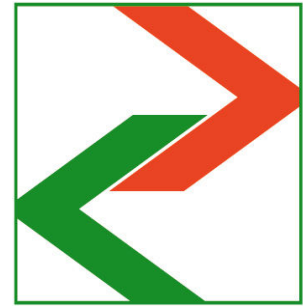


Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab (AGEG)
Werkgemeinschaft van Europese grensgebieden (WVEG)
Associação das Regiões Fronteiriças Europeias (ARFE)
Σύνδεσμος Ευρωπαϊκών Συνοριακών Περιφερειών (ΣΕΣΠ)
Stowarzyszenie Europejskich Regionów Granicznych (SERG)



ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN BORDER REGIONS (AEBR)

Annual Report 2007

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1. Introduction

In the year 2007 the new programming period till 2013 began at European level based on new EU regulations:

- on European Cohesion and Regional Policy,
- on Territorial Cooperation,
- on Neighbourhood and Partnership Programme,
- on Pre-Accession Instrument,
- on European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation.

Important for the future is the fact that the regional policy is not focusing on geographical target areas any longer, but on three political objectives. In consequence cross-border cooperation, as part of territorial cooperation, has been defined as a political task of the EU. The transfer of the responsibility for cooperation at external borders (in the Neighbourhood and Partnership Programme) to DG RELEX is a further important political decision that needs some more time before its results can be evaluated. All these issues are closely related to the Territorial Agenda that played main role during the General Assembly of AEBR in Pamplona in the year 2006.

The Treaty of Lisbon was adopted in the year 2007 after the failure of the European Constitution. The main elements required by AEBR, i.e. the territorial cohesion and cross-border cooperation, are both included in the treaty.

Personal changes in the end of 2006 went along with new thematic priorities set by the new Secretary General (rural area, healthcare, cooperation of universities) and with further development of the organisational structure (testing of a smaller political presidium, launching of ad-hoc working groups, modifications as regards the meetings of the General Assembly).

Throughout the year 2007 important international decorations were bestowed to some members of AEBR:

Order of Oranje-Nassau of the Netherlands to Mr Reinhold Kolck, Vice-President,
Federal Merit Cross of the Federal Republic of Germany to Mr Frans Willeme, Treasurer,
National Order of Merit of the French Republic to Mr Jens Gabbe, honorary member.

2. Member Structure

By the end of 2007 / beginning of 2008, AEBR had more than 100 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 such as Alps Working Community, Nordic Council of Ministers, Carpathian Euroregion etc. include border regions in several states as members.

The membership structure reveals a balanced ratio of border / cross-border regions in both the „old“ EU and the new member states. As up to now, AEBR has the position that its area of operation ends, for the time being, at the new EU external borders (including the neighbouring regions in Russia, Belarus, the Ukraine, Moldova and the neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean area).

Some new members from Russia and its neighbouring states outside the European Union were accepted already. But generally, a larger working area can not be effectively handled in terms of work-load, content and finances with the present number of staff and the current membership fees.

Between the 1 January 2007 and 31 December 2007, the following new members were admitted:

- Euroregion Danubius (RO/BG)
- Regionalverband Südlicher Oberrhein (D)
- Region Alentejo (P)
- Region Centro (P)
- Euroregion Stara Planina (BG/SRB)
- Euroregion Nishava (BG/SRB)
- Euroregion Danubius 21 (Romanian partner)
- Lviv Oblast (UA)
- Yaroslavna Euroregion (RUS/UA) as observer
- Euroregion Ipel-Ipoly (SK/HU) as observer.

3. General Assembly and Annual Conference in 2007

3.1 General Assembly

The General Assembly and Annual Conference of AEBR in 2007 took place on 13/14 September in Lappeenranta and Imatra (FI). More than 200 participants from 28 states attended this event, which was very well prepared and organised by the region of South Karelia.

The General Assembly mainly dealt with the Annual Report, the Annual Accounts and the budget for 2007. Furthermore, there were some personal changes in the Executive Committee due to leave-taking of members, new regional representatives etc. These changes are explained in the footnotes.

President:

Mr. Lambert van Nistelrooij, MEP, Committee on Regional Development

1st Vice-President:

Mr. Heider, Vice-President Région Alsace, France

Vice-Presidents:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Border area</u>
Ms. Backgren	Österböttens förbund / Kvarken Rådet	Finland/Sweden/Norway/Russia
Ms. Pallero Espadero ¹	Extremadura/ Alentejo/ Centro	Spain/Portugal
Mr. de Buck	Euregio Scheldemond	Belgium/Netherlands
Mr. Charakidis	Euroregion Nestos-Mesta	Greece/ Bulgaria
Mr. Iacop	Regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Italy/ Slovenia/ Austria
Mr. Kolck	Ems Dollart Region	Germany/Netherlands
Ms. Lackner-Strauss	Euregio Bayerischer Wald/ Böhmerwald	Austria/ Germany/ Czech Republic
Mr. Maïtia	Pyrenean Region / Aquitaine	France/Spain
N.N.	N.N.	Poland/

Honorary Presidents:

Mr. Ahrens, former President

Mr. Vallvé, former President

Honorary Members:

Mr. Mitterdorfer, former member

Mr. Gabbe, former Secretary General

Treasurer:

Mr. Willeme, EUREGIO (Netherlands/Germany)

Members:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Border Area</u>
Mr. Möller	Øresundskomiteen	Denmark/Sweden
Ms. Kunsemüller ²	Sønderjylland-Schleswig	Denmark/Germany
Mr. Ronkainen	Tornedalen	Sweden/Finland/Norway
Mr. Hyttinen	North Karelia/ Euregio Karelia	Finland/Russia
Mr. Greif	Euroregion Elbe / Labe	Germany/Czech Republic
Mr. Friese	Euregio Spree-Neiße-Bober	Poland/ Germany
Mr. Skamarocius	Euroregion Nemunas	Lithuania/Poland/Belarus
Mr. Kulik	Euroregion Nysa	Poland/Czech Republic/Germany
Mr. Hermansson	County of Värmland	Sweden/ Norway
Mr. Molloy	NorthWestRegionCrossBorderGroup	Ireland/Northern Ireland/Great Britain
Mr. Eurlings	Euregio Maas-Rhein	Netherlands/ Germany / Belgium

¹ Following regional elections in Extremadura Ms Pallero Espadero replaced in July 2007 Mr Sanchez Amor

² Ms. Kunsemüller was nominated as member of the Executive Committee in July 2007

Mr. Weiß	Euregio Bayerischer Wald/Böhm.	Germany/Czech Republic/Austria
Mr. Haberkorn	Euregio Egrensis	Germany/Czech Republic
Mr. Steinmaßl	Euregio Salzburg/ Berchtesgadener Land/ Traunstein	Austria/ Germany
Mr. Muñoa	País Vasco	Spain/France
n.n.	Catalunya	Spain/France
Mr. Gómez-Reino Lecoq	Galicia	Spain/Portugal
Mr. Valverde Gomez	Castilla y León	Spain/Portugal
Mr. Luther	Bozen/Südtirol	Italy/Austria
Mr. Jakob	RegioTriRhena	Switzerland/France/Germany
Mr. Attaguile	Regione Siciliana	Italy
Mr. Staudigl	ArGe Alp	Austria/Germany/Switzerland/Italy
Ms. Laszlo Major	Carpathian Euroregion (HU)	Poland/Hungary/Ukraine/Slovak Republic/Romania
Mr. Papademetriou	Euroregion Nestos-Mesta	Greece/Bulgaria
Mr. Tatsis	Border Region Delta-Rhodopi	Greece/Bulgaria
Mr. Girard	CAFI	France/Italy
Mr. Požarnik	Slovenia	Slovenia/Italy/Hungary/Croatia/Austria
n.n.	Euroregion Pomerania	Poland/Germany/Sweden
Mrs. Csókasi	Euroregion DKTM	Romania/Hungary/Serbia
Mrs. Purcaru	Giurgiu Local Council	Romania/Bulgaria

