

Annual Report

2013



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Annual Report 2013

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1 Introduction

In December 2013, the regulations referring to the EU Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 came into force. That means that the legal foundations for the continuation of the programmes of territorial cooperation in the next programming period have been created. The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) initiated contacts very early (as of 2008) with the representatives of European institutions in order to present its positions and proposals for improvement of the regulations, procedures and contents of these programmes.

The AEBR was regularly in contact in particular with high representatives and desk officers of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy in the European Commission, and here mainly with the Director-General Walter Deffaa (and previously with Mr Dirk Ahner). Mr Deffaa participated in the year 2012 and also in 2013 in the Annual Conferences of AEBR and discussed with representatives of border and cross-border regions the future of territorial cooperation. The AEBR was also quite often in contact with the Chair of the Committee on Regional Development in the European Parliament, Ms Danuta Hübner. Together with Director-General Deffaa, Ms Hübner participated as keynote speaker in the Annual Conference of AEBR in 2013 that took place in the beginning of November in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. The contacts with the Committee of Regions have also been frequent, as well as with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Council of Europe) and partner associations of regions.

The AEBR Annual Conference and General Assembly in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine was certainly one of the highlights in 2013. Thanks to a new concept, the direct exchange of ideas and experiences came better to the fore.

Another successful event in 2013 was the seminar on the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) that was organised together with the Committee of the Regions in November 2013 in Brussels. About 70 participants attended the seminar that was focused on the future of territorial cooperation. In this context, it was repeatedly underlined that border regions should be more involved in the preparation of the programming documents.

For the European institutions the AEBR is a well-respected organisation. Its positions and opinions are studied in Brussels with much interest, as well as in other continents and integration processes. In order to be able to maintain this good standing in the future, the AEBR needs the support of its members. Accordingly, I would like to ask you to further on support the activities, operation and growth of our association, in order to ensure that the AEBR also in the future keeps on representing the interests of European border and cross-border regions as their most relevant platform.

Martín Guillermo Ramírez
Secretary General

2 AEBR in brief

MISSION

Our mission involves working for the benefit of all European border and cross-border regions by highlighting their specific problems, opportunities, tasks and projects within the international arena.

We initiate, support and coordinate cooperation between European (cross-)border regions throughout the entire continent, forming goal-oriented networks of cooperation, which helps to simplify common actions and the exchange of experiences.

We enable the exchange of professional knowledge and information in order to define and direct common interests and offer suitable solutions to daily problems encountered by (cross-)border regions.

We represent the common interests of our members at national and international parliaments, offices, administrative bodies and other institutions. We inform European institutions and the public about matters related to cross-border issues and the specific needs of border regions and put forward specific proposals for initiatives and political measures.

ORGANISATION

The AEBR's bodies include the General Assembly, Executive Committee and Secretary General.

The General Assembly is the highest-ranking body of the Association. It elects the President and the Executive Committee, decides upon the admittance and expulsion of members, determines the fees, etc.

The Executive Committee is elected for a term of two years. It is responsible for the formulation of the official opinions of the Association, cooperation with EU and national institutions, organisations and associations and the nomination of the Secretary General.

The President is the highest-ranking representative of the AEBR and represents the Association externally. He is entitled to making decisions in agreement with the Secretary General, who is accordingly authorised and privileged for representation purposes.

BENEFITS FOR MEMBERS

AEBR members act within **the only Europe-wide** network of cooperation between (cross-)border regions;

AEBR members **are represented by the only organisation in Europe** which deals with the specific interests and needs of (cross-)border regions and protects them at the national and European level;

AEBR members can apply to the Association for assistance in **solving problems whose scope goes beyond the borders of one state** and for assistance with the execution of cross-border measures and projects;

Association members can benefit from the **experience and knowledge** of representatives of other (cross-)border regions and the AEBR whilst working on their own cross-border projects and strategies;

AEBR members are regularly invited to interesting conferences, seminars and workshops organised by the Association, its partners and other European organisations dealing with the issue of cross-border cooperation;

AEBR members regularly receive **topical information** about important events and changes at the European and national level, mostly concerning the issues of territorial cooperation, Cohesion Policy and Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union;

AEBR members can take advantage of the media made available by the Association (website, newsflash, social networking, etc.) in order to publish interesting information or search for partners for project implementation;

AEBR members can take active part in strategic working sub-groups (task forces), partnerships and projects initiated by the Association and its partners;

As AEBR members, (cross-)border regions act in favour of the European policy supporting public interest and society's needs to contribute to the rise of mutual understanding and tolerance and help to overcome the existing barriers between European population and the citizens of neighbouring states.

3 Members and membership fees

According to the supplementary budget 2013 and the minutes of the General Assembly held in Liège the AEBR counted 99 members at the end of the year 2013 from all over Europe. However, as in various cases the status of associated member was terminated from 1st January 2014 on, at the beginning of the year 2014 the number of members has gone down to 90. In 2013, five new members were admitted, including COMET Interreg Partnership (GB), Euregio Pskov-Livonia (Estonia), CESCO (HU) as well as the region Algarve (PT) as full members, and the National Security Faculty of the Russian Presidential Academy in Moscow as an advisory member.

The analysis of the AEBR membership structure indicates that there is still some balance in the Association between the membership of cross-border and border regions from the “old” and “new” European Union member states. Also several border regions from EU neighbouring countries (in particular from Norway, Switzerland, as well as the Russian Federation, Belarus and Ukraine) are active members of the AEBR. The current aim of the Association is to be better represented in South-East Europe. For that reason the AEBR is trying at the moment to cooperate closer with stakeholders dealing with cross-border cooperation in the Balkans, while keeping record of the activity of Greek partners. Moreover, it is being examined if there is a possibility to establish an information point of the AEBR or an antenna in a Balkan country in order to facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge and to enhance the visibility of the AEBR in South-East Europe. The effects of globalisation have contributed to the popularisation of the idea of cross-border cooperation in far-away areas. In consequence, the AEBR has been asked several times, to support concrete initiatives in Latin America, West Africa, Asia and even in Jerusalem, while offering its know-how and knowledge. Thanks to the participation in such projects the AEBR was able to further enhance its reputation by some important partners. But, generally

speaking, new topics and the greater geographical scope of activities mean greater challenges for a relatively small Secretariat General.

The AEBR must closely control the present scope of its activities, which primarily includes the preparation of the Association’s official statements and working documents on European relevant issues, observation of developments at European, national and regional levels, organisation of events, and implementation of current projects. It must also adapt this scope to the Association’s practical and financial capacity, particularly considering the current staff, its structure and the standing decrease in income from membership fees.

In previous years, this income from AEBR membership fees did not reach the expected level, despite the efforts to accommodate it with the GDP and population of every region. This fee is still a disproportionately high burden for small cross-border structures from economically poor areas, but it should not be for bigger structures. In any case, even some regional governments beaten by the current crises have stopped their contributions, meaning a serious blow to the AEBR. Then, new contributions are needed (therefore more new contributing members) and new sources of financing are being explored, such as sponsorship and publicity, consultancy services for the public and the private sector, and joint partnerships to organize activities, publications, etc.

In fact, the level of demand is much higher than the capacities of the AEBR, but this has been compensated with extraordinary efforts made by the staff, volunteer contributions of some partners and the specific involvement of some AEBR members. There are many new challenges to be tackled which demands further efforts, and the association should be ready to face them with reasonable resources, building up on its accumulated expertise.



On invitation of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine the General Assembly and Annual Conference of AEBR 2013 took place in Liège, Belgium

4 General Assembly and Annual Conference

General Assembly

The General Assembly and Annual Conference of AEBR took place in 2013 from 6th to 9th November in Liège, Belgium. About 300 participants attended the conference that was organised with particular commitment by the staff and representatives of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. The Euregio Meuse-Rhine was founded as an association in the year 1976 and belongs to the oldest organisations for cross-border cooperation in Europe. In 1991 the legal structure of the association was changed into a “stichting” in accordance with the Dutch law. The Annual Conference 2013 focused on the subject: “Cross-Border Urban and Rural Integrated Areas – Challenges and Chances.”

The agenda of the General Assembly included in particular such items as Activity Report 2012, Annual Accounts 2012, Budget 2014 and Supplementary Budget 2013. **Karl-Heinz Lambertz**, President of AEBR and Chairman of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine opened the meeting and welcomed the participants from different European countries in Liège. In his opening address the President of AEBR referred in particular to the future of European Territorial Cooperation and the current challenges for the Association of European Border Regions.

On the occasion of the meeting in Liège the General Assembly confirmed the membership of five new AEBR members:

- **COMET Interreg Partnership (Northern Ireland)**
It is one of a total of five groups active in the support area of the INTERREG scheme for the good of Northern Ireland, Ireland and Western Scotland.
- **Euregio Pskov-Livonia (Estonia)**
Within the Euregio Pskov-Livonia cooperate partners from Estonia, Latvia and the region Pskov from Russia.
- **CESCI (Hungary)**
The abbreviation CESCO stands for Central-European Service for Cross-border Initiatives. The organisation was founded in 2009 and has its office in Budapest. With its expertise and ideas it should promote the development of cross-border initiatives in this area.
- **Algarve (Portugal)**
Algarve is the southernmost region in Portugal. Together with Alentejo the region cooperates very closely with the Spanish neighbour region Andalusia. This cooperation was institutionalised in 2010 with the creation of the Euroregion Alentejo-Algarve-Andalusia.
- **National Security Faculty of the Russian Presidential Academy in Moscow as advisory member**
As education and research institution of the Russian Presidential Academy in Moscow the faculty deals also with questions related to international cooperation and security.

An important subject discussed in the General Assembly was also the draft AEBR Strategy from 2014 on. According to this draft as key tasks for the AEBR for the next years were defined:

Lobbying for border regions towards national and European institutions and bodies, e.g. through personal contacts, sound statements and analyses.

Awareness of problems, tasks, chances and challenges of border regions by organising subject-related events and targeted information on cross-border topics.

Exchange of information and experiences between the members, e.g. through thematic meetings.

