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Annual Report 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

While in 2007 border and cross-border regions focussed on the implementation of the new programming period 2007-2013, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) followed the reflections initiated in Pamplona 2006 on the Territorial Agenda of the EU. Already in 2007, the first impressions about the new programming period showed by AEBR member regions, euroregions and friends, as well as the conclusions on new ways for Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) elaborated at different meetings (fora, Annual Conference) let us follow the process to implement the Territorial Agenda by the European Union (EU) and Member States; and even take the initiative to do some proposals.

At the end of 2008, the Association launched a discussion on the “future of CBC after 2013”. With the active support of the member regions, an argumentation paper was elaborated with the title: „**CBC – A European priority and political objective of the EU beyond 2013**“ that underlined the importance of CBC, while presenting concrete proposals aiming to improve the institutional conditions for the implementation of the funding programmes. Despite its European dimension and demonstrable achievements, CBC is hardly (or just in rare cases) a national priority. Therefore it is of crucial importance that, also in the future, **all** European border regions should have political priority; being CBC a major EU objective to be implemented at regional/local level.

The **European Commission** (EC) has recognised unanimously the added value that CBC creates, showing its intention to further improve the quality and applicability of the existing instruments. The EC clearly cooperates in a sustained manner with the AEBR and its members. Several meetings with Commissioner Danuta Hübner and Director General Dirk Ahner took place in 2008 dealing with this subject and its impact on the Territorial Cooperation Objective. In 2009, the AEBR has continued with this close cooperation for the benefit of **all** border regions.

At the **European Parliament** (EP), main activity was developed within the Committee of Regional Development by the AEBR President, MEP Lambert van Nistelrooij, and towards the Party Groups and EP President, Hans-Gert Pöttering. The efforts to get an ombudsman of border and cross-border regions increased in 2008 until the achievement of a decision by the EP at the beginning of 2009, through the nomination of MEP Tunne Kelam (EPP, EE) as “follower” (*suiveur*) on CBC. With the **Committee of the Regions** (CoR), a biannual agreement was signed in March 2008, improving the framework and the intensity of our bilateral cooperation. With the **European Economic and Social Committee** (EESC), after the collaboration in the EESC own opinion on Euroregions by Mr José María Zufiaur Narvaiza in 2007, there has not been a sustained contact, although it remains the mutual will to keep on cooperating on issues related to social cohesion.

Two **Task Forces** got speed in 2008, achieving a certain cruising one in 2009. CB Health and EU External Borders have played a growing role in our Association, especially referring to the participation of AEBR members.

The AEBR coped with many further tasks in 2008 focusing on border and cross-border regions’ interests. This report provides an overview of the activities in 2008 that could neither be initiated nor realised without the special dedication of many AEBR member regions.

I wish you a pleasant reading!



Martín Guillermo-Ramírez
Secretary General

2. MEMBERS' STRUCTURE

By the end of 2008, the AEBR had 104 members representing more than 200 border regions all across Europe. The difference between the number of members and the number of border regions is due to the fact that cross-border regions comprise several national border regions. Furthermore, large-area cooperation structures as the Working Community of the Alps, Nordic Council of Ministers, Carpathian Euroregion, etc. include as members border regions from several states.

The membership structure reveals a balanced ratio of border / cross-border regions in both the „old“ EU and the new member states. The AEBR has kept a strong position to extend its operations across the new EU external borders (including the neighbouring regions in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and the neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean area). There is a strong movement to strengthen CBC in these countries, both at regional and national level in many cases. The effects of globalisation, as well as other increasing challenges, spread CBC far beyond up to the Caucasus, in the Arctic, and as far as in the American continent and in Africa.

Some new members from the Russian Federation and its neighbouring states outside the European Union have already been accepted as full members. In general, a larger working area can not be effectively handled in terms of work-load, content and finances with the present level of staff and income.

Between the 1st January 2008 and the 31st December 2008, the following new members were admitted:

- **Norte Region (PT)**
- **Province of Gelderland (NL)**

Moreover, the status of the **Euroregion Slobzhanschina (RU/UA)** changed from having an observer status to full membership from 2009 on.

NORTE REGION OF PORTUGAL	
POPULATION:	3.752.100 inhabitants
LOCATION:	Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula
TERRITORY:	21.278 km ²
BORDER REGION TO:	Galicia and Castilla y León, Spain
FURTHER INFORMATION:	http://www.ccdr-n.pt/

PROVINCE OF GELDERLAND	
POPULATION:	1.990.871 inhabitants
LOCATION:	East-central part of the Netherlands
TERRITORY:	5.155 km ²
BORDER REGION TO:	North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany
FURTHER INFORMATION:	http://www.gelderland.nl/

3. GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN 2008

3.1 General Assembly

The General Assembly and Annual Conference of the AEBR in 2008 took place on 16th-18th October in Plauen, Euregio Egrensis (Germany). More than 130 participants from 24 states attended this event, which was very well prepared and organised by our colleagues from the Euregio Egrensis.

The General Assembly mainly dealt with the Annual Report 2007, the Annual Accounts, the Budget for 2009 and the Elections. A new Executive Committee of the AEBR for the period 2009-2010 was elected in Plauen. The following representatives were elected as members of the new AEBR Executive Committee:

<u>President</u>	Mr. van Nistelrooij	MEP
<u>1st Vice-President</u>	Mr. Heider	Région Alsace
<u>Vice-Presidents</u>	Mrs. Backgren	Österböttens förbund / Kvarken Radet
	Mrs. Pallero Espadero	Extremadura/Alentejo/Centro
	Mr. de Buck	Euregio Scheldemond
	Mr. Charakidis	Euroregion Nestos-Mesta
	Mr. Tondo	Regione Friuli-Venezia-Giulia
	Mr. Kolck	Ems Dollart Region
	Mrs. Lackner-Strauss	Euregio Bayr. Wald/Böhmerwald/Mühlviertel
	Mr. Maïtia	Pyrenean Region / Aquitaine
	Mr. Zahradnik	Euregio Silva Nortica/Waldviertel
	Mr. Friese	Euregio Spree-Neiße-Bober
	Mr. Lambertz	Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens
<u>Treasurer</u>	Mr. Willeme	EUREGIO
<u>Auditors</u>	Mr. Jungk	
	Mr. Sammer	
<u>Observer</u>	Mr. Bohner	Council of Europe
	Mr. Klipp	Assembly of European Regions
	Mr. Radvilavicius	Nordic Council of Ministers
<u>Honorary President</u>	Mr. Ahrens	former President
	Mr. Vallvé	former President
<u>Honorary Members</u>	Mr. Mitterndorfer	former member
	Mr. Gabbe	former Secretary General

	<u>Member</u>	<u>Organisation</u>
Members	Mr. Stamming	Øresundskomiteen
	Mr. Hansen	Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig
	Mr. Ronkainen	Tornedalen
	Mr. Hyttinen	North Karelia/ Euregio Karelia
	Mr. Berg	South Karelia
	Mr. Greif	Euroregion Elbe/Labe
	Mr. Skamarocius	Euroregion Nemunas
	Mr. Kulik	Euroregion Nysa
	Mr. Hermansson	County of Värmland
	Mrs. Mullan	ICBAN / NWRCBG / East Border Region
	Mr. Wöfl	Euregio Bayr.Wald/ Böhmerwald/Mühlviertel
	Mr. Oberdorfer	Euregio Egrensis
	Mr. Steinmaßl	Euregio Salzburg/Berchtesgadener Land/Traunstein
	Mr. Anton	Pais Vasco
	Mr. Cortadelles	Catalunya
	Mr. Mato	Galicia
	Mrs. de Diego Durantez	Castilla y León
	Mrs. Leal Monteiro	Alentejo
	Mr. Luther	Provinz Bozen-Südtirol
	Mr. Jakob	RegioTriRhena
	Mr. Attaguile	Regione Sicilia
	Mr. Staudigl	ArGe Alp
	Mrs. Laszlo-Major	Carpathian Euroregion (HU)
	Mr. Moskov	Euroregion Nestos-Mesta
	Mr. Tatsis	Border Region Delta-Rhodopi
	N.N.	Slovenia
	Mr. Heise	Euroregion Pomerania
	Mrs. Csokasi	Euroregion DKTM
	Mrs. Purcaru	Giurgiu / Rouse
	Mr. Verdaas	Euregio Rhein-Waal/Rhein-Maas-Noord/Maas Rhein

40 further representatives were elected as members of the Executive Committee in case of prevention of persons listed above.

