

Annual Report 2012



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Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
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ANNUAL REPORT 2012

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CONTENTS:

1 INTRODUCTION.....	3
2 AEBR IN BRIEF	4
3 MEMBERS AND MEMBERSHIP FEES	5
4 GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE.....	7
4.1 General Assembly.....	7
4.2 Annual Conference	8
BESTOWAL OF THE AEBR AWARD 2011	11
5 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE	13
6 MAIN TOPICS IN 2012	14
6.1 European COHESION Policy	14
6.2 CROSS-BORDER WATER MANAGEMENT	15
6.3 EUROPEAN GROUPING FOR TERRITORIAL COOPERATION (EGTC).....	16
6.4 EXTERNAL BORDERS AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP.....	17
6.5 CROSS-BORDER LABOUR MARKET	18
6.6 TRANSPORT POLICY.....	20
7 TASK FORCES OF AEBR	21
8 OTHER EVENTS	24
9 CURRENT PROJECTS	27
9.1 ULYSSES	27
9.2 SCULTBORD	28
9.3 Cooperation between the EU and Latin America	29
9.4 Cross-border cooperation IN the Parana RIVER Delta	30
9.5 IMPROVING INFORMATION FOR Frontier Workers in European Border Regions.....	31
10 CONTACTS WITH EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS	33
10.1 Committee of the Regions.....	33
10.2 European Commission.....	34
10.3 European Parliament	35
10.4 Council of Europe, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.....	35
11 COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS	36
11.1 JOINT STATEMENT OF POLIGLOTTI4.EU AND THE AEBR ON MULTILINGUALITY	36
12 AEBR Advisory Committee and the Secretariat General	37
Others about the AEBR.....	39



1 INTRODUCTION

2012 was another very work-intensive year for the Association of European Border Regions. Numerous meetings, initiatives, projects and events took place aimed at further strengthening cross-border cooperation in Europe through our lobby activities, and facilitating the exchange of information and experiences between border and cross-border regions, their representatives and experts. The height of 2012 is obviously the AEBR Annual Conference, this time organised by the AEBR general secretariat in Berlin.

The main topic of the AEBR Annual Conference of 2012, "Cross-border labour market mobility - experiences, problems, challenges", is of particular importance in border regions, as it is part of the every-day life of citizens to cross the border, either to get to their work places or for leisure purposes. The problems related to different social security and tax regulations are particularly challenging in border areas that are confronted with complex and steadily changing legal, administrative, social and economic conditions. Information on standard solutions is in this case not sufficient, as individual situations require individual advice. The Annual Conference of the AEBR had the aim to exchange experiences in cross-border labour market cooperation. Similarly, the current challenges and issues were discussed with the invited experts from European border regions and politicians representing regional, national and European levels.

I would like to thank at this point particularly all our members and partners for their support for the general secretariat of the AEBR during the organisation of the AEBR Annual Conference, other events, project activities, etc. I also want to thank especially our small secretariat and our colleagues of EUREGIO in Gronau and Glanerburg for a successful and challenging year. We have begun to move part of the Secretariat to Berlin while organizing our annual meeting there without a host—a crucial aspect, in financial and organizational terms—it was a considerable challenge to organise a conference of this magnitude besides daily work. Similarly, many other activities and projects compiled in this Report could not have been implemented without the active and effective support of our members. At this point I would like to praise particularly the work of the Task Forces of the AEBR and their members. We have a permanent source of debate for EU external borders, cross-border cultural co-operation and cross-border health care. They were created by initiative of individual members, supporting the activities of the general secretariat with their knowledge and experience. Other groups are under consolidation, but the debate flows systematically amongst AEBR members and friends on cross-border labour market and the role of the Single (just *Interior*) Market, youth unemployment, on the implementation of the new Territorial Objective, the role of EGTCs, or macroregional strategies.

There are manifold activities that we have organized or taken part in. The summer youth seminar was organised for the fourth time, thanks to the prominent assistance of the members of the task force for EU external borders, and particularly Friuli-Venezia-Giulia. Several events have also been organized by the TF Culture with both successful participation and outputs. I should especially mention Johannes Moisis's (South Karelia) Rudolf Godesar's (Euregio Meuse-Rhein) commitment to keep a standing activity within the Task Forces External Borders and CB Culture. We sadly stopped to count on Eric Jakob at the Health TF head, but EUREGIO and Euregio Meuse-Rhine have taken over its coordination, ready for re-take off in 2013.

In 2012 we established partnerships with TEIN (Transfrontier Euro-Institut Network) and CECICN (Conference of European Cross-Border and Interregional City Networks), and new relations have been developed within and outside the EU. The AEBR also implements a growing number of projects, involving temporary experts for the additional work. For instance, the Secretariat General successfully participated in some EU tenders referring to cross-border cooperation in Latin and Central America, and West Africa. Thanks to these projects, the AEBR was able to expand its cooperation with the European Commission and a growing brand-new group of partners. The Commission is evaluating the findings, recommendations and outputs of these experiences very positively, helping to further increase AEBR's relevance at the European level. Our involvement in projects and other initiatives aimed to improve the information for cross-border commuters in European border regions was the central issue of the AEBR Annual Conference 2012 in Berlin and launched new initiatives in 2013.

The Secretariat General will strive to achieve further EU projects and orders in the years to come, to do justice to the rising challenges and expectations. The services of the AEBR and its communication with the members and partners should be further improved. For this reason, the Secretariat General has devised a schedule plan for the years to come, which very specifically names the focal points of activity of the AEBR and its priorities for the coming years. The full implementation of the Territorial Agenda towards EU Cohesion will also be the most important issues for the AEBR in the future, stressing the meaning of cross-border cooperation for social, economic and territorial cohesion of Europe. We work on recruiting new supporters for our ideas and activities, and would like to recall all members and partners of our association that our visibility is essential for the continuation of our activities in the future.



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, facilitating common activities 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 problems encountered daily 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 composed of the President and Vice-Presidents, Treasurer and at least 20 members representing the (cross-)border regions, with consideration given to the principle of regional balance.

The Executive Committee 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 make decisions in agreement with the **SECRETARY GENERAL**, who is accordingly authorised and privileged for representation purposes.

MEMBER BENEFITS

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** dealing 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, the scope of which exceeds the borders of one state** and for assistance with the execution of cross-border activities 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 **current 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 EU;

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

AEBR members can take advantage of the Association as **a platform** enabling the search for partners for project execution, solutions to cross-border problems or interesting ideas for new ventures;

AEBR members can take active part in strategic working sub-groups, 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 societal needs to contribute to increasing mutual understanding and tolerance, and to help overcome the existing barriers between Europe's society and the citizens of neighbouring states.

3 MEMBERS AND MEMBERSHIP FEES

At the turn of 2012/2013, the AEBR had 96 members from all over Europe. In 2012, four new members were admitted, including the Kvarken Council (Finland/Sweden), MidtSkandia (Norway/Sweden) and the North East Partnership (Northern Ireland) as full members, and the Institute of Spatial Planning from Kaliningrad as an advisory member.

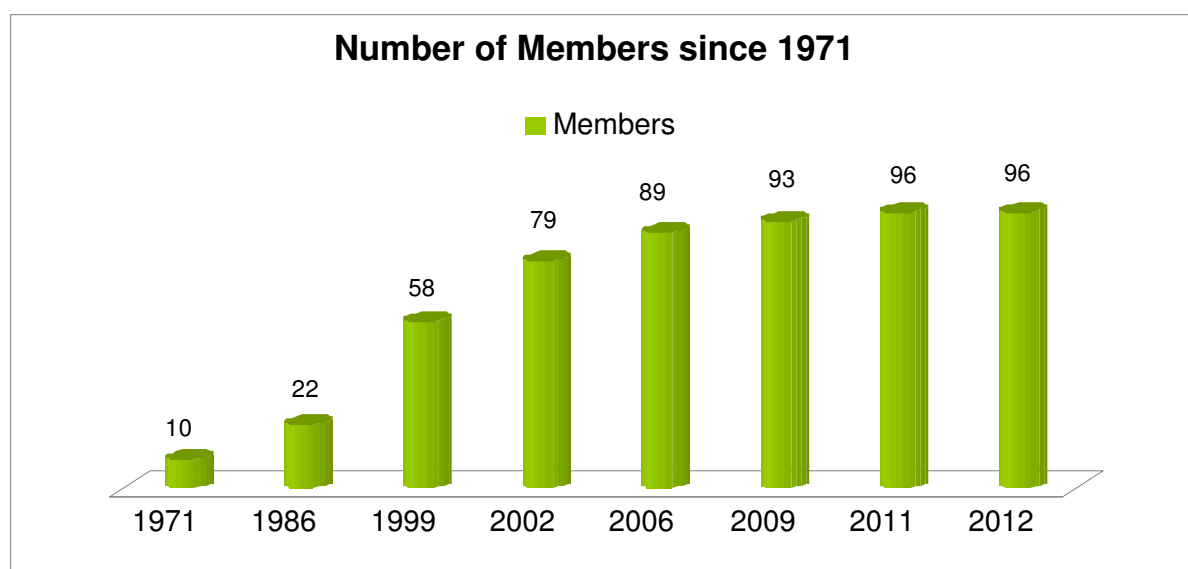
As evident from the enclosed table, the number of members has stabilised after the rapid rise at the beginning of the 1990s resulting from the political transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. In this regard, however, one should note that due to the financial bottlenecks, the status of numerous member regions must have been changed to associated members. This was followed by a reduced income from the member contributions.