And, **networking**: initiation, promotion and coordination of cooperation between regions in Europe, e.g. by means of joint projects and thematic Task Forces.

Annual Conference

„Cross-Border Urban and Rural Integrated Areas – Challenges and Chances“

300 participants from almost 30 countries gathered in Liège (Euregio Meuse-Rhine, Belgium) from 6 to 9 November 2013 for the AEBR General Assembly and Annual Conference 2013.

High-ranking representatives of the European Parliament, European Commission, Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee discussed with the conference delegates about the need to further develop urban-rural partnerships in cross-border areas in order to develop the full potential of polycentric development in these challenging areas. Together, urban centres and surrounding rural areas, can propose better solutions for cross-border transport links, use of common emergency services, plan cross-border strategies for sustainable and smart development, etc.

Manifold activities took place, including a floating

World Café for more than 250 people with fluvial sessions during the journey Liège-Maastricht-Liège, in order to get a collection of varied arguments on the proposed topic and to strengthen networking capacities amongst the AEBR members. Additionally, the AEBR Task Forces and the Advisory Committee also met in the boat, and the final speeches with an early summary of the conclusions of World Café closed this floating session before putting into Liège's port.

The final declaration, which was adopted by the AEBR members and handed over to Walter Deffaa, Director General, European Commission's DG Regional and Urban Policy, and Danuta Hübner, Chairperson of the REGI Committee at the European Parliament, is available for download from the AEBR website in several languages.

About 300 participants attended the AEBR Annual Conference in Liège.





Danuta Hübner, Chair of the Committee on Regional Development in the European Parliament received the personal award

The first round table tackled the topic “Cross-border Integrated Areas in Science and Practice”. Mr. **Gregory Hamez**, Director, Department of Geography, University of Lorraine in Metz, moderated this round table with **Jacques Teller**, Professor for Urban and Spatial Planning, University of Liège, who spoke about Cross-Border Spatial Development in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. **Andrea Hartz**, Project coordinator of the German action programme for spatial planning MORO/IMeG, presented activities of Cross-Border Metropolitan Regions. **Serge Novaretti** of DG Connect, European Commission, spoke about the Large-Scale-Pilot-Project ‘e-SENS’: paving the way to EU Digital Services Infrastructures. **Olav Jern**, Chief Executive of the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia, presented “Cross-border actions for integrated smart specialisation”. **Joachim Beck**, Head of the EURO-Institute (Kehl), gave an overview on Governance of cross-border integrated areas. And **Anja Schmotz**, Institute of Geography, Technical University of Dresden, spoke about quality of life and cross-border integration at the border area Saxony-Lower Silesia.

The political panel discussion was moderated by **Alexander Homann**, Director of the representation of the German-speaking Community of Belgium in Brussels, and **Welf Selke**, Head of Division in the German Government (ret.) and Member of AEBR Advisory Committee. Ms. **Danuta Hübner**, Chairwoman of the European Parliament’s Committee on Regional Development, Mr. **Walter Deffaa**, Director General, Regional and Urban Policy,

European Commission, Mr. **Joost van Iersel**, President, Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Mr. **Stewart Dickson**, Rapporteur on Interregional Cooperation, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and Ms. **Hande Özsan Bozatli**, President of the Assembly of European Regions (AER) discussed the political point of view of challenges and chances of cross-border urban and rural integrated areas.

The “floating” World Café gathered more than 200 people organized in 40 tables with moderators. These were main recommendations:

Concerning the key actors, next to the traditional governmental actors, several other players are to be taken into account:

- ☐ Youth organizations and the educational system;
- ☐ Public Transport Services;
- ☐ Health Services;
- ☐ Companies, business partners, chambers of commerce, etc.
- ☐ Intercultural events organizers
- ☐ Cultural associations and industries

The citizen is not to be forgotten in CBC. We need to stimulate bottom-up approaches.



Prof. Danuta Hübner received the personal award



Bestowal of the AEBR Award 2013



Chairman of the Award-Jury, Dr. Reinhold Kolck

Bestowal of the AEBR Award 2013

For the 12th time the Cross Border Award “Sail of Papenburg” has been endowed by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). This award is a unique and eminent European distinction in the field of cross-border cooperation, endowed for the first time in 2002 in the region where it was devised, the Ems Dollart Region (EDR) in Papenburg.

In 2013, the award ceremony took place in Liège in the framework of the General Assembly and Annual Conference of the AEBR on invitation of the member region of AEBR Euregio Meuse-Rhine.

The motto of the Award 2013 was: “Urban and rural integrated areas – cross-border challenges and chances”, and the winning region was Lower Austria – Burgenland – Bratislava with the project **“Bratislava-urban regional cooperation” (BAUM)**. Exemplary for this project is the creation of a master plan for the implementation of common strategies in the fields of agriculture, nature and landscape protection as well as tourism and housing. First measures have been implemented, successes can be already measured.

The “BAUM region” covers 14 municipalities in the Austrian hinterland of Bratislava, in two Austrian provinces and all the districts of the Slovak capital. With a series of projects and joint initiatives these actors have entered into a process of intense cross-border co-operation to harmonise the development in the greater region and to limit unwelcome activities there.

The following activities are foreseen in the framework of the project:

- **Information-, cooperation-, and coordination meetings** for the Slovak and Austrian villages and the city of Bratislava
- **Elaboration of a common strategy** for the spatial development of the border region
- **Elaboration of an Urban Masterplan** for Bratislava, integrating the interests of urban regional and local stakeholders on both sides of the border

- **Elaboration of a common Regional Development Concept** for the Austrian villages (Lower Austria and Burgenland) integrating the inputs from the Urban Masterplan
- **During the project the first cross-border urban-regional-cooperation management structure** at the former iron curtain shall be established.

Dr. Reinhold Kolck aus Emden, chairman of the award jury, stressed: “It can be stated that there is a clear tendency of increased quality of the presented projects, on a European level. There are more and more large-scale integrated concepts, leading to the implementation of concrete measures.”

The “Sail of Papenburg” was organized in 2013 under the patronage of President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz and Commissioner for Regional Policy Johannes Hahn.

Occasionally, the AEBR also endows the personal award “Sail of Papenburg”, in order to honour high-ranking European personalities and their commitment to cross-border cooperation. In 2013 this award was endowed to **Ms Danuta Hübner**, Chairperson of the Committee on Regional Development in the European Parliament. Ms Hübner was honoured for her commitment for many years in the field of European regional policy and cross-border cooperation. On 7 November 2013, Mr. Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the AEBR and Chairman of Euregio Meuse-Rhine, handed the award over to Ms. Danuta Hübner on the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference 2013 in Liège.



Executive Committee meeting in Santiago de Compostela, Spain



Executive Committee meeting in Trim, Ireland



Executive Committee meeting in Liège, Belgium

5 AEBR Executive Committee

In 2013, three meetings of the AEBR Executive Committee took place: on 8th March in Santiago de Compostela (Spain), on 14th June in Trim (Ireland) and on 7th November in Liège (Belgium).

The discussions in the Executive Committee in 2013 focused in particular on the future Territorial Cooperation 2014-2020. In the meeting of the Executive Committee in Santiago de Compostela in March 2013 participated Mr José Antonio Ruiz de Casas from the European Commission (DG Regional and Urban Policy), who discussed with the members of the Executive Committee the new cohesion package 2014-2020. In this context also the subject of „People-to-people“ projects (small project funds) was repeatedly on the agenda of the Executive Committee. In many border areas these projects make an important contribution to the successful implementation of cross-border actions and, thus, for border and cross-border regions their continuation in the new programming period is necessary. With the aim to underline the importance of „People-to-people“ projects the AEBR elaborated in April 2013 a working paper devoted to this subject that was discussed with the Director General of the DG Regional and Urban Policy in the European Commission, Mr Walter Deffaa. The paper was also forwarded to several Members of the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions.

On the occasion of the meetings of the Executive Committee, the Secretary General of AEBR, Martín Guillermo Ramírez, presented also current and finalised projects of the Association. Further subjects discussed by the Executive Committee members were: cross-border healthcare, external borders of the EU, research and innovation, languages in border regions as well as cross-border labour market. The Executive Committee also discussed organisational and internal affairs, such as events of the AEBR, working content, financial affairs, the Advisory Committee, recommendations, events and procedures of the Task Forces and the future perspectives of the AEBR.

Executive Committees are more and more connected with thematic fora and other events. In

fact, in 2013, the three meetings of the Executive Committee were connected with major events: a CBC Forum in Santiago, another one in Trim, and our Annual Conference in Liège. This makes easier the exchange of practices in a systematic way, while increasing available time for networking amongst AEBR members. It has been proposed to connect, as minimum, an AEBR forum with every Executive Committee meeting in the future.

Members of the Executive Committee will also be offered new possibilities, as the participation in the online forum and/or the online knowledge platform.

The AEBR represents the interests of all European border and cross-border regions.

Thanks to the Association's efforts the subject „Cross-Border Cooperation“ does not lose its relevance and it is regularly on the agenda of the European institutions. It is a growing priority in Brussels. The AEBR brings together partners from different border regions, which can exchange their experiences and information and can learn from each other. It acts as mediator in conflict situations and promotes quick and easy solutions when border problems arise.



6 Important topics in 2013

6.1 European Cohesion Policy



On 20 November 2013, the Members of the European Parliament voted in favour of the new cohesion policy package, which was then adopted by the Council of the European Union in its meeting on 16 December 2013 and published in the Official Journal of the EU on 20 December (L 347).

The purpose of the cohesion policy is to reduce disparities between the levels of development of the European regions by promoting economic growth, job creation and competitiveness. Consequently, cohesion policy contributes to the achievement of the Europe 2020 strategy objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The EU support for cohesion policy amounts to EUR 325.15 billion for the next seven years, in line with the EU's multiannual financial framework for 2014-2020 adopted by the Council on 2 December 2013. To the objective of European territorial cooperation (ETC) an amount of EUR 8.95 billion should be allocated —2,75 % of the global resources available for budgetary commitment from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund—,

distributed as follows: 74,05 % (i.e., a total of EUR 6 626 631 760) for cross- border cooperation (CBC);

20,36 % (i.e., a total of EUR 1 821 627 570) for transnational cooperation;

5,59 % (i.e., a total of EUR 500 000 000) for interregional cooperation.

