Government on European Issues'. <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/centre/report2-01r.htm> The report noted that:

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The question of how interregional organisations and the institutions and bodies of the European Union should be interlinked forms part of the ongoing Future of Europe debate which is due to culminate in an Inter-Governmental Conference in 2004.

In July 2001, the European Commission published its White Paper on European Governance http://europa.eu.int/comm/governance/white_paper/index_en.htm. The paper represents a significant contribution to the Future of Europe debate, as it contains a set of recommendations on how to enhance democracy in Europe and increase the legitimacy of the institutions.

The preparation of the White Paper was organised into six work areas and twelve working groups. Each working group, composed of European Commission officials from all Directorate Generals, conducted external consultations and the result of their work is presented in twelve reports.¹ The report by the Working Group on "Multi-level Governance Linking and Networking the Various Regional and Local Levels highlighted the importance of associative networks stating that:

It must be recalled that the majority of the European regions and local authorities are now grouped together – either according to their geographical location, or according to their economic or cultural characteristics – in associations providing an interface between the institutions and bodies of the Union and the reality on the ground. Notable among these are the CEMR, ARE, CPRM and Eurocities. Official representation of the regions and local authorities by the Committee of the Regions has not undermined either the existence or the *raison d'être* of the associative networks at European level. On the contrary, the interregional cooperation structure fulfils tasks that neither the Commission, the Committee of the Regions, the national administrations, or the regions and local authorities have the means to achieve individually.

¹ Whilst the reports were published in parallel with the White Paper, the contents of these reports do not reflect the official position of the Commission.

This briefing note, prepared by the Assembly Research & Library Service, provides background information on four European Inter-Regional Organisations:

The Assembly of European Regions (ARE)

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE)

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR)

The information contained in the paper is drawn largely from these organisations' websites and links to these and other relevant sites are contained in the briefing note.

2. The Assembly of European Regions (AER)

<http://www.are-regions-europe.org/index.html>

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) was created in 1985 and describes itself as the political forum and representative organisation of the regions of Europe. The AER declares that it is committed to democracy, solidarity and the development of interregional cooperation throughout Europe. The AER has close to [300 member regions](#) from 25 different European countries, which represents 400 000 million people. The AER's headquarters are in Strasbourg (F).

Mission

Originally, the AER's main task was to have the place and role of the regions acknowledged in the construction of a democratic Europe, close to the citizens. Consequently, right from the beginning, the AER has been committed, above all, to promoting regionalism and to institutionalising the regions' participation in European politics. In the AER's view, the creation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe by the Council of Europe in 1994 followed by the creation of the Committee of the Regions by the European Union in 1995, are proof of these principles in action.

Although the AER continues to work towards better mechanisms for regional participation within the two bodies to reinforce their position in the European decision making process, it has, however, changed its priorities in view of the evolution of the European context. From as early as 1989, the year the Berlin Wall came down, it has put a lot of effort into the democratisation process in central and eastern European countries and in the development of cooperation with new regions from these countries. Today the AER makes claims to be not only the main protagonist and animator of the regionalist movement on the European continent but also a forum for exchanges of experience and cooperation for the regions of the "Greater Europe".

Objectives

In 1998, the AER adopted a "Strategy 2000 for the regions of Europe". This Strategy was designed to better meet the demands of its member regions but also to take up the challenge of maintaining ideals of political, economic, social and territorial cohesion. The Strategy, launched in the perspective of European Union enlargement, has the following priority objectives:

- Acceleration of the process of regionalisation on the European continent in view of building a “Europe with the Regions” on the eve of this third millennium; and
- Promoting and developing interregional cooperation networks and cultural, economic and social partnerships between the regions of Europe through the transfer of know-how and exchanges of experience.

Article 1 of the Statute of the Assembly of European Regions sets out the following six objectives for the organisation:

1. To organise and develop dialogue, consultation and cooperation between all Regions of Europe, while respecting the Constitutions, laws and regulations, and treaties in force in the States, as well as respecting and promoting cultural plurality within Europe;
2. To promote regionalisation in Europe and encourage the application of the principles of subsidiarity and complementarity between the local, regional, national and European Institutional levels;
3. To promote the institutional participation of the Regions in decision making processes and in order to do this increase their active role in the construction of Europe, especially in the work of the Council of Europe, of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and of the European Union;
4. To cooperate with European associations representing local authorities;
5. To cooperate with and support activities within the Interregional Association-Members or Organisations which could later join the AER; and
6. To run its own programmes or participate in programmes organised by third parties in order to realise or pursue its objectives.

The AER and the European Institutions

The AER states that, from the beginning, it has attached a great deal of importance to its relations with the [Council of Europe](#) which represents the States of the “Greater Europe”.