Chairman of the Advisory Committee:

Mr. Frhr von Malchus, Unna/Germany

Auditors:

Mr. Jungk, Austria
Mr. Sammer, Germany

Observer:

Mr. Bohner, Council of Europe, Strasbourg/France
Mr. Klipp, Assembly of European Regions
Mr. Radvilavicius, Nordic Council of Ministers (Denmark/Norway/Sweden/Finland/Iceland)

Representative in case of prevention:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Representing</u>	<u>Organisation/Region</u>
Mr. Barrau	Mr. Maïtia (not as Vice-Pr.)	France/ Spain
Mr. Leenen/Mr. Aaberg	Mr. Möller	Øresundskomiteen
Mr. Gammelgaard ³	Ms. Kunsemüller	Sønderjylland-Schleswig
Ms. Comelli ⁴	Mr. Iacop (not as Vice-Pr.)	Region Friuli-Venezia Giulia
Mrs. Defrancesco	...	Province Trento
Mr. Rainer	Mr. Luther	Bozen/ Südtirol
Mr. Leskinen	Mr. Hyttinen	Euregio Karelia
Mr. Patri	Ms. Lackner-Strauss (not as Vice-Pr.)	Euregio Bayer. Wald/Böhmerw.
Mr. Preußcher	Mr. Greif	Euroregion Elbe/Labe
Mr. Greiter	Mr. Staudigl	Arge Alp
Mr. Krebs	Mr. Willeme (not as treasurer)	EUREGIO
Mr. Neef	Mr. Kolck (not as Vice-Pr.)	Ems Dollart Region
Mr. Zubiaur/ Mr. Hueso	Mr. Muñoa	Navarra / Pais Vasco
Ms. Rainha/Mr. Corrales	Mr. Pallero Espadero (not as Vice-Pr.)	Extremadura
Mr. Martín Mallén/Ms. Colomina ⁵		Aragon / Catalunya
Mr. Cao Fernandez	Mr. Gómez-Reino Lecoq	Galicia
Mrs. Maria José Gato ⁶	Mr. Valverde Gomez	Castilla y León
Mr. Evers	Mr. Eurlings	Euregio Maas-Rhein
Mr. Sammer	Mr. Weiß	Euregio Bayer. Wald/ Böhmerwald
Ms. Petrick	Mr. Friese	Euregio Spree-Neiße-Bober
Mr. Oberdorfer/Mr. Jakl	Mr. Haberkorn	Euregio Egrensis
Mr. Jankowski	Mr. Kulik	Euroregion Nysa

³ Mr. Gammelgaard was nominated as member of the Executive Committee in July 2007

⁴ Following elections in the region Friuli Venezia Giulia Ms Comelli replaced Mr Ambrosi

⁵ Ms Colomina replaced Ms Repullo

⁶ Ms Gato replaced Ms Ferreiro

Mr. Melander	Ms. Backgren (not as Vice-Pr.)	Österböttens Förbund/Kvarken Radet
Mr. de Pauw	Mr. de Buck (not as Vice-Pr.)	Euregio Scheldemond (B/NL)
Ms. Arthurs/ Ms. Mullan	Mr. Molloy	NorthWestRegionCrossBorderGroup
Mr. Westman	Mr. Ronkainen	Bothnian Arc Association (S/F)
Mr. N.N.	N.N.	Euroregion Pomerania (PL/D/S)
Ms. Renner ⁷	Mr. Požarnik	Slovenia

3.2 Symposium

A symposium dealing with the „New EU Neighbourhood Policy“ took place after the General Assembly that focused on the needs of the host region and the AEBR members at the new external borders.

In the Round Table under the chairmanship of **Mr Lambert van Nistelrooij**, MEP and President of AEBR, new political and practical aspects were discussed.

The subject was introduced by following keynote speakers:

- **Paavo Väyrynen**, Minister of Foreign Trade and Development (FIN)
- **Emma Udwin**, Cabinet of EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy
- **Sergey Miroshnikov**, Director of Department of Federal Affairs, State and Local Governance, Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation (RUS)

In the discussion participated:

- **Jan Olbrycht**, MEP, Deputy Chairman of the Committee on Regional Development in the European Parliament
- **Andrzej Pruszkowski**, President of Bug Euroregion (PL/UA/BY), President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Voivodship Lubelskie
- **Iwona Kur**, NEEBOR (Network of Eastern European Border Regions) (PL)
- **Fulga Turcu**, Euroregion Siret-Prut-Nistru (RO/MD), Iasi County Council (RO)

After the symposium the members of the ad-hoc working committees on healthcare and external borders came together in order to discuss their further working programme.

3.3 Annual Conference

The topic of the Annual Conference 2007 was „**Innovative solutions for cross-border rural areas**“. Opening speeches were delivered by:

- **Timo Puttonen**, Executive director of South Karelia Region (FIN)
- **Heikki Järvenpää**, Chairman of Lappeenranta City Council (FIN)
- **Tatiana Vladimirova**, Committee of External relations, St. Petersburg city administration (RUS)
- **Lambert van Nistelrooij**, Member of the European Parliament, President of AEBR

⁷ Ms Renner replaced Mr Suvorov

In the first Round Table under the chairmanship of Mr Urpo Moisio, South Karelia (FIN), political and strategic aspects were discussed.

In the discussion participated:

- **François Maitia**, Vice-President Region of Aquitaine, Vice-President of AEBR (FR)
- **Josep Tortosa**, REDR (Spanish network on rural development) (ES)
- **Iwona Kur**, NEEBOR (Network of Eastern European Border Regions) (PL),
- **Steffen Rubach**, Executive Director, EuRegio Salzburg-Berchtesgadener Land-Traunstein (DE/AT)

In the second Round Table under the chairmanship of Mr **Sture Hermansson**, Executive Director, Värmland (SE), examples of best practices were presented.

In the second Round Table participated:

- **Caitriona Mullan**, Programme manager for Strategic Development, Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) (UK/IRL)
- **Erwin Schmitz**, Executive Director Euregio Rhein-Waal (DE/NL)
- **Christian Preußcher**, Executive Director Euroregion Elbe/Labe (DE/CZ)
- **Pieter Parmentier**, Stichting Stimuland (EUREGIO) (NL)
- **Antti Pätilä**, Director, Technopolis Ventures Kareltek (FI)

While closing the Annual Conference following final declaration was unanimously adopted:

Introduction

The reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 2003 and 2004 represent a major step forward in improving the competitiveness and sustainable development of farming activity in the EU. They set the framework for future reforms and also for new actions enhancing the development of rural areas.

Moreover, the Community's Strategic Guidelines for rural development lay down that the synergy between structural, employment and rural development policies needs to be encouraged. Member states should ensure complementarity and coherence between actions.

Rural regions occupy over ¾ of the EU's total surface area, border regions over 1/3. Rural regions and border regions together are therefore of crucial importance to the lives of all citizens. In view of this, it is of vital importance to preserve and further develop the wealth and diversity of rural areas, and of border areas in particular.