The Cohesion Policy Package 2014-2020 consists of the following regulations:

- five fund-specific regulations for the European regional development fund, the European social fund, the cohesion fund, the European territorial cooperation (ETC) and the European grouping for territorial cooperation (EGTC),
- common provisions regulation setting out common rules governing the five European structural and investment funds, i.e. the European regional development fund, the European social fund, the cohesion fund, the European agricultural fund for rural development and the European maritime and fisheries fund.

According to the regulations, the Commission shall communicate to each Member State its share of the global amounts for cross-border and transnational cooperation, according to population size. The Commission shall, on the basis of the information provided by Member States, adopt a decision, by means of implementing acts, setting out a list of all cooperation programmes and indicating the global amount of the total ERDF support for each programme.

The contribution from the ERDF to cross-border and sea- basin programmes under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and to the cross-border programmes under the IPA II (Instrument for Pre-Accession) shall be established by the Commission and the Member States concerned. The ERDF contribution established for each Member State shall not subsequently be reallocated between the Member States concerned. Support from the ERDF to individual cross-border and sea-basin programmes under the ENI and to the cross-border programmes under the IPA II shall be granted provided that at least equivalent amounts are provided by the ENI and the IPA II. That equivalence shall be subject to a maximum amount set out in the ENI legislative act or the IPA II legislative act.

At least 80 % of the ERDF allocation to each CBC and transnational programme shall be concentrated on a maximum of four of the eleven thematic objectives set out in Article 9 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. All of these thematic objectives may be selected for interregional cooperation:

1. *Strengthening research, technological development and innovation;*
2. *enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT;*
3. *enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, of the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and of the fishery and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF);*
4. *supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors;*
5. *promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management;*
6. *preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency;*
7. *promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures;*
8. *promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility;*
9. *promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination;*
10. *investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning;*
11. *enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration.*

In addition, the ERDF may also support the following investment priorities within the thematic objectives indicated for each European territorial cooperation component:

- under CBC:
 - i. promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility by integrating cross-border labour markets, including cross-border mobility, joint local employment initiatives, information and advisory services and joint training;
 - ii. promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination by promoting gender equality, equal opportunities, and the integration of communities across borders;
 - iii. investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning by developing and implementing joint education, vocational training and training schemes;
 - iv. enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and

cooperation between citizens and institutions;

- under transnational cooperation: enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by developing and coordinating macro-regional and sea-basin strategies;
- under interregional cooperation: enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by:
 - i. disseminating good practices and expertise and capitalising on the results of the exchange of experience in relation to sustainable urban development, including urban-rural linkages.
 - ii. promoting the exchange of experience in order to reinforce the effectiveness of territorial cooperation programmes and actions as well as the use of EGTCs;
 - iii. strengthening the evidence base in order to reinforce the effectiveness of cohesion policy and the achievement of the thematic objectives through the analysis of development trends;

In the case of the PEACE cross-border programme and within the thematic objective of promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination, the ERDF shall also contribute to promoting social and economic stability in the regions concerned, in particular through actions to promote cohesion between communities.

The Association of European Border Regions welcomes the adoption of the new regulations and would like to thank the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions for the intensive dialogues during the past years, which have led to practical and very concrete improvements and advancements, and this particularly in the field of CBC. On principle, AEBR also welcomes the partnership agreements, especially if they ensure a good involvement of the regional and local level in the development and implementation of EU programmes. The AEBR has also stressed that, as usually at least two states are involved in CBC, measures and priorities for a given area should not be decided separately at national level, they should rather be jointly defined in the operational programmes.



On 20 November 2013, the Members of the European Parliament voted in favour of the new cohesion policy package, which was then adopted by the Council of the European Union in its meeting on 16 December 2013 and published in the Official Journal of the EU on 20 December (L 347).



6.2 P2P People-to-people projects (small projects)

From the beginning of INTERREG (1990) many A programmes have worked with “People-to-people projects” (small projects). The aim of these P2P projects is to prepare, support and realign (experimental small projects) the priorities and actions laid down in A programmes. In most cases, these are actions with financial volume that lies below the agreed threshold (eg. 50.000 €) for projects in INTERREG A-programmes. However, as they evidently create the necessary conditions for efficient cross-border implementation of programmes and projects (eg. while improving the necessary professional and intercultural skills, through legal and administrative cooperation), particular modalities were created in A programmes enabling the implementation of such “people-to-people projects” (small projects).

Due to the rather negative opinion in the EU Commission and the Parliament the continuation of the Small Project Fund and “People-to-People projects” was more than uncertain. Thanks to the AEHR and its political interventions (with the responsible EU Commissioner and the Director General for Regional Policy as well as with the spokespersons of the political groups in the Committee on Regional Development in the EU Parliament) as well as the concrete demonstration of the added value of the Small

Project Fund these cross-border actions are still possible and can be managed by our members. It should not be difficult to find the right direction within the thematic objectives to implement sets of P2P projects, and Operational Programmes should not close this possibility.

„People-to-people projects“ (small projects) have proved to be successful instruments for sustainable regional development of cross-border areas that create added value. They strongly promote and facilitate important cooperation in legal and administrative questions as well as cooperation between institutions and citizens. They create the necessary conditions for the establishment of functional networks by stakeholders from both sides of the border, the exchange of knowledge and experiences, the elaboration of joint solutions to problems and in particular for the elaboration of real cross-border projects, particularly by private stakeholders.

Accordingly, they prove to be an engine accelerating current and future cross-border cooperation in economic / infrastructural and socio-cultural field. In particular, through „People-to-people projects“ (small projects) European funding policy becomes visible and tangible for citizens: cross-border cooperation in daily life.

6.3 European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

The AEBR Secretariat General is actively involved in the activities of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) focusing on the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation and pays much attention to all actions and decisions referring to EGTCs launched at European and national level. It is particularly worth it to mention the work developed by the EGTC Platform that serves the exchange of experiences and implements numerous activities involving a growing number of players all over Europe, being also present within online social networks. On 25 February 2013 the third Annual Meeting of the EGTC Platform took place in Brussels, attended by the Chairman of the AEBR Advisory Committee, Jens Gabbe. The conference facilitated the exchange between the representatives of European institutions, regional representatives, and interested private bodies on the role of EGTCs in the transport and enterprise policies. The Committee of the Regions and the AEBR

organised jointly on 19 November 2013 in Brussels a seminar on the future of the European Cohesion Policy 2014-2020. The discussion in the framework of the seminar focused in particular on the possibility to better involve the citizens in border regions in the elaboration of new Operational Programmes as well as on the role of the EGTCs in the new funding period. Keynote speakers were Mr Herwig Van Staa, Representative of the Committee of the Regions in charge of EGTCs and President of the Parliament of the Land Tyrol, and Mr Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of AEBR. The European Commission was represented by Mr Dirk Peters from the Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy. The seminar gathered about 70 participants representing existing and planned EGTCs, regional and local authorities as well as some scientific institutions.



Conclusions of the seminar from 19 November 2013 in brief:

- The Committee of the Regions and the AEBR wish to draw attention to the necessary participation of border regions in Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes.
- The specific situation of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) has to be taken into account. EGTCs are called to play a more active role in the future programming period.
- For many border areas in Europe, this period is crucial to overcome the economic crisis. Most of these border areas, in particular established EGTCs and other cross-border structures (Euroregions) have designed their own strategies.
- Cross-border cooperation does not only involve economic issues, but also addresses cultural, social and environmental needs.
- Cross-border cooperation cannot be successful without active involvement of civil society.
- Border regions and EGTCs have to be involved in the preparation of programming documents in the framework of a structured dialogue.
- It is up to national authorities to be aware of the needs of border areas, and also about the potential of the EGTC and its possible uses in the future period.
- It is important to recall the principles of multi-level governance and partnership, which have been enshrined in Art. 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation.

6.4 External borders of the European Union

In 2013, the AEBR made a huge effort to strengthen its involvement at the external borders of the EU and far beyond. The cooperation with border areas at the external borders has been further developed in the past years. Several meetings with representatives of border regions at the external borders of the EU took place in the framework of the Task Force on External Borders. Moreover, together with its members and partners the AEBR initiated additional activities focusing on the future of cross-border cooperation at the external borders in the year 2013. Lutsk, situated in the Euroregion Bug (Poland/Ukraine/Belarus) was the venue of a seminar on invitation of Volyn Oblast, the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (represented by the leader of the office in Kiev, Ms Gabriele Baumann) and the AEBR. 27 representatives from all partners at the external border of the EU with the Ukraine attended the seminar from 4-6 September and discussed about upcoming regulations on the EU Neighbourhood Programme, new possibilities offered by EGTC in order to involve third countries, and the improvement and intensification of cross-border cooperation at the Western border of the Ukraine with all neighbours.

Despite the fact that this border region is not easily reachable, nobody of the invited representatives declined from attending. High-ranking national officials responsible for EU programmes came from Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, the Ukraine and Belarus. Additionally, also all border regions concerned were present. Ms Bodil Persson, Deputy Head of Unit for Eastern Neighbourhood Programmes attended on behalf of the EU, and Mr Lucas Reichel participated on behalf of Mr Zeller, rapporteur on this topic within the European Parliament.

The seminar was held in a crucial period of time, some few months prior to the adoption of the new EU regulations. This was also underlined by the lively debates. The concrete proposals of the AEBR to intensify and improve the cooperation were supported by the participants of the meeting.

