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Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
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***Investing in Europe's Regions and Cities: Public and
Private Partners for Growth and Jobs***

Open Days 2006

***Cross-Border Co-operation – Important Contribution to
Implementing the Lisbon Strategy***

***Speech of Jens Gabbe,
Secretary General of AEBR***



Territorial cooperation is, in spite of its comparably low financial equipment, one of the three priorities of European Cohesion and Structural Policy. Cross-border cooperation, achieving 74 % of the funds, plays an important role within territorial cohesion. Cross-border cooperation is European priority and a political aim of the EU, for it provably contributes to the European integration and the effective implementation of the Lisbon strategy. It also creates added values on European, political, institutional, economic and socio-cultural level. Furthermore, cross-border cooperation is characterised by a practically oriented subsidiarity and partnership.

Experiences gained in the field of cross-border cooperation in general and also especially the evaluations of EU programmes (INTERREG-A) show that the regional/local level is the best one for implementing cross-border cooperation (subsidiarity). Due to the frequently missing legal basis (EGTC will only apply in future) and competences, the success of regional/local cooperation across borders can only be explained with an intensive partnership. In order to develop working cooperation structures, this partnership firstly has to be developed in a vertical sense on either side of the border (i. E. between local/regional, national and sometimes also European levels). Those vertical and national partnerships then have to be linked across the border in order to form a horizontal partnership, which is one of the most difficult tasks due to the different and incomparable national structures and competences, laws, etc. The horizontal partnership is the basis for cross-border cooperation structures (Euregios etc.), which take joint decisions despite those differences. The partners implement those decisions in line with their competences and structures in the respective member states.

For successful cross-border cooperation, external and internal partnerships are indispensable. **External partnership** means to cooperate with the national governments on either side of the border and with European authorities, because prevailing national and European programmes/plans have to be considered. Furthermore, national and European co-financing is necessary.

Internal partnership means mobilisation of all social partners, NGOs, authorities, private bodies etc. that could contribute to cross-border cooperation. It is in the end a matter of mobilising the existing knowledge in all areas from both sides of the border to the benefit of cross-border cooperation. By mobilisation of all actors, cross-border cooperation (also in EU programmes) is supported by a broad basis (public or private



actors). Thus, a creative cross-border action level is created for project development and mobilisation of regional/local and private funds.

A cross-border structure (Euregio or similar) is in this case a driver for cross-border cooperation, a platform, and motivator and help desk to realise cross-border ideas and projects. A Euregio or similar structure is not a new administrative level, but a cooperation tool. It is not a question of cross-border competencies, but of the fulfilment of necessary cross-border assignments, and this in spite of continuously existing different competencies and structures on either side of the border.

Particularly in the sectors economy, innovation and research, concrete results can be obtained through cross-border cooperation:

- A cross-border action programme in the fields of research and technology should be developed and funded by national, European, public sector and private sector sources.
- Cross-border cooperation between small and medium enterprises should be supported in such a way as to allow them to participate in innovation and research processes (for example, risk capital).
- The transfer of expertise related to new application-oriented skills developed in basic research to SMEs on a national level and across borders should be fostered and speeded up.
- 'European poles of excellence' could also be created in border regions through cross-border cooperation between universities and their facilities as well as between laboratories (for example, where at least one outstanding institution or group exists on both sides of the border, but where excellence can only be achieved through cooperation).
- Cross-border cooperation in basic research (for example, academic research at a university on one side of the border and application-oriented research in a technical college or higher education institute, for example, on the other side of the border).
- The fluid crossover between basic research and applied research and development (product and process development) in particular can be used in cross-border cooperation in border regions that would not be in a position to do so alone.
- Infrastructures of European interest can also be developed across borders (advice from the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures). For example, selected large structures or a broadband fibre optic cable could be purchased or laid



across a border. A single border region alone would not have enough resources for such investment but a cross-border investment could be worthwhile (critical mass).

- Medium-sized research infrastructures that would benefit neighbouring regions and Member States could also be set up across borders. Regions working alone often do not have enough resources to justify such investment in a medium-sized infrastructure.
- Cross-border technology platforms should bring together companies, research institutions, the financial world and regulatory authorities with the objective of boosting cooperation in a lasting manner and implementing innovative ideas.

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