Postulates towards European and national level

The political objectives and actions should take into account:

- *constantly changing conditions due to economic and political globalisation and the growing world population;*
- *accelerating EU integration;*

- *the effects of EU enlargement on the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU and increasing interdependence between the EU and its neighbours;*
- *more territorial concentration of economic activities;*
- *the effects of demographic change and migration on the labour market and public utilities;*
- *the effects of climate change, growing scarcity of resources and consequently rising energy costs as well as growing utilisation of environmental potentials;*
- *that new EU policies for the period 2007-2013 at the internal and external borders and in consequence new policies for rural areas in the member states of the EU must meet major challenges that rural areas, in particular European border regions, are facing.*

Equal living conditions, including in rural areas and border regions, remain a key socio-political objective that has to be achieved through following actions:

- *It is in the political, economic and social interest of the EU and its Member States to foster the new principle of territorial cohesion.*
- *Extreme geographical variations (at both national and European level) must be avoided, in order to advance EU integration, avoid serious conflicts and take the legitimate interests of people in disadvantaged regions into account.*
- *According to the “Territorial Agenda” funding shouldn’t focus solely on the structurally strong and already positively developing national / regional centres at the expense of structurally weak rural peripheral areas, located often in border regions. Because policy promoting solely metropolitan regions is counterproductive.*
- *In accordance with the “Territorial Agenda” all endogenous potentials (metropolitan regions, agglomerations, medium-sized towns and rural areas) should be exploited.*
- *Many prosperous rural areas (cf. ESDP, Territorial Agenda), which demonstrate that economic growth and prosperity are not directly depending on the level of concentration should be used as good practices while enhancing the political framework in other parts of the European Union.*
- *European and national programmes should use the manifold development opportunities of rural areas, in particular in border and cross-border regions, in order to ensure a sustainable development of the European continent.*

Actions for the development of rural areas must be initiated in order to:

- *halt the decline of these areas, stem the population loss and brain drain as well as improve living conditions;*
- *counter imbalance geographical concentration of population and business in metropolitan regions and agglomerations by means of polycentric development, in particular by strengthening small and medium-sized centres (urban poles);*
- *exploit territorial potentials (including regional diversity) more effectively to foster growth and employment and focus in rural policy rather on “helping people to help themselves”;*

- *move towards a multifunctional agriculture, which makes a significant contribution to environmental protection and rural development;*
- *create sufficient job opportunities, this being one of the key prerequisites for equal living conditions in rural border areas;*
- *maintain development programmes for villages and LEADER-action groups (bottom-up-approach with enhanced methods = success story of the EU) with, if possible, innovative project approaches as network for the whole country and with competence circles for local / regional development;*
- *create conditions (e.g. in terms of infrastructure, taxes) enabling citizens of rural areas to work as commuters in larger centres.*

Recommendations and solutions for the regional / local level in border areas

Generally

As regards recommendations and solutions for the regional / local level it has to be considered that:

- *Rural areas are extremely manifold and differ considerably from one region to another.*
- *Specific statements on individual border or cross-border regions are very difficult, in particular with regard to challenges affecting generally all rural areas. Particular proposals concerning opportunities and solutions can be rather defined for border regions.*
- *Due to the diversity of rural areas and the difficulty as regards targeted statements on individual border regions, only general conclusions are possible that should be used as a frame while elaborating specific cross-border solutions taking into account the individual geographical conditions of the regions.*

Partnership of the regional / local level with the European and national level

In partnership with national authorities regions / border regions need to take the future into their own hands and develop active cross-border cooperation in all areas. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, including following actions:

- *development of an overall strategy for the sustainable development of rural areas, not only in the form of agricultural subsidies but also by strengthening the third pillar of the agricultural policy from 2007, namely rural development;*
- *development of integrated cross-border models at regional / local level with real targets, action areas as well as project ideas, in sectors such as the economy, innovation and research, local planning and urban development, landscaping, social infrastructure, technical infrastructure, culture and tourism;*
- *cross-border exploitation of the LEADER-programme;*
- *closer cooperation between political, administrative and economic players and non-governmental organisations (great creative potential through cross-border competence circles);*
- *creating "regional clusters" in peripheral rural areas with due regard for regional characteristics (e.g. for sport/wellness/health; national parks/nature reserves and the environment; renewable resources/alternative energy generation; innovation and research centres);*

- *ensure adequate public utility provision with appropriate facilities, another key factor in ensuring equal living conditions. Related to this is the ability of medium-sized and smaller centres to function, something that depends very much on sufficient population levels (demographic development) in the surrounding area of influence and on proper accessibility, particularly in sparsely populated rural border regions;*
- *develop adequate financial instruments for services, as they can be very expensive in rural areas;*
- *facilitate moving from cities to rural areas (e.g. tax incentives, housing support, particular local welcome to new residents in rural areas) and transfer public jobs to rural areas (e.g. in scientific, service and energy sector);*
- *area-wide broadband connection in rural border regions;*
- *internet training at different age levels („the digital school“);*
- *priority “children culture in the countryside” (Culture Kids).*

Specific political action fields of the regional and local level

Rural regions, in particular thinly populated border areas with major structural problems, require completely different measures from urban or suburban areas. The main challenge is to actively support and shape inevitable structural change in rural areas and border regions and so curb a potential downward spiral within these regions. This can be done by:

- *exploiting endogenous national and cross-border potentials in a consistent way;*
- *strengthening a number of key centres within rural areas;*
- *closer cooperation between municipal and regional associations, new innovative partnerships between centres of different levels with the surrounding rural area, in which the strongest players (larger centres) bear the greatest responsibility (advantage: enables potentials to be pooled, disadvantage: risk of loss of identity);*
- *using the decreasing financial resources available a) to bring about the necessary concentration and b) to distribute tasks sensibly between regional and local authorities;*
- *combine potentials of rural areas on both sides of borders (economic, cultural, social and infrastructure), as solely in this way the necessary capacity (critical mass) for worthwhile measures, investments and projects can be created (universities, hospitals, services, joint education institutes etc.), e.g. cross-border research clusters or “life science” regions;*
- *fostering the creation of new businesses, the foundation and expansion of SME, stimulating investments, strengthening existing facilities inclusively training (management, marketing, application of new technologies, information technology);*
- *The following practical measures could be taken:*
- *Strengthening new forms of concentration, especially in thinly populated border areas, for example by redefining centres (including cross-border) and minimum supply standards:*

- *existing population concentrations around medium-sized and small towns should be strengthened, so that these towns can serve both to encourage development and offset inevitable emigration and concentration processes, thereby countering the insidious processes of wide-scale population loss and passive restructuring;*
- *efforts must be made to preserve educational and social institutions by developing innovative and creative public utility solutions;*
- *the effects of demographic change in thinly populated rural areas/border regions should be taken into account in the development of transport infrastructure (especially public transport), the housing market (older population) and tourism (declining population, older population);*
- *a certified status could be awarded to important urban regions (urban networks), and even to European cross-border metropolitan regions in border areas;*
- *there should be regional and local cooperation in the cross-border areas of influence of large centres and in divided border towns/cities.*
- *Economic development and education are critical factors in the development of rural border areas and the exploitation of their endogenous potentials. Measures here include:*
 - *diversifying sectoral structures in good time (the effects of demographic change only manifest themselves in the medium term);*
 - *examining the possibilities of immigration in areas where skilled workers are lacking;*
 - *training policy and adult education for regional / local development (country and town planning, social development, environment, project development, self-help groups e.g. in health) with artists as multipliers;*
 - *adapting training structures to older people;*
 - *learning the language of the neighbour at all school levels;*
 - *gearing education network planning to future needs: likewise with cooperation between local authorities and schools (e.g. classes covering more than one school year or boarding schools as alternatives to long-distance daily school transport);*
 - *providing cross-border public and private services;*
 - *organising cross-border labour markets.*
- *Adequate and accessible services are a critical factor in preventing population loss:*
 - *in terms of health care, the possibilities of telemedicine in rural areas and mobile services in specialist healthcare fields should be exploited;*
 - *in terms of public utilities, such as food and other daily consumer goods and services (medicine, post, etc.), certain types of service should be offered at a single shop, joint ordering services set up and mobile sales possibilities created;*
- *Maintaining good transport links and accessibility is key to the future of rural/border regions:*
 - *the priority should be to maintain existing transport infrastructures rather than building new ones.*
 - *local public transport provision should be secured and adapted where necessary (e.g. taxi-buses and taxis, community buses, etc.).*