The AER has enjoyed observer status at the Council of Europe since 1987 and also contributed to the creation of the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe \(CLRAE\)](#) in 1994. The AER pursues its commitment for a better representation of the regions within this body and other forums of cooperation within the Council of Europe such as the Intergovernmental Conferences.

The AER is an independent body with no formal legal, financial, or political ties to the institutions of the European Union. However, it has developed what it describes as a fruitful dialogue with the institutions of the [European Union](#). In 1988, the Consultative Council of Regional and Local Authorities of the European Union was set up as a forerunner of the [Committee of the Regions \(CoR\)](#) which was established following the Maastricht Treaty. With the establishment of the Committee of the Regions, the

Treaty's principle of subsidiarity has become a guideline for European decision-making. The AER continues working to reinforce the CoR's position within the European authorities in an attempt to guaranteeing that its work become more efficient.

In March 2002, in Linz, the Assembly of European Regions brought together the Presidents of the European interregional organisations with the aim of the enhancing cooperation between these organisations. The Conference of Presidents took place in the context of the ongoing Future of Europe debate and the Presidents decided to adopt a common position on the following issues:

- Regional Policy and Cohesion
 - Transport Networks in Europe
 - Sustainable agriculture and protection of rural areas
 - Sustainable development
- <http://www.are-regions-europe.org/COMMUN/Linz.html>

The AER has stated its intention to observe the activities of the Convention on the Future of Europe and to participate as the representative umbrella organisation of the Regions, both within the European Union and in accession countries. The AER also has indicated that it hopes to play an important role – along with other political organisations such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)- in the Forum set up by the Convention.

3. CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF EUROPE (CLRAE)

<http://www.coe.fr/cplre/indexe.htm>

In 1994, the Council of Europe established the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe \(CLRAE\)](#) as a consultative body to replace the former Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities. The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organisation and should not be confused with the European Union or any of its institutions. All 15 European Union states, however, are members of the Council of Europe.

The CLRAE helps new member states with practical aspects of their progress towards establishing effective local and regional self-government. The CLRAE:

- provides a forum where local and regional elected representatives can discuss problems, pool their experience and express their views to governments;
- advises the [Committee of Ministers](#) and the [Parliamentary Assembly](#) of the Council of Europe on all aspects on all aspects of local and regional policy;
- co-operates closely with national and international organisations representing local and regional government;
- organises hearings and conferences to reach a wider public whose involvement is essential to a working democracy; and

- prepares - under [Statutory Resolution \(2000\) 1](#) of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe - regular country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all the Council's member states and the countries that are candidates for membership, and monitors, in particular, how the principles of the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) are implemented.

The emergence of new states from varying political and economic bases has necessitated reappraisal and reformulation of the Congress's objectives to include:

- promoting effective local and regional government structures in all Council of Europe member states, especially in the new democracies;
- examining the state of local and regional democracy in member and applicant states;
- developing initiatives to enable citizens to participate effectively in local and regional democracy;
- representing the interests of local and regional government in the shaping of European policy;
- encouraging regional and transfrontier co-operation for peace, tolerance and sustainable development;
- observing local and regional elections.

How the Congress works

The Congress is divided into two chambers: the [Chamber of Local Authorities](#) and the [Chamber of Regions](#). The two-chamber assembly comprises 301 titular members and 301 substitute members, each of whom is an elected representative from one of over 200 000 local and regional authorities in the Council's forty-one member states. The chambers alternate to elect the [President](#) of the Congress for a two-year term. The Congress [meets once a year](#) in Strasbourg and welcomes delegations from approved European organisations and some non-member states as special guests or [observers](#). The [Standing Committee](#), drawn from all national delegations, meets between the [Congress plenary sessions](#). The Congress organises its work around [four statutory committees](#):

- the [Institutional Committee](#), which has the particular task of preparing reports on the progress of local and regional democracy in Europe;
- the Culture and Education Committee, for media, youth, sport and communication;
- the Committee on Sustainable Development, for environmental affairs and spatial and urban planning; and

- the Committee on Social Cohesion, for issues concerning employment, citizenship, inter-community relations, public health and equality between women and men.

In November 2001, the CLRAE, along with the Wallon region in Belgium, organised the second Conference of the Presidents of European Regions with Legislative Power. At the conference, held in Liege during the Belgian presidency of the EU, the presidents (or their representatives) of 52 Regions with legislative power of the European Union adopted a resolution, which, amongst other things:

- endorsed the 'Political declaration of 7 constitutional regions' on the reinforcement of the role of constitutional regions within the European Union;
- welcomed the debate on the Future of Europe and requested direct representation of the Regions with legislative power on the Convention on the Future of Europe;
- demanded that Regions with legislative power have a place within the European decision making forums and to participate actively and directly in the European decision making process.
- pronounced themselves in favour of a more precise delimitation of powers, on the basis of the principles of the EU's restricted prerogatives, subsidiarity, proportionality and the obligation to respect the national identity of Member States.