Due to electoral processes in border and cross-border regions following changes have occurred in the Executive Committee after the meeting in Plauen:

- Mr Hueso has replaced Mr Anton, representing the Basque Country (ES)
- Mr Gamallo has replaced Mr Mato, representing Galicia (ES)
- Mr Hessels has replaced Mr Verdaas, representing Euregio Rhein-Waal / euregio rhein-maas-nord / Euregio Maas-Rhein

3.2 Annual Conference

The topic of the first plenary session on 16th October was “**The Case of the Host. Transport Networks at the New Internal Borders.**” It was selected by the host Euroregion to develop a debate on a hot border issue. Under the chairmanship of Mr Tassilo Lenk, President of the Euregio Egrensis, Working Community Saxony / Thuringia, political and strategic aspects were discussed.



Source: Euregio Egrensis

In his introduction Mr Tassilo Lenk, President of the Euregio Egrensis, Working Community Saxony / Thuringia presented the cross-border local public transport system EGRONET in the German-Czech border area. As result of cooperation the individual timetables are ideally coordinated and the passenger can visit the whole region, even across the border, with just one ticket.

Further speakers in the first plenary session were: Martín Guillermo-Ramírez, Secretary General of AEBR; Gintaras Skamarocius, Secretary General of the Euroregion Nemunas; Prof. Thomas Schempf, Distance University Riedlingen; and Dieter Friese, President of the Euroregion Spree-Neiße-Bober.



Source: Euregio Egrensis

As a result of the Egrensis case of the host, and following recommendations of the **AEBR Forum on CB Transport Networks**, held in Zaragoza (Aragón) on 9th September 2008, under the chairmanship of Mr Marcelino Iglesias, President of the Aragon Regional Government, the Association further elaborated a Position Paper on the DG Transports' Green Paper on the Trans-European Networks of Transports (TEN-T), “Towards a Better Integrated TENT-T at the Service of the Common Transport Policy” in March 2009, and the specific document “Small-scale infrastructures at the internal and external borders of the EU”. The region of Aragón has offered to organize the AEBR Forum on Border Transports every other year.

The plenary sessions on 17th October dealt with the main topic of the Annual Conference 2008: „**Cross-border cooperation in research and higher education. The chance of regional development for European Neighbours**”, following recommendations of the **AEBR Forum on CBC of Universities and Research Centres**, held in Trieste (Friuli-Venezia-Giulia) on 3rd April 2008, based upon the results of the study on this topic prepared by Dr. Viktor Frhr. von Malchus (†), Chairman of the AEBR Advisory Committee.

In the morning session strategic questions referring to CBC between universities and research institutions were discussed, while in the afternoon session various practical examples of cooperation in higher education were presented.



Source: Euregio Egrensis

Lambert van Nistelrooij, President of AEBR commemorated **Dr. Viktor Frhr. von Malchus**, who passed away in the summer of 2008. Dr. von Malchus was Chairman of the Advisory Committee from 1978 to 2008 and member of the Executive Committee since the foundation of the AEBR in 1971. He strongly influenced CBC with his scientific and unique knowledge about European border areas. Especially in the field of spatial planning, development structures and logistics, cooperation between universities and research centres, or indicating paths to an extended Eastern CBC, he decisively showed major working directions. He lived the idea in practice, that “Europe must grow bottom-up”.



Speakers in the morning session (from the left): Ralf Oberdorfer, Mayor of Plauen; Olivier Brunet, DG REGIO, European Commission; Lambert van Nistelrooij, MEP and AEBR President; Jens Gabbe, AEBR Honorary member; Mikael Stammaing, Director of the Öresund Committee; María Dolores Pallero Espadero, First Vice-President and Speaker of the Regional Government of Extremadura; Rafael Hueso, Basque Country (Source: Euregio Egrensis)

At the end of the event, **the final declaration of the Annual Conference 2008** was unanimously adopted. It underlined the added value created by CBC in research and higher education at the European border areas:

- European, institutional and economic added value not solely for border regions but for the European research activities in general (e.g. by closing the information gap in the ERA-Watch database).
- Mobilisation of European, national and other public and private resources through cross-border action programmes in research, development and innovation (based on a cross border strategy).

- Improvement of CBC and facilitation of cooperation in innovation, research and development between public facilities and private enterprises (result: „public-private partnerships“).
- Creation of the necessary „critical mass“ for particular innovation and research facilities that otherwise would not be located in a border region, as their realisation solely on one side of the border would not be possible (would not achieve support enough):
 - Creation of “European Poles of Excellence”, “regional research landscapes” or “innovation clusters” (top performance can be rendered only through cooperation between facilities on both sides of the border).
 - High investment costs for medium-size complex research infrastructures can be rather justified in a cross-border environment.
 - Creation of infrastructures in border regions that are of interest for the European level, e.g. selected large equipment or broadband cable (Debate: European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures).
- Specialisation at regional level with a huge dynamic of innovation through combination of competences and joint priorities.
- Achievement of important progress in cooperation at previous and current external borders of the EU while using the experiences of the “old” EU.

3.3 Bestowal of the AEBR Award 2008

For the first time the AEBR Award “Sail of Papenburg” donated by the Ems Dollart Region was bestowed on the occasion of the Annual Conference in 2002. In line with the motto “Cross-border cooperation in research and higher education. The chance of regional development for European Neighbours“ the award was bestowed *ex aequo* to the Upper Rhine’s project **European Confederation of Upper Rhine Universities (EUCOR)** and the border area Galicia (ES)-Norte (PT) for the project **Service of Studies of Eixo Atlântico**. The award was officially handed over by the Chairman of the AEBR Jury, Mr Reinhold Kolck.



In 2006 for the first time a personal award was given to the German MEP **Elmar Brok**. In 2008 the vice-president of the Committee of Regions, **Michel Delebarre**, was honoured with the Sail of Papenburg. The award ceremony took place on 10th December 2008 at the Premises of the CoR in Brussels.

4. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The following meetings of the AEBR Executive Committee took place in 2008:

- 14th March in Taormina / Sicily (Italy)
- 4th July in Chora / Island of Samothrace (Greece)
- 16th October in Plauen / Euregio Egrensis (Germany)
- 28th November in Osnabrück / EUREGIO (Germany), commemorating the **50th Anniversary of EUREGIO¹**.

Throughout the year 2008, the Executive Committee dealt in particular with following topics:

- European Cohesion and Structural Policy
- European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)
- Action Programme to implement the European Territorial Agenda
- CBC between universities and research centres
- CBC in healthcare
- CBC at the external borders of the EU
- CBC in mountainous areas
- CBC in maritime regions
- Single market in 21st century: Challenges for European Border Regions

Extensive reports were given on most of the topics. The Executive Committee discussed them and elaborated special recommendations and remarks concerning CBC. On that basis, the Association worked out sets of arguments and requests for European and national institutions. AEBR members received written information about the recommendations and the reactions of the European and national levels (successes or failures of interventions).



AEBR Executive Committee in Osnabrück (Germany) in November 2008

Source: EUREGIO



AEBR Executive Committee meeting on the island of Samothrace (Greece) in July 2008

Source: AEBR

Furthermore, the Executive Committee also treated organisational and internal issues, such as AEBR events (special fora), work contents, financial matters, advisory committee, task forces on health and external borders, and future perspectives of the AEBR. In line with the General Assembly decisions, it has been repeatedly stressed by the Executive Committee that AEBR should remain an autonomous organisation, both in terms of funding and contents.

¹ In 1958, the first Euroregion was constituted, which is called since then the EUREGIO. The AEBR Head Offices are located at the EUREGIO premises in Gronau.