In November 2013, the Secretary General of the AEBR, Martín Guillermo Ramírez visited the region Kharkiv in the Eastern part of Ukraine. The Secretary General of AEBR participated in several events organised on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Euroregion Slobozhanschina. In particular, on 12 November the Secretary General of AEBR, the Vice-Rector

of the National University of Economics in Kharkiv, Mykola Afanasiev and the President of the Kharkiv NGO „Euroregion Slobozhanschina”, Eduard Syromolot signed an agreement on the establishment of the Information Centre of the AEBR at the National University of Economics in Kharkiv. The Information Centre has in particular the task to coordinate the cooperation between border regions from Ukraine, Russia and the European Union, to initiate and implement cross-border projects, to strengthen the role of local authorities while developing cross-border cooperation concepts as well as to further develop the activities of the Euroregion Slobozhanschina. As a short-term objective, this AEBR Info Center would coordinate the action of the Euroregions established in Eastern Ukraine and keep regular contact with the Task Force External Borders and the AEBR Secretariat.

When this report is being produced and distributed (from March to September 2014), the situation in this part of Europe has changed dramatically. The crisis originated in Crimea and following in several provinces in Eastern Ukraine has put the Euroregions in the area under severe circumstances. The AEBR Info Center in Kharkiv has provided accurate information on the daily situation and has taken part in several initiatives to keep peace flowing in the country.



Secretary General of AEBR visited Kharkiv

6.5 Cross-border labour market

In 2012 already, the AEER paid particular attention to the subject of cross-border labour market and implemented a project supported by the EU —*Information services for cross-border workers in European border regions*— that resulted in the elaboration of concrete proposals for the improvement of information services for frontier workers:

http://www.aeer.eu/pdf/fmanager//Projekte/CB_Labour_Market/121030_Final_Report_long_version_EN.pdf.

In 2013, the Committee of the Regions approved an own opinion on the subject: *Frontier workers – Assessment of the situation after 20 years of the internal market: problems and perspectives*, which was presented by the President of AEER and President of the PES Group in the Committee of the Regions, Karl-Heinz Lambertz. The AEER was actively involved in the elaboration of this opinion. The Secretary General of AEER, Martín Guillermo Ramírez supported the elaboration and adoption of the opinion as expert, and Anna Winkler (AEER

Secretariat) coordinated the activities, including a Final Conference in Berlin. Moreover, on initiative of Mr Lambertz on 11 March 2013 a meeting in Brussels was organised with representatives of border and cross-border regions in order to discuss the existing problems and challenges as regards labour market mobility.

The opinion was approved by the ECOS Commission on 23 April 2013. On 3 July 2013, it was adopted in the plenary session of the Committee of the Regions. As rapporteur Mr Lambertz underlined in his speech before the adoption of the opinion that the removal of obstacles in the field of tax measures, better coordination of Member States' social security systems, combating social and wage dumping as well as easier recognition of vocational qualifications are crucial conditions for the promotion of labour market mobility.



Excerpts from the CoR opinion on the situation of frontier workers:

The Committee of the Regions:

(...) views the complexity of rules coordinating social security systems as major challenge. It is hardly possible to reduce problems related to differences between social security systems in the EU, as the legislative and administrative rules at national levels constantly change and produce new challenges. Accordingly, the access to reliable and regularly up-dated information and to advisory services should be further improved. As the situation of frontier workers differs heavily from standard situations, frontier workers should have access to individual information. E-services are an important tool as well, but cannot replace personalised services; (...)

fears that providing advice to workers and jobseekers would be less of a priority for EURES from 2015 onwards, because the focus would be on job matching and service provision for employers rather than on advice concerning social security, taxes and wage and working conditions. The Committee wants to emphasise that the task of advising workers and jobseekers should on the contrary be reinforced, for example by reinforcing the frontier information points for workers and jobseekers, and by providing the social partners with more possibilities concerning offering advice to frontier workers; (...)

7 Task Forces of AEBR

7.1 Task Force on External Borders

Cross-border cooperation at the external borders of the European Union also requires more attention by AEBR. In this sense, a Task Force was created in Lappeenranta (2007) to coordinate AEBR's and its members' activities focusing on external borders. Mr Johannes Moisio from the region of South Karelia is responsible for the organisation of the Task Force activities.

Main activities of the Task Force in 2013 included in particular:

- Working meeting of the Task Force on the occasion of the AEBR Executive Committee meeting in Santiago de Compostela in March 2013,
- Participation in a seminar of the CIVEX-Commission as well as the economic forum of the Iasi region in Romania in July 2013,
- Organisation of the fifth AEBR Youth Forum in July in Drama, Greece,
- Participation in the All-Russia Forum in St. Petersburg in October 2013,
- Working meeting of the Task Force on the occasion of the AEBR General Assembly in Liège in November 2013.

In 2013, the city of Drama in Northern part of Greece (Euroregion Nestos-Mesta) organised together with the Democritus University of

Thrace and the AEBR the fifth Youth Forum. The forum took place from 22nd to 27th July. From 53 applicants, finally 24 young people from nine different countries were invited to participate in the forum. Mr Alkis Papademetriou was responsible for the organisation of the event. With support of the host city and region as well as the Democritus University of Thrace he prepared a very varied programme for the participants of the forum. Mr Kyriakos Charakidis, Mayor of Drama, was fully involved in most of the programme.

In the AEBR Summer Seminar for Youth, the young participants:

- get information on possibilities of studies abroad,
- learn to know the work of AEBR,
- get information on the EU integration process and different cross-border cooperation programmes,
- make new friends from different countries.

On the other hand, the universities from AEBR member regions have the possibility to promote their international studies. For the host region the seminar is a perfect opportunity to present itself as possible place for studying and living and to demonstrate on practical examples what cross-border cooperation means for border areas.



7.2 Task Force on Cross-Border Healthcare



The Task Force on cross-border healthcare was founded on the occasion of the Annual Conference of AEHR in Lappeenranta (Finland) in 2007. The previous Executive Director of REGIO BASILIENSIS, Mr Eric Jakob, coordinated this Task Force between the years 2009 and 2012 with the aim of improving the exchange of experiences between border regions in the field of cross-border healthcare and to initiate joint projects and other activities. Besides, that Task Force elaborates joint opinions and position papers on cross-border healthcare that the AEHR uses for its lobbying at the European and national level. Due to his new position within the federal Swiss government, Mr Jakob suspended at the end of 2012 his activities within the framework of the Task Force. The coordination of the Task Force was taken over in an interim basis, half way through 2013 by EUREGIO and the Euregio Meuse-Rhine.

On the occasion of the AEHR Annual Conference in Liège in November 2013 the Task Force met for the first time under the new chairmanship. Several cross-border projects from different countries were presented in the meeting, among others the cooperation between hospitals from Lower Austria and South Bohemia, the cooperation in emergency care between the Portuguese region Norte and the Spanish regions Galicia and Castilla y Leon, the cross-border cooperation in healthcare between Germany and Switzerland in the Basle region, the cooperation in outpatient sector in the Eurodistrict Regio Pamina (DE/FR) as well as the cross-border project euPrevent|EMR in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine (DE/NL/BE).

The exchange on the different projects was very fruitful and useful. The participants of the meeting decided that the Task Force should try to prepare a project proposal that could be submitted in one of the new EU calls under Interreg "Europe" (former C branch). This proposal could be based on the previous project ideas of the Task Force and its strategic documents.

For many member regions of the AEHR the subject of cross-border healthcare is of crucial importance. All measures, meetings and strategies, the focus of which is cross-border health care, are aimed at creating conditions allowing people to live in health and to profit from demand-based health care services, to make their decisions as consumers and to develop their full potential when it comes to reaching their goals in the society and in the economy.

The AEHR faces the challenge of having developed a strategic issue of CB relevance, but it is very difficult to organize a new leadership for such a complex Task Force.



7.3 Task Force on Cross-Border Culture

Following the request of the city of Maastricht, as candidate for European Capital of Culture 2018, in the Euregio Maas-Rhine, the Executive Committee of the AEBR agreed on its meeting held in May 2012 in Istanbul to organize a workshop on cross-border and interregional tourism and cultural cooperation. This workshop took place in the scope of the AEBR General Assembly on November 8th 2012 in Berlin, where the Task Force Cross-Border Culture was officially created with the aim to:

- raise more awareness for the importance of the topic culture at the European level,
- support cross-border cultural projects across Europe,
- promote the cooperation between cultural institutions, artists and further cultural stakeholders from border regions.

In 2013, two regular meetings of the Task Force took place. On 25th and 26th April about 50 cultural stakeholders from several border regions attended a seminar of the Task Force in Maastricht. The seminar had in particular the aim to develop new ideas as regards possible European cultural projects as well as to strengthen the cooperation between existing cross-border cultural networks. On the first day of the seminar, the participants were divided into four groups that covered following topics: Euregional portals for culture and leisure, languages, pop music and early music. On the second day of the seminar information on existing cross-border cultural networks was

exchanged. In particular, the question was discussed, if there is a possibility to strengthen the cooperation between these networks and which joint activities could be implemented by them.

The second regular meeting of the Task Force took place on the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference in Liège on 8th November. The meeting had mainly the aim to discuss the hitherto presented ideas and proposals referring to the work of the Task Force and to plan the activities for the year 2014. Moreover, the results of further accompanying meetings were presented that were initiated by the coordinator of the Task Force, Rudolf Godesar in order to involve in the work of the Task Force further stakeholders.

A great challenge in the area of culture is the somewhat weaker position of culture on the European level. In the debates about the allocation of EU funding at European, national and regional level the topic of culture seems to rather be in the background. Cultural cross-border projects are, however, very important and should not be reduced to a type of economic product. It is thus very important to provide more meaning to the area of culture, so that it could obtain its own place within the European agenda and be considered a cross-section topic.

8 Other events

6 February 2013: INTERMODES 2013 „Towards a mobile and sustainable Europe“

For this fifth event, INTERMODES welcomed 200 delegates coming from 27 European countries. The objective of INTERMODES is to create a platform focusing on the subject of mobility with the aim to exchange know-how and to develop new solutions. All transport modes are in INTERMODES scope of work.