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. AEBR's activities grow at the new external borders of the EU (up to the neighbouring regions in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, the Caucasus, the Balkans and Mediterranean states). One should also note that these countries make great efforts to strengthen cross-border cooperation both at the regional and national level.

The effects of globalisation have contributed to the popularisation of the idea of cross-border cooperation in far-away areas, such as the Caucasus and the Arctic, as well as the Americas and Africa. Some Russian regions and its neighbours outside of the EU have already been admitted as AEBR members. But, generally speaking, the greater geographical scope of activities means greater challenges for the 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, 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 in its structures and the 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, 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.





Mr Walter Deffaa's interventions during the AEBR Annual Conference 2012 in Berlin were followed with enormous interest by most participants

4 GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

4.1 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In 2012, the General Assembly and Annual Conference of the AEBR took place on **November 8th-9th in Berlin, Germany**. Approximately 250 participants took part in the conference, which was organised by the personnel of the Secretariat General for the first time. The Annual Conference officially concluded in November 9th the **project 'Improving information for cross-border commuters'**, implemented by the AEBR in the year 2012 in close co-operation with numerous member regions. Accordingly, the cross-border job market was the focal point of the Annual Conference of 2012.

The agenda of the General Assembly included in particular the report about activities for 2011, annual accounts 2011, the budget for 2013 and supplementary budget for 2012. In addition, the AEBR members have elected a new board for the election period 2012-2014. Karl-Heinz Lamberts, Minister-President of the German-speaking community of Belgium, was elected once again to the post of president of the Association of European Border Regions. Ann-Sofi Backgren, representing the region of Österbotten, was elected to be the first vice-president.

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the AEBR and Minister-President of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, together with the Secretary General of the AEBR, opened the Assembly and warmly welcomed the participants from all over Europe in Berlin. In his speech, the AEBR President referred to the future of the European Territorial Cooperation and the current challenges for European border regions.

During the session in Berlin, the General Assembly officially confirmed the admittance of five new members into the Association. These are:

- ♦ **Euroregion Donbass (Russia/Ukraine)**
The agreement on the formation of the Euroregion Donbass was signed in the year 2010. The Euroregion has the goal of supporting co-operation in the socio-cultural and economic areas between the member regions. The Euroregion was founded by the Ukrainian region of Lugansk and the Russian region of Rostov. A bit later, the Euroregion was joined by the Ukrainian Donetsk region
- ♦ **North East Partnership (Northern Ireland)**
North East Partnership was founded with the goal of supporting sustainable development of the north-

eastern part of Northern Ireland through cross-border, interregional and transnational cooperation. It is one of a total of five groups active in the support area of the INTERREG IV A scheme for the good of Northern Ireland, Ireland and western Scotland.

- ♦ **Kvarken Council (Finland/Sweden)**
Due to structural changes, the membership of *Kvarkenrat* in the AEBR ceased in the past years. In the year 2012, Kvarkenrat joined the AEBR again.
- ♦ **MidtSkandia (Norway/Sweden)**
MidtSkandia supports cross-border cooperation between the Norwegian region of Helgeland and the Swedish region of Västerbotten.
- ♦ **Institute for Spatial Planning from Kaliningrad as an advisory member**
The Institute, as a research centre for the Kaliningrad Region, focuses on issues of regional planning, regional development and international co-operation.

A vital issue discussed at the session of the General Assembly was the strategic action plan (Road Map) for the AEBR. It was prepared in order to enhance the communication of the Association with its members, create new service offers and initiate projects, as well as improve the financial and administrative management of the Association. In the future, the AEBR is to strengthen its presence in the German capital and initiate new co-operation with the foundations and organisations registered in Berlin that deal with topics interesting for the AEBR.

After the Executive Committee meeting and the General Assembly, on November 8th took place an opening event concerned with the future of territorial cooperation in the European Union. The main speakers participating in the discussion were the General Director of DG REGIO, Walter Deffaa, and European MP Markus Pieper. The approximately 250 present representatives of (cross-)border regions put forward, in a very lively debate with the two representatives of the EU, primarily the question of how to simplify the implementation of cross-border operational programmes in the future, what role to so-called people-to-people projects (small projects) play for the success of cross-border programmes, and why a decentralised management system is important for successful implementation of territorial cooperation programmes.

4.2 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“CROSS-BORDER LABOUR MARKET MOBILITY - EXPERIENCES, PROBLEMS, CHALLENGES”

The AEBR Annual Conference 2012, dealing with "Cross-Border Labour Market Mobility- Experiences, Problems, Challenges" was opened on Friday, November 9th, by **Uwe Schulz-Hofen**, Head of labour market and vocational training unit, Senate of Berlin (Leiter des Referats Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsbildungspolitik der Berliner Senatsverwaltung für Arbeit, Integration und Frauen), **Walter Deffaa**, Director General, European Commission, DG REGIO, **Henning Heidemanns**, State Secretary, Ministry for Economy and European Affairs, German Land of Brandenburg, **Natalia Romanova**, Chairperson of the Committee of the Regions, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and **Karl-Heinz Lambertz**, President of AEBR and Minister President of the German-speaking Community of Belgium.

Karl-Heinz Lambertz chaired the first Round Table on "Cross-border labour market – political challenges and responses." **Jutta Steinruck**, European Parliament Member, Rapporteur on the EU Programme for Social Change and Innovation, **Roberto Grilo**, Vice-President for Cooperation Affairs, Region of Alentejo (PT/ES), **Ole Norrback**, Former Finnish Minister and Ambassador, Chairman of the Freedom of Movement Forum of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and **Klaus Heeger**, Secretary General of the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI), presented their views and recommendations..

During the second session on the '**Cross-border labour market - regional experiences, problems and challenges**', which was moderated by AEBR Secretary General, experiences were presented from the regional point of view by **Ruth Taillon**, Deputy Director, Centre for Cross Border Studies, Northern Ireland, **Charles Ricq**, Centre d'Observation Européen des Régions (C.O.E.U.R.), Professor at Genève University, **Milan Jeřábek**, University of Ústí nad Labem (CZ/DE), **Linda Blom** of EUREGIO (DE/NL) and **Katrine Glotvold-Solbru**, Eastern Norway Research Institute.

In the last session, "**Cross-border labour market – cooperation initiatives and best practice examples**", cooperation initiatives and best practice examples related to cross-border labour market were presented. Among the speakers were **Eric Jakob**, Executive Director of REGIO BASILIENSIS, **Peter Hansen**, of the Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig, **Petri Kahila** of NORDREGIO, **Ilka Meisel**, German federal state of North Rhine Westphalia, and **Paul Nemes**, County Administrative Board of Värmland, as well as **Walter Reiter** of L&R Social Research from Austria.



BERLIN DECLARATION

(...) More than one third of the EU population, more than 200 million citizens plus those in neighbouring regions at the external borders of the EU, live in cross-border areas. Crossing the border to work or for leisure is part of their daily life. The possibility to work or employ personnel across borders opens new opportunities for employees and employers that benefit in manifold ways from the know-how and experiences of their neighbours. In particular cases, labour shortage in specific branches can be overcome, at least temporarily, through workers from the neighbouring country, especially if they cannot find adequate jobs in their own land. Moreover, taking into account demographic change and its expected negative impact on national labour markets, CBC can help to develop new and wider regional strategies.

Cross-border labour markets offer many additional opportunities, but **the number of cross-border commuters could still significantly be higher**. Due to difficult access to reliable information on the consequences of getting a job at the other side of the border and different languages, in many cases citizens in border areas do not take into account searching for a job in the neighbouring country. They fear that they would not have the same rights as at home, being the bureaucratic burden much higher. Moreover, there are still many practical obstacles to cross-border labour mobility that have not been solved yet, and which require much commitment and efforts by responsible public bodies. **These obstacles are mainly related to differences between national social security and taxation systems, not always compatible**. The European Commission has also fostered with its manifold initiatives the coordination of social security systems in the EU. In some cases, a clear legal framework was created in order to facilitate the mobility of workers within the EU. But in many others it is still not clear how to implement the European legal framework in practice. The responsible national bodies and administrations are usually not located at the border, and are consequently not sufficiently aware of the problems that frontier workers have to face. Consequently, the national regulations not always take adequately into account the circumstances of frontier workers, who often need “tailor-made” solutions for their special case.

Euroregions and other CBC structures can help to improve the information flows between citizens in border

areas and national bodies and administrations dealing particularly with social security and taxation issues. In fact, in many border areas, specific cross-border networks and partnerships have been initiated to bring together all relevant stakeholders from both sides of the border in order to propose adequate solutions to mobility obstacles (eg. EURES T-networks or specific networks in Euroregions dealing with cross-border labour market mobility). An important task of these cross-border networks and partnerships is also to provide all relevant information to employees and employers in border areas as regards working conditions, social security and taxation rules, job offers in the neighbouring country, bilingual vocational training and education as well as other targeted solutions to remaining barriers in the framework of infrastructure, public transport etc. (...)

This information can hardly be provided in a standardised form via internet, as the problems faced by frontier workers are very individual and constantly changing. Personalised advisory services are, accordingly, of particular importance for current and future frontier workers. They improve the accessibility of citizens to sometimes complex information, and in this way have a positive impact on cross-border labour mobility along European borders. They encourage labour mobility —however without idealising the reality— and promote the idea of cross-border labour market. Accordingly, these cross-border networks and their advisory services must be maintained and supported by the EU, but also by the regional and national governments. Information is a key element, when it comes to the promotion of labour mobility in Europe. (...)