- *the mobility and accessibility needs of older citizens should be taken into account (e.g. hospitals, specific medical centres).*
- *Active management of the housing market has an increasingly important role to play in keeping people in these areas and bringing new people in. In view of this, measures must be implemented that take account of the ageing of the population and of lifestyle diversity, for example:*
 - *providing enough housing for singles and couples;*
 - *modernising housing blocks, which have a role to play in social cohesion (e.g. new exploitation possibilities for farming land);*
 - *meeting the growing demand for housing for older people;*
 - *building attractive mixed housing, in which young and older people can live with and side by side with one another.*
- *Standards in technical supply and disposal in peripheral rural areas, which differ from those in urban areas, should be examined (should all small settlements be connected to a central sewage treatment plant or are small treatment plants environmentally viable?).*

3.4 Bestowal of the AEBR Award 2007

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 „Innovative solution for border rural areas“ the award was bestowed upon the Euregio Rhein-Waal (D/NL) for its project “Agriculture without borders.” The award was officially handed over on 9 October 2007 in Brussels by the President of the Committee of the Regions, Mr Michel Delebarre and the Chairman of the AEBR Jury, Mr Reinhold Kolck.

All competing applicants received certificates by the President of the Committee of the Regions, Mr Michel Delebarre. A personal award was not bestowed in 2007.

4. Executive Committee

The meetings of the Executive Committee took place on:

30/31 March 2007 in Tujillo, Extremadura (ES),
 29/30 June 2007 in Vilnius, Euroregion Nemunas, (LT)
 13 September 2007 in Lappeenranta, South Karelia (FI)
 30 November/1 December 2007 in Nyiregyhaza, Carpathian Euroregion (HU).

Throughout the year 2007, the Executive Committee dealt in particular with following topics:

- European Cohesion and Regional Policy
 - Perspectives 2007-2013
 - Cohesion and Structural Policy after 2013
- Neighbourhood and Partnership Programme
- Legal instrument of the EU
- Rural areas and border regions
- Cross-border healthcare

- Cooperation of universities and research centres
- Territorial Agenda and Action Programme
- Ombudsman for border issues in the European Parliament
- Publication „Cooperation between European Border Regions – Review and Perspectives“ (known first as White Paper on European Border Regions)
- Cooperation at European level
- Trans-European Transport Networks (halftime review of the White Book on Transport)
- Finalisation of the INTERREG IIIC-Project RFO “Change on Borders”
- AEBR Award „Sail of Papenburg“ 2007
- Financial matters.

Extensive reports were given on most of the topics. The Executive Committee discussed them and elaborated special recommendations and remarks concerning cross-border cooperation. On that basis, demands on the European and national levels were worked out. The border and cross-border regions received written information about the recommendations and the reactions of the European and national levels (successes or failures of interventions).

Furthermore, the Executive Committee also treated organisational and internal issues, such as AEBR events (special fora), work content, financial matters, advisory committee and future tasks and perspectives of AEBR.

In line with the General Assembly it has been repeatedly stressed by the Executive Committee that AEBR should remain an autonomous organisation, both in terms of funding and contents. An increase of membership fees was therefore indispensable, in order to maintain the ability to work at the same level as before.

With the aim to better involve the Vice-Presidents in the working processes of AEBR in addition to the Executive Committee that works in line with the stipulations of the statutes a smaller political Presidium should meet on a trial basis in the future. The new gremium should include the President, the Vice-Presidents, the Treasurer and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee. Occasionally, further personalities could be invited to the meetings.

Despite the efforts of the Secretary General in favour of this political Presidium it was not possible so far to set a date for a meeting in 2007 or in 2008.

5. Main Themes in 2007

5.1 European Cohesion and Regional Policy

Mr Dirk Ahner was chosen for the position of the new Director General in the DG REGIO of the EU Commission. After his nomination the Secretariat General of AEBR got immediately in contact with him. First meeting took place with the Vice-President of AEBR, Mr Reinhold Kolck.

The Secretariat General took position on following EU documents / participated in following conferences:

- „Regions for economic change“,
- „Innovation through Regional Policy of the EU“,
- „Regional Policy and demographic challenges“,

- „Promotion of competitiveness through innovative technologies and products and through functioning communities“,
- Fourth Cohesion Forum on 21/22 June 2007.

While modifying the working structures of DG REGIO, there were serious plans in the year 2007 to transfer the responsibility for cross-border cooperation from the independent unit for territorial cooperation once again to national ERDF units (mainstreaming). The consequence would have been not only a disadvantageous position compared with the interregional and transnational cooperation remaining in one single unit but also a higher renationalisation risk in INTERREG A Programmes. Thanks to a quick AEBR intervention these plans were given up.

A further important priority was to get involved in time in the interim evaluation process of the programming period 2007-2013 and in the preparation of the programming period beyond 2013. On the occasion of the Executive Committee meeting on 30 November / 1 December 2007 in Nyiregyhaza (Carpathian Euroregion, Hungary) a draft discussion paper was adopted with the title „Cross-border cooperation - European priority and political objective of the EU beyond 2013.“ After having included some suggestions and proposals for modifications the Secretary General presented this paper to DG REGIO of the EU Commission in December 2007. Because the AEBR expected that the approval of all structural funds programmes in the EU Commission, especially in the DG Regio, will be followed by a lively discussion on the second half of the programming period 2007-2013 and the future after 2013.

Already on 4 December 2007 the Secretary General and a member of the Advisory Committee had the opportunity to discuss the most significant messages of the document with Director General Ahner and some representatives of the DG REGIO on the occasion of a meeting organised by the Euregio Bayerischer Wald / Böhmerwald in Brussels. The Committee of the Regions has been also contacted with regard to the paper.

The aim of the paper containing a list with arguments is to accompany the discussions beginning now in the EU Commission and to get involved on a permanent basis in the debates.

As part of territorial cooperation the cross-border cooperation should remain a political priority in the future with particular status as regards the contents and funding.

Closely related to these efforts is the opinion of AEBR on the 4th Cohesion Report of the EU.

In context of the Cohesion Policy the AEBR discussed, furthermore, the different funding possibilities from the European Fund for Regional Development (EFRD), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF).