AEBR Secretary General, Martín Guillermo Ramírez moderated the Round Table on "Cross-Border Intermodal Transport", where some very interesting experiences were presented. Mr Luc-René Gaillet, Director of the Rail Link, Basel-Mulhouse Airport, explained the challenges for the passenger transport in the Upper Rhine region. Mr Andreas Warnecke, Head of Aachen regional office, explained the practice of dealing with some complicated tariff and ticketing systems in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine with three different (not interoperable) electronic ticketing systems. Mr Michel Jadot, General Manager of SNCB Europe explained the problems and proposed solutions with Fyra, the international high-speed train between several Belgian and Dutch cities. Ms Anette Solli, Chair of the Committee for Transport at the Akershus County Council in Norway explained the cooperation between Gothenburg and Oslo areas regarding the development and improvement of infrastructure.

7 March 2013: III AEBR-Xunta de Galicia Forum "Cross-border Cooperation in Europe: Perspectives towards the 2014-2020 Financial Framework"

The AEBR, the Regional Government of Galicia and the EGTC Galicia-Norte organized the first Vigo Forum on "Research, Development and Innovation in Cross-Border Areas" in February 2009, followed by the second Forum in April 2011. In 2013, the third Forum took place on 7 March in Santiago de Compostela, in connection with the AEBR Executive Committee on 8 March.

The first Round Table dealt with the state of the art of the negotiations of the Territorial Cooperation objective for the period 2014-2020 and other European programmes and initiatives that are of interest to European border and cross-border regions.

Some good practices were presented during the launching of the AEBR Good Practices Data Bank, including some from the host regions and the Norwegian-Swedish border area, while stressing the need to guarantee people-to-people projects. The second Round Table addressed the situation of territorial cooperation in the Iberian Peninsula, including the participation of the Spanish and Portuguese national governments, and foreseen perspectives towards the contract with the EU and the next Operational Programmes.

15 March 2013: Anniversary event „20 years of EUREGIO EGRENSIS“

About 300 participants representing political bodies, economic sector, public authorities, cultural, tourism and sport organisations as well as media and further civil society organisations attended the anniversary event of the EUREGIO EGRENSIS celebrating its 20th anniversary that took place in Bad Elster.

One of the highlights was the keynote speech of the Member of the European Parliament, Ms Constanze Krehl. Impressive was also the contribution of the past and present presidents of the three Working Communities of the EUREGIO EGRENSIS that in a dialogue looked back at the past 20 years: Dr. Tassilo Lenk, Head of the Vogtlandkreis district, Dr. Birgit Seelbinder, Mayor of Marktredwitz and President of the Working Community of Bavaria and František Čurka, Mayor of Halže and President of the Working Community of Bohemia. The President of the Working Community of Saxony / Thuringia, Ralf Oberdorfer closed together with the Secretary General of AEBR, Martín Guillermo Ramírez, the official part of the event.



INTERMODES 2013



AEBR Forum in Santiago de Compostela



Martín Guillermo Ramírez and Ralf Oberdorfer, "20 years of EUREGIO EGRENSIS"

13 June 2013: Conference ""Cross-border cooperation: Best practice and Future Opportunities from across the European Union""

In cooperation with the AEBR the East Border Region Ltd, an organisation founded by the local authorities for the coordination of cross-border cooperation at the Irish-Northern Irish border, organised on 13th June 2013 a conference in Trim, Ireland. In the scope of the conference the current situation of the European territorial cooperation objective was checked and best practice examples presented. More than 150 participants, 50 of which were from border regions across Europe, took part in this event. In the first session that focused on territorial cooperation in the new funding period participated representatives of the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions, the AEBR as well as the Managing Authority for the INTERREG Programme between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The second discussion dealt with cross-border economic development, whereas in the final session an exchange on the subject of sustainability took place. This very dynamic Forum was proposed to be organized every other year in order to follow up best practices and their influence in new opportunities for development through CBC.

9 July 2013: Seminar „Multilevel governance in practice at local and regional level - Decentralised policy strategies in the European year of citizens“

On invitation of the members of the Committee of the Regions, Mr Luis Durnwalder and Mr Herwig Van Staa a seminar of the CoR CIVEX Commission took place on 9 July 2013 in Bolzano. The host of the meeting was the EGTC “Europaregion Tirol – Südtirol – Trentino.“ The seminar had the aim to compare different local / regional policy management tools within the framework of the multi-level governance approach and to draw conclusions, which could be useful in the on-going consultative and political work of the EU institutions. Moreover, different approaches to regional policy in the EU were presented on the occasion of the seminar. Particular attention was paid in this context to such structures as EGTCs, Euroregions as well as macroregions. Jens Gabbe, Chairman of the AEBR Advisory Committee participated as speaker in the session dealing with the subject of interregional cooperation as model and challenge for democratic governance and citizens’ involvement.

21 October 2013: 20th anniversary of the Euro-Institut

Under the title: „Capacity building and Cross-Border Cooperation: An Approach for the Future!“ a conference took place on 21st October 2013 in Strasbourg on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Euro-Institut in Kehl. Since 1993 the Euro-Institut has supported the stakeholders of cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine region in their work. Through consultancy and training the institute helps to overcome existing obstacles and to develop new approaches. Furthermore, the Euro-Institut has promoted the creation of new structures in other European borders and the partnership with other institutions within the frame of the TEIN, the Transfrontier Euro-Institut Network (<http://www.transfrontier.eu/>).

The President of the AEBR, Karl-Heinz Lambertz and the AEBR Secretary General, Martín Guillermo Ramírez participated in the conference as speakers.



9 Projects

9.1 Combating Youth Unemployment

Border regions, especially in Baltic countries and North-West Russia are often economically back-lagging areas, lacking large urban centres, big industries and well developed infrastructure. This leads to even higher rates of youth unemployment. As a consequence, youth migration to the more centrally situated regions of the country or abroad becomes more probable. Cross-border cooperation provides unique possibilities to enlarge labour market opportunities; it increases potential of developing innovative, small businesses of international character, which might be an attractive option for young people, especially for them, who do not have a sufficient educational level. Sharing of experiences and creation of joint solutions across the border are important for addressing the challenges.

The purpose of the project is to improve the employment situation of youth in border regions in the Nordic and Baltic countries and North-West Russia. Thus the project aims to empower youth to take an active role in the process of combating unemployment as well as in the implementation of concrete activities. In order to achieve the project purpose it is planned to

involve business community from Nordic and Baltic countries and North-West Russia to engage in solving the problems of youth unemployment.

The geographic scope of the project is mainly limited to the cross-border regions of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden and Norway and the regions of Leningrad, Pskov, Murmansk, Republic of Karelia and Kaliningrad of the Russian Federation. Further European partners should be involved in the implementation of the project as speakers and experts. Thanks to the participation of the Association of European Border Regions and Council of Europe in the project, also best practice from other European border areas can be taken into account.

The project should be limited to 23 months of implementation: February 2014 – December 2015. The project is administered by the offices of the Nordic Council of Ministers in St. Petersburg and Vilnius. The total project budget amounts to 4.806.710 DKK. The Russian co-financing is 1.451.740 DKK, which constitutes 30% of the total project budget. The co-financing of the Nordic Council of Ministers is 3.026.250 DKK, which constitutes 63% of the total project budget.

The Association of European Border Regions participates in the project as one of the main partners. The project was submitted in the end of the year 2013. First project activities started in the beginning of 2014.



9.2 Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Bridge

The project Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Bridge is implemented by the member region of AEBC, the Association of the Carpathian Euroregion Poland in cooperation with the Association for Development and Promotion of Podkarpackie „Pro Carpathia.“ The project is realized under the Swiss – Polish Cooperation Programme, which is a support programme from Switzerland to the enlarged European Union. By virtue of the international contract signed on 20 December 2007 in Berne, Switzerland has made available CHF 1 billion for nine countries that joined the European Union on 1 May 2004, including Poland. The Association of European Border Region supports the implementation of the project as external expert. Services provided by the AEBC include in particular support and advisory services in searching for Swiss partners for the exchange of know-how and best practice as well as assistance in organizing the „Alpine-Carpathian Forum of Cooperation“, an international fair and conference event taking place once a year in Rzeszów, Poland.

The strategic objective of the project is to stimulate innovative economic processes on the local, regional and international level by creating the support system and implementing institutional-operative solutions on the basis of Swiss experiences as well as to support local, regional and international partnership for the benefit of the growth policy.

The “Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Bridge” promotes and strengthens a rich market of the regional, traditional and ecological products of Podkarpackie, which potential is not used in a proper and sufficient way. It also facilitates establishing international cooperation and creates a possibility for local businesses to become present not only on Polish, but also on foreign markets.

Total project budget equals 5 488 588 CHF. The Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme supports all actions in 90% (there are also specific actions financed in 100%). The project is scheduled for 3 years: it started on 1 October 2011 and ends on 30 September 2014.

Major event organised every year in the framework of the project is the “Alpine-Carpathian Forum of Cooperation.” In 2013, Jens Gabbe, the Chairman of the AEBC Advisory Committee officially represented the AEBC in the forum and took part in a panel discussion focusing on local and over-regional initiatives of territorial cooperation in the Alps and in the Carpathians.



Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Forum 2013

9.3 CBC gets global: Latin and Central America, West Africa and Jerusalem

Study: Cross-border cooperation in Central America

The Central-American Integration System (SICA) plays an important role in the promotion of cross-border cooperation that supports considerably the regional integration processes. In particular, as regards cross-border and interregional cooperation the experiences of the European countries and the EU are of great interest for the Central-American stakeholders. On behalf of the European Commission the AEBR supported SICA in the development and implementation of cross-border actions and elaborated concrete recommendations.



