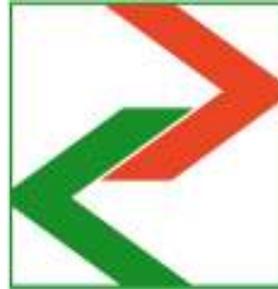


Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)  
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)  
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)  
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)  
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)  
Europæiske grænseregioners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

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***ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN  
BORDER REGIONS  
(AEBR)***

**ANNUAL REPORT 2005**

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## **1. Introduction**

During the year 2005 important steps were taken at European level for future support of cross-border cooperation due to the advancement of the regulations

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

It was very meaningful for the cross-border cooperation that there is again a political platform, the "Committee on Regional Development", in the European Parliament. AEBR President Lambert van Nistelrooij as well as many other representatives from European border regions are members of this Regional Committee.

Important decisions were taken within AEBR concerning the succession of the Secretary General and the registered seat of AEBR.

## 2. Member Structure

By the end of 2005 / beginning of 2006, AEBR had 96 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 ARGE Alp, Alps Adria, Nordic Council, 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 present EU and the associated countries. 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 and Moldova). The present number of staff and the current membership fees are just sufficient to handle this area of operation in terms of workload, content and financing.

Between 01.01.2005 – 31.12.2005, the following new members were admitted:

- Euregio Silva-Nortica (CZ/A)
- Slovak part of the Carpathian Euroregion
- Euregio The Wadden (NL/D/DK), Observer
- Community Special EU Programme's Body (Ireland/Northern Ireland), Observer

This shows that AEBR is still attractive, both in the "old" and the "new" EU.

### 3. AEBR General Assembly and Annual Conference 2005

#### 3.1 General Assembly

In 2005, the General Assembly and Annual Conference were held on 20 and 21 October 2005 in Drama, Euroregion Nestos-Mesta (EL/BG). More than 170 participants from 28 states attended this event, which was very well prepared and organised by Euroregion Nestos-Mesta.

The General Assembly mainly dealt with the Annual Report, the Annual Accounts 2004 and the budget for 2006. The Annual Conference dealt with content-related questions.

#### 3.2 Annual Conference

The Annual Conference 2005 had the motto: „Cross-border cooperation – important contribution to implementing the Lisbon Strategy“.

Welcome addresses were given by:

- **Michalis Aggelopoulos**, Secretary General of the Region of East Macedonia – Thrace (GR)
- **Konstantinos Evmiridis**, Prefect of Drama, President of Euroregion Nestos – Mesta (GR)
- **Vladimir Moskov**, Mayor of Gotze Delchev, President of Euroregion Nestos – Mesta – Bulgarian Side
- **Kyriakos Charakidis**, President of the Drama Chamber, Deputy President of Euroregion Nestos – Mesta (GR)
- **Lambert van Nistelrooij**, Member of the European Parliament, President of AEBR

A political Round Table on “Added value of cross-border cooperation” followed. Under the chairmanship of Lambert van Nistelrooij, MEP, AEBR President, the following persons contributed to the discussion:

- **Jan Olbrycht**, MEP, Vice-President of the European Parliament’s Committee on Regional Development (PL)

- **Yavuz Mildon**, *President of the Chamber of Regions, Council of Europe (TR)*
- **Evrpidis Stylianidis**, *Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs (GR)*
- **Iskra Mihailova**, *Deputy Minister for EU Integration and Regional Development, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (BG)*
- **Reinhold Kolck**, *Vice-President of AEBR, Vice-President of the Ems Dollart Region (NL/D)*
- **Kyriakos Charakidis**, *President of the Chamber of Drama, Vice-President of Euroregion Nestos-Mesta, Vice-President of AEBR (GR/BG)*

Two further Round Tables dealt with the following special topics:

**Round Table 1:**

***Cross-border cooperation – driving force for growth and employment***

**Chairman:**

**Konstantinos Tatsis**, *President of “Border Region Delta-Rhodopi” (GR/BG)*

**Participants:**

- **Roger Barrau**, *Special delegate to the President, Région Midi-Pyrénées (FR)*
- **José-Angel Zubiaur**, *Director General, Directorate General for European Affairs and Planning, Region of Navarra (E)*
- **Gabriele Lackner-Strauss**, *Vice-President of AEBR, Euregio Bayerischer Wald-Böhmerwald, (A)*
- **Panagiotis Koutsikos**, *President of the Chamber of Commerce GR/BG and GR/TR*
- **Bernd Greif**, *President of Euroregion Elbe/Labe (CZ/D)*
- **Bojan Pajtić**, *President of the Executive Council of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Chairman of Danube-Kris-Mores-Tisa Euro-Region (DKMT)*

**Round Table 2:**

***Cross-border cooperation – political priority of European Cohesion and Regional***

**Policy**

**Chairman:**

**Göke Frerichs**, Member of the Board of the European Economic and Social Committee

**Participants:**

- **Konstantinos Hatzidakis**, MEP, rapporteur on general provisions of the European Cohesion and Regional Policy (GR)
- **Sture Hermansson**, Managing Director of Länsstyrelsen Värmland (SE/NO)
- **Marco Marincic**, Provincial Councillor of Gorizia (I)
- **M.J.A. Eurlings**, Deputy of the Province of Limburg, Euregio Maas-Rhein (D/NL)
- **Ignacio Sanchez Amór**, Vice-President of the region of Extremadura, Vice-President of AEBR (E)
- **Olav Jern**, Executive Director of the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia (FIN)

Towards the end of the Annual Conference, the following **final declaration**<sup>1</sup> was unanimously adopted:

**Contribution of cross-border cooperation to implementing the Lisbon Strategy**

Pursuant to a statement by President Barroso the European Commission is still committed to upholding the balance between the three pillars of the Lisbon Strategy:

- growth and employment,
- social cohesion,
- sustainable environment.

Gelöscht: ,

Barroso added, however, that the relating instruments are currently redesigned in such a way that they boost dynamic economic growth. In terms of financing, these restructuring measures take priority over all other issues, as economic growth prepares the ground for strengthening the other two pillars, i.e. "social cohesion" and "sustainable environment".

In the debate about the future financing of the EU budget and priorities, one key question needs to be asked:

<sup>1</sup> Final Declaration of AEBR's Annual Conference on 20 and 21 October 2005 in Drama, Euroregion Nestos-Mesta (GR)

- Which contribution does cross-border co-operation make to implementing the Lisbon Strategy?

Answer:

- Cross-border co-operation adds value.
- Evidence for this added value can be provided.

Gelöscht: Welcher

Gelöscht: Wie

The added value of cross-border co-operation

Gelöscht: Der generelle wird durch die Anlage deutlich.

The European, political, institutional, economic and socio-cultural added value is described in Annex 1.