In fact, **cross-border labour market is both a challenge and an opportunity**. It is a challenge, as there are still many prejudices and practical obstacles that usually cannot be solved at regional level, and have no priority at national level. But it is also an opportunity for employees, employers and public administrations in border areas to get to know new methods, approaches and ideas, to exchange know-how, and to find new ways in promoting entrepreneurship and growth. In any case, it is a basic brick of EU integration and, as such, it should be further facilitated and encouraged. These analyses can be also a source of inspiration for other integration processes outside the EU.



BESTOWAL OF THE AEBR AWARD 2012

The AEBR Award "Sail of Papenburg", donated by the Ems Dollart Region, was bestowed for the first time on the occasion of the Annual Conference 2002 in the city of Papenburg. This prize is awarded to border regions for outstanding programmes, strategies or projects promoting cross-border co-operation. The motto for the competition in 2012 was: **"Cross-Border labour market mobility - experiences, problems, challenges"**.

In course of evaluation of the submitted projects by the jury, there was found, after the points were awarded, equality between two projects, so that in 2012, two first place awards were given out. On the one hand, the Cross-border award 'Sail of Papenburg' went to the project **'Labour Market Mobility' of the region Galicia-Norte de Portugal**. In this Spanish-Portuguese project, the focus was on cross-border recognition of vocational diplomas and the support of bi-national educational courses.

The second distinguished project is the one in the Austrian **Region Mühlviertel and in Southern Bohemia** in the Czech Republic, bearing the name **'RegioTalent'**. The project focuses on the issue of emigration and skilled worker shortage.

In total, in the year 2012, 15 projects have applied for the Cross Border Award 'Sail of Papenburg'. Dr Reinhold Kolck, Chairman of the Jury, stressed in his address that the contributions from the most diverse regions of Europe show that the cross-border labour market has, at a considerable extent, already become reality. It became also clear, however, that the need for action persists at many borders.

WINNER OF THE AEBR AWARD 2012: EUROREGION GALICIA-NORTE DE PORTUGAL PROJECT „LABOUR MARKET MOBILITY“

IMPLEMENTATION: BEGINNING IN 2010

PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

- Support for workforce mobility in the Euroregion Galicia-Norte de Portugal;
- Strengthening competitiveness of the Euroregion through increased flexibility on the job market;
- Facilitating and simplifying the mutual recognition of vocational diplomas.

ACTIVITIES:

- Demanding detailed information on the evaluation and recognition of vocational diplomas of foreign workers on the other side of the border.
- Provision and publishing of information on the evaluation and recognition of vocational diplomas on the other side of the border for the local community.
- Removal of often-seen difficulties and hindrances that make fast recognition of vocational diplomas difficult.
- Comparison of vocational diplomas that are the same or comparable in both border regions. If necessary, definition of required qualification measures for full recognition of the relevant vocational diploma in the neighbouring country.
- Development of joint training courses

WINNER OF THE AEBR AWARD 2012: UPPER AUSTRIA (MÜHLVIERTEL) / SOUTHERN BOHEMIA 'REGIOTALENT'

PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

- The project plan aims at making the potential (qualifications, abilities) of the border regions Mühlviertel / Southern Bohemia visible and, primarily, usable
- In this regard, the first thing is to create impulses for qualified persons to work and live in the region

MAIN ACTIVITIES WITHIN THIS PROJECT:

- Collection of present information on potential (qualifications, abilities) of the border regions so that a so-called talent map is developed;
- Determination of requirements and conditions with regard to life and work in the region. In this respect, a life quality index is created;
- Determination of the readiness to implement innovations by regional close-border enterprises, as well as the need for qualifications arising from this;
- Initiation of pilot projects contributing to an increase of the quality of life and of localities as well as the use of the potentials available;

MORE INFORMATION AT:
www.regiotalent.eu



5 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In the year 2012, three meetings of the AEBR Executive Committee took place: on April 20th, an informal meeting took place on the occasion of an event organised by the AEBR at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels, on May 18th, at the invitation of the Turkish association of municipalities 'Trakyakent', and on November 8th in Berlin.

At the AEBR Annual Conference in Berlin, the new executive committee of the AEBR for the period 2012-2014 was elected. Karl-Heinz Lambertz, Minister-President of the German-speaking community of Belgium was again chosen for the post of president of the AEBR. Also Ann-Sofi Backgren from the region Österbotten, was confirmed in her function of first vice-president of the AEBR by the delegates. Günter Alsmeier, President of EUREGIO, was again elected to be the treasurer of the AEBR. Kaspar Sammer, the head of the Euregio Bayerischer Wald / Böhmerwald (German side) and Wilhelm Jungk were confirmed to be the auditors of the AEBR for the next two years.

The year 2012 was a year of looking back on the performance and results in the area of European integration and territorial cooperation. It was also a year in which the next support period in the EU, and, in relation thereto, the discussions on the long-term financial framework of the EU, gained particular attention. At the initiative of the AEBR, on April 20th, 2012, Brussels saw an event on the future of the INTERREG programmes, in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions. It presented a great opportunity to meet with representatives of the European institutions and to exchange experiences in the area of inter-

tation of operational programmes within territorial cooperation, and furthermore to discuss possible improvement options. The executive committee of the AEBR was kept updated on the developments at the European level concerning future regional and cohesion policy. Appropriate opinions and statements of the AEBR on the future of territorial co-operation were drawn up and updated as required.

Further topics handled by the executive committee were: cross-border health care, the outer borders of the EU, research and innovation, languages in the border regions as well as the 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 board, the task forces and the future perspectives of the AEBR.

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 MAIN TOPICS IN 2012

6.1 EUROPEAN COHESION POLICY

The AEBR kept its contacts with the European Commission in 2011/2012, in particular with the holder of the “Regional Policy” portfolio.

On January 1st, 2012, Denmark has taken over the presidency of the EU for six months. In the area of cohesion policy, Denmark has made it its goal to continue the negotiations about the new regulations for the years 2014-2020, and in regard to this as well the discussion on the financial perspectives. The presidency of the EU has made it as its goal to reach agreement between the member states and the European Parliament on key topics such as: strategic planning, thematic focus, ex ante conditionality, simplification, financial management and financial control.

Cohesion policy played an important role also under the following presidency of Cyprus. The working priorities of Cyprus that took over the presidency of the council of July 1st, 2012 can be divided into the following four categories:

- **efficient and sustainable Europe;**
- **Europe with a more robust economy based on growth;**
- **Europe that means more for its citizens, including solidarity and social cohesion;**
- **Europe in the world, closer to its neighbours.**

At the initiative of the Council presidency of Cyprus, in October of 2012 there took place a meeting on territorial cohesion and cohesion policy, serving particularly the preparation of the most important event on cohesion policy within the scope of the Cypriot presidency. It was primarily an informal conference of ministers on cohesion policy, which took place on November 6th, 2012, in Nikosia. The main topic of the conference was stated as the question of how cohesion policy may be more efficiently shaped in the future.

In the beginning of 2012, the AEBR has consulted its members on drawing up of a statement on the proposed new regulations concerning European cohesion policy. In the up-dated version of the statement, the **difficulties and hindrances** in the framework of the implementation of cross-border programmes and projects were treated more extensively. In relation to this, on April 20th, at the Committee of



the Regions in Brussels, within an AEBR seminar, practical examples were presented and discussed. In addition, the AEBR stressed in its statement particularly also **the major contribution of the cross-border cooperation to territorial integration and territorial cohesion** (also holding the European estate together), as well as the high European, political, institutional, economic and socio-cultural added value it creates

According to the Lisbon Treaty, border regions belong to especially disadvantaged areas. Consequential funding for all border regions has to be continued. The AEBR welcomes the introduction of a **separate regulation focusing on European Territorial Cooperation**. This is great progress, especially in the areas where cross-border cooperation is complicated or real cross-border results are hampered by diverse factors to date. A separate regulation is necessary, as the programmes affect more than one Member State. Therefore, special provisions are needed to achieve the targeted results. Some of the present weaknesses of the cross-border programmes (already identified in the Barca Report, the INTERREG ex-post evaluation as well as in several communications of the AEBR) are due to the frequent lack of bottom-up approach and overall strategic framework, an excessive number of priorities, lacking real cross-border character of projects, non-defined joint eligibility and management description, as well as the need to enhance the stakeholders' participation. In addition, the introduction of improvements and simplifications in the programme implementation and monitoring is necessary.

The AEBR could submit practical oriented and concrete recommendations and proposals, on its own initiative and in all relevant consultations, most of which have been adopted in the new draft regulation.

6.2 CROSS-BORDER WATER MANAGEMENT

An effect of climate change, the frequency of extremely dry periods and floods increases. This may strongly influence in the coming decades the availability and quality of water in European rivers and lakes. The Water Framework Directive of the EU sees water management not only as a national and regional task, but increasingly also as a cross-border task. In this respect, optimum use of the available water resources constitutes close co-operation and mutually agreed activities of the related agents at the European, national and regional / local level.

Because the topic of cross-border water management is very relevant for many member regions of the AEBR, the working group has developed the first ideas and suggestions for the foundation of a task force focusing on cross-border water management. As a prelude to this task force, **the AEBR has, together with the regional representatives of Extremadura in Brussels, on the occasion of the Open Days 2012, organised an information event on water research and management.** The event took place on October 11th, 2012 in Brussels. During the meeting, the entire spectrum of political initiatives and options of support in the area of water research and management was presented. In addition, potential partners for future tenders and projects were brought to meet.

