European Industrial Regions Association
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European Industrial Regions Association (EIRA) was established on 3rd May 2002 in Motherwell, North Lanarkshire, Scotland, UK as a result of a merger process of two associations:

- **RETI** – European Regions of Industry and Technology, created in 1984 by 4 industrial regions of Nord-Pas de Calais (France), Nordrhein Westfalen (Germany), Hainaut (Belgium) and West Yorkshire (UK) which found themselves facing similar economic and social challenges. RETI was considered as a common forum of experience, ideas and know-how established to create a coherent voice of industrial regions on the European Community Policy arena,

- **CASTer** – The Conference and Association of Steel Territories formed in 1995 to represent the interests of the steel areas across Europe, which aimed at promoting the exchange of experience and best practices in economic and regional regeneration among those areas.

The organisation is legally established in accordance with Belgium law as a non-profit making association and has been in operation since the day of creation. The network’s main aim is to support the importance of industrial production in regional economies, regional development strategies and the future of European Regional Policy, against the background of the development of the knowledge economy.

The two main bodies of the Association are:

- General Assembly, comprising regional and local authorities, who meet at least once a year and take the final decisions in every area of the Association’s activities,

- Executive Board, the political body, elected by the General Assembly and consisting of the President, two Vice-Presidents, Treasurer and the political leaders of 5 Interest Groups embracing EIRA activities.
Both General Assembly and Executive Board are supported by:

- Senior Advisory Group, the body of civil servants appointed by the Executive Board members, of counselling character,
- The Brussels Central Secretariat, providing overall co-ordination of the organisation and supporting the Executive Board and the General Assembly in the implementation of their decisions.

EIRA has set itself clear aims and objectives:

- **Monitoring of and contribution to European policy making.** The network proclaims the importance of industrial sector in regional economies, based on the experience and expertise of the member regions and monitors the undertakings of the European Commission in the relevant policy fields.

- **Liaison with stakeholders.** The development of the Association’s raison d’être is systematically discussed with the member regions during the Executive Board meetings and General Assemblies. The authorities representing members co-operate with the actors within their regions from the public and private sector, directly dealing with or affected by the industrial change process. They feedback this information to the Executive Board where the decisions are taken about their importance and relevance to EIRA activities. This process stimulates ideas which are later implemented in the EIRA work plan and strategy and reflected in its position papers on topics relevant to the issues on which the European Commission requires consultation. The vision of the organisation is also continuously discussed with the Members of the European Parliament, European Commission and the Committee of the Regions.

- **Impact on regional development strategies of member regions and future regional policy in Europe.** The Association emphasizes the importance of industrial production in the development and redevelopment of regional development strategies and the future of European regional policy and structural funds by taking part, as the representative of industrial regions, in the consultations of the European Commission with European Associations and regions on the subject of social and economic cohesion and structural funds post 2006.

- **Interregional co-operation.** EIRA contributes to inter-regional co-operation through taking part in European projects, enabling its member regions, but also non-members, to share knowledge and experience in the area of industrial change. The association also provides the transfer of knowledge and experience in this field to the industrial regions from the accession countries in order to assist them in restructuring of their industry and thus contribute to their regional development.
EIRA activities amount to the work of 5 Interest Groups, the topics of which have been found as most relevant to the Association’s mission:

- **Enlargement**, chaired by Northrhin Westphalia (Germany) and Central Transdanubia (Hungary), continues the activities of RETI’s Panorama Platform, area of its major work, launched in 1997. RETI’s initiative sought to promote the political and practical dialogue between the industrial regions of the EU Member States and the Central and Eastern European Countries. In the EIRA structures the Platform transformed into Enlargement Interest Group. The Panorama Platform focused on construction of networks and stimulation of partnerships between the EU 15 and CEE industrial regions, whereas the Enlargement Interest Group activities have been defined as to build further bridges between EU 15 and CEE member regions in EIRA, monitor the enlargement policy and practice in industrial regions in EU 15 and CEECs, define the main factors for successful regional restructuring in accession countries, identify of mutual benefits and opportunities in interregional economic development between CEECs and EU15 and also to outline the changes necessary in the fields of social and economic cohesion and structural funds post 2006 in order to diminish the possible future effects of enlargement eastwards. In 2002 the 10 interest group members (Northrhin Westphalia - Germany, North Lanarkshire County - UK, West Midlands - UK, Champagne-Ardennes - France, Lorraine - France, Terni County - Italy, Vastmanland County through the membership of Bergslagen - Sweden, Province of Limburg - Netherlands, Central Transdanubia Region - Hungary, and Alba County - Romania) took part in 3 seminars organised in CEE countries on topics related to most important aspects of industrial restructuring (physical regeneration of industrial areas, their economic diversification and social implications of the restructuring processes), which resulted in the submission of an Interreg IIIc project, Industrial Change Network, led by Northrhine Westphalia, approved by the Programme’s West Zone Secretariat. It will enable the project partners to effectively transfer technical support and expertise between EU and the candidate countries.