For the period 2000-2006, approx. 5 billion € are available for the entire cooperation in the EU. This amount nearly corresponds to the EU aid for the objective-1-labour market programme in Spain. Thus, cross-border cooperation achieved great successes with comparably low means.

The specific added value of cross-border co-operation to implementing the Lisbon Strategy derives from the fact that cross-border co-operation always adds value to national measures.

This added value results from

- additionality of cross-border programmes and projects,
- synergies through cross-border co-operation,
- joint research and innovation,
- cross-border networking,
- exchange of best practice and know-how,
- spin-off effects by overcoming borders,
- efficient cross-border resource management.

Evidence of the specific added value of cross-border co-operation to implementing the Lisbon Strategy:

Gelöscht: 4

- cross-border spatial and development concepts (i.e. border areas in Germany (Bavaria/Saxony) along the border to Austria or the Czech Republic, as well as in Austria along the borders to the Czech Republic/Slovakia/Hungary/Slovenia; Italian/French border; Polish/German border; sea protection areas between Corsica and Sardinia);

- *creation of the necessary cross-border infrastructure (also maritime) as inevitable physical precondition for cross-border cooperation with regard to creating growth and employment (e.g. Spain/France, Sweden/Finland/Norway, Alpine area, external borders of the EU, etc.);*
- *further promotion of growth and economic development in addition to the developments at national levels (i.e. cross-border area Ireland/Northern Ireland; Germany/Belgium/Netherlands with new jobs; Spanish/Portuguese border with its risk capital fund or Bulgaria and Romania with a cross-border business card);*
- *new cross-border business relationships between producers and suppliers (i.e. network of the Chamber of Commerce in Northern Greece/Bulgaria and in the Czech Republic/Germany (Saxony); at German/Danish border; French/German border along the Upper Rhine; Hungarian/Austrian border);*
- *new co-operation and sales opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises; these companies typically operate within a radius of some 200 km from their location, which usually covers the geographic area of the neighbouring border region (i.e. Northern Greece with an entrepreneurship centre for Balkan and the Black Sea states; Finish/Norwegian/Swedish border with the Arctic Investors Network; Spanish/Portuguese border with the forum of entrepreneurs);*
- *establishment of a cross-border labour market which offers additional new employment opportunities (i.e. France and Switzerland with adjustment payments for commuters that work in Switzerland; German/French border area along the Upper Rhine; Øresund with its specific labour market strategy = increase of commuters from 3.000 up to 10.000)*
- *bilingual cross-border professional training (i.e. German/Polish, Dutch/German and French/German border areas);*
- *establishment and improvement of cross-border public transport links (buses, railways) for the benefit of citizens, commuters and tourists (i.e. Austrian/German border close to Salzburg and in the triangle Germany (Bavaria/Saxony) /Czech Republic with a cross-border public transport system including throughout tariffs; Swedish/Danish border with a common public transport across the Øresund Bridge);*
- *cross-border tourism concepts and projects (i.e. Lake of Constance; Germany (Bavaria) /Austria, Poland/Lithuania with a joint Touristic Service Centre; Galicia/Norte with a touristic map for Spanish/Portuguese area; Tatra (Poland/Slovakia) in the Carpathian Mountains); joint touristic marketing and promotion activities in Ireland/Northern Ireland and the Pyrenees (France/Spain); joint touristic strategies for Kent (GB) and North-Pas-de-Callais [F]);*

- *greater catchment area for business activities and services on both sides of the border; in many cases, businesses and services, such as research facilities and universities, waste disposal, recycling and infrastructure facilities, would not yield a profit (critical mass) or not even be available at all in border regions if there was no cross-border co-operation (i.e. joint Research Institute for New Rehabilitation Techniques or Centre for Microscope and Spectroscopy Analyses in EUREGIO on the German/Dutch border; co-operation network of universities in Øresund, in the Danish/German border area and in the cross-border region South Tyrol (I)/Tyrol (A));*
- *a more efficient use (critical mass) of public funds (joint sewage plants on the Polish/German border; joint libraries in the Upper Rhine region, Saar/Lor/Lux area and on the Danish/German border; co-operation in the health sector between Greece and FYROM, Spain and Portugal, Ireland and Northern Ireland);*
- *joint research and innovation (critical mass) generating additional synergies (i.e. co-operation in the field of technology in Extremadura/Alentejo; Technology and Business Park on the Austrian/Slovenian border);*
- *additional synergies and spin-off effects thanks to the co-operation of universities, colleges of further education and other educational institutions (i.e. co-operation of universities Strasbourg, Basel, Freiburg in the Upper Rhine region or in Lorraine/Saarland as well as of the universities in the region Friuli-Venezia Giulia with their neighbours in Slovenia and Austria);*
- *Sustainable cross-border management with regard to environment and environmental protection (Extremadura/Castilla y León/Portugal, Pyrenees, Germany (Bavaria) /Austria, Austria/Czech Republic, Poland/Ukraine/Belarus, Baltic States/Russia/Belarus, Belgium/Netherlands/Germany);*
- *Cross-border co-operation as model for “new governance” (everywhere in Europe through Euroregions and similar structures, which practice subsidiarity and partnership, networks etc. in spite of different structures, competencies and laws on both sides of the border).*

*Prospects: The regional diversity and the different basic conditions in Europe call for region-specific concepts and solutions, and this particularly for cross-border cooperation: it is of particular importance that growth and employment, social cohesion and ecological sustainability are taken into account in all three pillars of the Lisbon strategy.*

*The value of cross-border cooperation can be proven in terms of money. The objective-1-labour market programme for Spain alone amounts to € 5,4 billion. This amount corre-*

sponds to the sum that is available for the entire cooperation in the EU for the period 2000-2006. We do not need to be afraid of a comparison with regard to the results: With comparably low means, a very good job was done.

It would be good if all the other cooperation structures could, like the cross-border cooperation, provide evidence of their contribution to the implementation of the Lisbon strategy.

### **3.3 Bestowal of the AEBR AWARD 2005**

On the occasion of the 2002 annual conference, the AEBR Award "Sail of Papenburg", founded by the Ems Dollart Region, was bestowed for the first time.

In line with the motto „**Cross-border cooperation – important contribution to implementing the Lisbon Strategy**“, the award was bestowed upon CAWT (Cooperation And Working Together, Ireland/Northern Ireland) for their project **A strategic approach to cross border health and social care**. The award was handed over by the Chairman of the AEBR Jury Dr. Reinhold Kolck. All competing applicants received certificates.