In terms of water policy and the prevailing EU law, the representative of EU Issue Tracker, as sponsor of the event, a detailed overview of the diverse legal documents on which the water policy of the EU is based. Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortínez, member of the European Parliament, supplemented this information with details on the EU water directive and the current work in this area in the European Parliament.

Massimo Burioni, DG Research and Innovation, presented the existing support options within the framework of the current seventh framework programme (RP7), which can be used for projects in the area of water-related research. Interesting initiatives, platforms and experiences may have also been presented within the framework of the event. The AEBR has also presented its first report concerning cross-border water management, which was made available to its members in updated form and on the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference in Berlin.

Thanks to the event in Brussels, new contacts were possible. Thus, the representatives of Euregio Meuse-Rhine and of Eurisy have discussed their first points of reference for future cooperation. The region of Extremadura (the host of the event) has exchanged possibilities of closer cooperation with Eurisy during the Brussels event.

The AEBR's proposal of founding a task force on cross-border water management was discussed on occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference in Berlin with interested member regions. On this occasion, Alfred Evers of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine has presented the task force Water Governance, initiated by Euregio Meuse-Rhine, the goal of which is to exchange knowledge in the area of water management and to further strengthen cooperation between government bodies, private entities and non-profit organisations active in the water management area.



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 **CoR EGTCs Platform** that serves the exchange of experiences and implements numerous activities (also present within social networking websites). By initiative of the EGTC platform, on March 29th in Brussels, an inter-institutional conference took place, in which the Secretary General of the AEBR, Martin Guillermo Ramirez, participated. The conference served the exchange between the representatives of European institutions, regional representatives, and interested private bodies with respect to perspectives and options of use of EGTCs particularly in the next support period of 2014-2020.

On October 24th, 2012, the **Euregio EGRENSIS working group Bavaria - leading the German group of the AEGR** - has organised in Leipzig as an amendment to the regional development fair 'Euregia 2012' a workshop on the **'European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation - EGTC'**. In this quite popular event have participated over 40 representatives from German and neighbouring border regions, in order to inform themselves first hand about the newest experiences with this European legal instrument.

The European Commission presented in autumn 2011 a proposal for **the revision of the EGTC regulation**. The AEBR welcomes the submission of this proposal that has the aim to improve and facilitate the creation of EGTCs. The proposed amendments correspond with important problems that still exist while setting up and running an EGTC and offer practical solutions. They include in particular following issues:

- ♦ Bodies in non-Member States can become members of an EGTC regardless of whether the other members are from one or many Member States of the EU.
- ♦ The eligibility of membership of bodies under private law is clarified.
- ♦ Criteria for approval or rejection by national authorities are specified, and limited time for examination proposed.
- ♦ In situations, where some members of an EGTC have limited liability and other members unlimited liability, an insurance-based solution modelled on that, used for European Research Infrastructure Consortia (ERIC), is proposed.
- ♦ Concrete solutions for tax and social security regimes for employees of an EGTC are proposed.

The Council reached an agreement on the new ordinance proposition in the Spring of 2013.

THE FOLLOWING NEW EGTC WERE FOUNDED IN 2012:

- 11/2012 EGTC Euregio 'Senza Confini' (Without Borders) between the Italian regions of Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto and the Austrian federal state of Carinthia.



- 12/2012 EGTC European Urban Knowledge Network with seat in the Hague (The Netherlands).

<http://www.eukn.org>



- 08/2011: The EGTC EFXINI POLI / SolidarCity Network (Greece / Zyperus / Bulgaria)

<http://www.efxini.gr>



6.4 EXTERNAL BORDERS AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

In 2012, the AEBR made a strong effort to strengthen its involvement at the external borders of the EU and far beyond. The cooperation with border regions in this area has increased enormously in the last years. This has been particularly enhanced by the AEBR General Council and Annual Conference of the year 2011, which took place by invitation of the Euroregion Yaroslavna in Kursk. In December of 2011, a further Russian-Ukrainian **Euroregion has joined the AEBR, the Euroregion Donbass**. On October 22nd and 23rd of 2012, the new member region in the Ukrainian city of Lugansk has organised **a seminar on environment and border infrastructure**. Within the event, the border infrastructure could be analysed, and common investment options presented. The seminar offered to the Euroregions from central and eastern Europe also space for exchange of knowledge, information and experiences in environment and logistics.

The EU Member States at the external borders and the Eastern neighbouring countries are developing their territorial approaches. The Russian Federation and its cross-border structures were involved in the organisation of the Annual events of the AEBR in 2011, and a strong input to cross-border cooperation at the Russian borders is expected in the next years. Encouraging news regarding the constitution of cross-border structures and the launch of new strategies come from the Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia. On February 2nd, 2012, Kiev saw the signing, between the Ukrainian region of Vinnytsia and the Republic of Moldova, of an agreement on the creation of **the new Euroregion Dniester**. It covers the entire region of Vinnytsia and six counties of Moldova.

The cooperation of the EU with its Eastern European partners - the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova

and the Ukraine - are a key component of the international relations of the EU. Through closer ties of these countries with the EU, there arise additional possibilities for the intensification of cooperation of these countries with the EU and also among themselves.

According to the decisions made at the summit of the Eastern Partnership of September 29th/30th, 2011, the European Commission has **presented a road map for the implementation of the agreed measures and initiatives**. The progress in implementing the individual objectives should then be analysed at the subsequent summit of the Eastern Partnership in Autumn of 2013. The road map considers both the bilateral as well as the multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership. The principles of **joint responsibility, differentiation and conditionality** remain in the foreground in this regard.

The roadmap is based on the 'more for more' principle.

This means that the more a partner state progresses in striving towards reforms, the more it will obtain from the EU. We are speaking in this regard of resources for support of social and economic development, the programme for the comprehensive upgrade of institutions, better access of the partner states to the EU internal market, more robust investment financing by the EU as well as increased political dialogue.

At the meeting of the foreign ministers of the EU and the partner states of the Eastern Partnership on July 23rd in Brussels, the participants have confirmed that the road map presented by the EU Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security, constitutes an important basis for the implementation of goals of the Eastern Partnership and the evaluation of the achieved progress.



6.5 CROSS-BORDER LABOUR MARKET

All over Europe thousands of people cross the border daily or weekly on their way to work. These people require additional information and support, in particular with regard to social security and taxation. In many border areas **special advisory services** are available that provide comprehensive and individual information to frontier workers. According to a recent survey of the AEBR, in most cases **these services are dependent on EU funding**. The support for frontier workers is not a priority for national governments. In many cases the particular working and living conditions of cross-border commuters are not taken into account in national legislation at all. And even if there are appropriate legal rules at the European level, they are not always consequently implemented. **It is, therefore, important that the existing information services for cross-border workers, which very often deal also with legal problems, are maintained.** In the beginning of the year 2012, the European Commission presented a proposal for a new instrument that from the point of view of many EURES border partnerships could threaten their existence. The Committee on Employment of the European Parliament shares the opinion of the EURES border partnerships. During its meeting on June 21st, it spoke in favour of major changes to the new programme and requested financial support for EURES border partnerships within the new EU programme.

The arguments of the Employment Committee of the European Parliament were introduced successfully. In a press release from September 5th, 2013, **Jutta Steinruck**, European Parliament member, who followed the AEBR invitation to its Annual Conference to Berlin, that a **compromise could have been reached**. In the beginning, the EURES border partnerships should be financed from the European Social Fund. This would have the result of the participating member states having to request funds individually. If a member state would omit this, financing from the European Social Fund would not be provided.

The AEBR has closely followed the discussions on the new 'Labour and Social Innovation Programme' (as the official name says). In order to indicate more strongly the need of border workers for advice and the challenges of the cross-border labour market, **a workshop took place within the framework of the Open Days 2012 in cooperation with the AEBR in Brussels, entitled 'Cross-**

border labour market - a decisive challenge.' The workshop was organised by the Extremadura region in cooperation with eight further partners: the region Alentejo (Portugal), the regions Värmland (Sweden) and Hedmark (Norway), the region of Öresund (Sweden / Denmark), the East Border Region (Ireland / Northern Ireland), the Opole Region (Poland), the Olomouc region (Czech Republic) and the Bulgarian city of Varna. The workshop took place on October 9th, 2012, at the permanent representation of Portugal towards the EU. Approximately 80 participants have followed the invitations of the organisers, to discuss the chances and challenges of cross-border labour market.



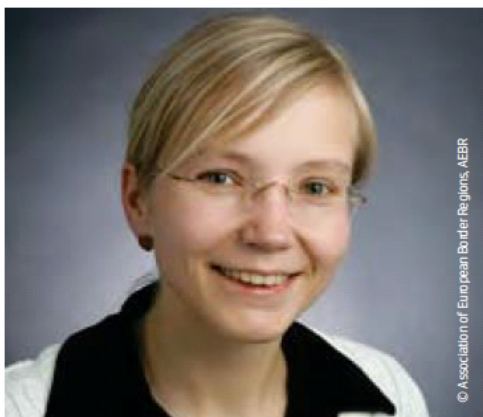
Further events of the AEBR on the cross-border labour market took place within the scope of the project implemented by the working group in the year 2012: 'Cross-border commuter information improvement'. Among them counted primarily two project workshops organised in April of 2012 in Brussels and in September of 2012 in Cracow, as well as the AEBR Annual Conference of Berlin of November 2012. In the Summer of 2013, the publication 'Sozial Agenda', published by the DG for Employment, included an article on the project results (see following page).



SPECIAL FEATURE

Cross-border commuters

Raising awareness of their particular needs
and addressing them



Anna Winkler, AEBR Projects officer: it is difficult to find information on complex cases.