While INTERREG A is focusing solely on cross-border cooperation, other funding forms open manifold possibilities for implementation of specific projects at the border (principally also cross-border projects). For this reason, based on the article of Director General, Mr Dirk Ahner, the AEBR elaborated a working document „Coherence and complementarity“ for its members and friends that describes how border regions, in particular in rural areas, can make full use of these funds:

*While planning and implementing cohesion policies and rural development programmes an optimal **funding mix from the different funds** should be ensured in order to achieve a **maximal added value**. The local / regional actors play a **key coordinating role**. In the programming period 2007-2013 the rural development funding was transferred to EAFRD. Also in the rural development policy the main objectives of the EU - more competitiveness, higher employment, and sustainability - should be better taken into account.*

According to the regulations governing EU funds **coherence and complementarity** play an **important role** while negotiating and implementing the national strategic plans and based on them, the mostly regional programmes. With reference to all financial instruments of the EU the regulations and guidelines recommend the definition of selection criteria (demarcation lines) for the national and regional plans and programmes due to the possibility of **interferences**. Clear demarcation lines should be developed in the rural development strategies depending primarily **on regional / local considerations**. These criteria are important in particular in axis 3 of the EAFRD-programme.

From EAFRD and ERDF could be supported for example:

- mini-enterprises,
- development of tourism offers,
- small-scale infrastructures encouraging entrepreneurship,
- measures improving the quality of life in rural areas,
- basic services (including cultural events and leisure activities),
- village modernisation,
- preservation of cultural heritage,
- development of NATURA 2000-areas.

Theoretically EAFRD and ESF could support:

- education and training for rural development actors,
- training and information of employees in agriculture.

As recommendation the demarcation lines defined by member states and the funds managing authorities the funds could be based on:

- action and target group related criteria (agriculture versus non-agricultural sectors),
- their spatial impact (regional versus local),
- project size or involved communities.

As general recommendation actions in rural areas supported from **ERDF and ESF** should focus on **areas and target groups not related to agriculture** (e.g. improved connection between urban and rural areas through broad band services). In order to avoid the risk of overlapping or funding gaps for rural development it's of crucial importance to ensure the coherence and complementarity of the EU funds by means of a comprehensive strategy development and a coordinated assistance and assessment by the funds managing authorities.

In this context **the main questions addressed to border and cross-border regions** are as follows:

- To what extend regional/local bodies will be/are involved in the development/implementation of the national strategic plans?
- Have border and cross-border regions examined, to what extend the funds managing authorities have eliminated the risk of overlapping / funding gaps?

- *To what extent border and cross-border regions have helped/can help avoid overlapping and funding gaps with conceptualisation, elaboration and implementation of cross-border programmes?*

5.2 **European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation**

As the AEBR had elaborated the background study on the legal instrument for the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission (DG REGIO) it was actively involved in the developments accompanying the adoption of the regulation and could achieve even in the final phase some improvements. Also during the implementation process of the regulation on EGTC the Secretariat General permanently cooperated with the DG REGIO and the Committee of the Regions. The latter has the task to observe the developments in individual member states regarding this subject and to examine the foundation process of EGTC.

Due to lacking practical experiences the implementation of EGTC raised some difficulties and was treated in the regions with some reservation. Besides, till the end of 2007 only few member states had taken all promised steps necessary for the implementation of EGTC.

The draft INTERACT Manual on EGTC used rather a scientific approach than practical examples. Difficulties presented in the manual are not in line with the experiences of AEBR with cross-border cooperation and legal working communities in practice. The position of AEBR with proposals for improvements was used nearly completely for the revision of the manual in the end of 2007 / beginning of 2008.

The AEBR forwarded also to the DG REGIO of the EU Commission and the Committee of the Regions following opinion regarding the implementation of EGTC:

- *The EGTC can be applied in many cross-border and also large interregional and transnational projects (e.g. infrastructure, environmental projects etc.)*
- *The EGTC will be used by several cross-border structures for general cross-border cooperation (without EU funding programmes).*
- *It can't be estimated to which extent the EGTC will be used for future cross-border funding programmes of the EU. The reason is that usually a decentralised cross-border co-operation at regional / local level takes place without the involvement of the national state. However, in EU programmes the involvement of states is indispensable, alone for the reason that the national co-financing is needed. It can't be expected that the states would accept voting them down by the majority of the regional / local level. Majority votes are possible in an EGTC.*
- *The EU-programmes that have up to now been working with an agreement between the regional / local level and the states on both sides of the border will prefer to continue this way (while further improving the agreement).*
- *As regards interregional and transnational cooperation on programme level, the EGTC will certainly not be applied very often due to the fact that the programme partners will continue their work on the basis of previous agreements, which will be improved. Considering that an EGTC has a fixed office, joint finances and is subject to national control etc., it is a too "difficult" legal instrument for those forms of cooperation (except the project level).*

The DG REGIO published in September 2007 an INTERREG IVC Manual. A summary of the manual with most important elements (general information, eligible actions) and critical remarks was elaborated by AEBR.

The aim of the summary was to provide brief information on the new INTERREG IVC Programme to partners in border and cross-border regions and to encourage all partners that are interesting in an own application or participation in an INTERREG IVC project to read the Manual.

5.3 Territorial Agenda

While adopting (24/25 May 2007) and implementing the Territorial Agenda the detailed discussions on the occasion of the General Assembly in Pamplona in the end of 2006 and the extensive argumentative final declaration of AEBR were taken into account. It's due to the German and afterwards the Portuguese Council Presidency that practically all postulates were considered and much attention was paid to cross-border cooperation in the Territorial Agenda. It has also to be stressed that the position of AEBR was comparable with the position of member states, as it was treated throughout the whole process as a partner.

The Portuguese Council Presidency further enhanced the Territorial Agenda through following working packages:

- First Action Programme for the implementation of the Territorial Agenda,
- Action Templates,
- Contributions of ministers for spatial development on the public debates concerning the Green Paper „Adapting to climate change in Europe – options for EU action“,
- Conclusions of the Portuguese Council Presidency on territorial cohesion.

While the Territorial Agenda is focusing on contents discussed during the General Assembly of AEBR in Pamplona in 2006, the Action Programme is dealing mainly with the processes and the implementation. Main objective of AEBR now is to ensure a detailed discussion with important stakeholders in cross-border cooperation.

5.4 Cross-border healthcare

Initialised by AEBR, which has gathered some practical experiences from several border regions throughout the past years, the subject is getting increasing attention in practice and politics. Provision of healthcare services is a social task with a strong regional impact. It includes above all:

- The optimisation of medicine and life quality,
- Creation of networks for cross-border healthcare services,
- Exchange of experiences between border areas.

These activities are of particular importance for rural border areas with nationally limited operation and supply area. In some further developed cross-border structures, mostly within an agglomeration, the cooperation is already something natural.

The Executive Committee discussed this important subject in all meetings in 2007. On the occasion of the meeting in Trujillo on 30/31 March 2007 the responsible min-

ister for regional policy, Mr Fernandez Vara (today the Prime-Minister), confirmed in a detailed speech the importance of the subject and promised to support AEBR in any possible way.

After the first AEBR Forum "Cross-border healthcare" had taken place in 2005 in cooperation with the Regio Basiliensis and Euregio TriRhena, the Secretariat General had the opportunity to acquire new knowledge on the subject while participating in the „EUREGIO“ project implemented by the Land North Rhine-Westphalia. From 300 different healthcare projects reported to the project leader ten best were chosen as best-practice examples. The project's final report includes several important paragraphs from the AEBR Paper on cross-border healthcare (2006/2007).

An Ad-hoc Working Committee of AEBR on cross-border healthcare began its work in 2007. All interested border regions were encouraged to cooperate in this network and asked to fill in a questionnaire. Surprising was, however, that in spite of the strong interest in joining the Ad-hoc Working Committee only few regions sent their answers to the questionnaire.