### **3.4 Tributes by Euroregion Nestos-Mesta**

Mr. Evmiridis, President of Euroregion Nestos-Mesta, Mr. Charakidis, President of the Chamber of Drama, and the Secretary General of the Euroregion Mr. Papademetriou honoured some persons that have rendered outstanding services to cross-border cooperation in general and the cooperation with Northern Greece:

- Jens Gabbe
- Viktor von Malchus
- Eugenio Ambrosi
- Peter Straub
- Lambert van Nistelrooij
- Wim Schelberg

## 4. Executive Committee

The Executive Committee met on:

- **4 and 5 March 2005 in Gorizia, Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy**
- **17 and 18 June 2005 in Karlstad, Värmland/Sweden**
- **2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2005 in Ripoll, Region Catalonia, Spain**
- **20 October 2005 in Drama, Euroregion Nestos-Mesta, Greece**
- **9 and 10 December 2005 in Maastricht, Euregio Maas Rhein, The Netherlands**

During the year 2005, the Executive Committee dealt with the following topics:

1. EU- regulations:
  - on Cohesion and Regional Policy 2007-2013 (incl. Legal instrument on cross-border cooperation)
  - on a Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument and an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
2. Report of the European Parliament, Committee on Regional Development, on the Role of the territorial cohesion in regional development (final A6-0251/2005)
3. Rural development in the framework of the EU's agricultural policy (GAP)
4. Maritime cooperation
5. Second Report of the European Commission on the implementation of the Single Market Strategy 2003-2006
6. EU-Communication: Science and technology: key to Europe's future: guidelines for research support
7. Commission Communication "More research and innovation – investing in growth and employment: a joint approach"
8. Commission Communication „Implementation of the Community Lisbon Programme: a reasonable SME policy for growth and employment"
9. Commission communication of President Barroso in agreement with Mr. Barrot „Realisation of the Transeuropean Networks"
10. Report of the European Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism on new prospects and new challenges for a sustainable European tourism
11. Cross-border rescue services
12. Cooperation of Universities and Higher Education Institutes
13. Cross-border health services
14. Everyday border problems

15. Cooperation with the CoR and European regional organisations

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 council and succession of the Secretary General. On the occasion of the Executive Committee meeting in Maastricht (Euregio Maas-Rhein) on 9 December 2005, three candidates introduced themselves and Martín Guillermo Ramírez, Extremadura (Spain) was elected new Secretary General.

Gronau (EUREGIO) was confirmed as location for AEBR's registered office with the remark that this issue can again be addressed in the year 2007.

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## **5. Main Themes 2005**

### **5.1 European Cohesion and Regional Policy (incl. Future of cross-border cooperation)**

The Secretariat General closely followed up the elaboration of the European regulations. Detailed statements were worked out in agreement with the Executive Committee. In particular, there was a close cooperation with the Committee on Regional Development of the European Parliament, the DG REGIO, and the Committee of the Regions. AEBR's concerns concerning future cohesion and regional policy as well as on the regulations on cohesion and regional policy, and here in particular on the territorial cooperation, could be involved into the Committee on Regional Development. AEBR's proposals concerned general aspects of territorial cohesion, the proportion of rural areas/urban areas (large cities), the question of an independent regulation on territorial cooperation (which was successful at last) as well as the quality of cross-border programmes and projects. Towards the end of the year 2005, the amount of the future funding was addressed due to the fact that the member states were trying to cut the EU budget. Despite substantial cuts in the territorial cooperation, the funds for cross-border cooperation could even be increased.

### **5.2 Legal instrument of the EU on a decentralised cross-border cooperation**

Due to the fact that AEBR elaborated the basic studies for both the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission, AEBR was strongly involved in that subject. In the light of the opposition of some Member States, it took a lot to persuade them that such a legal instrument was necessary for the regional/local level. A further issue was the safeguarding of general cross-border cooperation in the framework of this instrument in order to make sure that it won't only apply to EU programmes. Another point that was discussed concerned the role of members states in this legal instrument, as normal cross-border cooperation takes place without the direct membership of states, whereas an involvement of the states is requested and indispensable in EU-programmes (e.g. due to co-financing).

It was also avoided that states can arbitrarily hinder the registration of a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation. Furthermore, it was made sure that a so called review will be carried out by the Commission after 4 years, aiming at making suggestions for improvement.

Particularly due to the activities of AEBR, and this together with the Committee of the Regions, the necessary majority could be reached in the decision-making bodies. The Federal

Republic of Germany for example, at first objecting to approve, changed the attitude and gave its approval.

### **5.3 Fostering structural change – an industrial policy for an enlarged Europe<sup>2</sup>**

#### 1. Summary of the Communication from the European Commission

*The Lisbon Strategy was completed in 2000 and claimed to have set the objective of helping the European economy get into a leading position. However, since then growth in productivity has slowed down, unemployment has increased and fears are growing that manufacturing activities in entire industrial sectors will be relocated to countries outside the EU. A rising tide of European and national regulations threaten to banish companies from Europe. The gulf between Europe and the United States (especially with regard to high technologies, research and development) is growing ever wider.*

*Competitors in China and India are growing, both in industrial sectors where Europe is traditionally strong (engineering, chemicals and automotive) and in high-tech sectors (directly connected to relocation of manufacturing process by European companies).*

*In the course of EU enlargement, the flow of investment from EU 15 to the new Member States is increasing - and for this to take place the EU needs an internal market that functions well (for example, as regards environmental and labour standards).*

*EU industrial policy, which was very important in the early years (European Coal and Steel Community), has dropped down the list of political priorities over the decades. In 2000, the Commission did indeed outline all relevant instruments for industrial policy but failed to propose concrete measures. It was only in 2004, with its Communication on Fostering structural change: an industrial policy for an enlarged Europe, that the Commission presented a clear analysis of the situation containing precise data on employment, output in the manufacturing industry and development of individual industrial sectors (threats/prospects). The Commission also stated that clear solutions will need to be found in response to the process of dynamic change:*

- *better regulation;*
- *integrated policy approach in view of competitiveness;*
- *specific needs of different industrial sectors;*

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<sup>2</sup> Statement on the Commission Communication: Fostering structural change – an industrial policy for an enlarged Europe

- forward-looking identification of problems;
- targeted support for growth factors.

Since this issue needs to be approached in a general manner, the Commission advocates a 'level playing field' based on international standards (EU standards are generally higher than

standards in competing countries across the world). All these issues have already been discussed at European level and now place emphasis on competitiveness.

The Commission document attaches new significance to the **sectoral dimension**. Although there are common points that apply to all sectors (for example, quality requirements as a competitive advantage, expertise as a primary resource, increased capital intensiveness and an increase in international competitive pressure), the document presents the situation differently for each sector (high-tech v. low-tech, labour intensive or capital intensive industries, consumer goods or capital goods, sectors affected by players dominating the market or by small and medium-sized enterprises).