From 2011 to 2012, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) ran a project to raise awareness about legal and administrative information for nationals of EU countries working in another EU country.

Anna Winkler, AEBR Projects and Finances officer, describes the project.

The AEBR project focused specifically on cross-border regions. Due to their peripheral location and differences in legislation, languages and cultures, the availability of reliable information for cross-border commuters proves to be particularly challenging. Although information on standard situations can be obtained quite easily via brochures and websites, it is difficult to find information on more complex cases. The aim of the AEBR project was therefore to promote the exchange of information between cross-border advisory services, elaborate concrete proposals to improve the existing advisory services and raise awareness about the problems and challenges faced by cross-border workers.

Cross-border information networks

Information is crucial for the promotion of labour mobility in Europe. Personalised advisory services play a key role in letting migrant workers access complex information. Cross-border information networks alongside the existing personalised advisory services must therefore be maintained and supported. Without reliable information for European cross-border workers and the exchange of information between all relevant stakeholders, it is difficult to achieve a real cross-border labour market.

Committee of the Regions opinion

This summer, twenty years after the creation of the European internal market, the EU Committee of the Regions, supported by AEBR, will issue an opinion on the situation of cross-border workers. We hope that this opinion will help raise awareness about the obstacles and challenges faced by these workers, at European and national level.

From the national perspective, cross-border workers make up for only a small group of workers. National legislation in most cases does not sufficiently take into account their particular needs and problems. We expect that the Committee of the Regions opinion will give rise to new initiatives and actions at European, national and regional level, promoting mobility in the European Union.

The AEBR plans also to launch a task-force focusing on cross-border labour markets. It should make it easier to exchange information and strengthen the network created through the AEBR project.

More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1865&furtherNews=yes>

6.6 TRANSPORT POLICY

Many border areas have suffered for decades from their peripheral location (national, sometimes even European) resulting from missing transport infrastructure. Only with a truly integration of Europe ensuring unity in diversity the previous peripheral situation of many border regions can be transformed into a more favourable central location within Europe.

Border regions at the external borders of the EU can be released from their isolation through improved connections. Border and cross-border regions gain thereby the function of bridges and become touchstones of European integration. Also improved transportation links can facilitate communication between regions, exchange of best practices and knowledge.

Cross-border infrastructure links belong to the projects of common interest, which in opinion of the AEBR should be prioritised. In creating transeuropean infrastructure, it has turned out to be very helpful to arrange border-crossings first (this causes a pull effect to the national centres, while in the interior the execution of such infrastructure components slows down towards the border). Above that, transeuropean transport axes can only unfold their full (European, national, and regional) potential, when coincidental good regional links are provided. In fact, good links to large-scale axes improve the accessibility of a border region (location factor) and the mobility (prevention of migration).

82 seaports, 37 airports, 46 border crossings with non-EU countries and 82 urban areas **were defined as infrastructure priorities within the planned Trans European**

Transport Network (TEN-T). This list is contained in the draft regulation presented by the EU Commission on October 19th, 2011., together with the proposal to establish the facility named 'connecting Europe', already informed about in the financial overview for the period 2014-2020. The whole **TEN-T network should be in place by December 31st, 2050**, but there is a priority network which is to be implemented by 31st December 2030.

The topic of the trans-European transport networks was mentioned in two events, organised by the AEBR member regions, the Euroregion Elbe/Labe and the EUREGIO. Under **the leadership of the Euroregion Elbe/Labe**, on October 23rd, 2012, within the framework of the professional fair 'Euregia', there took place in Leipzig **a professional forum entitled 'The EU initiative 'Connecting Europe - TEN-T' - good for border regions, good for Germany.'** As speakers and discussion partners were invited representatives of the EU Commission, of the AEBR, of the German Parliament, the German federal states and the border regions.

At the initiative of **EUREGIO**, on November 23rd, 2012, Osnabrück saw an international conference entitled **'Partnership for Corridor 2'**. Political representatives (of regional, national and European levels) and representatives from the area of transport and logistics discussed, within the framework of the conference, discussed the challenges and chances of working together in the corridor. Apart from that, the members obtained the chance of getting to know their partners along the corridor.



7 TASK FORCES OF AEBR

7.1 TASK FORCE OF 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. The TF has divided its geographical area into three main subareas: North-West External Borders, Eastern External Borders and Mediterranean and Black Sea.

Main activities of the Task Force in 2012 included:

- The organisation of the 4th AEBR Youth Summer Seminar in Trieste in the region Friuli-Venezia Giulia in July as well as preparations for the 2013 seminar;
- Participation in NEEBOR Annual Conference in Kirkenes (Norway) in February of 2012;
- Organisation of a seminar on cross-border migration routes and of a working meeting in Imatra (Finland) in March 2012;
- Participation in the event of Euroregion Donbass on environment and logistics on October 22nd/23rd in Lugansk (the Ukraine);
- Planning of projects and examination of project opportunities;
- Exchange of information and experience on European Neighbourhood Programme and Pre-Accession Instrument.



Already for the seventh time, the representatives of the NEEBOR network have met in the beginning of February in Kirkenes in Norway at the border with Norway to perform their annual meeting. The Annual Conference served primarily the exchange of information on the development of cross-border cooperation at the eastern external borders of the EU. Johannes Moisio, chairman of the External Borders Task force, was invited as the speaker of the event.

As in previous years, also in 2012 the AEBR Youth Summer Seminar was organised. The seminar took place upon invitation by the region Friuli-Venezia Giulia between July 23rd and 27th in Trieste. Twenty young people from Croatia, Latvia, Spain, the Ukraine, Belarus, Hungary, Greece, Serbia, Italy, Finland, the FYROM and Russia, participated in the 2012 Youth Forum. During the forum, there were plenty of debates on the peculiarities, advantages and limits on cross-border cooperation in the individual border regions. The participants also visited the neighbouring regions of Slovenia and Croatia, and learned the most important tools of cross-border cooperation at the region Friuli Venezia Giulia. An important topic was additionally cross-border cooperation between higher education facilities and research bodies.



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 AEBR in Lappeenranta (Finland) in 2007. The 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 AEBR 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 half way through 2013 by EUREGIO in close cooperation with the Euregio Meuse-Rhine.

The AEBR Task Force followed carefully from the beginning on the initiative of the European Commission for a directive on cross-border healthcare. The directive, which has the aim to facilitate access to safe and high-quality healthcare and to promote cooperation on healthcare between Member States was finally adopted by the Council on February 28th, 2011. Main contents of the new directive are:

- As a general rule, patients are allowed to receive healthcare in another member state and be reimbursed up to the level of costs that would have been assumed in his home country;
- Member States have to establish national contact points that must provide patients with information about their rights and entitlements and practical aspects of receiving cross border healthcare;
- Cooperation between member states in the field of healthcare has been strengthened, for example, in the field of e-health and through the development of a European network which will bring together, on a voluntary basis, the national authorities responsible for e-health.

From the point of view of the European border and cross-border regions, the following must be remembered:

- Cooperation between health care facilities is of particular importance for border regions, to optimise the available health infrastructure and further improve it. This aspect requires stronger attention, because the approved guideline primarily focuses on the topic of patient rights and mobility;



- Citizens in border regions need understandable and reliable information on the available health care services, costs, reimbursement and the cost of the provided services. National contact points should be able to process and respond to specific cross-border queries;

- Citizens in border regions must be guaranteed at least the current minimum standards, even if each member country continues to define their quality standards by itself;

- Border regions must be treated as pilot areas that should obtain all relevant information needed for the development of future health care policy;

- Patients and their representatives should be included more strongly in the implementation of the approved guideline.

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.

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 Euregion 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 inter-regional touristic and cultural cooperation. This workshop took in the meantime 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.

A group of about twenty cultural stakeholders, consisting in particular of heads of European Capital of Culture initiatives and representatives of border regions active in the cultural sector, gathered in Berlin to exchange their experiences, share their views on the challenges of culture and discuss the possibility of a future sustainable cooperation, in order to install a chain of cultural welding points of cultural practice.

The concept of 'culture' was defined by the workshop participants in a broad context, and did not limit itself to cultural events or economic products. They considered culture rather as a cross-section topic that influences the life of citizens and that can bring them closer together.

Considering the meaning of European identity, the workshop participants agreed that it is based on cultural diversity and not on the joint European culture. This diversity is great potential for Europe and its citizens, which, however, is not fully utilised. There exists thus the need to research specific approaches and instruments that can contribute to better utilisation of this potential in every-day life.

In this regard, border regions play, as links between varied identities, an important role. Despite the fact that many limitations were removed with European integration, and that citizens may move around freely from one country to another, cultural barriers seem to greatly separate the citizens from themselves. Border regions thus present a unique chance of better utilising the potential of cultural diversity. Thus, they should function as laboratories, where new instruments of co-operation in the area of culture may be tested.

The experiences exchanged during the workshop have shown that further on many obstacles exist hindering cross-border cooperation. These may take diverse forms. The responsible agents must at certain times handle asymmetric administrative structures and work with financing limitations for international cooperation. The public may, in certain cases, be critical towards cultural exchange due to its national history. Visa restrictions on the outer borders limit free personal movements, and certain borders remain zones of political conflict.