5. MAIN SUBJECTS IN 2008

5.1 *European Cohesion and Structural Policy*

Between September 2007 and February 2008, the European Commission has started a public consultation on the future of the cohesion policy as well as on the topic "Growing regions, growing Europe". The results of the consultation and the Commission's reflections have been introduced in the fifth progress report on economic and social cohesion presented by Commissioner Hübner in June 2008. Additional important documents referring to territorial cohesion adopted in 2008 by the EU Commission were a **Communication on the Renewed Social agenda** and the **Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion**.

The AEBR was involved in the discussions on the future of the European cohesion policy and elaborated comments on documents presented by the European Commission. Moreover, personal meetings with Commissioner Danuta Hübner and Director General Dirk Ahner offered the opportunity to explain existing difficulties and to present AEBR concrete proposals to improve European Cohesion and Structural policy:

- **Concrete proposals for the future:**
 - INTERREG should obtain significantly more funds after 2013. As political objective Territorial Cooperation is rather undervalued, even though its results are very positive.
 - Within territorial cooperation, CBC should have further on the highest political priority. From the three different cooperation strands it is the sole cooperation form that could easily absorb higher funds.
 - Maritime cooperation should be evaluated. The results of the expanded 150 kilometres zone very often do not reveal real cross-border projects, as it is the successful case of land borders. There are interesting initiatives and possibilities for border areas when constituting operational euroregions or even EGTCs to manage interregional or transnational initiatives (especially the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, the Eastern European Partnership, the Black Sea or the Baltic Sea Programmes, the future perspectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, etc.).
 - Even on the land borders more and less intensive forms of cooperation have to be accepted (cross-border, interregional and transnational), developing A, B and C projects respectively.
 - *Specially for border areas in the new member states, parts of Southern Europe and on the external borders:*
 - *As regards Technical Assistance in individual INTERREG A programmes it should be possible to use the expertise of advanced Euroregions and other CB structures in less advanced regions in order to close the existing and / or to avoid further knowledge and capacity gaps (e.g. in the field of Healthcare, Innovation, EGTC).*
 - *Transfer of the responsibility for CBC programmes on the new external borders from DG Relex back to DG Regio*

- ***Suggestions to improve future regulations and programmes:***
 - Stronger focus should be placed rather on quality than on quantitative features in the regulations.
 - Even if the present regulations are the best submitted so far, they still include too many detailed procedures (especially with regard to management and finances). Up to now, most important qualitative issues are not or only weakly described.
 - A joint bank-account for all funds (EU and national) has to be obligatory as well (there are adequate examples how this can be arranged and that it is functional).
 - In future, improved and real cross-border programmes must be submitted.
 - An INTERREG agreement between the partners should be submitted together with the programme, clarifying beforehand all difficult questions and problems, for example common project criteria, or common eligibility. This INTERREG-agreement has to be approved by the EU together with the programme. That seems to be the only guarantee to avoid the implementation of national border-area projects instead of real cross-border ones if difficulties arise.
 - The still lacking decentralisation criticised by the EU should be ensured in the next regulation through the inclusion of necessary rules. Unfortunately, along with the current trend, the programme areas become larger. This is contrary to all evaluations carried out since 1990 praising small, region-specific programmes and projects as the best ones.
 - The solution could be one programme per border with independent sub-programmes. This would ensure the implementation of region-specific programmes and cross-border projects as well as the decentralisation. Large scale projects covering the whole border and all sub-programmes still would be possible.
 - The AEBR could present a model for the implementation of operational programmes with sub-programmes.

5.2 European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

During the implementation process of the regulation on EGTC the Secretariat General has permanently cooperated with the DG REGIO and the Committee of the Regions, within the frame of the biannual agreement between the CoR and the AEBR signed in March 2008 in Brdo (SI) by Mr Gerhard Stahl, Secretary General of the CoR and Martín Guillermo, AEBR Secretary General.

The CoR has committed to observe the developments in individual member states regarding the implementation of the EGTC regulation, and to examine the foundation process of particular EGTCs. For this purpose, an **Expert Group on EGTC** has been established at the CoR that monitors the adoption and implementation of provisions at member state level and facilitates the exchange of knowledge and experiences. The AEBR Secretariat General is actively involved in the activities of this Expert Group and pays much attention to all actions and decisions referring to EGTC taken at European and national level.

In June 2008, the rapporteur on EGTC in the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER), **Mrs Mercedes Bresso**, President of the Piedmont Region, presented in a plenary session a CoR opinion on this new legal instrument entitled: “**European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation: new impetus for territorial cooperation in Europe.**” The aim of

this opinion was to stress the need for rapid application of the regulation on EGTC throughout the territory of the EU; and to present the perspectives created by this legal instrument in favour of European integration. The ideas and comments of AEBR on the draft version of the opinion forwarded to the CoR in the first half of 2008 were used while elaborating the final version of the document.

Based on reports from member states and the exchange with DG REGIO and the CoR, the Advisory Committee of the AEBR has continuously updated the available information on EGTC and has used the first experiences in implementing the new legal instrument of the EU in its comments and opinions. Documents on EGTC elaborated by AEBR have been regularly distributed to members of the Executive Committee and member regions interested in the subject.

Several events dealing with EGTC took place in 2008, in which the AEBR actively participated, e.g.:

- Conference of the Committee of the Regions on EGTC on 19 June 2008 in Brussels,
- INTERACT Seminar on EGTC on 10-11 April 2008 in Brussels.

Moreover, the AEBR Political Forum organised in cooperation with the region of Sicily on 13th March 2008 in Taormina included a discussion on the perspectives and possibilities of the implementation of EGTC in the Mediterranean area.

Some examples of the application of the new legal instrument of the EU (EGTC) are presented below:

EUROMETROPOLE LILLE-KORTRIJK-TOURNAI

BORDER: France / Belgium
 FOUNDATION: January 2008
 AIMS: This Eurometropole EGTC is a structure under French law. Its main task is to enhance cross-border communication, initiate new cross-border activities and to find solutions to still existing day-to-day border problems.
 INTERNET: <http://www.lillemetropole.fr>
 (International)

DUERO-DOURO EGTC

BORDER: Portugal / Spain
 FOUNDATION: March 2009
 AIMS: Members of the EGTC are Spanish and Portuguese municipalities along the Duero River. Its main objectives are to organize and manage cross-border, transnational and inter-regional cooperation actions, facilitate, promote and enhance territorial collaboration between both countries.
 INTERNET: <http://duero-douro.com/>

ISTER-GRANUM EGTC

BORDER: Hungary / Slovakia
 FOUNDATION: May 2008
 AIMS: It is the first EGTC founded in Central Europe. Esztergom and Štúrovo aim to pool their resources on 20 joint projects including a regional healthcare system, new port facilities, a regional tourist agency and others.
 INTERNET: <http://www.istergranum.hu>

5.3 Territorial Agenda

The Territorial Agenda of the EU is a common policy proposal that was elaborated with the aim to enhance the potentials of European regions and cities; as well as the use of territorial diversity for sustainable economic growth and jobs through integrated spatial development. It is a coherent consequence of the **European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)**. The Territorial Agenda was adopted during the **German Presidency** of the European Council by the EU Ministers responsible for spatial development on the occasion of the Informal Ministerial Meeting held in Leipzig in May 2007. During the **Portuguese Presidency** (second half of 2007) the **First Action Programme for the Implementation of the Territorial Agenda** was adopted by the EU Ministers responsible for spatial development on the occasion of the Informal Ministerial Meeting held at Ponta Delgada, Azores.

During the **Slovenian and French Presidencies** in 2008 first concrete measures were taken; and several working groups dealing with individual actions proposed in the Action Programme were launched in order to implement the Territorial Agenda. The AEBR was involved in the discussions in some working groups focusing in particular on territorial cooperation and cohesion policy. Moreover, it provided all available information to member regions and encouraged them to actively participate in the discussions on the Territorial Agenda initiated at national level.