CBC areas identified and studied in Central America within this study

Cooperation EU – Latin America 2012-2013

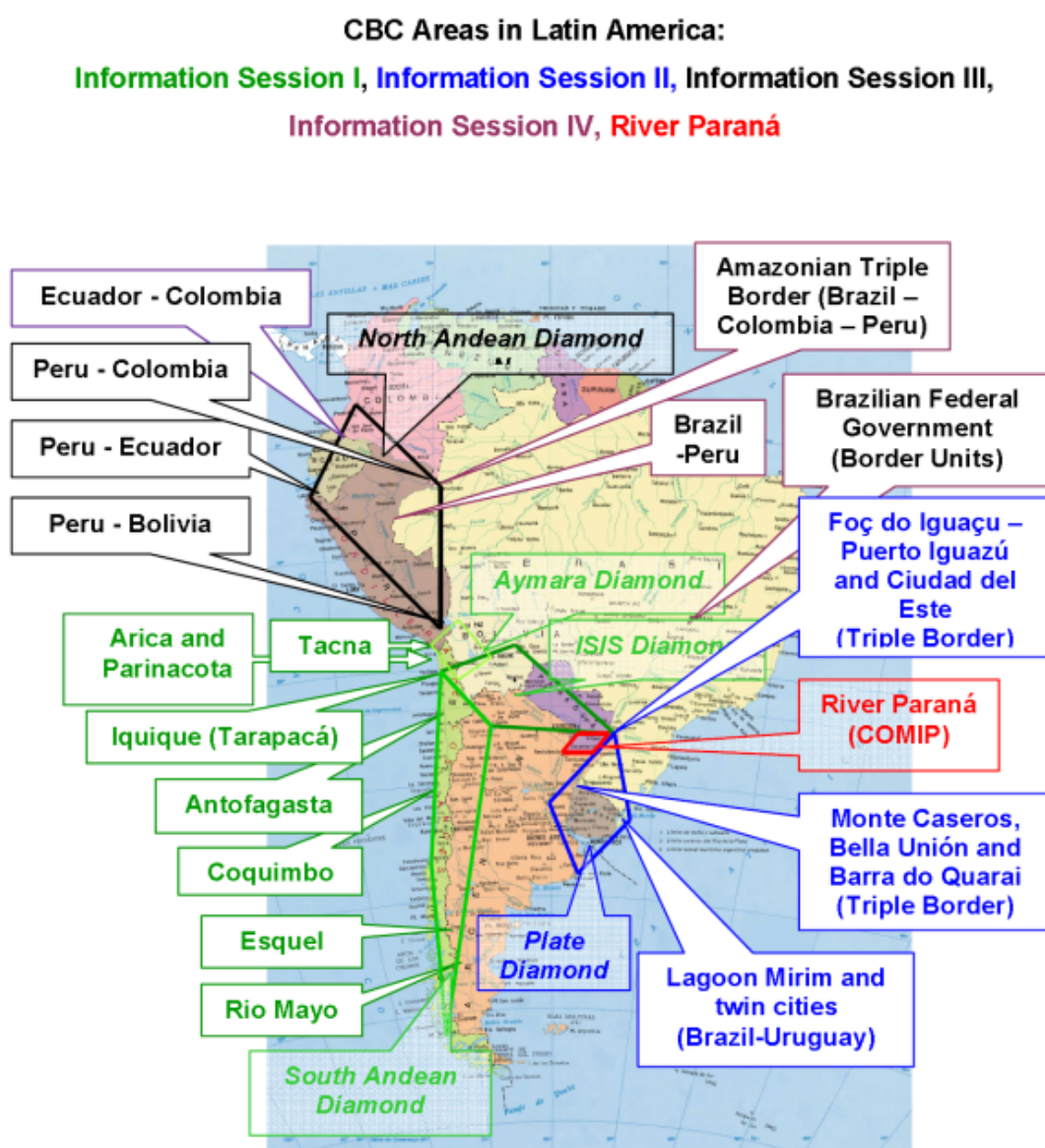
Based on the general study prepared in 2010, the AEBR gained a new contract to promote CBC in Latin America in 2011, and organised in 2012 on behalf of the European Commission several information sessions in Europe and workshops in Latin America for experts and politicians that focused on different aspects of EU regional policy and cross-border cooperation. The aim of these seminars was to exchange experiences and to foster the dialogue between the EU and the Latin American countries. By the end of 2012 the AEBR was offered a new contract by the European Commission to organise similar events in 2013.

From 19th April to 5th May 2013 a group of fourteen experts and politicians from border areas in Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia visited border regions along the Spanish-French and along the Polish-German border with the aim to exchange experiences and to get to know different structures for cross-border cooperation. The group visited Bilbao, San Sebastian, Barcelona and Perpignan in the Basque Country and Aquitaine, the German Federal Government and several projects and initiatives in Berlin; cross-border structures, local authorities and projects in Szczecin, Dresden and Frankfurt/Oder; and finished the study visit with European institutions in Brussels. The group had meetings with political representatives, project coordinators and administrative employees that demonstrated on practical examples, which potentials and chances cross-border cooperation offers.

A further information session took place from 20th May to 6th June 2013. With support of its members and partners the AEBR was able to prepare also for the second group an interesting and varied programme. In this occasion, experts and politicians from the Ecuadorian-Colombian border, the Triple Amazonic Border (Brazil-Colombia-Peru), Peru-Brazil and the Federal Government of Brazil visited the following European border areas: Euroregion Meuse-Rhine (BE-DE-NL), Greater Region (BE-DE-FR-LU, Eurodistrit Saar-Mosel (DE-FR), Région de Alsace (FR), EU institutions in Brussels, Euroregion Scheldemond (BE-NL), European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai (BE-FR), the Mission Operationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) in Paris and the Euroregion Galicia-Norte (ES-PT).

This study also foreseen the organization of several workshops (WS) in Latin America. Already in 2012, a set of WS-1 was organized in Iquique and Arica (Chile) and a set of WS-2 in Foz do Iguazú (Brazil) and Montevideo (Uruguay). In this occasion, the first set of WSs (WS-3) was organized in Puno (Bolivian-Peruvian border) on 9th September 2013 and in Lima on 11th September. The second set (WS-4) was organized in Leticia (Colombia) on 15th September, Tabatinga (Brazil) on 16th and Islandia (Peru) on 17th.

During the implementation of this study, the AEBR has updated the map of CBC areas in Latin America:



*Cross-border cooperation areas and integration diamonds in Latin America
(AEBR, own elaboration, 2013)*

Additional seminars and conferences have been organized by the European Commission and local partners in this framework: in Perú (Cusco, Tarapoto y Lima) in November 2012; Foz de Iguazú (September 2013), and Lima (December 2013).

In the interest to promote CBC also in the Caribbean area, the Commission also supported the meeting of experts in CBC from Latin America and the Caribbean, organized in Fort-de-France (Martinique) in November 2013.

- Study: Cross-border cooperation in West Africa (Macaronesia, Cap Verde, Senegal)

In the framework of this study that the AEBR realized for the European Commission, an action plan for the strengthening of cross-border cooperation in the West African coastal region - Macaronesia, Cape Verde and Senegal – has been elaborated. This action plan is mainly based on the results of the first study on cross-border cooperation in West Africa, realized by the AEBR in 2010-2011.

The president of the Beirat, Mr Jens Gabbe, also had the chance to get to know more in detail CBC initiatives in **Asia**, particularly at the borders of China.

The initiative launched by the AEBR in **Jerusalem**, together with some members and local partners, got interesting support in 2013, though recent developments in the area make very difficult any successful cooperation. In any case, there is a team of experts working in this issue together with EU officers and representatives of Israel and Palestine civil society organizations.

- 7th June: The International Day of Integration across National Boundaries

In this framework, the AEBR launched a proposal to make the 7th of June "The International Day of Integration across Borders", following the decision of the African Union to establish the 7th of June as the African Day of Borders, and assuming this in a global scenario. Making this day an official International Day would not only raise awareness of the importance of promoting peace and understanding in border regions and across national boundaries, but will also confirm their current progress, and the success of the African Union's global initiative.

Due to AEBR's relationship with the African Union (Peace and Security Department), it has collaborated in the implementation and follow up of the African Union Border Programme (AUBP), supported by the GIZ (the German International Development Agency) since 2007. This AUBP is an initiative of the African ministers in charge of border issues, with the overarching objectives of preventing conflicts and promoting integration through the delimitation and demarcation of African boundaries where this has not yet taken place. It also focuses on the promotion of the integration process and other large-scale initiatives such as local cross-border cooperation and capacity building of AU Member States on border management.

As a follow-up to the above mentioned decision of the Executive Council, the Commission of the AU celebrated the African Border Day on 7th June 2011 in Addis Ababa for the first time, inviting other organizations like AEBR and the MOT. As European organization of border regions, the AEBR decided to take this initiative on board and celebrate this Day in Europe as well (Decision of the General Assembly of the AEBR in Kursk, Russian Federation, September 2011). Afterwards, this proposal was also made to Latin American colleagues. In 2012 a video conference was organized from Arica (Chile), where Latin American stakeholders connected with their peers in Brazil, Spain and Scotland to celebrate this Day of Integration across Borders. In Scotland, hosted by the Centre for African Studies of the University of Edinburgh, representatives of the AUBP and also from the Economic Community of West African States took part.

On the 7th of June, 2013, the AEBR organized a seminar at *Casa África* in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria to commemorate this Day as well, and to follow-up different initiatives to promote Cross-Border Cooperation in Africa, Europe and Latin America, in the framework of the "Macaronesian" study. A new video conference was planned to be organized on 7th June 2014 in Joensuu (Finland), hosted by the Karelian Euroregion and in close coordination with the Association of Borderland Studies, keeping a permanent activity on this Day.

This initiative has been communicated to the Secretariat General of the United Nations in order to take into consideration the possibility of proposing the General Assembly of the UN the establishment of 7th of June as the International Day of Integration across National Boundaries. The relevance of this initiative is not only symbolic, since it also contains two significant factors. On the one hand, it is about the promotion of peace and understanding between neighbouring communities on both sides of national boundaries, but it is also about an African initiative to become global.

10 Contacts with European institutions

10.1 Committee of the Regions



The Committee of the Regions represents, as a forum of local and regional representatives from the EU, the interests of local and regional authorities in the European decision process. The Strategy Europe 2020 belongs currently to the most important political priorities for the work of the Committee. It is naturally also very strongly bound to the allocation of funds in the new programming period 2014-2020, and in this regard, the CoR is particularly watchful to the new programmes within the European cohesion policy.