At the same time in cooperation with the Regio Basiliensis and the Euregio TriRhena the Secretariat General was preparing a second AEBR Forum dealing with „Cross-border healthcare“ in Basle (SUI). The forum should focus on some specific aspects, as e.g. cross-border telemedicine, electronic chip cards, cooperation between health insurances.

With partners from Upper Rhine the AEBR would like to organise this AEBR Forum regularly, in order to discuss recent developments in healthcare. The work of AEBR on this subject should be based, as before, on the AEBR Position Paper elaborated in 2007 that focuses on the reasons for cooperation, cooperation opportunities, difficulties and solutions as well as positive conditions and the role of Euroregions. The paper should be regularly actualised with the support of the Advisory Committee.

5.5 Cross-border cooperation between universities and research centres

Since 2004 Viktor Freiherr von Malchus gave particular attention to universities and research centres (three surveys by the end of 2006) that are more and more an important location factor for regions. He gathered many important materials that should be used for an AEBR publication including a rather describing part, a summary chart and recommendations for cross-border regions as regards the cooperation between universities and research centres. In the end of 2007 / beginning of 2008 a summary paper with first results of the surveys was presented:

Background

Europe is moving towards a future without borders, towards a European knowledge society! European national states are growing together and Europe has become more than a vision only.

*Beyond the Economic and Monetary Union a **European Knowledge Area** is growing and with it the innovation and cooperation capability of European states and regions and the ability of citizens, particularly in European border regions, to get involved in this process. The vision „**Education and knowledge without borders**“ is becoming more and more a reality.*

In its communication on „The role of universities in the Europe of knowledge“ (COM 2003/58) the European Commission analysed new challenges for higher education in

Europe. According to the Commission a debate on the future of European universities is necessary focusing on:

- long-term adequate funding for universities,
- efficient allocation of funds and
- excellence generation through cooperation, networking and higher international attractiveness.

Following Alfred Nobel's recommendation from 19th century ("With growing knowledge grows welfare") while adopting the „Bologna Declaration“ in 1999 the European ministers on education encouraged all to create jointly a European Higher Education area and to improve the position of European education systems in global competition.

Survey of AEBR

Due to the fact that an important first step towards a competitive European Higher Education area in border regions is the knowledge of as well as the exchange of information and best practices on cooperation between different regional universities, higher education institutions and research centres the Executive Committee of AEBR decided to carry out a survey on „Cooperation between universities and higher education institutions in Europe's border regions“. This knowledge is an important condition facilitating practical cross-border cooperation in border regions between universities etc. both in terms of research, education and professional training and the cooperation with business and public administration.

Geographical distribution of answers:

European areas	Answers from border and cross-border regions (2003)
Northern Europe and Baltic Sea:	12
Central and Eastern Europe:	6
North-West Europe:	6
Alps and Danube area:	6
South-West Europe - Western Mediterranean:	6
South-East Europe - Eastern Mediterranean:	0
Europe	36 regions

Up to now the AEBR has received reports on cooperation from 120 of 146 border and cross-border regions in Europe, i.e. from 80% of all border areas.

Based on the replies and reports first important conclusions on cross-border cooperation between universities and higher education institutions can be summarised as follows:

1. Universities and higher educations institutes cooperate mainly in border and cross-border regions where their headquarters are located. Some universities work also with other universities and higher education institutions at European and global level.
2. Cooperation between universities, higher education institutions and research centres is usually based on bilateral, trilateral and multilateral agreements on

overall and cross-border cooperation, declarations and projects, often with long tradition. Other universities, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe have begun to cooperate in the early 90s. Manifold European cooperation areas, priorities and networks have been created in recent years.

Cross-border higher education policy in research and cooperation areas

Compared with other facilities, universities in border regions are different as regards its specific location and partially also its mission. Interregional and cross-border cooperation, even though with highly different intensity, had become something natural for them long before the Bologna process was launched.

Following research and cooperation areas were created in European border regions in the past decades:

- **In Northern Baltic Sea area** (SE/FI/NO) North Calotte + Karelia + Tornedalsrådet + Kvarken Council;
- **In Copenhagen-Malmö area** (Öresund-Science-Region) 12 universities work in 4 expert networks together;
- **Danish-German border** with close cooperation between universities, higher education institutes and research centres in Sønderjylland and Flensburg;
- **In Oder river-area Euroregion „PRO EUROPA VIADRINA“** – with universities in Potsdam + Szczecin + Poznań, foundation of „Collegium Polonicum“ + cooperation in **Spree-Neisse-Bober-area** with 4 universities and higher education institutes;
- **EUREGIO** with universities in Twente, Münster, Osnabrück and 4 universities of applied sciences;
- **In Euregio Maas-Rhein** (Aachen-Maastricht-Lüttich area);
- **In SaarLorLux area** = „European Core Area for Education and Research“ with European dimension (Europe Institute);
- **In Upper Rhine region** „Research area in Upper Rhine region“ with 7 universities and several other higher education institutes (European Confederation of Upper Rhine Universities – EUCOR);
- **In Alps-Adria area** – Rectors’ conference with 50 higher education institutes;
- **In Alps Maritimes/ Cuneo Imperia area** (5 universities and 8 institutes);
- **Euroregion Lower Danube** (MD/RO/UA) with cooperation between 10 universities and general cooperation in education;
- **Pyrenees** (traditional cooperation between 8 universities);
- **Castilla y León/ Regiao Norte** = „Polo Universitario Transfronteriza“.

There are ca. 25 research areas in European border regions that must be analysed in detail.

The objectives of **research and cooperation areas** are as follows:

- Adoption of new overall and regional strategies;
- Education, division of tasks, improvement of performance as priorities;
- Cross-border education and research;

- *Cooperation with politics, economy and administration with the aim to further develop the region through implementation and application of scientific know-how.*

Nearly all cooperation forms between universities have to fulfil following tasks:

- *Coordination of research and education, introduction of joint courses and degree programmes;*
- *Mutual utilisation of knowledge and experiences and employment of technical staff;*
- *Exchange of students and teachers, e.g. with scholarships;*
- *Cross-border organisation of conferences and symposia,*
- *Courses and summer universities;*
- *Launching joint courses and institutes;*
- *Supporting regional development and developing new research facilities for the benefit of the region;*
- *Implementing joint scientific ideas and projects;*
- *Adult education: Launching interuniversity further training programmes;*
- *Fostering cooperation between East and West, North and South;*
- *Improving knowledge skills, at least in 3 languages (Swiss model) – Dissemination of knowledge on the history and culture of the region;*
- *Joint cross-border publicity.*

Although the budgets are low, cooperation at European and cross-border level has been further developed thanks to many new institutes and new joint project ideas. Usually, these initiatives are launched by universities and other higher education institutes and are financially supported by national and European programmes.

The manifold efforts of universities and higher education institutes to improve cooperation at cross-border, European and global level are respectable. However, it will be hardly possible to implement the structural changes of the Bologna Process inclusively the proposals of Berlin till 2010, as initially planned.

The process of Europeisation requires from universities and higher education institutes, from teachers and administrations in all parts and regions of Europe the examination of existing courses and even the conceptualisation of fully new programmes closing with a bachelor or master degree. Only in this way a European Higher Education Area, which respects and highlights the diversity and the regional differences, can be created.