2. Recommendations for a new style of European industrial policy (derived from various documents and opinions):

- In addition to market conformity and liberalisation, other factors - such as sector-specific features, technology, research, development, human resources, harmonisation of legislation and removal of non-tariff trade barriers - play an important role.
- Practical steps specific to each sector need to be taken involving actions that should ideally be in line with the economic and social framework conditions.
- There must be coherence between EU policies and legislation in Member States must be harmonised.
- Interaction between industry and services must be clarified because many services are directly dependent on industry (the distinction between industry and services is becoming ever more blurred).
- Analysis and data must be improved because they are the basis upon which any policy decisions are made. Possible areas include:
  - o industrial Europe, both from a manufacturing and employment perspective;
  - o individual sectors and clusters;
  - o interaction between industry and services;
  - o technology links;

- *global comparisons.*
- *The structural inequalities between Member States and regions that have differing industrial bases must be taken into account.*
- *The European Commission must make a substantial contribution in order to improve and simplify legislation and to better coordinate and improve the coherence of its own directives (in terms of inconsistencies and harmonisation of implementation procedures).*

### 3. Situation of border regions in terms of a new EU industrial policy

*Border and cross-border regions are directly affected by the new style of EU industrial policy:*

- *Different national implementation procedures for EU directives, national tax laws, social legislation and environmental and training standards collide against each other at borders.*
- *Border regions are often peripheral areas both within their own country and at European level. As a result they often lack an industrial base, research and development institutions and forward-looking industrial sectors (insufficient critical mass for activities or support).*
- *The planned Europe-wide sector analyses are only partly valid for border regions (different national sector requirements that meet at borders, distort competition and make it difficult to collaborate).*

### 4. Conclusions for border and cross-border regions

*Since the new EU industrial policy places the emphasis on implementing the Lisbon Strategy, border and cross-border regions can make a significant contribution (added-value and additionality)<sup>3</sup>.*

*Improving the attractiveness of the location of border and cross-border locations can be achieved through:*

- *detailed analysis of cross-border cooperation in view of competitiveness and location factors;*
- *increased cross-border cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises;*
- *targeted cross-border cooperation between sectors;*
- *new cross-border links between manufacturers and suppliers;*

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<sup>3</sup> AEBR working document: *Contribution of cross-border co-operation to the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy*  
 AGE/AG/ARFE / Enscheder Str. 362 / D-48599 Gronau / Tel.: 0049 2562 70219 / Fax: 0049 2562 70259  
 info@aebr.net / [www.aebr.net](http://www.aebr.net)

- *cross-border cooperation between research and development institutions, universities, higher education colleges and so on;*
- *cross-border promotion and use of human resources (for example, bilingual and cross-border training);*
- *the strengthening of a cross-border labour market;*
- *concentration on a border or cross-border region's specific economic and social framework conditions of a.*

#### **5.4 Science and technology, the key to Europe's future – Guidelines for future European Union policy to support research<sup>4</sup>**

##### 1. Summary of the Communication from the European Commission

*The Communication from the Commission includes a list of objectives and reflections on the preparation of the 7<sup>th</sup> Research Framework Programme and the Euratom programme. Three percent of the EU's funds should be allocated to these programmes. The leverage effect of public sector spending on private sector investment in research should thereby be emphasised in the same way as the need to make careers in the research sector attractive.*

##### 2. The following priority objectives were identified for cross-border cooperation:

- *'European centres of excellence' could also be created in border regions through cross-border cooperation 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 cross-over 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.*
- *Cross-border regional technological initiatives should be set up.*

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<sup>4</sup> Summary and statement of AEBR on the Commission Communication

- *Infrastructures of European interest can also 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).*
- *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.*
- *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.*

*Financial instruments that could support these objectives include the Research Framework Programme (plus Euratom), the European Structural Funds and the European Investment Fund.*

## **5.5 Rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)<sup>5</sup>**

*The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR),  
Having regard to the „Proposal for a Council Regulation on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)“, COM(2004) 490 final – 2004/0161 (CNS) dated 14 July 2004;*

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<sup>5</sup> Statement of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) on “Rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)”

*Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the "Proposal for a Council Regulation on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)", Official Journal of the European Union, 5.7.2005, C164/18;*

*adopted the following opinion at its Executive Committee meeting held on 17 June 2005 in Karlstad (SE):*

1. AEBR's view

The AEBR fully assents to the contents of the Committee of the Regions' opinion

2. Further recommendations of AEBR

*Recommendation 1, article 14 para. 2*

Proposed AEBR amendment

*A Member State may submit either a single programme for its entire territory and/or a programme for each region. If programming is at national and regional level, there must be a clear link between the two. Member States may also submit for approval general framework regulations, which are to be incorporated entirely or in part in the programmes of the regions. In border regions, programmes have to be adapted to the objective-3-programmes.*

**Reason**

*This would give Member States more scope to adapt programming to their own needs. Due to the fact that rural areas are a matter of special importance for the border regions in Europe, it is important to adapt programming and corresponding measures in border regions with objective-3-programmes. This concerns particularly the Articles 49 - 53 and Article 58. This adapting may lead to synergy effects and avoid aberrations.*

Recommendation 2, Article 58

Proposed AEBR amendment

*The measures in Article 49 shall be implemented preferably with the active involvement of local authorities through local development strategies. In border regions, these local*

development strategies have to be adapted to the aims of objective-3-measures, in respect of Article 64.

**Reason**

Many of the measures set out in Article 49 are core responsibilities of local authorities. In previous rural development programmes, local authorities in some Member States were marginalised in the process and not directly involved in delivering local development strategies. Ensuring the active involvement of local authorities in the EAFRD will provide for a more comprehensive and coherent approach to the development of many rural areas. Failure to have a specific reference to local authorities may undermine delivering on the objectives of the EAFRD.

In the framework of the future rural development policy, it has also to be ensured that agricultural policy measures are coordinated across the border with measures of spatial planning, transport and regional policy. Therefore, agricultural policy programmes have to be adapted to regional policy development planning and measures, such as objective-3, and the funds have preferably to be used jointly. The inter-territorial and trans-national cooperation within the LEADER approach as described in Article 64 has to be fully used for regional and local cross-border cooperation in the framework of the INTERREG programme as well.

AEBR decided to organise a forum on the topic “rural areas”, which is planned to take place in the beginning of 2007 in Euregio Salzburg – Berchtesgadener Land – Traunstein.