It should be mentioned that some Presidencies involve the European Associations of Regions and Municipalities more than others, being the German, Portuguese and Slovenian ones quite successful to include an active participation of these important European territorial stakeholders. The AEBR elaborated several contributions for this debate, in particular to the Action Programme for the Implementation of the Territorial Agenda, focusing on several topics:

- The Multi-Level Governance approach to the discussion by Member States was a main step in involving all political levels in the European Territorial debate.
- Climate and demographic challenges were included as key-issues when dealing with future territorial policies (after 2013 or even after 2020).
- The Territorial Agenda should affect:
 - The Lisbon process after 2010
 - The midterm review of the Cohesion Policy and the debate on the Cohesion Policy after 2013
 - The Transport Policy after 2010
 - The 2010 midterm review of the EU Rural Development Policy
 - The 2011 re-development of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS)
 - Some cross-cutting issues, as climate change and ageing
- The following should be taken into account, as they can affect the implementation of the Action Programme:
 - The Blue Book on an Integrated Maritime Policy for the EU
 - The 7th Environmental Action Programme of the EU
 - The Research and Innovation Policy
 - The Neighbourhood Policy

- The AEBR offered its (and its members') expertise to deal with the following issues:
 - Coordination between spatial and rural development in border areas
 - Specific territorial constraints in key EU dossiers, policies and legislation
 - AEBR members involvement in national debates on related issues
 - Explaining the CB approach of many spatial development policies and programmes
 - CBC has a lot of experience with flexible decision-making processes, with partners having different structures and competences
- The best coordination system for all territorial stakeholders is the framework established by the Committee of the Regions.

5.4 *Languages and borders*

With the support of the Languages and Borders Comenius Network, the AEBR carried out a survey on languages in border areas. According to this survey in **most border regions (72%), lacking knowledge of the neighbour's language** is an obstacle for CBC.



Participants of the workshop on languages in border regions that took place in Plauen in October 2008

Source: Languages and Borders Comenius Network

On the occasion of the Annual Conference of AEBR in Plauen a **workshop on Languages and Borders** was organised to offer the opportunity to exchange views and experiences and to present existing language initiatives in border areas.

The participants of the workshop in Plauen supported the idea to launch a **network of "excellent education Euroregions"** with the aim to disseminate best practices and to develop new methods and approaches to languages learning in border areas. On the occasion of the meeting of the Executive Committee of AEBR in Osnabrück in November 2008, the decision was taken to support the creation of a network on languages in border areas within the association in cooperation with the Languages and Borders Comenius Network.

5.5 *Single Market in 21st Century. Challenges for European Border Regions*

The future challenges for European Border Regions were in 2008 on the agenda of the Executive Committee and the Advisory Committee of AEBR. The discussions focused in particular on following aspects:

- **Globalisation (knowledge, mobility, competition, innovation)**
- **Demographic Change**
- **Climate change**
- **Safe, sustainable and competitive energies.**

The AEBR dealt with these topics from a cross-border point of view in the final declaration of the **Annual Conference** held in **Pamplona in November 2006**, and also in the statements on the Territorial Agenda as well as the Territorial Cohesion. These four challenges would influence almost all regions in the middle term. Therefore, it would be important to investigate **which regions would be especially susceptible**, and if national differences in the EU would thus change in the future.

At the present time, it could be noted that the young members Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal had advanced considerably between 1999 and 2006. However, there would still be some risks in convergence regions, as well as some regions in Eastern Germany and peripheral areas. Differences between East and West would be higher than between North and South. Moreover, also the periphery would have to be taken into account, either at European or at national level.

The question on how different **regional challenges** can be faced by EU policies has a crucial importance for AEBR. The EU financial instruments have to be examined also from this point of view.

5.6 *Ombudsman for border issues in the EU*

In the beginning of 2007 a petition was forwarded to the President of the European Parliament, Mr Hans-Gerd Pöttering asking for the nomination of a permanent rapporteur on CBC within the EP Committee on Regional Development:

*“**Cross-border co-operation** of regions along a border, covering all aspects of daily living together means much **more than EU programmes**. Considering the verifiable contribution of CBC to European integration it is politically of crucial importance that the subject „**cross-border co-operation**“ remains constantly on the political agenda. This would be possible to achieve if the issue of “**cross-border co-operation**” is assigned as a **specific task** to the **Committee on Regional Development** of the European Parliament. Furthermore, a **permanent rapporteur** should be nominated. This implicates that once a year the subject „cross-border co-operation“ would be included in the agenda of the Committee on Regional Development as a single item.”*

The AEBR intervention was successful: in 2008, the European Parliament decided to nominate a *suiveur* (follower) on CBC in the Committee on Regional Development. Till the elections to the European Parliament in June 2009, this function was held by the Estonian MEP Tunne Kelam.

5.7 Cooperation with ESPON, INTERACT, NEEBOR and MOT

5.7.1. ESPON

The cooperation of the AEBR with ESPON, already initiated in 2006, was intensified in a systematic way. Several meetings took place with **Mr Peter Mehlbye**, Director of ESPON, with the aim to discuss the opportunities for our Association to participate in ESPON Programmes. The meetings made obvious that in future ESPON will force its activities in two large disciplines: basic research and applied research. As regards the latter, it should be a possibility to introduce regional interesting subjects in particular regions in order to bring ESPON in line with practical needs.

On the occasion of an ESPON Seminar in May 2007 in Bonn (Germany) the AEBR elaborated first ideas for a **project dealing with „cross-border development strategies“**. ESPON showed much interest in this project idea. Therefore, the AEBR elaborated a first project concept. On 1-2 August 2007 the project was discussed by the AEBR Advisory Committee directly with Mr Mehlbye. The project proposal was further developed and finalised in 2008, being submitted to ESPON for approval.

By launching an experimental and innovative project idea that makes use of applied research results from ESPON as a yardstick for cross-border spatial development planning, the involved stakeholders had aimed at achieving the following three objectives:

- To raise general awareness amongst involved stakeholders on the basic function and the practical utility of decentralised cross-border spatial development planning; and to promote a more widespread use of ESPON research results for elaborating high-quality cross-border spatial development concepts.
- To elaborate multi-thematic territorial analyses for a certain number of cross-border areas, making use of available ESPON applied research results and other local analyses and data.
- To promote further application of targeted research results in the selected CBC areas; and to review the general usefulness of applied research results produced by the ESPON Programme in the context of cross-border spatial development planning.

Several changes in the procedures have caused a great delay in the process to develop this project. However, due to the high involvement of several AEBR members, as well as the re-confirmed interest by ESPON, it is expected that this project (ULYSSES) will begin to be implemented in 2010.

5.7.2. INTERACT

The AEBR has intensified its cooperation with INTERACT, after some misunderstandings in the past. It turned out that INTERACT does not organize any direct tender for external organisations. Subject-related tenders with a scientific approach are structured in such a way that only universities or consultants are able to fulfil the criteria. Consultancy by external experts based on practical experiences does not take place within INTERACT.

In any case there were several issues in which a certain level of cooperation was necessary. After the elaboration of an extensive opinion document on the INTERACT EGTC Manual in 2007, the AEBR took part in an INTERACT Seminar on EGTC in April 2008. The opinion of AEBR was fully taken into account in the revised version of the manual.

5.7.3. NEEBOR

Since the foundation of the **Network of Eastern External Border Regions** (NEEBOR) in December 2005, the AEBR has tried to keep sustained contacts with its representatives. The communication and exchange with NEEBOR were further strengthened in 2008, in particular due to the initiative of the common AEBR and NEEBOR members, as well as the AEBR Task Force on External Borders.

5.7.4. MOT

In the last 10 years the cooperation with the French organisation *Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière* (MOT) was occasional. In 2007, the MOT launched the EuroMOT, a network which is still to show its aims and scope. An agreement and further contacts have been developed since then between the AEBR and the MOT, to work together to strengthen CBC in Europe, but the establishment of a EuroMOT is still seen as an overlap by many AEBR members. It is strongly recommended to cooperate with the French MOT, while EuroMOT should not create misunderstandings in the European cooperation of border and cross-border areas. In May 2008, the AEBR Secretary General participated at the EuroMOT Conference in Saarbrücken (DE) and Sarregemihes (FR), with the presence of the first EuroMOT President, the former French Prime Minister, Mr Pierre Mauroy.