*A particular task of universities and higher education institutes is **the cross-border cooperation** with corresponding facilities on the other side of the border. The reports on universities from many border regions confirm, however, that a **“higher awareness of cross-border cooperation as necessary for European integration”** and the **„creation and promotion of political will for cooperation”** are quite often lacking.*

5.6 Ombudsman for border issues in the EU

Following a meeting on 21 July 2006 with the chairman of the EVP/ED parliamentary group in the European Parliament, Mr Hans-Gerd Pöttering, the chairman of the

Committee on Foreign Affairs, Mr Elmar Brok, the chairman of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Mr Jo Leinen, the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mr Ingo Friedrich and the spokeswomen of the political groups in the Committee on Regional Development, Mrs Constanze Krehl (Socialist group) and Mrs Elisabeth Schroedter (Greens) following petition was forwarded on 14 February 2007 to the newly elected President of the European Parliament, Mr Hans-Gerd Pöttering:

“The European Parliament decides:

The Committee on Regional Development is responsible for cross-border co-operation and nominates a permanent rapporteur.

Justification:

General background:

Cross-border co-operation is not as much a national but primarily a European priority and a political objective of the EU.

Cross-border co-operation creates European, institutional, economic and socio-cultural added values and contributes verifiably to the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy.

Cross-border co-operation is of particular importance within the territorial co-operation (74 % of the funds).

The EU has the unique opportunity to directly communicate with citizens in border areas (about 32 % of the EU-population live in border areas covering 40 % of the EU-territory).

On the one hand the attitude of citizens in border areas towards the EU is highly positive, but on the other hand nobody else as the citizens in border areas is more concerned with the difficulties of the European unification process, as at the borders, in the “small Europe”, like in a mirror problems of the “big EU” are reflected (they are the result of e.g. different structures, competences and social low etc.).

Special investigations in Scandinavia and conclusions of the AEBR show unani- mously that despite the European single market many daily border problems further on exist and new problems emerge at the EU internal and external borders.

Citizens on both sides of the border are confronted with these problems in their daily life and in their contacts across the border. They wish a solution for these problems and address mainly the regional / local level while the reasons are mostly of Euro- pean and national nature.

These problems can be observed specifically as regards e.g.:

- *Cross-border rescue and civil protection,*
- *Cross-border use of or investments in health care facilities,*
- *Limited mobility of commuters (social insurance, acknowledgement of di- ploma etc.)*
- *Cross-border water, wastewater and waste disposal facilities,*
- *Cross-border problems related to the mobility of employees,*

- *Realisation of a cross-border labour market.*

With INTERREG I – III programmes the European Union has provided substantial assistance and the EU funds proved to have an accelerating impact on cross-border co-operation.

Political role of the Committee on Regional Development in cross-border co-operation

Cross-border co-operation is a political priority within the territorial co-operation in 2007 - 2013. Important sections of the overall cross-border co-operation will be supported by EU Programmes.

After having adopted the regulations on ERDF and on territorial co-operation the European Parliament, in particular the Committee on Regional Development, will be no more than just informed about the implementation of EU Programmes.

However, 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 cross-border co-operation to European integration it is of crucial political 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**” was 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 put on the agenda of the Committee on Regional Development as a separate item.

The Parliament recommends in this context a close co-operation with the Association of European Borders Regions that is the sole European regional organisation dealing with this subject, has Europe-wide a representative number of members and has the respective experience.

Following the first positive answers throughout the year 2007 the AEBR hopes that such rapporteur will be nominated in 2008.”

5.7 RFO Change on Borders

In the year 2007 the INTERREG IIIC project RFO „Change on Borders“ was finalised. 25 partners participated in this project.

Three Thematic Forums were created in the RFO that focused on future strategies for cross-border cooperation:

- Spatial planning, cross-border structures and environment under the chairmanship of the region of North Karelia (FI)
- Business and labour market under the chairmanship of the region Friuli Venezia Giulia (IT)
- Social and cultural cooperation under the chairmanship of the province of Gelderland (NL).

The meetings of the Thematic Forums took place on:

- 30 January - 2 February 2007 in Karlstadt, Värmland (SE)
- 22 March – 24 March 2007 together with the RFO Annual Conference in Linz / Krems (AT);
- 14 -15 May 2007 in Xanthi, Eastern Macedonia (GR)
- 21 - 22 June 2007 in Lublin (PL).

The project was officially closed on 22-24 October 2007 with a Final Conference that took place in Düsseldorf (DE).

5.8 *Political Forums of AEBR*

Forums of AEBR focus on specific important subjects. In the year 2007 two such forums were organised.

On 12 March 2007 in the monastery of Seon, Euregio Salzburg-Berchtesgadener Land-Traunstein (AT/D) a forum on the subject „Rural areas in border regions“ took place. The results of the forum were used while preparing the Annual Conference that took place in the autumn in Lappeenranta, South Karelia (FI). About 50 participants attended the forum.

The programme included following contents:

- The conflict between metropolitan regions and rural areas, particularly in border regions – An introduction to the topic, with a view from the EuRegio Salzburg – Berchtesgadener Land – Traunstein,
- Experiences, perspectives and financial promotion for the development of rural areas from the point of view of the European Union: new regulations – strategic basis – approach,
- National and regional programme planning for 2007-2013. The case of Germany (Bavaria) and Austria (Salzburg): Outlines – Partners – Assessment,
- Problems, Opportunities and Approaches in several rural border areas - reports from the experience:
 - Sparsely populated border regions in Northern Europe,
 - Densely populated rural areas in Central Europe,
 - Rural areas in mountain regions,
 - Rural areas in border regions from the Mediterranean,
- New Forms of Interregional Co-operation for European SME's (An innovative solution for Europe to face global challenges),
- Strategies for the development of rural regions in Europe,
- Final debate, summary of results and adoption of a common declaration towards the Leipzig European Council on 24-25 May 2007.

On 29 November 2007 fifty participants discussed in Nyíregyháza (H): “Current Questions of Border Areas at the new EU External Borders.” Following aspects were highlighted in the debate:

- The implementation of the New EU Neighbourhood Policy at regional level,
- Foreign affairs of the Hungarian Republic,
- Experiences with CBC at the Finnish-Russian Border,
- Cooperation in the Northern Part of the EU external border area,

- The possible effect of the Schengen Border for CBC in the Carpathian Euroregion from the point of view of Ukraine,
- The future cooperation and strategic development priorities in the Carpathian Euroregion,
- Cooperation in the Southern Part of the EU external border area.

5.9 Cooperation with ESPON, INTERACT, EURISY and MOT

ESPON

The cooperation with ESPON initialised in 2006 was intensified in a systematic way. Several meetings took place with the director, Mr Peter Mehlbye, with the aim to discuss the opportunities for participation 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, in particular regions should have the possibility to introduce regionally interesting subjects 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.“ As ESPON showed much interest in this project idea, based on it the AEBR elaborated a first concept. The experience shows that cross-border development strategies, if possible supported by sectoral development strategies (infrastructure, economy, innovation, research, tourism, culture etc.) are of high value, as national spatial development plans and programmes end at the border. Cross-border development strategies have been elaborated only along the Rhine river so far (Upper Rhine, German-Dutch border). In the new member states and Southern Europe there are no such strategies at all.

On 1-2 August 2007 the project was discussed in the AEBR Advisory Committee with Peter Mehlbye. Further discussions took place in October in Luxembourg and in the end of 2007 a project application for the next call for proposals expected in the beginning of 2008 was finalised.

INTERACT

The Executive Committee is determined to intensify the cooperation with INTERACT even if the relations were quite complicated in the past. It turned out that generally INTERACT is not organising any direct tenders 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 doesn't take place within INTERACT.

On 11 June 2007 AEBR participated in an INTERACT Seminar on maritime INTERREG Programmes in Malmö (S). On the occasion of this seminar the AEBR document on maritime cooperation was presented. In autumn 2007 the AEBR participated in an INTERACT Seminar on the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). The remarks of AEBR made towards the end of the discussions were included in the summary paper of the seminar.