<http://www.eu2001.be/Main/Frameset.asp?reference=23-01.03-01.05-01.01-01&lang=en>

4. THE COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS (CEMR)

http://www.ccre.org/mis_an.html

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) was founded in 1951 in Geneva, becoming the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) in 1984. Today, CEMR brings together more than 100 000 local and regional authorities in Europe, federated through 42 large national associations of local and regional authorities in 29 European countries. Since its merger with [IULA](#) (International Union of Local Authorities), CEMR claims to have become the most representative association of local and regional authorities in Europe. It is today presided by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, President of the Auvergne Region and also currently President on the Convention on the Future of Europe. The main objectives of the CEMR are to :

- develop a European spirit among local and regional authorities in order to promote a federation of European states, based on the autonomy of these authorities and their participation in European construction,
- contribute to the reflection of local and regional authorities on the Union's main political dossiers which affect them directly : reform of the institutions, subsidiarity and governance, employment, Charter of Fundamental Rights, equal opportunities,

- encourage dialogue, exchange of experience and co-operation between its members, using all means (interregional and intermunicipal co-operation, partnership, twinning...),
- disseminate to its members the information from the Community institutions,
- help make the voice of its members heard by the representative institutions and bodies.

The CEMR states that the popular base of its action remains the [network of twinnings](#) which it initiated. There are now over 15,000 European twinnings and the CEMR succeeded in obtaining the setting up of a financial structure by the [European Parliament](#), adapted to support and encourage twinning : the Community Aid for Twinning Programme established in 1990 promotes the thousands of twinning events in Europe.

CEMR describes itself as being at the origin of the [European Charter for Local Self-Government](#), which has become a Convention of the [Council of Europe](#), now signed and ratified by 34 Member States.

CEMR contributes its support to the draft European Charter on Regional Self-Government, adopted in 1997 by the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe](#).

The XX1st General Assembly of European Municipalities and Regions, which gathered more than 900 local and regional elected representatives from 29 European countries, closed on 17 June 2000 with the adoption of the "[Oulu Declaration](#)". The next CEMR General Assembly will be held in Poznan, Poland in 2003. In the Oulu Declaration the CEMR indicated that it expected institutional reforms of the European Union to reinforce the position of local authorities within the Committee of the Regions, thus ensuring their proper representation, and called for close co-operation between the Committee of the Regions and the associations of local and regional authorities at national and European level.

5. THE COUNCIL OF PERIPHERAL MARITIME REGIONS OF EUROPE (CPMR)

<http://www.cpmr.org>

The CPRM website states that the organisation was founded in Saint-Malo in 1973 on the initiative of the Region of Brittany, at the same time as the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark entered the European Community. The Region of Brittany was afraid that the handicap of its remoteness would be worsened at European level, in comparison with the large agglomerations situated in the heart of Europe. The Region invited around thirty peripheral maritime Regions to meet in Saint-Malo, where they decided to launch the first specifically regional organisation with a view to:

- exploiting together their common assets - the sea and the coastline - and contributing towards a greater enhancement of Europe's maritime dimension;

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- creating awareness among the European authorities of the need to fight major disparities in competitiveness between the central part of Europe and its peripheries; and
- ensuring greater involvement of the regional level in European integration. The CPMR has the status of association, and its financial resources are based on dues paid by its members, thus guaranteeing its independence

The CPMR's membership includes 145 Regions from 25 States - both members and non-members of the EU - all located in one of Europe's main sea basins. They have chosen to open up towards the international scene and join transnational cooperation networks as a way of strengthening their competitiveness.

The CPMR states that it is endeavouring to promote a more balanced and polycentric development model for the European territory (spatial planning) and a greater involvement of sub-state players in defining and applying EU policies (governance).

It fosters the development of cooperation between European regions (interregional cooperation), as well as with Regions from non-EU member countries (external cooperation), by helping to set up projects and establish and follow up relations with the European Commission in the framework of the different European programmes.

It promotes the model of sustainable development and the maritime dimension of Europe through a number of EU sectoral policies: structural funds, development and enterprise, transport and maritime economy, the environment, integrated coastal zone management and protection, maritime safety, fisheries, rural development and agriculture, ultra-peripherality, culture, etc.

These activities are led by the General Secretariat in collaboration with working groups made up of representatives from each of the Geographical Commissions: ECOMAR, coastal zones, fisheries, research, Latin America, Northern Dimension, Environment, etc.

The CPMR work programme for the period 2002-2003 was adopted by the Political Bureau meeting in Florence on 6 and 7 November 2001 and is available online. The programme indicates that, in cooperation with the official representation of the Committee of the Regions, the CPMR will be participating in the three work phases of the Convention on the Future of Europe.