The AEBC kept also in 2013 a close contact with the Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions, Gerhard Stahl and the Head of the Cabinet, Gianluca Spinaci. The opinions of the AEBC on the future cohesion policy of the EU were always made available to the members of the Committee of the Regions to support their work. In addition, the AEBC is regularly invited to

conferences, meetings and other events on territorial cooperation that are initiated by the CoR. For example, on 9 July 2013 the Chairman of the AEBC Advisory Committee, Jens Gabbe participated in a seminar focusing on multi-level governance at local and regional level that was organised on the initiative of the CoR CIVEX Commission in Bolzano. The seminar looked at different approaches to regional policy in the EU with a focus on EGTCs, cross-border cooperation and macroregions.

The work of the EGTC Platform of the Committee of the Regions, founded in January of 2011, strongly involved the AEBC, which participated actively in diverse events. Among them counts for example the 3rd Annual Meeting of the EGTC Platform that took place on 25 February 2013 in Brussels. The Chairman of the AEBC Advisory Committee, Jens Gabbe, participated in the meeting. Its agenda included an update on the inter-institutional work on the revision of the EGTC Regulation, which at the beginning of the year 2013 was at the stage of co-decision between the European Parliament and the Council. The AEBC Secretary General took also part in several events organized by the Platform during the Open Days 2013 in October.

The Committee of the Regions and the AEBC organised jointly on 19 November 2013 in Brussels a seminar on the future of the European cohesion policy 2014-2020. The discussion in the framework of the seminar focused in particular on the possibility to better involve the citizens in border regions in the elaboration of new Operational Programmes as well as on the role of the EGTCs in the new funding period. Keynote speakers were Mr Herwig Van Staa, President of the Parliament of the Land Tyrol and Mr Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of AEBC.'

10.2 European Commission

Cohesion policy is one of the most important policies of the EU, taking up more than one third of its entire budget. Only the Common Agricultural Policy is provided with more funds. At the end of July of 2011, the Commission presented its budget proposal, the multi-annual financial framework, for the period of 2014-2020. The budget debate could not be concluded until the end of 2012, despite the efforts of both Presidencies of the Council. It was only in the year 2013 when a compromise solution was successfully found. Considering the difficult financial position of certain states, it was absolutely necessary that in the territorial cooperation the priorities are selected to bring profit to the highest numbers of members, and to provide clear added value within the EU, whereby all regions shall be further on sufficiently supported.

In 2013, the AEBR was frequently in contact with the Director General for Regional and Urban Policy in the European Commission, Walter Deffaa. Mr Deffaa knows the AEBR already since 1988 from his work in the cabinets of the commissioners Alois Pfeiffer, Peter Schmidhuber and Monika Wulf-Mathies. In this regard, an intensive exchange has been developed concerning regional policy, especially cross-border cooperation. On 8 April 2013 Mr Deffaa met with the AEBR Secretary General, Martín Guillermo Ramírez and the Chairman of the AEBR Advisory Committee, Jens Gabbe in order to discuss important current issues of cohesion and regional policy. The discussion had a special focus on cross-border cooperation and people-to-people projects. The meeting was attended by three senior

officers of the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy and dealt in particular with: the negotiations on the multi-annual financial framework and the new regulations, partnership agreements between the EU and the member states, the quality of INTERREG A programmes, small project funds, time schedule for submission and approval of the operational programmes and territorial impact of EU policies.

In preparation of the meeting with Director General Deffaa, the AEBR elaborated a document that shows the importance, the benefits and added value of small projects (people-to-people projects). The arguments are based on INTERREG assessments and practical experiences in border regions. It was agreed that such projects make sense, if they serve to prepare, support and reorientate (experimental character) the measures that are foreseen in the priorities. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to combine several smaller projects in one package, making the benefits and the impact on economic and socio-cultural life in the region more visible. There is no doubt that the EU policy becomes visible and tangible through this kind of projects.

As in the previous year, Mr Deffaa also accepted our invitation to attend the Annual Conference of the AEBR in Liège, and had the chance to discuss with AEBR members about the latest developments (the Cohesion package was unlocked that same day by an agreement of the Trialogue - the Parliament, the Commission and the Council -) leading to a favourable voting on 20th November 2013.



10.3 European Parliament



The AEBR cooperates closely with members of the Committee on Regional Development of the European Parliament. In 2013, the Chair of the Committee, Ms Danuta Hübner, participated in the Annual Conference of the AEBR in Liège. On that occasion, Ms Hübner received the personal award of the AEBR for her particular commitment to the European regional policy and cross-border cooperation. Together with Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, Ms Hübner accepted one of the most important political responsibilities as Commissioner in charge: the European Regional Policy. This happened at a moment when important choices for the future needed to be made. The new regulations for cohesion and regional policy were put on the agenda. Furthermore, there was the regulation on the new European legal instrument, the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation. The scientific basis for this instrument had been provided by the AEBR that had also defined its legal basis. From the beginning on, Ms Hübner made clear that cohesion and regional policy,

and first of all territorial cooperation, should not be a top-down policy, but that the regional/local level needs to play a crucial role when this EU policy is meant to be a sustainable success.

In the years 2009-2014 Ms Hübner was the Chair of the Committee on Regional Development of the European Parliament. Also in this function she accomplished crucial tasks in favour of cross-border cooperation. Thanks to the work done by this Committee, there is a regulation for territorial cooperation in the programming period 2014-2020 and the EGTC regulation has been considerably improved and allows better cooperation at the external borders. The role of regional and local authorities with regard to the process of the elaboration of Operational Programmes has been strengthened thanks to the support of the Committee on Regional Development as well.

When she arrived to our Annual Conference in Liège, she informed about the unblocking of the Cohesion package by the Trialogue, and announced a favourable voting in the following days at the European Parliament.

In May 2014, the elections to the European Parliament took place, closing this term. In its constitutive meeting on 7 July 2014 the Committee on Regional Development elected Ms Iskra Mihaylova as new Chair of the Committee. Ms Danuta Hübner was elected as new Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs. When this report in presented to AEBR members (September 2014), the first hearings are taking place in the Parliament in order to decide on the composition of the new Commission, which will be chaired by Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker (LU) from November. The new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will be Ms Federica Mogherini (IT). Mr Donald Tusk (PL), former Primer Minister, will chair the European Council as of 1st December.

10.4 Council of Europe. Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

The cooperation with the Council of Europe dating already from the 1960s remains still intense. The AEBR has a consultative status within the Council of Europe and observer status within the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. This status gives AEBR the right to take part in the works of the Congress, submit memoranda and comment on issues discussed in plenary sessions. The AEBR regularly takes part in events organized by the Council and the Congress, particularly since the strong involvement of Mr. Karl-Heinz Lambertz in the Congress. On the other hand, due to the fact that the Secretary General himself can not attend the numerous meetings organized by the Council and the Congress, the AEBR Advisory Committee, some representatives of the region Alsace and Prof. Charles Ricq (COEUR) also represent the AEBR at some of these appointments.

The cooperation between the AEBR and the Congress focuses on the exchange of information, participation in the activities organized by both organizations and the preparation of joint actions. Some specific points refer to the increasing relevance of cross-border cooperation outside the borders of the EU. The cooperation with the Congress in this field is very important, as the emerging cross-border cooperation structures in this area need specific assistance by different actors. AEBR could also attract new member regions from this area. Constructive relationship of AEBR with the Russian Federation, Ukraine and other countries as regards the development of cross-border initiatives and structures in their border areas is very much appreciated by the Council of Europe.

The President of AEBR, Karl-Heinz Lambertz is the Chair of the Governance Committee of the Congress. The Governance Committee is responsible for affairs falling within the scope of the Congress' statutory mandate such as governance, public finance, cross-border and interregional co-operation and e-democracy as well as co-operation with intergovernmental

bodies. In October 2013, the Governance Committee presented a report focusing on cross-border cooperation: "Prospects for effective transfrontier cooperation in Europe." This report lays down some theory behind transfrontier co-operation and how actors in this co-operation have developed a positive pragmatism to overcome the legal and administrative challenges they face. Based on this report the Congress debated and adopted an own resolution on transfrontier cooperation in its plenary session on 30 October 2013.

The report and the resolution debated and adopted on 30 October 2013 by the Congress put forward innovative proposals for tackling cross-border obstacles, which are often greater in the countries which have joined the European institutions recently than in older member states. The challenge is on a par with the significance of cross-border relations: 40% of Europeans live in regions bordering on another state, and 140 of Europe's 362 regions are themselves border regions.

The report presented by Breda Pecan (Slovenia, SOC) on behalf of the Governance Committee addresses the way in which the new concepts of European governance, in particular multilevel governance, can facilitate transfrontier co-operation. Under the subsidiarity principle, transfrontier bodies should be able to deal directly with matters which concern them without having to involve national authorities.

The report lists the challenges to be tackled by those involved in transfrontier co-operation, including developing equivalences between political and administrative systems, transferring competencies and information, optimising interaction between the various players and, of course, identifying transfrontier activities which are most relevant and also most profitable and sustainable. The document then considers how transfrontier bodies can best fit into the various European governance frameworks, both horizontally and vertically.

11 Cooperation with other organisations

The Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies.

The AEBR signed in December 2012 a cooperation agreement with the CALRE, which unites seventy-four presidents of European regional legislative assemblies from Spain, Italy, Germany, Austria, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Finland and Belgium. Since the founding Declaration of Oviedo in 1997 the CALRE's mission is to go in depth in the democratic and participative principles within the framework of the EU, to defend the values and principles of regional democracy, and to reinforce links among Regional Legislative Assemblies. CALRE makes a contribution to the democratic participation of Regional Legislative Assemblies within the framework of the European Union, and by strengthening the relations between the regional assemblies, in particular by exchanging good practices. CALRE supports also the activities of cross-border cooperation of its associates.

According to the signed agreement AEBR and CALRE have the intention to:

- establish co-operation on a regular basis and develop their contacts on issues of shared interest,
- take into account the counterpart's activities when carrying out their own activities,
- promote the counselling and mutual support on issues related to the objectives of both bodies,
- identify measures likely to increase complementarities between their activities, and
- collaborate in programs or projects of interest for both parties.