It has to be mentioned, furthermore, that AEBR elaborated an extensive opinion on the INTERACT Manual on EGTC (see chapter EGTC). The opinion as well was completely considered in the revised version of the manual.

EURISY

The AEBR participated on 29-30 May 2007 in the conference „Future Challenges for Local and Regions Authorities: How can Space Technology help?“ that took place in Barcelona, Spain.

As EURISY is practically not dealing with cross-border subjects at all, further cooperation is reasonable only on particular occasions.

MOT

In the last 10 years the cooperation with the French organisation „Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière“ (MOT) was occasional. The EuroMot founded in 2007 should not be in competition with AEBR. An agreement on future cooperation was adopted.

5.10 AEBR Publications

Revised map of European Border Regions

It has to be stressed once again that it is not a map presenting INTERREG-Programmes, interregional cooperation structures or city partnerships. It's a map of cross-border regions including members and friends of AEBR. A revised version of the map was published in 2007 with the financial support of the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs during the German Council Presidency.

The print run was chosen in such a way that the map could be also published in official documents dealing with the Territorial Agenda.

White Paper on European Border Regions

Based on the offers of some publishing houses the Executive Committee decided to publish the White Paper with the title „Cooperation between European Border Regions – Review and Perspectives“ in German, English and French. Throughout the year 2007 the text was completed. A bibliography and a chronology were included in the paper. The German final version was forwarded in the end of 2007 to the editor.

6. 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 via 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. Other important dialogue partners of AEBR are the “Committee on Foreign Affairs“ and the “Committee on Constitutional Affairs“.

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

The AEBR made also efforts to establish good relations with new directors and desk-officers that it had had already with their predecessors.

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

- 11 December 2007: Meeting with the President of the European Commission, Mr José Manuel Barroso. Participants: President of AEBR, Lambert van Nistelrooij,
- 18 December 2007: Structured Dialogue with Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner. The AEBR was represented by the President, Mr Lambert van Nistelrooij (main themes: external borders and territorial cooperation).

In December a meeting with the Director General, Mr Dirk Ahner, took place in Brussels on the invitation of the Euregio Bayerischer Wald/Böhmerwald. The Secretary General, Mr Martín Guillermo-Ramírez and the honorary member, Mr Jens Gabbe, attended the meeting. The discussion focused on the conceptualisation of the cohesion and structural policy after 2013.

As regards the cooperation with the Committee of the Regions (CoR) throughout the whole year 2007 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. In 2007 two meetings of the Secretaries General took place.

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

- 2-3 May 2007: Conference on European Values, Münster (DE)
- 5-7 June 2007: Plenary Session of CoR and Forum on Plan D „Communicating Europe, Going Local“, Brussels (B)
- 8-11 October 2007: Open Days 2007, Brussels (B).

Besides, in 2007 the CoR-AEBR Action Plan was elaborated by Mr Stahl, Secretary General of CoR and Martín Guillermo-Ramírez, Secretary General of AEBR (signed in the beginning of 2008) defining the cooperation priorities for the future:

- Joint activities on territorial cooperation and EGTC,
- Participation of AEBR in the meetings of CoR Commissions with rapporteurs,
- Structured dialogue,
- Organisation of joint conferences, seminars and events.

Contacts with the European Economic and Social Committee concerned mostly individual questions: in 2007 particularly the report on Euroregions (rapporteur: Zufiaur). Important contents and recommendations based on AEBR documents (definition, added value, solutions etc.) were considered in the report.

Cooperation dating back to the 1960s with the Council of Europe remains quite intensive. Once a year the Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities should participate in a meeting of the AEBR Executive Committee in order to improve the exchange of experiences. The AEBR attended numerous Council of Europe seminars, particularly in Central Europe. It had taken part in the plenary session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in the end of May / beginning of June 2007 in Strasbourg. AEBR is a permanent member of the main committee of the CLRAE and in the Committee of Experts for Transfrontier Cooperation. In 2007 main issue as regards the cooperation with the Council of Europe was the further development and coordination of the legal instruments (EGTC) of the EU and the Third Protocol to the Madrid Outline Convention of the Council of Europe.

Also in the year 2007, 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. On 11-12 June 2007 a conference on maritime security took place in Malmö (SE) that was organised by AEBR, INTERACT, CPMR and the MSUO.

7. AEBR and globalisation

The question, which role cross-border cooperation and regions play outside Europe gains gradually more attention. A first international convention for regional and local development approaches organised by CPMR and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) took place in Marseille. A second conference was organised in Cape Town / South Africa. Both events were attended by the Vice-President of AEBR François Maitia, Region of Aquitaine (FR). Moreover, the President of AEBR, Lambert van Nistelrooij participated in a conference of UNDP in New York. On that occasion he met the officials responsible for the programme and the representatives of the Secretariat General.

In Africa, Central and South America cross-border cooperation becomes more important in practice and in politics. In particular members of the AEBR Executive Committee from Spain cooperate with partners in Central and South America. As regards the cooperation with the African Union, especially with Western Africa, a meeting on 8-9 March 2007 in Bamako (Mali) took place. A representative of AEBR was invited to this meeting and made two contributions. It had the aim to prepare the conference of African ministers for cross-border affairs that took place in Ethiopia in May 2007.

Due to its experiences the AEBR is a highly recognised consultant. With support of the Directorate General for External Relations of the European Commission the decision was taken in 2007 to develop an Africa Programme including, among others, the necessary training for cross-border cooperation that covers also the costs for consultancy.

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.

8. Working methods of AEBR

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 bother about border regions.

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 represen-

tatives of border regions are more and more ready to represent AEBR during meetings organised in and by the EU.

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

The support for AEBR from the 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 fields of duties politically. The circle of persons available for a relatively short time or temporary - as politically necessary – has remained limited yet. Whilst an increased participation of members and the AEBR Executive Committee in the network would be very desirable indeed, this creates problems in praxis, 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 regularly place, 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 periodically place, 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. For financial reasons the Committee consists of a small permanent circle of recognised “border experts” with europeanwide 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). Occasionally, some further experts can be invited to the meetings with a particular thematic focus.

The activities of the Advisory Committee in 2007 included:

- Preparation of the AEBR Forum on rural areas,
- Preparation of the final declaration for the AEBR Annual Conference,
- Finalisation of the map of European Border Areas,
- White Paper on European border regions published with the title: Cross-border cooperation in Europe, Review and perspectives”,

- Working paper „Cross-border cooperation beyond 2013 – European priority and political objective of the EU“,
- Recommendations for the implementation of the Territorial Agenda,
- Development of the project idea „cross-border development strategies for ESPON“,
- AEBR paper on cross-border healthcare,
- AEBR survey on cross-border cooperation between universities and research centres,
- Preparation of AEBR Forum on cross-border cooperation between universities and research centres that took place in the beginning of 2008 in Trieste,
- Opinion on the EU Neighbourhood and Partnership Programme
- Evaluation of applications for the AEBR Award 2007,
- Opinion on EGTC,
- AEBR Newsletter.

9. *Secretariat General*

The Executive Committee is continuously informed on developments in the General Secretariat. At the end of 2007, the following staff members were working in the General Secretariat:

- a foreign language correspondent (2/3 working time)
- a foreign language secretary
- a project worker for RFO Change on Borders
- an accountant (part-time)
- a secretary general

The EUREGIO continuously provides organisational and ideational support to the General Secretariat.

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.