- **Adapting to Industrial Change**, led by North Lanarkshire, UK, expert region in the regeneration of industrial areas. The group is actively involved in one of the subtopics of the Interreg IIIc project providing expertise on dismantlement of contamination on the industrial land, enriching EIRA’s expertise on environmental as well as planning issues.

- **Knowledge Economy/Innovation/Research and Development**, chaired by Swedish Bergslagen, relates to regional innovation, competitiveness and the shift towards knowledge based economy. The changing conditions in Europe present challenges to and opportunities for regional competitiveness. This theme has been identified as one of the major areas for EIRA activities in order to provide synergy between R&D, innovation policy, SME policy and regional development policy. The activities of the innovation group continue the actions previously undertaken by RETI. Through the work of this group, EIRA contributes to
the achievement of the aims of the Lisbon strategy for the EU to become most dynamic and competitive knowledge economy in 2010. The group is organising 2 major meetings in June and October 2003, which will focus on analysing facts and figures about regional productive, knowledge and service sectors, preparing toolkits and innovation score boards, developing the models of development phases for industrial regions and delivering its developments to EIRA members.

- **Social Cohesion**, chaired by the Dutch province of Gelderland, focuses on the social impact of industrial change processes. EIRA members have realized that in the areas undergoing restructuring, the society is turning away from mainstream economic activities. For this reason the interest group has decided to take actions to avoid the social downturns.

- **Sustainable Development**, led by Nord-Pas de Calais, France, aims to facilitate collaboration of industrial regions on sustainable policies, working on partnership with innovative environmental companies and non-governmental organisations, testing the ecological footprint model for its impact on EIRA member regions. The seminar held by the interest group in March 2003 focused on emphasis of the importance of and the necessity of taking a transversal view of sustainable development which implies that each interest group in the Association takes into account the sustainability issues. It strongly stressed that sustainability of regional development is not only related to environmental protection, but more importantly to maintenance of social and economic stability of the regional economies. At the meeting the possible areas for exchange of experience between the member regions were identified and led to an initiation of a common project idea on the promotion of environmentally friendly goods. The next meeting of the interest group is scheduled for early June 2003.

In addition, the Association is actively involved in the collaboration with Directorate General Regional Policy on preparations for the Third Report on Social and Economic Cohesion and Structural Funds post 2006, as the crosscutting theme to EIRA activities. EIRA’s President, Cllr Roger Stone, has participated in consultative meetings with Commissioner Michel Barnier on this subject. EIRA has also submitted its preliminary position paper towards the topic to the European Commission and as a result its content will be included in the in the EC’s publication.

In addition, the attached document is Association’s contribution to the European Commission’s working paper with regards to the on-going and systematic policy dialogue with local government associations, an initiative also undertaken by Directorate General Regional Policy. The document constitutes EIRA’s position towards the structure and scope of the future co-operation of the European Commission with the associations representing the interests of various groups of regions in Europe on subjects
proposed by the former. The communication aims at providing the rules for their involvement in the EU decision-making process by being given the opportunity to express their views on Community policies. It also brings the European legislative processes closer to the regional and local authorities and thus to the citizens, performing in accordance with the Community rule of subsidiarity.

Encouraging you warmly to read the attached document on the subject,

We remain sincerely yours,

Cllr Roger Stone  
EIRA President

Mr. Alain Perelle  
EIRA Vice-President

Brussels, 21st May 2003