5.8 AEBR Publications

After the completion of the text throughout the year 2007, the AEBR's White Paper on CBC was finally published in 2008 in German and English, with the title **“Cooperation between European Border Regions – Review and Perspectives”**.

In this book, the authors and co-founders of the AEBR, Mr Jens Gabbe and Dr. Viktor Frhr. von Malchus, examine 40 years of CBC, its added value and most important results and achievements.

It describes the activities of the AEBR at European level, the developments in different parts of Europe, general experience and key elements of successful CBC, as well as its contribution to the process of European integration based on regional diversity. The “European house” needs to be built from the bottom, while resting on solid foundations. And these foundations are made by day-to-day cooperation of peoples, municipalities and regions across the European borders.



6. AEBR TASK FORCES

6.1 Task Force on Cross-Border Health

Since many years, the AEBR has made own opinions regarding important topics for the population living in border areas. One of these important issues is Cross-Border Health Care. In this sense, in September 2005, the AEBR organized together with the Regio Basiliensis in Basel the 1st AEBR Forum “Health without Borders: CBC in Health Care – Added Value for European People, Economy and Regions”. In February 2008, the 2nd AEBR - Regio Basiliensis Forum on CB Health Care was organized in Basel paying special attention to the process of developing a proposal of a directive on CB Health Care and Patients’ Rights.

In the meantime a Task Force was launched dealing with Cross-Border Health issues within the Association. The 2nd Basel Conference gave orientations to the Task Force on the main health issues for European border regions. The AEBR Task Force on Cross-Border Health took up its work in 2007 on the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference in Lappeenranta, under the coordination of Mr. Martin Eurlings (Euregio Meuse-Rhine). Its main objective is to enhance the exchange of information and best practices as regards cross-border healthcare and to develop joint activities and projects.

Health services are an important element of the European social model as well as the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU. Due to disadvantageous concerns of some Member States regarding the specificities of health care, they were finally not covered by the EU Directive on Services of General Interest. So, the EU Commission postponed the proposal for a directive on cross-border healthcare, while the European Parliament urged the Commission to present a draft paper regulating the cross-border health services (April 2005: European Parliament report on patient mobility and healthcare developments in the European Union; March 2007: European Parliament resolution on Community action on the provision of cross-border healthcare).

Finally, on 2nd July 2008, the new Commissioner Mrs Androulla Vassiliou (CY) presented her Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Application of Patients' Rights in Cross-Border Health Care. Despite the efforts of Commissioner Vassiliou, as well as other actors, as the patients' associations or the border regions, most of the debates on this proposed Directive focused on prior authorisation and other finance-driven aspects. On the other hand the AEBR has promoted the central role of patients and border regions at different fora, having the chance to meet Commissioner Vassiliou on several occasions.

In 2008 the activities of the AEBR Task Force on cross-border health included in particular:

- The preparation and organisation of the **II AEBR Basel Forum on CB Health**, in cooperation with the Regio Basiliensis.

130 participants attended the conference that took place in February 2008 in Basel. It focused on the proposed EU Directive on cross-border health care and patients' rights, and its implications for health care in border areas.



Some impressions from the conference in Basel (Switzerland) in February 2008

Source: Regio Basiliensis

Since February 2008, and following the orientations established at the II Basel Conference, the AEBR has witnessed the extraordinary impetus given to cross-border health at European level.

- The elaboration of a new project on cross-border health **EUREGIO II: “Health in CB Regions from a Patient’s point of view”** based on the experiences of the EUREGIO I project finished in May 2007. It has the general aim to stimulate and promote CBC in health care in border regions, by fostering the usability of various existing instruments and methods, and analyse further needs and gaps. EUREGIO II was approved in 2008 by the European Commission (Grant Agreement No 2007118) under the Public Health Program for the period 1.12.2008 to 30.11.2011.

In the course of the project a handbook should be developed, as well as several specific guidelines. The **project started officially in December 2008**, and the Lead Partner is the Department of Public Health of the University of Maastricht. EUREGIO II is complementary to EUREGIO III (project leader: Health ClusterNET) which is directed to intraregional capacity building to support the utilization of EU Structural Funds for investments in health and health related projects as a part of strategies for regional development.

- A **workshop on cross-border health** was organized on the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference in Plauen in October 2008, with the aim to show progress of the tasks developed by the Task Force, and to raise the interest of further AEBR members in this topic.
- AEBR took part in the **Structured Dialogue with Commissioner Vassiliou** on 9th December 2008, in the premises of the CoR in Brussels. It was possible to ask foreseen questions as well as establish a real dialogue with her during two hours. **Mr. Konstantinos Tatsis**, President of the Prefectural Authority of Drama-Kavala-Xanthi (Greece) and member of the AEBR Executive Committee, as well as an active member of the CoR, posed AEBR questions and insisted on some interesting topics for European border regions. The Commissioner showed a great interest on keeping exchanges of views with the AEBR.
- The AEBR keeps on exploring the possibilities to use AEBR Network to follow up the implementation of the Directive and several elements of its Draft Outline Proposal, to be developed in cooperation with the Patients’ Association EPECS. The Commissioner has appointed some members of her Cabinet to be in contact with the AEBR in order to discuss further cooperation.

In November 2008 due to a decision of the Executive Committee of AEBR the Regio Basiliensis took over the coordination of the Task Force on cross-border health.

6.2 Task force on external borders



Cross-border cooperation at the external borders of the Union is also claiming for more attention of AEBR. In this sense, a Task Force has been created to coordinate activities focusing on external borders. The TF has divided its geographical area into three main sub-areas: North-West External Borders, Eastern External Borders and Mediterranean and Black Sea.

Related themes are also dealt with by AEBR members, as they constitute main topics in certain border areas: migration policy, as an authentic European issue and not only a national priority; intercultural dialogue; and maritime cooperation and safety. Several

seminars have been planned and organised already by the Task Force coordinated by the Region of South Karelia.

In 2008, following events took place:

- AEBR Forum in Taormina, Sicily (Italy) on 13th March 2009: “Role of the Regions at the EU borders: the Cross-Border Co-operation in the Mediterranean and its new instruments”
- Summer seminar of the Task Force in Lappeenranta (Finland) in June 2008, in the framework of the Northern Dimension Conference on LOGISTICS, Energy and Forest. Main subject: “External Border Regions in change and progress”
- Joint meeting of the Task Force on the occasion of the Annual Conference of AEBR in Plauen in October 2008.



Summer seminar in Lappeenranta, June 2008
Source: Task Force of External Borders

AEBR Forum in Taormina, March 2008

The cooperation at the external borders of the EU was also mentioned in the meetings of the AEBR Secretary General with Commissioner Danuta Hübner and Director General Dirk Ahner. The AEBR has raised in particular the question of the responsibility for the EU programmes at the external borders that should be transferred from DG RELEX to DG REGIO. The Secretary General of AEBR participated also in some meetings organised by the Russian Ministry for Regional Development and the Ministry of External Affairs. In the middle term the role of Euroregions will gain in importance in Russia and Ukraine. The AEBR can support the newly created cross-border structures with its know-how and expertise.

7. AEBR POLITICAL FORUMS

Forums of AEBR focus on specific important subjects for European border and cross-border regions. In the year 2008 four forums were organised.

- **22 February 2008: “European Cooperation in the Health Sector II”**

On 22 February 2008 the second international AEBR Forum “European Cooperation in the Health Sector” took place in Basel, in the Regio Basiliensis. The speakers and 130 participants from 15 European countries dealt with the topics of patient mobility, health economy and cross-border health cooperation.

MEP Lambert van Nistelrooij, President of the AEBR and **Dr. Georg F. Kraye**r, President of the REGIO BASILIENSIS opened the Forum and welcomed the participants. Kraye stressed the importance of the four freedoms in the EU, the free movement of people, goods, services and capital, for cross-border health, as well as the cross-border use of health facilities.