A further great challenge in the area of culture is the somewhat weaker position of culture on the European level. In the debates about the European budget, in the strategy Europa 2020, and in the preparatory work leading up to Interreg V, the topic of culture seems to rather be in the background. Cultural cross-border projects are, however, very important and may 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

In cooperation with its members and other partners the AEBR organises regularly conferences and seminars, meetings dealing with specific subjects that are of particular importance for European border and cross-border regions. Quite often, the AEBR participates also in events of other organisations and institutions. It's hardly possible to mention all these events in the Annual Report. Several important conferences and seminars that were organised in cooperation with the member regions of AEBR in the year 2012 have been already mentioned on previous pages. Information on further selected events can be found below:

JANUARY 29TH-30TH, 2012: ARLEM GENERAL ASSEMBLY, BARI (ITALY)

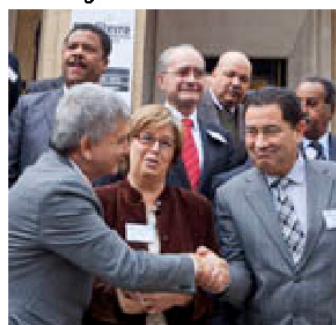
The ARLEM General Assembly took place in Bari (Italy) on January 29th-30th, 2012. The promotion of the access of local and regional authorities to European Neighbourhood Policy funding, the extension of the Covenant of Mayors to Southern Mediterranean cities and regions and the enforcement of territorial cooperation in strategic fields like sustainability and energy infrastructures can open the way to an innovative Euro-Mediterranean cohesion policy. This was the ambitious message delivered on Monday by regional and local representatives from more than 30 countries, gathering in Bari for the third plenary of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), co-organised by the Puglia region and chaired by ARLEM co-presidents Mercedes Bresso, president of the Committee of the Regions, and Mohamed Boudra, president of the region of Taza-Al Hoceima-Taounate (Morocco). ARLEM, a joint project of the Committee of the Regions, regional and local authorities around the three shores of the Mediterranean, and European and international asso-

ciations representing regional and local authorities working on the ground, is a response to the request to put the role of regional and local authorities in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership on an institutional footing. It therefore gives the partnership a territorial dimension and seeks to involve local and regional authorities more closely in the specific projects of the Union for the Mediterranean.

To be updated on the latest developments, visit the ARLEM website at:

www.cor.europa.eu/arlem

[rys]



FEBRUARY 5TH-7TH, 2012: ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE NETWORK OF EASTERN EXTERNAL BORDER REGIONS' (NEEBOR), KIRKENES (NORWAY)

The 'Network of Eastern External Border Regions', NEEBOR, was founded in Brussels in 2005, with the goal of making EU bodies, member states, regions, local authorities and NGOs sensitive to particular weaknesses and strengths of cross-border cooperation at the outer borders of the EU.



The 7th annual conference of NEEBOR took place between February 5th and 7th of 2012, in Kirkenes, Norway. AEBR was represented during the conference by its Secretary general, Martin Guillermo Ramirez, and the president of the External Borders Task force, Johannes Moisio.

Since the signing of the declaration of Kirkenes in 1993, this city has become the turning point and reference point for cross-border cooperation in the far North. In Kirkenes there have taken place already numerous events on cross-border cooperation.

Many agents in the area of cross-border cooperation from politics, economy and society have visited this border city. Many institutions active in the area of cross-border cooperation have their seats in Kirkenes. Among them is for example the International Barents Secretariat, the Barents Institute as well as the Norwegian Barents Secretariat.

JUNE 28TH-29TH, 2012, EUROPEAN UNION CONFERENCE ON INDEPENDENT LABOUR UNIONS, LUXEMBOURG

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) represents the interests of many millions of employees and workers in the European institutions, and unifies more than 50 labour union organisations in 26 countries under one roof. Since 2005, the CESI is recognised as an European partner in social issues, and within this function is regularly consulted as part of the social dialogue.

The Europe Academy is the research and training facility of the CESI. Through the organisation of seminars that are supported by the European Commission, the European Academy allows CESI members to obtain information of current European topics and to exchange information with political decision makers and international experts.

Among the topical fields of past seminars are the role of public services in the integration of migrants, the support of diversity in European public services, mobility of employees of the health sector in the European Union, life-

long learning, health and prevention at the workplace, the reconciliation of professional and private life, the European social model or also the challenges related to demographic developments.

The conference, which took place at the end of July in Luxembourg, focused on selected aspects on administrative cooperation in Europe. Martin Guillermo Ramirez, AEBR Secretary general, was invited to present at the conference the experiences and practical examples of cross-border cooperation in Europe.



JUNE 30TH, 2012: FOUNDATION CELEBRATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN REGION DONAU-MOLDAU, LINZ (AUSTRIA)

After intense three years of preparations, on June 30th, 2012, in Linz, the European Region Donau-Moldau was founded. It unifies, as an international cooperation community, the regions Plzeň, Southern Bohemia and Vysočina from the Czech Republic, Upper and Lower Austria with the Waldviertel and Mostviertel as well as the Bavarian regions of Lower Bavaria, Upper Palatinate and the community of Altötting. The task of the European Region of Donau-Moldau should be to profile the cross-border region in the county triangle of Germany-Czech Republic-Austria at the national and international level, and to further cooperation in the areas of economy, research and innovation, education and labour, energy and transport, tourism and natural resource protection.

The European Region of Donau-Moldau understands itself as a platform of information and support network for the expansion and development of existing cooperation relationships. The goal of this European region is creation of added value for the project supporters and actively making the region an attractive space of life and economy. With the official signing of the foundation deed on June 30th, 2012, the tri-lateral cooperation began for the benefit of the people living in this European Region. It should make a grand contribution to strengthening the region among competition as well as the implementation of the European thought.



JULY 10TH, 2012.: PARTNERSHIP EVENT OF TEIN, MOT AND THE AEBR ENTITLED 'PERSPECTIVES OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN EUROPE', BRUSSELS (BELGIUM)

The goal of the symposium organised on July 10th, 2012, in Brussels, was to discuss the current challenges and results of cross-border cooperation as part of European cohesion policy. The event was organised by the Transfrontier Euro-Institute Network (TEIN) in cooperation with the MOT (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière) and the AEBR. The AEBR was represented by its president, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, who has led a round table discussion in course of the event, as well as its Secretary General, Martin Guillermo Ramirez.

The participants stressed that border regions play a decisive role within European cohesion policy, should one consider that they cover 40% of the area of the EU, as well as 30% of its population. Mobility of employees, consumers, citizens and entrepreneurs is highest in border areas. Thus, border regions and cross-border regions may be considered to be testing points of European integration. In the future as well, there European cohesion policy must accordingly consider the experiences and ideas of border regions if it wants to succeed at the borders of Europe.

SEPTEMBER 14TH-16TH, 2012: THE ALPINE - CARPATHIAN COOPERATION FORUM, RZESZÓW (POLAND)

The working group of the Polish Carpathian Euroregion has organised between September 14th and 16th an international fair and conference under the title **Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Forum**. Regional and local administrative bodies from the Alpine region and other tourism regions, companies as well as NGOs were cordially invited to participate in the fair and present themselves. The AEBR was a patron of this event.

The event had the goal of supporting the development of economy within the Carpathian Euroregion through stronger political and economic cooperation, as well as to discuss new cooperation options between the Alpine area and the Carpathian region and to present and better utilise the current potentials of the regions in the Alps and the Carpathians.



9 CURRENT PROJECTS

9.1 ULYSSES

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

The participants wanted to achieve the following goals with the developed experimental and innovative project idea:

To raise general awareness amongst involved stakeholders on the basic function and the **practical utility of decentralised cross-border spatial development planning**; and to promote a more widespread use of ESPON research results for elaborating high-quality cross-border spatial development concepts.

To elaborate **multi-thematic territorial analyses for a certain number of cross-border areas**, making use of available ESPON applied research results and other local analyses and data.

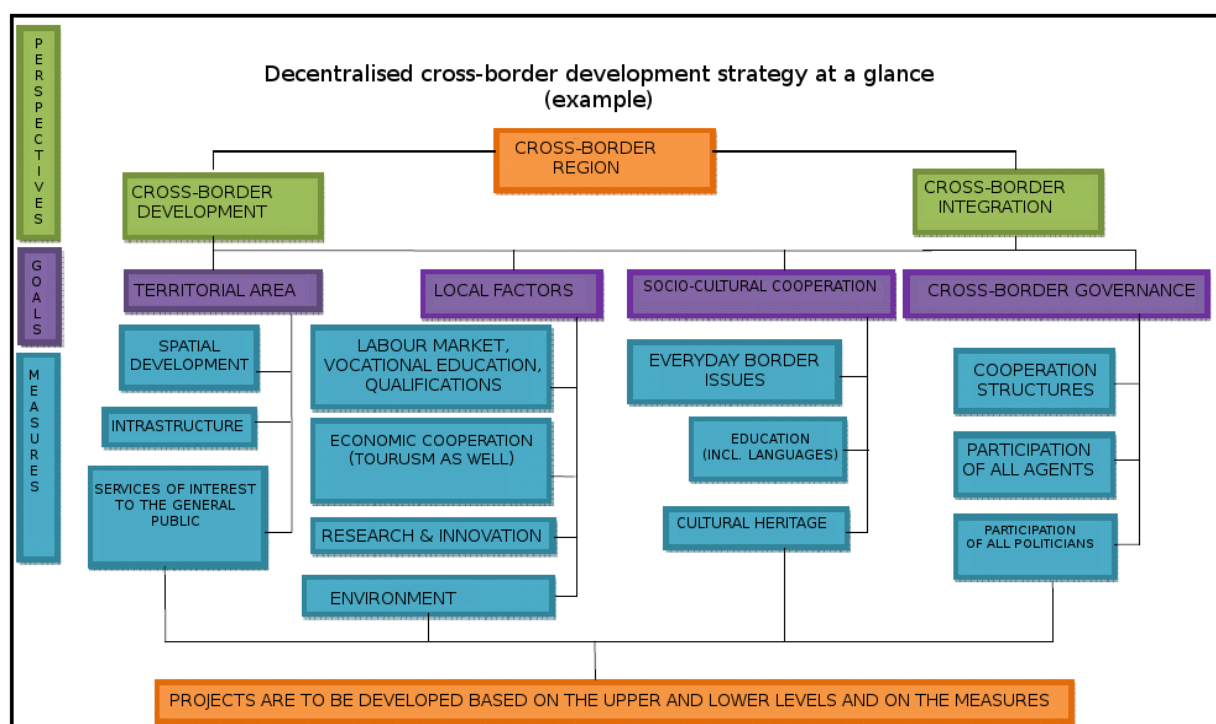
To promote **the exchange of experience and best prac-**

tice in the field of cross-border spatial development also by using cross-border strategies for preparing future INTER-REG Programmes.