**5.6 New prospects and new challenges for a sustainable European tourism<sup>6</sup>**

AEBR's Executive Committee intensively dealt with the report of the European Parliament on the occasion of its Maastricht meeting on 9 December 2005 and comments as follows:

1. General

The AEBR welcomes this initiative and approves particularly the following aspects stated therein:

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<sup>6</sup> Statement of AEBR on the Report of the European Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism on new prospects and new challenges for a sustainable European tourism

- *The changed demography has to be taken into account, also with regard to the growing part of senior citizens.*
- *The demands made on tourism have changed; above all due to the fact that today's tourist has higher and altered demands.*
- *The tourist destinations in Europe are in a competition with touristy efforts in neighbouring non Member States and other continents.*
- *On the one hand, difficulties of border crossings have to be solved in order to ensure a cross-border tourism, but on the other hand, the security has to be improved because tourism is an acute threat in border regions, too.*
- *In some regions, the offers are further developed on the one side of the border than on the other and there is also a lack of coordination.*

*AEBR expresses its concerns that despite the joint statement of the European Parliament and the support rendered by all fractions, this Parliament initiative in favour of tourism has not particularly been considered in the European Commission's work programme up to now. Only in some work fields of the Commission, such as e.g. transport safety, external relations with accession countries or free market access, direct connections to tourism can be established. It would be important that sustainable tourism be acknowledged by the European Commission, e.g. within the framework of rural development and with regard to cross-border and international aspects (e. g. in financial funding, visa obligations or in special regulations within the context of the Schengen agreement on cross-border tourism at external borders etc.).*

*AEBR stresses the following points of the report, which are important for border and cross-border regions:*

- *classification of tourist services*
- *exact determination and harmonisation of jobs in the tourism sector in order to avoid confusing customers*
- *special rules for and simplification of the VAT*
- *controlled indication of origin for agricultural craft products which are not destined for consumption*
- *furtherance of educational training, advanced training, senior tourism, consumer protection, tourism packets, camp mobile tourism, sales via electronic media, ecological preservation.*

2. Based on its action programme for border and cross-border regions, AEBR recommends as follows:

2.1. Tourism as location factor

*Tourism is a key factor in measures designed to develop a region's economy; it also provides large numbers of jobs.*

*Furthermore, tourism helps to exploit many of the development opportunities that are typical for border areas and to overcome developmental weaknesses. It facilitates economic diversification, creates additional new employment possibilities and new qualifications, helps to maintain local natural and cultural heritage, and improves the quality and quantity of establishments, services and infrastructure.*

*The environmental quality and type of landscape of a region (air, water, the nature of the landscape itself, buildings and infrastructure) are factors that play just as vital a role in determining an area's tourism potential as the type of tourism envisaged (either mass tourism with summer visitors on coasts and winter sports enthusiasts in the mountains, or alternative forms of tourism based on the region's cultural heritage, special activities or the notion of a holiday in the countryside). However, they are also important for determining the quality of what tourists are offered and for the type of visitor target groups. This applies equally to the development of tourism in rural areas, which may be based on mass or alternative tourism, and to urban tourism, which is based on culture, historical heritage and leisure facilities.*

*The following measures are recommended for the development of cross-border tourism in border regions:*

- in the context of regional development:
  - *Taking account of tourism in regional and cross-border development plans with a view to promoting economic diversification, creating new and additional employment possibilities and new qualifications;*
  - *planning and securing the sustainable development of tourism, e.g. by developing cross-border tourism concepts and/or free space concepts;*
  - *overcoming fierce rivalry on either side of a border by developing cross-border tourism concepts with a wide range of shared facilities and services on offer so as to guarantee guests a comprehensive service of high quality:*
    - *firstly for the respective border region;*
    - *then for the cross-border region;*
    - *and if possible to make them stay longer and establish ties with the area;*

- *developing cross-border tourism and tourism in neighbouring border areas by making optimal use of endogenous potential to complement existing economic activities;*
- *avoiding overly close dependency on specific forms of tourism (mass tourism), which can create new burdens and imbalances in the structure of the regional economy;*
- *paying closer attention to the indirect potential impact of tourism (e.g. creating new markets for local products and services);*
- *avoiding disadvantages associated with the development of tourism (especially in remote rural areas) e.g. situations in which the financial gains and employment-related benefits are lost, owing to dependency on external organisers, transport and travel companies, whose activities do not benefit regional and/or local companies in the respective border regions.*

- *in transport:*

- *The national and cross-border expansion of infrastructures and services (the road network, railways, airports, telecoms, information centres for guests, providers of accommodation, leisure facilities, health care providers, shopping facilities), which pave the way for and guarantee the sustainable development of tourism in competition with other regions;*
- *eliminating bottlenecks in the transport and economic infrastructure required if tourism is to be developed, the aim being to enhance accessibility;*
- *boosting the quality of what tourists are offered in a bid to extend the tourist season and prolong tourists' visits.*

- *in marketing:*

*Unmistakable shaping of the tourism profile and image of cross-border regions;*

- *exploitation the possible strengths of a cross-border region, so as to sensibly plan and finance investments in infrastructure and services for tourists;*
- *paying special attention to the quality requirements of core and target groups of visitors;*
- *building up knowledge of the market and skills, so as to be constantly informed about the development of tourism products and successfully offer cross-border tourism to target markets;*
- *optimising strengths and resources with a view to investing in the development of new, high-quality tourism products and markets, especially on a cross-border basis;*

- *checking the quality of tourism services and the development of new, high-quality tourism products so as to be capable of weighing external needs against the internal allocation of resources;*
  - *building up and extending cross-border information, contacts and networks and also joint marketing by the respective tourism associations and other organisations, including private companies;*
  - *optimising qualifications and know-how so as to be in a position to offer high-quality services to tourists on both sides of the border and on a cross-border basis.*
- *in the natural environment and agriculture*
- *Avoiding activities that are damaging to the environment, deplete natural resources or undermine the conditions required for specific regional agricultural production;*
  - *concentrating on promoting activities that enable the harmonious coexistence of tourism and favourable environmental conditions and pave the way for an environmentally compatible form of region-specific agriculture;*
  - *creating services that bolster soft eco-tourism, especially in conjunction with the long-term guaranteeing of sustainable forms of cross-border, environmentally compatible rural development;*
  - *promoting greater use of synergies between tourism, agriculture and forestry, environmental policy and SMEs;*
  - *providing joint, bilingual information and devising measures designed to entice people seeking a refreshing change back to nature and the countryside, whilst also offering appropriate education or training in a bid to prevent the environment, landscape and agriculture from being spoilt or damaged.*

### **5.7 More research and innovation – Investing for growth and employment: A common approach<sup>7</sup>**

*On the occasion of its Maastricht meeting on 9 December 2005, AEBR intensively dealt with the Commission Communication (on the basis of two reports given by members of the Executive Committee), taking into account the Commission Communication „Science and technology, the key to Europe’s future – Guideline for future European Union policy to support research”.*

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<sup>7</sup> Statement of AEBR on the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions “More research and innovation – Investing for growth and employment: A common approach”

AEBR comments as follows on this communication:

1) *New mentality and bottom-up-approach*

*Due to the fact that national governments do not prioritise the interests of border regions and do not become active in order to remove existing hindrances between them, the border and cross-border regions need a change in mentality. Therefore, the border and cross-border regions have to show own initiative. It is necessary to bundle the strengths of the regions on both sides of the border, e.g. by intensifying contacts and real cooperation between universities, research facilities, economy, hospitals, supply/refuse disposal facilities, regional/local authorities etc. For that purpose, actions and contacts are needed, in which regional/local authorities play an important role as regards the future frame of border and cross-border regions.*

2) *Own initiative of border and cross-border regions*

- *it is necessary to strengthen the endogenous regional potentials across the borders,*
- *the strength of the regions on both sides of the border, not in the sense of administrative and national borders, but in the sense of economic borders, has to be the initial point,*
- *the strength and powers have to be reflected in a good cross-border „strategic regional programme“, in which a joint strategy for research and innovation should be embedded,*
- *this „strategic programme“ should be developed and implemented by the national levels and actors from both sides of the border,*
- *the thinking in terms of „concentration, complementarity and creation of a critical mass“ is as important as thinking in terms of „knowledge, cognition and finances “ (e. g. public/private cooperation or cooperation between knowledge facilities (Universities, HEIs/ economy, specialised training facilities and SMEs).*
- *Thus, there can be a mutual cross-border enhancement. Good examples are in this case cross-border research sceneries or “life sciences” regions.*
- *All available regional, national and European funds have to be positioned in such a way – just think about the 7<sup>th</sup> framework programme and the new structural funds -, that economy regions and all involved ones can use them optimally in order to realise their cross-border strategic programmes.*

3) *Cross-border competition*

*In the framework of the European Integration Process, border and cross-border regions must learn to accept the term competition:*

- **Competition** *situations between regional commercial locations of different countries should also be supported on a cross-border level. A cross-border rival situation can also help to stimulate competition between the best ones.*
- *In addition to natural cross-border **competition** situations, cross-border structures and programmes could achieve additional value by means of cooperation.*
- *Cross-border regions could improve the infrastructural and economic environment for founding enterprises, for instance via joint advisory services, a single contact centre for the formalities of founding a company, bilingual forms, joint advisory services for legal issues etc.*

4) Concrete measures for cross-border cooperation in favour of more research and innovation

- *'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 cross-over 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.*
- *Cross-border regional technological initiatives should be set up.*
- *Infrastructures of European interest can also 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.*
- *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.
- 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.

## 5.8 Maritime Cooperation

AEBR dealt several times with this topic and adopted the following statement on the occasion of the Executive Committee meeting in Gorizia on 4 and 5 March 2005:

### I. Situation at the outset

The request that all maritime areas be included in cross-border cooperation was already voiced on several occasions after INTERREG I and INTERREG II. The reasons cited were as follows:

- Considerably more money is available under INTERREG A than for interregional and transnational cooperation;
- the solid reputation of INTERREG A.

According to sub-section 2.3 of the Explanatory Memorandum on the general provisions of the regulation, all regions along internal land borders, certain regions along external land borders and certain coastal regions in the enlarged EU should be included in cross-border cooperation within the framework of EU programmes.

The draft regulation takes account of the special role of external borders and the diversity of forms of maritime cooperation, which, depending on the exact type or level of intensity may take the form of either cross-border, interregional or transnational cooperation.

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Chapter III, Article 7 of the regulation defines internal community borders in greater detail. The 150-km arrangement affords maritime border regions more possibilities for co-operation.

The remarks regarding transnational cooperation in Article 6 sub-section 2 of the Proposal for a Regulation on the European Regional Development Fund stress the possibility of bilateral cooperation between maritime regions.

The EU's New Neighbourhood Instrument also makes provision for cross-border maritime cooperation along external borders, special maritime cooperation in sea basins and participation by third countries not eligible for support, as well as for the availability of substantial funding.

## II. Evaluation results for INTERREG II and III

The results of the evaluation show that maritime border regions that are very far apart tend to act in parallel rather than across borders and that most infrastructure is generally the result of independent projects. This means that such projects could also have been undertaken within the framework of national mainstream programmes. On the other hand, a very high proportion of actions undertaken by these same regions involve inter-regional cooperation.

Conclusions from the evaluation show that the absence of cross-border cooperation in the past and the lack of both a cross-border strategy and an efficient cross-border structure is hampering attempts to develop real cross-border action and will probably lead to isolated cases of cooperation along interregional lines.

This means that only a limited number of maritime border areas are suitable for cross-border cooperation. The majority of cross-border areas can gain more from interregional or transnational forms of cooperation.

## III. The distinction between cross-border, interregional and transnational cooperation and how it also applies to maritime borders

The European Commission has clearly defined cross-border, interregional and transnational cooperation. Cross-border cooperation involves cooperation between directly adja-

cent areas along a border. In practice this means intensive cooperation on a daily basis between all actors on either side of the border regarding all issues and in all sectors.

It has become evident that this type of intensive cooperation is only possible for a few forms of maritime cooperation. Key elements here include short distances between the shores of border regions, good communications, recently completed fixed connections (such as tunnels or bridges) that to some extent turn the maritime border into a land border, strong relations in the past and similarities between cultures.

Support for coastal regions within the framework of cross-border cooperation should be limited to approximately 150 km, as proposed by the Commission. A certain degree of flexibility can be shown in individual cases. Considerably greater distances cannot be included because actual cross-border cooperation is no longer guaranteed.

#### IV. Overall consequences for cross-border cooperation - specific consequences for land borders

If all or the majority of maritime regions are integrated into cross-border cooperation, coastal regions in Italy, Spain, Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland and other Member States would also be included. This would entail either the funds for cooperation across land borders being significantly reduced and the funding for 'old internal borders' being generally under threat as a result of the need to modify the allocation of resources, or that a high proportion of funds earmarked for transnational cooperation would have to be allocated to cross-border cooperation from 2007, for bilateral maritime cooperation over greater distances is due to be incorporated into transnational cooperation.

The inclusion of all or most maritime border regions in cross-border cooperation does not contribute any added value, since the maritime programmes in question do not meet the conditions for cross-border cooperation. Due to the major distances between them, many regions are unable to engage in anywhere near as intensive cross-border cooperation (see the evaluation).

The inclusion of all or most maritime border regions in cross-border cooperation will inevitably produce negative results in an evaluation (for example because the majority of resources will not be used for cross-border cooperation and the projects could just as easily have been implemented under national mainstream programmes). In the long run,

this would damage cross-border cooperation in general and, as a result, hinder progress towards the new political objective of 'territorial cooperation'.