Dr. Andreas Schwab, Member of the European Parliament, gave an overview of the development of the activities of the EU institutions and the current discussions on patient mobility. He stressed that in all the debates the focus should be placed on the needs of the patient and the quality of the treatment, and not on the wealth of the regions. The EU draft directive, which has by now been changed and postponed several times, has then been analysed and discussed by representatives of European patient and hospital organisations and by experts of cross-border health care.



Dr. Georg F. Kraye, President of the REGIO BASILIENSIS, Source: Regio Basiliensis



Pascal Garel from European Hospital and Healthcare Federation, Source: Regio Basiliensis

Further participants in the political discussion were: **Klaus Bremen**, President of European Patients Empowerment for Customized Solutions (EPECS), **Pascal Garel**, representing the European Hospital and Healthcare Federation (HOPE), **Dr. Marian Ramakers-van Kuijk** from the Public Health Organization South Limburg, the Netherlands and **Dr. Alexander Friedrich** (University of Münster, Germany), who showed the relevance of developing joint research projects across the borders, as it is the case of the Dutch-German initiatives to study the behaviour of Multiple-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), as a model to monitor antibiotic-resistance, a very importance issue with extraordinary relevance in a cross-border framework.

Following the discussion on political aspects of this topic, its economical dimension was tackled, and then several examples of best practice from different border regions were presented.

- **13 March 2008: Mediterranean Cooperation and EGTC**

The AEBR Forum on “Mediterranean Cooperation and EGTC” took place on 13 March 2008 in Taormina on the invitation of the Italian region of Sicily that hosted the first Executive Committee meeting in 2008.

As in previous fora, this meeting had the aim to provide information on current developments in the Mediterranean area and to exchange opinions and ideas on the new legal instrument of the EU, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation. The forum in Taormina served as very important meeting place for regional associations that had the chance to discuss the Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue, the future of the Barcelona Process, and the implication of the whole European Union. It was a perfect opportunity for the AEBR Task Force on External Borders to get to know the situation of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, the position of the Commission, and several proposals by the regions and euroregions in the Mediterranean.

Further initiatives were launched on this occasion including the establishment of a Network of CB Mediterranean Euroregions.

In the Mediterranean area, apart from “regular” CBC within the framework of the INTERREG programmes (mainly terrestrial CBC), there has also been a CBC between EU-border regions and border regions of neighbouring countries supported in the framework of the MEDA programme for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Maritime cooperation is, however, **subject to special conditions and difficulties** due to its peculiarities and the fact that the regional level was not or only weakly developed.

The study of all this process is very important when talking about the ambitious project of a Mediterranean Union. To achieve such a Union there are many tasks to complete, many changes to make, and many concepts to implement, and all of them at different political levels.

Nowadays, there are different cases and degrees of Mediterranean CBC, with new emerging possibilities after the accession of Malta and Cyprus (e.g. Sicily/Malta, Cyprus/Turkey/Lebanon). However, the cooperation of the Aegean and Cyprus with Turkey will need further impetus, but the delicate political situation still poses an obstacle to develop the full potential of CBC in the region.

Many areas in the Mediterranean are regions with specific development problems (former Objective 1 areas, now convergence areas), being the **priorities** of the current European programmes:

- further improvement of the transport and communication infrastructure in and between border regions, as the basis for sustained CBC and related new economic activities;
- improved exploitation of region-specific development potential (regional cross-border Operational Programmes);
- diversification of activities in rural areas to prevent further de-population;
- promoting CB networks;
- improving the quality of human resources;
- solving environmental problems, especially in rural areas (and the impact of massive tourism activities);
- CB urban and rural development policy; and
- improving and intensifying CB forms of organisation.

At this point it can be concluded that CBC is a policy framework task for the European Union which must be implemented at regional/local level in partnership with the national bodies paying special attention to some geographical areas, as it is the case of the Mediterranean. There are many reasons to develop an EU programme adapted to the needs of the Mediterranean region. CBC as a practical task in the field and an objective for European policy will become a touchstone for:

- European (and Mediterranean) integration and social cohesion;
- peaceful human coexistence, including respect for diversity and the rights of minorities;
- respect for the principles of partnership and subsidiarity;
- the active participation of citizens, politicians, authorities and social groups in CBC;
- reconciliation, tolerance and equality, despite differences between the respective partners;
- social, cultural and economic interrelated cooperation, extending as far as CB integration, without undermining state sovereignty;

- a Union for citizens in their communities, regions and countries.

To travel down this road towards a 'Europe without borders' and, then, a 'Mediterranean without borders', in the 21st century, joint action by the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Arab League, the national governments, regions and the local level is just as essential as mutual solidarity between border and cross-border regions.

Integration problems within the Mediterranean region have not only to do with North-South relationship, always complex, but also with insufficient economical and human links between the countries in the area.

It is necessary to strengthen the cooperation between the Northern and the Southern shores of the Mediterranean covering old problems like environmental protection or democratic development, but also some new issues that did not exist twenty years ago: from massive immigration to energy, including the terrorist escalation.

In any case, current forms of cooperation in Europe at regional and local level, as it is the case of CB projects and programmes, have shown their success within the process of European integration. So, they are really necessary in the Mediterranean region. But they also need resources, political will, the implication of citizens and, time. They cannot be done in a short time and need large doses of partnership. So, there are many debates opened, and many actors to be included.

Existing networks of regions and municipalities should manifest their views on this topic and, regarding the AEBR, there are two main tasks:

- it should promote the exchange of ideas, proposals, and best practices in the most interesting fields for the Mediterranean between Northern countries and countries of the Mediterranean, including privileged contacts with other regional associations (Assembly of European Regions, Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, etc.); and
- it should also discuss its comments, remarks and alternatives, as well as the conclusions of the aforementioned contacts with the adequate institution, e.g. the Committee of Regions, the European Commission, the European Parliament, or the Council of Europe.

There could be many other AEBR's tasks on this topic: to continue the development of CB relationships in all European border areas, as well as to take part in the increasing number of CB initiatives outside the European Union, promote the values of mutual understanding and trust developed in Europe by CBC in the last half century; and, last but not least, pay a strong attention to any initiative to strengthen links across the borders, even if it seems to interfere with current processes.

- **3 April 2008: “Cross-border cooperation of universities and research centres”**

On 3 April 2008 the AEBR Forum “Cross-border cooperation of universities and research centres – Contribution to regional development” took place in Trieste upon invitation of the Italian region Friuli Venezia Giulia.

Franco Iacop, AEBR Vice-President and Regional Minister for Autonomous Bodies, European Affairs and International Relations of Friuli Venezia Giulia; dott. **Giorgio Tassarolo**, Director General for Autonomous Local Bodies, International and EU relations; and **Lambert van Nistelrooij**, President of the AEBR and MEP, opened the forum and welcomed the participants in Trieste. The audience included representatives of European universities, research institutes, European border and cross-border regions.

In his speech **Luis Delgado** from the Directorate General Research of the European Commission introduced and explicated the role of universities in the European Research Area (ERA), the modernization agenda for universities, the activities of the DG Research on universities, the globalisation of research and development and the regional dimension of the Seventh Framework Programme for research and technological development (FP7).



Giorgio Tessoro, Director General for Autonomous Local Bodies, European Affairs and International Relations of Friuli Venezia Giulia

Christian Smekal, University of Innsbruck, Cooperation in the Alps and Euregio Tiroi

Laura Comelli, Managing Authority Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013

Source: Regione Friuli Venezia Giulia

The following session of the conference started with the results of a study elaborated by AEBR Advisory Committee on cross-border cooperation of universities and research institutes and explanation of the role of euroregions in the cooperation between institutions for research and education and the local and regional level. The main part of the forum has been dedicated to the various case study presentations. Examples of cross-border cooperation covered Northern Europe, Western and Central Europe, South-East Europe and the Iberian Peninsula.