In order to achieve these objectives the Presidents of CALRE and AEBR shall meet whenever necessary and at least once a year. The bodies of AEBR and the CALRE working groups shall be encouraged to identify issues which might serve as a basis for joint activities, exchange information concerning their work programmes and other documents of shared interest so that account of these can be taken in their respective documents and activities, co-operate more

closely so as to co-ordinate their activities, promote the participation of the European regions to the legislative process in the framework of national Parliaments and European Institutions and promote the institutional model of Legislative Regional Assemblies in institution building projects.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE has a Border Unit, and has developed a stronger view on cross-border issues and "CBC in Post-Conflict Situations". Several contacts took place in 2012 and, in January 2013, Mr. Ignacio Sánchez Amor, Member of Spanish Parliament, was appointed as Special Representative of the OSCE President for Border Cooperation with the aim to raise awareness in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on border issues in order to follow more closely what is being discussed and proposed in the international arena to reduce border tensions, increase border cooperation and create favourable environments in border regions in the OSCE area.

On 21st February 2013, the AEBR was invited to speak at the OSCE General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and the Environment in Vienna, where the Secretary General introduced a brief history of CBC in Europe, its contribution to the EU integration process, and its role to inspire other integration processes.

Promotion of contacts with additional international organizations and issues

It lays in our agenda the promotion of further contacts with organizations such as FRONTEX, in order to establish a dialogue on the dialectic border control and border cooperation. This is particularly relevant in case like the Southern border of the EU in the Mediterranean Sea, where seasonal waves of migrating persons pushes the EU to face international cooperation and human rights.

It would be important to keep on discussing with relevant institutions about current border disputes and conflicts, such as the cases of Gibraltar, Cyprus, Ukraine, and others.

12 Advisory Committee and Secretariat

12.1 Advisory Committee



The AEBR Secretariat General is supported in particular by the AEBR Advisory Committee (the *Beirat*) that from 2006/2007 meets regularly again, usually twice a year. After Dr. Freiherr von Malchus passed away in 2008, the Executive Committee of the AEBR decided during its meeting in Salamanca in autumn 2009 to nominate Mr Jens Gabbe for the function of the new chairman of the Advisory Committee. In the meeting of the General Assembly in October 2010 the former Vice-President of AEBR, Mr Reinhold Kolck was nominated for the function of the Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Committee.

The Chairman of the Advisory Committee nominates the members of the Committee. Due to financial reasons, the Committee consists of a small permanent circle of recognised “border experts” with Europe-wide knowledge, proved scientific activities and evaluation experiences. At the end of 2013, beside the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman, the following experts were members of the AEBR Advisory Committee: Thomas Stumm, Haris Martinos, Welf Selke, Pavel Branda, Dirk Ahner, Hans-Martin Tschudi as well as two representatives of the European Commission (DG REGIO), Mr. Moray Gilland and Mr José Antonio Ruiz de Casas, and one representative of the Committee of the Regions, Mr Christian Gsodam, as well as Mr Alfonso Alcolea on behalf of the EGTCs’ Platform, as advisory members. In particular cases further

experts are invited to the meetings. From 2014, also Mr Sánchez Amor (OSCE), Ms Birte Wassenberg (University of Strasbourg) and Mr Hans-Martin Tschudi (Regio Basiliensis) will also be invited to the *Beirat*.

In 2013, one meeting of the AEBR Advisory Committee took place. The meeting was organised in Liège on 8 November in the framework of the AEBR Annual Conference. The agenda of the meeting included following topics: Final Declaration of the AEBR Annual Conference 2013, project ULYSSES, AEBR activities outside Europe, the new EU regulation on territorial cooperation, EU regulation with regard to EGTC, new developments at the external borders of the EU, AEBR document on people-to-people projects as well as the report of the CoR rapporteur Pavel Branda on the European Union Solidarity Fund. In his statement, Pavel Branda concentrated on regional natural disasters and in particular on their cross-border impact in the framework of floods, pollution or thunderstorms. He underlined that it is important to get support in situations of emergency, but also to implement preventive measures, for example in the field of infrastructure.

Some other tasks were developed by the *Beirat*, including the coordination of institutional visits with the Secretariat General, the review of AEBR draft documents prepared for the Executive Committee, such as position papers, agendas for meetings and events, and certain strategic considerations. The *Beirat* also checks project reports and studies produced for the EU.



12.2 AEBR Secretariat

The Executive Committee of the AEBR is regularly informed about the developments in the Secretariat General. In the beginning of the year 2014, the following persons have worked at the offices of the AEBR in Gronau (Germany):

- Cordula Pandary with 20 hours per week (Communication and AEBR media)
- Marie-Lou Perou with 25 hours per week (Projects and communication)
- Petra Doods with 20 hours per week (Finances and staff)

From December 2013 to August 2014, Anna Winkler (Project coordination and finances) was on maternity leave and supported the Secretariat General as telecommuter with 10 hours per week.

The Secretary General of the AEBR, Martin Guillermo Ramirez, works from Berlin, in order to increase the strength of the AEBR in the capital. He regularly visits Gronau to deal with administrative issues and discuss with staff most relevant topics. The discussions on regular issues occur in most cases by phone or internet, typical also in the past due to numerous external meetings of the Secretary General.

At times, students of diverse fields interested in cross-border cooperation and European topics do their practical training with the AEBR (in 2013 Kate Koning and Nino Macharadze).

The EUREGIO continuously supports the Secretariat General with human and material resources. Moreover, in the year 2013 the AEBR could keep on using the material and human resources of the representation of the region Extremadura in Brussels. In this way the AEBR could be more and better represented in meetings, conferences and events in Brussels. Other partners, like "individual" members, volunteers and former interns cooperate from time to time with AEBR, attending meetings as observers, initiating project proposals and producing positive "side effects" from AEBR projects and other initiatives.

The public relations of the AEBR are still difficult, because there is no AEBR communication officer at the moment. European-wide public relations are nearly impossible on a regular basis. The website www.aebr.eu, as well as the electronic Newsflash sent since November 2009 regularly to members and friends of the AEBR facilitate these public relations. The Newsflash has a more compact layout than the previous newsletter of the AEBR and provides a good overview of important

developments within the AEBR and at the European level. By using the AEBR Newsflash also the members of the AEBR have the possibility to present important news from border and cross-border regions to the public. During 2013 the Newsflash appeared regularly, though in 2014 it has been very difficult due to staff restrictions, whereas the frequency of news through the website has increased, and a short message "New in the AEBR website" is sent from time to time in order to attract awareness about our activity. An online platform of knowledge on CBC is under preparation, as an output of the projects and studies prepared for the European Commission. This will also serve practitioners and experts on CBC as online forum for the exchange of documents and views on any CBC issue. Also under study is the elaboration of an AEBR-App for smart phones, which could also serve to coordinate activities in Facebook, Twitter or in our regular website.

Several member regions of the AEBR have followed already the request of the Secretariat General and have presented their region in the Newsflash. Also in the future it can be always used by the members to publish interesting information from border and cross-border regions, but an increase in staff (an additional half a position) is very much needed to comply with these tasks properly. This is very much connected with the general financial situation and this discussion is not the purpose of the present report.

The AEBR members can also use the website of the AEBR as information medium. The website was completely redesigned in order to offer more possibilities for communication and exchange of information. Some internet fora have been launched. It has been also possible to provide online the meeting documents for the members of the AEBR Executive Committee and the General Assembly. The current AEBR website was activated in autumn of 2010, initially in English. In the meantime, the German and French versions have also become available, whereby it is not always possible to publish all contributions and news in all three working languages.

Contacts with the press take place on particular occasions and with support of AEBR members. Usually, the AEBR Annual Conferences offer the best occasion to organise a press conference. Besides, the AEBR has shown stronger presence in the social networks (in particular on Facebook and Twitter).

Sources pictures

P. 1 (from the top): 20 Years of Euregio Bayerischer Wald / Böhmerwald, Source: Euregio Bayerischer Wald / Böhmerwald; Visit of Martín Guillermo Ramírez in Kharkiv, Source: Euroregion Slobozhanschina; Joint seminar of AEBR and the Committee of the Regions in November 2013 in Brussels, Source: Committee of the Regions; AEBR Youth Forum 2013, Source: AEBR

P. 3: Joint seminar of the AEBR and the Committee of the Regions in November 2013 in Brussels, Source: Committee of the Regions

P. 8-10: Annual Conference of AEBR, Source: AEBR

P. 12: Source: AEBR

P. 13: Executive Committee meeting of AEBR in Trim, Source: AEBR

P. 14: Source: Council of the European Union

P. 16: Source: European Commission

P. 17: Source: Euregio Egrensis, AG Sachsen / Thüringen

P. 18: Joint seminar of the AEBR and the Committee of the Regions in November 2013 in Brussels, Source: Committee of the Regions

P. 19: Visit of Martín Guillermo Ramírez in Kharkiv, Source: Euroregion Slobozhanschina

P. 20: Stakeholder meeting in Brussels in March 2013, Source: AEBR

P. 21: AEBR Youth Forum 2013, Source: AEBR

P. 22: Source: European Commission

P. 23: Source: European Commission

P. 25 (from the top): Source 1. photo: INTERMODES, Francois Gigot; 2. Photo: Region Galicia; 3. Photo: Euregio Egrensis, AG Sachsen / Thüringen

P. 26 (from the left): Source 1. Photo: East Border Region; 2. Photo: EGTC Europaregion Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino; 3. Photo: Euro-Institut Kehl

P. 28: Source: Carpathian Euroregion Poland

P. 32: Source: AEBR

P. 33: Meeting of the presidents of European regional organisations with Commission president Barroso, Source: Committee of the regions

P. 34: Source: AEBR

P. 37: Jens Gabbe in Lutsk in September 2013, Source: Region Volyn as well as on the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference in Liège in November 2013, Source: AEBR

We would like to thank all persons, AEBR members and partners, institutions, organizations and other entities that have cooperated, supported and got somehow involved in our activities.

Without their active involvement it would have not been possible to develop our plans and achieve our objectives.

**The AEBR Team
Gronau, August 2014**

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