To promote **further application of targeted research results** in the selected CBC areas; and to review the general usefulness of applied research results produced by the ESPON Programme in the context of cross-border spatial development planning.

Several changes in the procedures have caused a great delay in the process to develop this project. However, due to the high involvement of several AEBR members, as well as the re-confirmed interest by ESPON, it was possible to submit a revised project application for approval in Autumn 2009. The project was approved in the beginning of 2010. Directly after approval, the implementation of the project measures began. The AEBR functioned within the project as its help desk.

The last works on the project were successfully concluded in autumn 2012. In this regard, primarily a handbook was drawn up, which should simplify the development of decentralised development strategies. The project was officially concluded with a closing event taking place on September 17th, 2012, in Strasbourg.



9.2 SCULTBORD

The project SCULTBORD was implemented within the scope of the GRUNDTVIG programme. It started on August 1st, 2010 and concluded on July 31st, 2012 SCULTBORD is the abbreviation of: Spreading CULTure on BORDER Regions.

The GRUNDTVIG Programme has the aim of enhancing the knowledge and skills of adult employees. Here, an important instrument is the exchange of experiences in specific fields with people from other European countries. In case of the SCULTBORD project, the main subject is the promotion of cultural activities in border regions and the maintenance of the cultural heritage. The project partners participate in different workshops dealing with these aspects that offer many possibilities to exchange experiences and ideas. Following project partners participate in the SCULTBORD project: the region of Extremadura (ES), the municipality Kavala (GR), the Association of European Border Regions, the Euroregion Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa (RO/HU/Serbia), Fundação Eugénio de Almeida (PT) and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Blagoevgrad (BG).

In the year 2012, two project meetings took place. On **May 2nd-4th, the fourth project meeting was organised in Blagoevgrad**. It was devoted to topics of historical, cultural and linguistic identity. The workshop participants were

acquainted in Blagoevgrad among others with certain Bulgarian traditions and customs. A peculiarity among Bulgarian customs is the so-called 'Lazarka'. In this custom, girls, called 'Lazarki', visit on Easter Saturday all village inhabitants, and sing a special song to each family member.

The **final fifth project workshop took place on June 8th, 2012, in the Hungarian city of Szeged**. On occasion of the workshop, the inviting region of Donau-Kreisch-Marosch-Theiss has presented interesting cross-border projects in the area of culture and media. Among them was for example 'Europe on the air', in which three radio broadcasters from the Hungarian, Romanian and Serbian part of this Euroregion worked together. The goal of this cooperation was conquering linguistic hurdles and to inform the public in the Euroregion comprehensibly on the structure and working practices of European institutions as well as on important regional topics. A further project presented in Szeged was the Euregional Information Centre ERIC, implemented within the scope of the INTERREG IIIA programme. The information centre should increase the level of awareness of the Euroregion among the public, and to support new cooperation initiatives in the economic, social and cultural area.



9.3 COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EU AND LATIN AMERICA

The AEBR participated in a tender of the EU Commission for the improvement of cooperation between the European Union and Latin America in the area of cross-border cooperation. It won the tender and signed in December of 2011 a contract for the organisation of multiple workshops and study visits in 2012 for Latin American experts, administration employees and politicians. A follow-up project with similar content was implemented by the AEBR in the year 2013.

The project follows the recommendations of the AEBR, that stressed in its study drawn up for the EU Commission in the year 2010 the necessity of exchange of experiences and practical training for Latin American bodies in the area of cross-border cooperation. This field is related to certain challenges that must absolutely be taken into account during organisation and conception of training units. There persist still misunderstandings when it comes to the question, what cross-border cooperation is and what it is not, and what issues may be solved within this framework. Furthermore, there persist prejudices, structural asymmetries and further hindrances (of physical and psychological nature) that still must be conquered.

Local agents in Latin America, that in most cases function in a purely 'national' context, where competences and sovereign rights play a decisive role, must accordingly be appropriately prepared and trained. Besides training, the generation of trust across borders is an important basis for success of cross-border cooperation in Latin America.

There already exist certain initiatives of cross-border cooperation in Latin America that are supported by the EU. Despite this, there still remain several hurdles to be taken care of, which stem from the fact that often the appropriate legal framework conditions and instruments are not in place at all, that on the political level, cross-border cooperation receive too little support and that in the public minds, the awareness of added value of cross-border cooperation is lacking.

With targeted study visits and workshops, AEBR attempted to show to selected agents in Latin America what cross-



border cooperation is and how it is implemented in practice. Thanks to the support of many member regions and partner organisations of the working community, a programme with many diverse and interesting aspects was drawn up.

Between April 14th and 29th of 2012, the first study visit took place. Numerous experts and politicians from the border regions between Chile and Argentina, as well as between Chile and Peru and Bolivia participated in the visit. They visited in particular the border regions along the German-Dutch-Belgian border as well as along the German-Czech-Austrian border. A meeting with representatives of DG REGIO and DG DEVCO also took place within the framework of this study visit in Brussels at the offices of the European Commission.

A second group of experts and politicians from Latin America visited the Spanish-Portuguese and Spanish-French border regions between April 30th and May 14th of 2012. The participants of this visit represented the border regions between Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay as well as between Brazil and Uruguay.

To complement the study visits, in June of 2012 there took place several workshops in Latin America, in which the Secretary General of the AEBR participated. They had in particular the goal in mind, to discuss possibilities of development of cross-border cooperation in Latin America and to develop specific cooperation reference points.

9.4 CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE PARANA RIVER BASIN

The study on cross-border cooperation in the Parana Delta River, which the AEBR has elaborated for the European Commission, includes concrete proposals for the improvement of the cross-border management of the Paraná River and its Argentinian and Paraguayan banks. In this context, in cooperation with local stakeholders (in particular the COMIP, a Joint Argentinian-Paraguayan Commission for the Management of River Parana) a concrete action plan has also been prepared.

According to its offer the AEBR receives for the elaboration of the study a grant, while the contract with the EU Commission was signed in the end of September 2011. The study was finalised in autumn of 2012.

There is a strong political will showed by both the national governments of Paraguay and Argentina to develop a sustained process of cross-border cooperation. This was

In the meantime, several actors at the political level (sub-national authorities in both sides of the river, universities, NGOs and private companies) have also shown their will to enjoy a legal framework prone to support cross-border cooperation at any level.

Supranational organisations are also including more systematically cross-border cooperation in their agendas, and they see the process in the Paraná River as one of the most promising in strengthening cross-border cooperation in South America.

Many initiatives have been announced and many studies have been implemented, to analyse various aspects to support the need to the joint management of river basins by the dwellers in order to better profit the potentialities in terms of energy, production, tourism, infrastructures, etc. However, it is necessary to have an integral approach of these potentialities taking into account the points of view of different actors living and developing their activities in every basin. The Parana River is a perfect playground to elaborate and implement a comprehensive Action Plan in the coming years.

The conclusions and recommendations of the Final Report will aim to be taken into consideration by the relevant authorities in order to be translated into more specific decisions regarding:

- better organisation and management of cross-border cooperation, through better coordination of both banks,
- better planning, based upon previous experience, and better policies,
- cost-efficient initiatives,
- added value interventions, transnational integration and development,
- better involvement and participation of public and private actors.



the reason to constitute the COMIP, and now it is the time to prepare a comprehensive programme of cross-border cooperation for the coming years, with the support of the EU and other European actors.

9.5 IMPROVING INFORMATION FOR FRONTIER WORKERS IN EUROPEAN BORDER REGIONS

The topic of labour market mobility is of particular importance in border regions, as it is part of the every-day life of citizens to cross the border, either to get to their work places or for leisure purposes. The problems related to **different social security and tax regulations** are particularly challenging in border areas that are confronted with complex and steadily changing legal, administrative, social and economic conditions. Information on standard solutions is in this case not sufficient, as individual situations require individual information and advice.

There is a lack of reliable data. Therefore, it is difficult to say how many workers cross a European border several times per week in order to get from their homes to their workplaces. According to a study commissioned by the DG Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission that was published in the beginning of the year 2009, the number of cross-border commuters amounted in the EU (including EEA/EFTA) in the year 2006/2007 to about 780.000 workers. According to this study most commuting streams are centred in North West Europe, but also in the Scandinavian countries and some border areas along the new internal borders (e.g. between Estonia and Finland, Hungary and Austria or Slovenia and Italy) the level of cross-border labour mobility is considerable.