Cross-border cooperation in research and education was the AEBR's main topic for the year 2008. The results of the forum provided theoretical foundation while preparing the AEBR Annual Conference 2008 in Plauen, Euregio Egrensis.

- **9 September 2008: "Cross-border Transport Networks"**

In cooperation with the Regional Government of Aragón an AEBR Forum on "Cross-border Transport Networks" took place on 9 September 2008 in Zaragoza. The forum provided an occasion to discuss current and future challenges as regards cross-border transport networks and to present examples of good cooperation from different European border areas.

In plenary discussions participated mainly representatives of the European Union, regional authorities as well as different cross-border organisations. Moreover, along with AEBR further large European regional associations (AER, CPMR and MOT) presented their opinions and views on cross-border transport networks in the first Round Table.

The AEBR has supported for a long time the implementation of networks to permit the best possible communication across European borders. This has been so especially in regions where geographical conditions are particularly complicated, as it is the case of mountain regions. In fact, there have been references to an efficient connection across the Pyrenees since the previous years to the accession of Spain to the European Communities, insisting on it on many occasions towards European institutions and Member States through the inclusion of this demand within the documents prepared by the AEBR regarding transport networks.

The AEBR organizes seminars periodically to actualize the best available knowledge, raise awareness and exchange best practises in every important aspect for European border regions. The special location of Aragon at the centre of the French-Spanish border let us

illustrate this debate with the case of the Central Pyrenees Passage and its importance to have better road and railroad connections in South-West Europe. This is a perfect example of cross-border action with an enormous impact in affected regions, which are many on the Iberian Peninsula and Europe.

Transport networks have been always planned departing from State capital cities, following a national and traditionally centralist approach. But the Single European Market has a growing awareness of the regional dimension. In this Europe the borders are the membranes where the integration of our continent breathes. Thus, it is imperative to plan with a European logic. Such logic should look for the most efficient border crossings and then plan the best routes to the capitals and activity centres.

In a Single European Market asking to eliminate barriers for the exchange of citizens, goods, services and knowledge within the whole territory of the Union, we affirm the growing economic exchange between the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of the EU, as well as its role as logistic platform and central junction for EU exchanges with the rest of the world. Thus it is necessary to establish efficient and environmentally friendly ways out to channel incoming and departing goods.

Europeans are worry with our environment and we want to use the safest and less pollutant modes, as it is the case of rail- and seaways, within an efficient transport network facilitating necessary links and continuity of connections to the rest of Europe.

Thus it is that the AEBR has manifested the need to improve connections in areas like South East Europe, amongst others (former Iron Curtain, external borders, etc.), to better channel goods arriving, departing or in transit on this territory. This is the only way to optimize existing economic development potentials. In this sense, we have to keep on promoting to take border regions into consideration in the great European transport plans, especially regions with particular geographical features. Urgently needed is the implementation of the axis number 15 of the TEN-T, a high capacity railway corridor with high performance departing from Sines and Algeciras harbours, crossing the Iberian Peninsula and the centre of the Pyrenees with a low-height tunnel, delivering goods coming from Asia, Africa and America to the whole Europe. The Pyrenees Central Crossing opens a new European corridor to connect the South East with Northern and Eastern countries, irrigating the core.

This cross-border infrastructure should be a cornerstone in the European Transport Policy, and an optimal solution for problems of road transport saturation, pollution, accident rates and growing transport costs. It is necessary to look for feasible financial solutions with the joint participation of public and private sectors.

8. CONTACTS WITH EUROPEAN BODIES

For many decades, AEBR has nurtured contacts with the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Contacts to **the European Parliament** were intensified, above all through the **Committee on Regional Development**. A lot of its members are well-known to AEBR. By this, the cohesion and regional policy has received a political basis. The idea of AEBR to nominate an ombudsman for cross-border issues in the European Parliament finally found support in the Committee on Regional Development. Since 2009, a member of the Committee has the function of a *suiveur* that deals with recent developments in cross-border cooperation and daily issues in border areas. At least once a year the situation in border and cross-border regions will be on the agenda of the Committee.

Where the **European Commission** was concerned, AEBR enjoyed close, solid relations with DG Regio, and, at the political level, in particular with Commissioner Danuta Hübner and Director General Dirk Ahner.

The AEBR actively participated in following events organised by the EU Commission:

- 7-8 April 2008: Seminar on the Future Cohesion Policy of the European Union in Maribor (Slovenia), Participant: AEBR Secretary General
- 15 April 2008: Hearing of DG REGIO on territorial cohesion in Brussels, Participant: Honorary member of AEBR, Jens Gabbe
- 18 June 2008: Structured Dialogue with Commissioner Danuta Hübner on territorial cohesion, Participant: Vice-President of AEBR, Mr Marc de Buck,
- 27 November 2008: Structured Dialogue with the Commission's President José Manuel Barroso on Commission's legislative and work programme 2009, Participant: Karl-Heinz Lambertz, Vice-President of AEBR,
- 9 December 2008: Structured Dialogue with Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou on health, Participants: Mr Konstantinos Tatsis, Member of the AEBR Executive Committee; AEBR Secretary General.

Two meetings with the **Director General, Mr Dirk Ahner**, took place in Brussels in July and November 2008. The Secretary General, Mr Martín Guillermo-Ramírez and the honorary member, Mr Jens Gabbe, attended these meetings. The discussion focused on the conceptualisation of the cohesion and structural policy after 2013. Furthermore, in the beginning of September the President of AEBR, Mr Lambert van Nistelrooij, the Secretary General, Mr Martín Guillermo-Ramírez and the honorary member, Mr Jens Gabbe, attended a meeting with the **Commissioner for Regional Policy, Mrs Danuta Hübner**. The discussion dealt mainly with the future of the European cohesion and regional policy.

Under the auspices of **the Slovenian Presidency** in the first half of 2008, as well as **the French Presidency** in the second half of 2008, several meetings and Conferences took place at European level. AEBR was involved mainly in activities related to European cohesion policy and the implementation of the Territorial Agenda. The opinions and views of AEBR and its member regions were presented in particular in a large number of meetings and events, in which AEBR actively participated.

As regards the cooperation with the **Committee of the Regions (CoR)** throughout the whole year 2008 the Secretary General of AEBR was in close contact with the Secretary General of CoR Gerhard Stahl. Moreover, he participated in the meetings of the Secretaries General of European regional organisations that are coordinated by the Committee of the Regions. The cooperation with CoR focused in 2008 in particular on the implementation of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

The AEBR participated in following events organised by the Committee of the Regions:

- 22 January 2008: Meeting of the Secretaries General in Brussels,
- 4 March 2008: Third Territorial Dialogue in Brdo, Slovenia,
- 24 April 2008: CoR Seminar: "Health Strategy in Europe's Regions" in Schwerte, Germany,
- 19 June 2008: Conference on European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation in Brussels,
- 2 September 2008: Meeting of the Secretaries General in Brussels.
- October, Open Days of Regions and Cities
- 18 November 2008: meeting of the Secretaries General

Besides, in the beginning of 2008 the CoR-AEBR Action Plan elaborated by Mr Stahl, Secretary General of CoR and the AEBR Secretary General was signed.

The **action plan** contains agreements on joint activities in promoting trans-European cooperation of regions and cities in relation to the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), sharing expertise – participation of the AEBR in the work of the Committee of the Regions and its rapporteurs, dialogue, communication and visibility, participation in the Structured Dialogue and the Territorial Dialogue, as well as organisation of common conferences, seminars and events.

Cooperation dating back to the 1960s with the **Council of Europe** remains quite intensive. AEBR has consultative status within the Council of Europe and observer status within the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. This status gives AEBR the right to take part in the work of the Congress, submit memoranda and comment on issues discussed in plenary sessions.

An AEBR delegation attended the 15th Plenary Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in the end of May 2008 in Strasbourg. During this meeting, elections for all three chambers and for the Secretary General of the Congress took place. **Mr. Yavuz Mildon** (Turkey), former President of the Chamber of Regions, became new President of the Congress. **Mrs. Ludmila Sfirloaga** (Romania) became the new President of the Chamber of Regions and **Mr. Ian Micallef** (Malta) was re-elected as President of the Chamber of Local Authorities. **Mr. Ulrich Bohner** was also re-elected as the Secretary General of the Congress.