If territorial cooperation, which was only recently deemed a priority by the EU, is to be sustained, it is absolutely necessary to implement convincing, high-quality programmes and projects for cross-border cooperation.

V Good opportunities and adequate resources for maritime cooperation

Coastal regions should be able to cooperate with neighbouring regions on the other side of the border according to their needs and opportunities, in other words by engaging in either cross-border, interregional or transnational cooperation. Coastal regions could engage in very meaningful and useful interregional or transnational cooperation across greater distances within selected sectors.

This would ensure that future evaluations would find that the implemented programmes and actions were of a correspondingly high quality.

For the same reason we also need the following criteria for distinguishing between cross-border, interregional and transnational maritime cooperation:

- Distances;
- differentiation of content (integrated multiannual programmes for cross-border maritime cooperation and sectoral and/or thematic programmes for bilateral transnational maritime cooperation).

Moreover, this would tally with the situation applying to land borders, where border regions work together in these three different ways depending on the distances involved and the level of intensity of their cooperation.

There are sufficient financial resources for maritime cooperation available in:

- Territorial cooperation:
  - on a cross-border basis for certain coastal regions;
  - on a transnational basis for bilateral cooperation over greater distances.
- The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument:
  - For cross-border maritime cooperation at the NUTS III level;
  - for maritime cooperation at the NUTS II level in sea basins with external borders;

- *and in some instances for cooperation with third countries not eligible for funding (e.g. outermost regions and/or islands and such like).*
- *The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA):*
  - *For regional and cross-border cooperation, also maritime cooperation;*
  - *where necessary for transnational and interregional cooperation, also maritime cooperation.*

## **5.9 Everyday border problems**

### **- Cross-border commuters after 10 years of Single Market**

The AEBR had in the past regularly dealt with everyday border problems and worked out a list (made up of different subject areas).

Despite the Single Market, the number of commuters has remained comparatively low. This leads to the assumption that there are still barriers preventing people from working in their neighbouring countries. At the same time, however, the incorporation of the ten new Member States into the EU had an impact on immigration (migrant workers) and the situation of commuters, which, in turn, affected the European labour market.

AEBR will continue the close cooperation with the Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament in this issue in order to make sure that practical proposals to overcome barriers, to prevent social dumping and to coordinate social security systems will be made.

### **- Representative for border issues in the EU**

Following a meeting with the Special Envoy of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the former Minister President Poul Schlüter, during the Executive Committee Meeting in Passau, the Secretariat General contacted the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the European Parliament, Mr Elmar Brok, and the Chairman of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Mr Jo Leinen, Vice-President Ingo Friedrich as well as the speakers of the groups in the regional committee, Ms. Krehl (socialist) and Ms. Schroedter (green), asking them to consider the question as to whether it would be desirable to have a delegate for border questions of the European Parliament.

### 5.10 RFO Change on Borders

The project was approved in September 2003 and project activities started in December 2003/January 2004. Lead Partner is the Land Nordrhein-Westfalen. 26 partners are involved, and AEBR acts as helpdesk. This RFO has very ambitious aims.

Future strategies for cross-border cooperation will be developed in three fora:

- Forum 1, chaired by the North Karelia region of Finland, deals with spatial planning, cross-border structures and the environment;
- Forum 2, chaired by the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region of Italy, covers the economy and the labour market.
- Forum 3, chaired by the Gelderland province of the Netherlands, handles socio-cultural cooperation.

Proposals were worked out for 12 working groups linked to the forums' subject areas, such as:

- The environment;
- cross-border structures;
- cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
- supplier-producer relations;
- cooperation between universities;
- innovation and technology;
- biochemistry and agriculture;
- cooperation between schools;
- minority issues;
- tourism.

The second annual conference took place on 16 – 19 March 2005 in Joensuu, North Karelia (FIN). First project ideas were developed, and the following projects were approved in 2005:

- B2S2B: New concepts and processes for the whole innovation value chain in a cross-border environment
- MENT: The Memory Environment and Tradition Trails on Borders
- Y4I - Youth for Innovation
- Trans-EA: Efficiency assessment of cross border transport infrastructure

- "The Rhine from the spring to the estuary": Pilot project for the Communication and Marketing Concept of the Rhine Bicycle Path
- CrossSIS - Cross-border Spatial Information Systems with High Added Value
- RiverCross – Many Rivers to cross
- Knowledge Roadmap
- Labour Market
- Multicultural Education on Borders
- E-Health and Telemedicine
- Working in Networks (WIN) – Knowledge and Technology Transfer in Cross-Border Life Science Regions

### 5.11 Political fora of AEBR

Two fora took place in the year 2005:

- **28/29 April 2005: Mérida, Extremadura**

Theme: ***Towards a new Community Legal Instrument facilitating public law based cross-border cooperation among territorial authorities in the European Union***

On the first day, 150 people from the Spanish-Portuguese border region and on the second day 50 people from right across Europe took part in a very good, substantive discussion and made headway towards forming an opinion. The representatives of the EU Presidency from Luxembourg and of the European Commission went away with many practical suggestions.

- **27 September 2005: RegioTriRhena, Basle/Switzerland**

Together with the RegioTriRhena and the Regio Basiliensis, AEBR organised a forum on cross-border health services that took place on 27 September 2005 on '***European Health Cooperation – Added value for people, economy and region***'.

The final report on the event basically said that an exchange of experiences at European level was urgently required to enhance the cooperation within the health system and that the health system represented value-added for people, the economy and the regions. Experiences from the German-Swedish, German-Dutch, Finish-Swedish, Spanish-Portuguese, Polish-German and Irish-Northern Irish border areas had been particularly impressive. Major barriers still remained within the national health systems which hampered cross-border cooperation.

However, cross-border cooperation (division of labour) could give rise to opportunities for the border regions in the areas of high-performance medicine, ambulances, medical equipment and so forth.

## 6. Contact 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 External 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 the new Commissioner Danuta Hübner and Director-General Graham Meadows. The regular discussions held with the directors Ms Helander and Mr. Leygues, as well as with the responsible Heads of Unit Mr. Bougas and Mr. Peters have to be pointed out.

With regard to EU enlargement questions and relationships with third countries, Mr. Elmar Brok, Chairman of the "Committee on External Affairs", was the most important dialogue partner.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> dialogue of the European Commission with the European regional associations took place on 24 February 2005. President van Nistelrooij spoke on behalf of AEBR.

On invitation of commissioner Danuta Hübner, President van Nistelrooij represented AEBR also on the occasion of the European Commission's conference on „Cohesion and Lisbon-Agenda: The role of the regions“, which took place in Brussels on 3 March 2005.

Martin Eurlings, member of AEBR's executive Committee and Vice-Governor of the Province of Limburg, took part in the dialogue meeting with Commission President Barroso on 17.11.2005 in Brussels.

