



Assembly of European Regions' Summer Academy 2014

Multicultural, Multiethnic, Multilingual Regions Regional Diversity for Economic Growth

Final statement

More than 140 participants from 37 regions out of 20 countries gathered at this year's AER Summer Academy that took place in Novi Sad upon the kind invitation of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (RS) from 17 to 22 August 2014.

The Summer Academy participants acknowledge

- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
- the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities¹
- the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions
- the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

and keep in mind AER's previous work in these fields.

In a period where Europe commemorates past military conflicts such as World War 1 that took the life of millions of people, bereaved families, entailed long-lasting distrust between peoples, destroyed heritage and mortgaged the economy as well as the future of the following generations, one would have hoped that lessons from the past had been learned.

Against this backdrop, the current conflicts in our close neighbourhood encourage the participants of the Summer Academy to call upon all actors to follow the positive example of the "Chapel of Peace" in Sremski Karlovci, the highly symbolic place in Vojvodina where the concept of the "round table" was first used in international diplomacy.

In this respect Vojvodina with its 26 ethnic groups living peacefully together and using 6 official languages was the ideal setting for the Summer Academy.

The various lectures, workshops and study visits allowed organisers and participants to share good practice through mutual learning. Some of the key issues linked to multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual regions that were addressed and debated, included:

¹ Europe's chequered history has shown that the protection of national minorities is essential for the maintenance of peace and the development of democratic stability

- Multicultural societies differ from intercultural societies: in the first ones, different groups live together without necessarily interacting, whereas intercultural societies are living spaces where people from different backgrounds live together and embrace their differences, resulting in tolerance and mutual acceptance.
- Equal treatment does not stand for fair treatment: The recognition of differences, specificities and vested interests of minorities must as much as possible be ensured in the legal framework, however, this strive for equal treatment is not fair when the collective rights might be endangered or countered.
- Integration goes hand in hand with the active participation of all members of society: integration is a personal choice and helps living together in diversity. Societies have to provide the tools and opportunities for the empowerment of minorities and the creation of social and territorial cohesion.
- Diversity and interculturality have to be encouraged: they contribute to the development of the individual and of society as a whole and can be a factor of economic growth through creativity, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Intercultural and multilingual learning as early as possible is essential. Formal and informal education are equally important helping people be open minded, understand each other and avoid misusing fears.
- Young people have a crucial role to play when it comes to designing policies for the future. The most important challenge for the time to come is the creation of a society that allows living together peacefully.

Participants of the Summer Academy

- call upon the regional, local, national and European governments to acknowledge the above mentioned considerations and to take into account all citizens when designing their policies, programmes and legislation for the integration of minorities and for the creation of intercultural societies.
- encourage all educational and cultural institutions, actors and stakeholders to consider intercultural and multilingual questions as an integral part of their curricula and/or agenda
- ask that European, national and/or regional funds be made available to design projects and help exchange experience on the successful initiatives
- recommend that regions and their stakeholders make use of the available funding programmes to improve the situation of minorities in their respective regions

Together with the host region Vojvodina, participants of the Summer Academy identified ways to celebrate diversity and debate differences without fracturing communities.