AEBR has also observer status in the *ad-hoc* Working Group of the Congress on Inter-regional Co-operation launched in 2008, which is responsible to follow the Congress' inter-regional and transfrontier co-operation activities. **Dr. Karl-Heinz Lambertz**, Prime Minister of the German-speaking Community of Belgium and Vice-President of AEBR, was nominated as rapporteur. Documents elaborated in the working group are mostly based on the papers and expertise of AEBR and its member regions.

Also in the year 2008, cooperation **between the large European associations of regional and local authorities** (AEBR, CPMR, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Eurocities, AER, and REGLEG) had furthermore increased and positively developed.

9. AEBR AND GLOBALISATION

The **Forum of Global Associations of Regions (FOGAR)** has been founded upon initiative of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) in March 2007. In May 2008 an organisational charter was adopted with the aim to create adequate structures and to specify the objectives of the organisation. The members of the FOGAR are associations of regions which can be geographical or thematic networks.

United Nations (UN) representatives showed interest in the role of regional associations and the expertise developed within the European Union as regards cohesion policy and cross-border cooperation which could be of importance also for other parts of the world. Within the United Nations Development Programme a strategic vision on the role of regional authorities is being developed. The result could be a permanent recognition of the regional dimension in the work of the UN.

In the first meetings of FOGAR in 2007 the AEBR was represented by its Vice-President, Mr François Maitia, Vice-President of the Region of Aquitaine (FR). In 2008 representatives of AEBR (Secretary General, President, Vice-President Maitia) participated in the meetings of the **Executive Committee of FOGAR** that took place in February, May and October 2008. Especially representatives from Latin America and Africa are highly interested in the experiences of European regions in cross-border cooperation. FOGAR meetings provide a good opportunity for the exchange and dissemination of information and know-how.

In January 2008, AEBR President van Nistelrooij, Vice-President Maïtian, and Secretary General Guillermo met the Commission's Director General for Development, Mr Stefano Manservigi, in order to explore further cooperation fields for the AEBR, regarding particularly the introduction of territorial development issues in the EU cooperation with third countries.

Strategic contacts are maintained also with the Government of the **Russian Federation** and **Ukraine** as regards the promotion of cross-border links between public and private organisations, enterprises and citizens. To this end, the AEBR kept direct contact with the Ministries of Regional Development and External Affairs in the Russian Federation, and with the Ministry of Regional Development in Ukraine. In April, the AEBR took part at the Baltic Sea Region Interreg III-B Conference (St. Petersburg); in the Conference on CBC organized in Pskov in September; and another Conference on CBC organized by the Euroregion Slobozhanschina in Kharkiv (UA) and Belgorod (RU) in November, with the participation of representatives of the EUREGIO.

The cooperation with **Africa** is important for AEBR in particular in the Mediterranean area, as the EU external borders refer not solely to the members of AEBR in Eastern Europe, but also in the Mediterranean area in the South. These borders are of high importance as regards migration and security issues, but they bear also many development opportunities through cooperation. In this continent, the African Union has begun the definition and preliminary implementation of an own African Border Programme.

In **Latin America**, both in the Central American region and in South America, there are several Cross-Border Programmes in different levels of implementation.

10. WORKING METHODS OF AEBR

The AEBR, as the **oldest European association** of regional and local authorities has the smallest budget compared with other associations. AEBR competes with other European regional organisations as regards the treatment of European issues, even though if AEBR is the only one to deal with border regions exclusively.

The question turns up, if the content-related quality of AEBR alone will be sufficient to endure at European level. A political representation must above all be ensured by the President. The external representation during important occasions in Europe has been improved. Vice-Presidents, members of the Executive Committee or representatives of border regions are more and more ready to represent AEBR during meetings organised in and by the EU.

When talking about European border areas, the AEBR means all border regions, within and outside the EU. Even if the interests are different, there is no general conflict of interests. The AEBR focuses its interest on members paying their membership contribution. However, support must be provided to all border regions.

The support to the AEBR by member regions has been further improved. In addition, members of the Executive Committee have participated at and have been involved in events to a greater extent or have carried out *ad hoc* operations, especially at political level. The circle of persons in a relatively short notice or temporarily has still remained limited. Whilst an increased participation of members and the **AEBR Executive Committee** in our Network would be very desirable indeed, this creates problems in practice, as **all are active on an honorary basis**. Should members and representatives of the Executive Committee increase their activities, a uniform stand of AEBR in public remains absolutely necessary, i.e. the principle and philosophy of the cross-border cooperation – as stipulated in the AEBR Statutes, the Charter and the Action programme, the Practical Guide and many other documents – should in this case also be uniformly supported.

Till the end of 2002 the meetings of **AEBR Advisory Committee** took place regularly, in particular within the LACE project. Later on, for financial reasons it was personally reduced in such a way that practically only Mr von Malchus worked in the Committee as its chairman.

Since 2006 - 2007 the meetings of the Advisory Committee take place periodically, usually twice a year. Main task of the Advisory Committee is to support the Executive Committee and the Secretariat General while elaborating independent opinions and recommendations, and accompanying the implementation of particular activities. It becomes active either on request or on its own initiative if the AEBR Advisory Committee considers it as necessary. Final decisions as regards the activities of the Advisory Committee and its members are taken by the **Secretary General in cooperation with the Chairman** of the Advisory Committee (Viktor Freiherr von Malchus 1988-2008).

The **Chairman of the Advisory Committee** nominates the members of the Committee. Due to financial reasons, the Committee consists of **a small permanent circle** of recognised “border experts” with Europe-wide knowledge, proved scientific activities and evaluation experiences (Jaques Robert, Thomas Stumm, Jens Gabbe, Christian Haefliger) as well as one representative of the European Commission (DG REGIO) and the Committee of the Regions (paying the travel costs by themselves).

Viktor Freiherr von Malchus, Chairman of the AEBR Advisory Committee received on 20 May 2008 in Unna (Germany) from Oliver Wittke, Minister for Building and Transport of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, the German Federal Cross of Merit, First Class. Only two months later he passed away at the age of 79 years.

On the photo with Martín Guillermo-Ramírez, his wife and Jens Gabbe in May 2008



Occasionally, some further experts can be invited to the meetings with a particular thematic focus.

The activities of the Advisory Committee in **2008** included in particular:

- Evaluation of the applications for the AEBR Award “Sail of Papenburg” 2008
- Preparation of the AEBR Political Forum on cross-border cooperation between universities in Trieste
- Completion of the working paper “Cross-border cooperation beyond 2013 – European priority and political objective of the EU”
- Elaboration of the project application “Cross-border development strategies” for ESPON
- Elaboration of comments on the 5th Cohesion Report of the EU and the Green Book on Territorial Cohesion
- Elaboration of comments on the report of the Committee of the Regions on EGTC,
- Elaboration of a report on cross-border cooperation for the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
- Preparation of the final declaration for the AEBR Annual Conference 2008

11. SECRETARIAT GENERAL

The Executive Committee is continuously informed on developments in the General Secretariat. At the end of 2008, the following staff members were working in the General Secretariat:

- a foreign language secretary
- an office assistant (part-time)
- an accountant (part-time)
- a secretary general

Assistance was provided by additional staff member working from home (telecommuting).

The EUREGIO continuously supports the General Secretariat with human and material resources.

The public relations of AEBR are still difficult, because there is no staff member for this work at the moment. European-wide public relations are nearly impossible. The website www.aebr.eu, as well as the electronic Newsletter "Partnership in a Europe without borders" facilitates public relations.

In 2009, a strong effort has been done to strengthen the communication of the AEBR with its members and with the exterior, but further actions are to be implemented. A Task Force on Communication issues is expected to be launched during the AEBR General Assembly and Annual Conference in Ghent (Euregio Scheldemond) on 5-7 November 2009.