Cooperation dating back to the 1960s with the Council of Europe was enhanced. AEBR attended numerous Council of Europe seminars in Central and Eastern Europe, and had taken part in the Council of Europe's Congress of Local & Regional Authorities of Europe. AEBR was a permanent member of the main committee of the CLRAE and in the Commit-

tee of Experts for Cross-Border Cooperation. On 29 September 2005, a meeting of AEBR's President and Secretary General took place with Mr. Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Also in the year 2005, cooperation between the big 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.

The five leading European associations of regional and local authorities forwarded their views in joint position papers to the European Heads of State and of Government, the European Convention, the European Parliament, and the Committee of the Regions. Subjects were the European Constitutional Treaty, the new political dialogue with the European Commission with the regional organisations, European cohesion and regional policy, trans-European networks, services of general interest and so on. The joint statements received a very well consideration.

The cooperation with the Committee of the Regions has grown closer, and the European Economic and Social Committee is a dialogue partner in individual questions.

Each year, there are three meetings of the Secretaries General of the European organisations representing regional and local authorities with the CoR in order to arrange working contents and joint events. The European organisations representing regional and local authorities will meet with Commission President Barroso on 24 February. Prior to the meeting of the European Heads of State or Government, the 5 European organisations representing regional and local authorities will organise in cooperation with the CoR a conference on financial prospects of the European Union.

On 19/20 May 2005, the Committee of the Regions organised a "European Summit of Regions & Cities" in Wrocław/Poland. The President of AEBR spoke in this summit.

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## 7. Structures and working methods of AEBR

### Work contents of AEBR:

AEBR as the oldest European association of regional and local authorities has the smallest budget compared to the other associations. Alongside the Secretary General, the following staff members were working in the head office in 2005: 1 full-time employee, 1 part-time employee (66%), 1 accountant (50%) and 1 full-time employee for RFO Change on Borders. 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 representatives of border regions are more and more ready to represent AEBR during meetings organised in and by the EU.

Since 1987, the AEBR has grown continuously. Due to this development, it was necessary to deal with aspects such as structures and working contents etc. In 1987, AEBR had approximately 15 members. In 1995, there were already 50 members and in 1999 ca. 75. Today, AEBR counts more than 90 members (representing nearly 200 border areas). The current budget amounts to approx. 400.000 €.

Since 1996, the member structure, which was originally concentrated on the former EU of 6 + Spain, has considerably changed. Border regions from Greece, Ireland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway have joined the AEBR as well as numerous border regions from Central and Eastern Europe. There are no AEBR members in England and Portugal. The number of French, Italian and Swedish members could be improved.

Up to now, the Executive Committee was of the opinion that the number of members is not an objective itself. But the spreading of members mirrors the functionality of the AEBR network.

AEBR regards itself as the provider of a service and, simultaneously, also as a lobby, in particular at European level. AEBR receives European monetary funds for the

implementation and acceleration of its objectives and as adviser of the EU. But AEBR should not depend upon the above and remains, first and foremost, a political spearhead.

The term of European border areas when used by AEBR applies to all areas, within and without the EU. A different structure of interests is evident here, but no fundamental conflict of interests. Members paying subscription fees are in the foreground of interest of AEBR. On the other hand, support has to be offered to all border regions. During the reorientation in Central and Eastern Europe, the border regions there have undoubtedly been the focus of attention for a while. On the other hand, AEBR has played a very decisive role in the revision of the Community Initiatives (of Interreg-IIIa, PHARE CBC, TACIS CBC in particular, but also with regard to transnational and interregional cooperation) and also in the developments in the field of territorial cooperation of the neighbourhood or pre-accession programmes in the new EU regulations. AEBR has, effectively and to the immediate benefit to the border regions, acted on the internal and external borders of the EU (see anchoring of cross-border cooperation in the European Constitutional Treaty).

The support for AEBR from the member regions could be further improved. In addition, members of the Executive Committee could participate at and be involved in events to a greater extent or carry 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. The praxis often reveals that this is unfortunately not the case.

- **decentralised or centralised**

When the current Secretary General volunteered to manage AEBR in 1987, he made acceptance of the job conditional on not having to take care of everything from Gronau. At the time, various regions, including Catalonia, Alsace, Sønderjylland and Friuli-Venezia-Giulia were kind enough to offer to serve as representations abroad. In the meantime, the number of members has increased considerably, as has the geographical area covered by AEBR. The need for a uniform AEBR policy for all European border ar-

eas remains, but if the work done is to be efficient, it can only be organised in a decentralised fashion. Independently of EU subsidies and programmes preferably there should be an AEBR representation in every respective country, which would be responsible for collecting and disseminating information, providing translations and so forth.

- **Mass meetings**

In the past, AEBR has held a General Assembly once a year and also organised an Annual Conference. These events are very expensive to stage, costing around € 100.000 – a price tag which not every border region can readily honour. For this reason we intend to stick to having just the one Annual Congress. Only special circumstances could make additional meetings of all the border regions necessary (for instance a meeting scheduled with a European Commissioner in Brussels).

Moreover, members of the AEBR organise political fora dealing with topics of current interest.

- **Additional national and regional meetings**

Before each Executive Committee meeting, the President and the Secretary General arrange a meeting with the border regions in the respective country. Regional meetings could be organised once a year for areas such as Southern Europe, Southwest Europe, Central Europe, Northern Europe, and Northwest Europe. The topic „Regional Groupings“ yet has to be discussed within the Executive Committee.

- **AEBR's public relations work**

AEBR's public relations work can only be done in decentralised manner, i.e. in the individual member regions which have contacts with the relevant national, regional and local press. There is little to be gained in having AEBR issue press releases and send them out the major daily newspapers on its own initiative.

An electronic AEBR newsletter is issued three or four times a year. The newsletter contains information on essential AEBR decisions (Executive Committee/General Assembly), the most important activities, results of meetings, statements etc. AEBR and the border regions could also spread news via Internet.

- **Cooperation with politicians (at European, national, regional and local level)**

AEBR is a policymaking body. To this end it needs the politicians at all levels (European, national, regional and local). For this reason, elected representatives at all levels from the border areas must be mobilised. Cross-border cooperation is not a party-political issue, but involves across-the-board agreement. Politicians like dealing with this topic, but we must serve up the issues to them in such a way that they can take corresponding action and bask in the glory of what is subsequently achieved. Politicians themselves cannot work on the problems faced by border regions and propose solutions. It must be the AEBR or border regions in the respective countries that do this.

## 8. Secretariat General

The Executive Committee is continuously informed on developments in the general secretariat. At the end of 2005, 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 new website [www.aebr.net](http://www.aebr.net) as well as the electronic Newsletter "Partnership in a Europe without borders" facilitate public relations.

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