The project: Improving information for cross-border workers in European border regions implemented with the financial support from the European Union provides the opportunity to exchange experiences in this field within the network of the Association of European Border Regions and to elaborate new ideas and recommendations referring to cross-border labour mobility. **The project that took 13 months started officially on December 1st, 2011. On December 14th, 2011, a project presentation took place in Brussels** in the representation of the region of Extremadura.

The project can be divided into three phases:

- Phase 1: Baseline study and exchange of experience
- Phase 2: Analysis of the current situation and formulation of recommendations
- Phase 3: Dissemination and Communication

The first phase focused on the collection and analysis of information. It was in particular examined, which forms of advisory services for cross-border workers already exist in Europe, how they function and which results and perspectives exist for these information infrastructures. While comparing and selecting the available information the project applicant and its supporters concentrated in particular on following questions:

- Which information services are available in European border regions (for employers, workers and job seekers) in the context of cross-border labour market?
- What information is particularly requested as regards cross-border labour market?
- How many workers cross the border for work in European border areas and how many of them use the available information services?
- What are the main challenges and problems as regards cross-border labour market?



Based on the received information and the exchanges with experts in the second phase the project activities were able to focus on the elaboration of concrete recommendations and proposals for the improvement of the advisory services for cross-border workers. These specific recommendations were aimed at political decision makers at European and national levels. They were included in a **final report** that was distributed to representatives of European institutions, border areas and other interested partners of the AEBR on the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference in Berlin. The report was published in four languages on the AEBR website.



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 area bodies 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 preparation of the next programming period 2014-2020, and in this regard, particularly strongly to the follow-up programmes within the European cohesion policy.

The AEBR remained also in close contact with the Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions, Gerhard Stahl, in the year 2012 as well. The AEBR had also directly after his election in July of 2012 contacted **the new president of the Committee of the Regions, Mr Ramon Luis Valcarlos Siso**. The opinions of the AEBR on the future cohesion policy of the EU were always made available to the members of the Committee to support their work. In addition, the AEBR is regularly invited to conferences, meetings and other events on territorial cooperation that are initiated by the Committee.

On **April 20th, 2012**, the EBR in close cooperation with the Committee organised a **seminar on INTERREG management** in Brussels. Around 100 representatives of (cross-)border regions from all over Europe took part in the meeting. Within this event, particularly practical aspects of INTERREG management were discussed (for example, hindrances and difficulties from overlapping processes, voting problems, long-lasting financial inspections, etc.). The seminar offered similarly the chance of experience exchange for

participants from different European border regions. The presentation of practical examples as well as the opening speech by **Director General Walter Deffaa** (DG REGIO, European Commission) were published on the AEBR website.

The work of the **EGTC platform of the Committee**, founded in January of 2011., strongly included the AEBR, which participated actively in diverse events. Among them counts for example the **inter-institutional EGTC conference** organised on March 29th, 2012, in Brussels. The AEBR Secretary General, Martin Guillermo Ramirez, participated in the conference. Its primary goal was to discuss the perspectives for this legal instrument of the EU in the next programming period 2014-2020 as well as the improvements to regulation (EC) 1082/2006 to the EGTC.

The chairman of the AEBR advisory committee, Jens Gabbe, participated in the **workshop of the EGTC platform organised in Brussels as part of the Open Days 2012**. The workshop had the goal of discussing chances and challenges for the EGTCs in the future cohesion policy. The workshop was moderated by the coordinator of the EGTC platform, Herwig Van Staa. He said in his statement: 'The future cohesion policy opens new possibilities for the EGTCs. These new possibilities must be evaluated positively, however still certain questions remain. We thus require more discussions as well as more information, and in the end, the practical experience will show what the result looks like.'



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 work of both presidencies of the Council. It was only in the year 2013 when a compromise solution could have been successfully found. Considering the difficulties of the financial position of certain states, territorial cooperation finds it absolutely necessary to select such priorities that may bring profit to the highest numbers of members, and that provide clear added value within the EU, whereby all regions shall be sufficiently supported further.

Only two days after takeover of the office of Director General for Regional Policy, Walter Deffaa had confirmed a meeting request of the AEBR. Already on March 19th, 2012, in Brussels an hour-long debate took place, where the Secretary General of the AEBR, Martin Guillermo Ramirez, as well as the chairman of the advisory board, Jens Gabbe, have participated.

Walter 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 thought exchange process was developed concerning regional policy, especially cross-border cooperation. In the foreground stood issues of improved decentralisation of INTERREG A programmes, improved cross-border quality as well as the necessary simplification of management and controlling issues. Walter Deffaa, who earlier was Director General for taxation and the customs union with the EU Commission, made it clear that he wanted to take a look at these topics, and requested the AEBR to continue send further suggestions and stances directly to him and to DG REGIO. Walter Deffaa participated both in the AEBR seminar on INTERREG management in April of 2012 as well as in the AEBR Annual Conference in November of 2012.

On December 6th, 2012, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, the head of the AEBR and the Minister-President of the German-speaking community of Belgium, the Commissioner for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn. The topic of the meeting was the current situation of the negotiations in the multi-year financial framework of the EU and the future of cohesion policy considering cross-border cooperation.



10.3 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The AEBR is working very closely together with the members of the Regional Development Council of the European Parliament. The AEBR also contacts the President of the European Parliament if necessary and in case of special occasions. In the beginning of 2012, EU Parliament member **Martin Schulz** was chosen to be the new President of the European Parliament.



The 57-year-old German national is to stand in total two and a half years heading this European Institution, until the begin-

ning of the next legislative period in July of 2014. He is the replacement of Jerzy Buzek (EPP, Poland).

In a short address of the European Parliament in Strasbourg following his election, Mr Schulz said: 'We must be very clearly aware of the fact that people in Europe interest themselves much less for institutional debates. They care much more for the future of their children, their workplaces, their retirement money (...). (...) this is the place where the interests of these people are represented.

Border regions are particularly interested in cross-border labour market mobility and the organisation of special advisory services for cross-border commuters. There existed the risk that through the EURES-reform, the existing EURES border partnerships would not be able to carry on their work in the subsequent support period. The AEBR has contacted the permanent rapporteur in the Committee of Employment of the European Parliament, Jutta Steinruck. Mrs Steinruck participated, upon invitation of the Secretary General, in the AEBR Annual Conference in Berlin as a speaker.

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. 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) represent the AEBR at some of these appointments.

AEBR cooperation with 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 CBC structures in this area need specific assistance by different actors. AEBR could also attract new member regions from this area. Construc-

tive relationship of AEBR with the Russian Federation, Ukraine and other countries as regards the development of CBC initiatives and structures in their border areas is very much appreciated by the Council of Europe.

The AEBR has also observer status in the **ad-hoc Working Group of the Congress on Inter-regional Co-operation** launched in 2008, which is responsible to follow the Congress' inter-regional and transfrontier co-operation activities. **Dr. Karl-Heinz Lambertz**, Minister-President of the German-speaking Community of Belgium and President of the AEBR, is the chairman of this working group. The AEBR follows actively the deliberations of this working group and takes good note of its recommendations and proposals, while making contributions regularly.

In October of 2012, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities had elected a new leadership. Herwig Van Staa was elected as the new President of the Congress. Jean-Claude Frecon was elected to be the new President of the Chamber of Local Authorities. Nataliya Romanova was elected as the new President of the chamber of regions. She participated in the AEBR Annual Conference in Berlin.

11 COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

11.1 JOINT STATEMENT OF POLIGLOTTI4.EU AND THE AEBR ON MULTILINGUALISM

On occasion of the AEBR General Assembly and Annual Conference of 2012 in Berlin, the AEBR Secretary General, Martin Guillermo Ramirez, and Uwe Rohr, Project director of Poliglotti4.eu, have signed a joint statement, in which both organisation underscored their support for multilingualism among European citizens and companies. “It gives me great pleasure to join our forces together and declare our steadfast support for the promotion of Multilingualism under the auspices of the AEBR Annual Conference”, shared Uwe Mohr. “By keeping the spotlight focused on Multilingualism, we are providing one of the imperative inputs for cross-border and cross-cultural cooperation and understanding”.

As co-signatory of the declaration, Mr Ramírez added, “We sign this declaration with high appreciation for the work that the Poliglotti4.eu project has done for the cause of Multilingualism. Enabling mobility and employability across border regions, Multilingualism is a skill that all Europeans must enhance within their own capabilities, not only for the eco-

nomic health of border regions but for the European continent overall.”

During the AEBR Annual Conference, more than 20 participants have provided interviews on their personal stances on the positive influence that multilingualism has on the support of labour market mobility. These interviews may be found on the website of Poliglotti4.eu at <http://Poliglotti4.eu>.

The Poliglotti4.eu started within the scope of work of the Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism. This platform prepares, by order of the European Commission, research on the situation of multilingualism in the areas of education, linguistic diversity and social cohesion, translations and terminology as well as language policy. Starting with the research results, a range of recommendations for the implementation of European language policy was made. These are the basis of the project Poliglotti4.eu, in which nine members have joined the platform.



12 AEBR ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL

AEBR ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The AEBR Secretariat General is supported in particular by the **AEBR Advisory Committee** 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 2012, beside the chairman and the deputy chairman, the following experts participate in the advisory committee: Thomas Stumm, Haris Martinos, Christian Häfliger, Welf Selke, Pavel Branda, as well as one representative of the European Commission (DG REGIO) and the Committee of the Regions. In particular cases further experts are invited to the meetings.

At the **meeting of the Advisory Committee in Brussels on October 10th, 2012**, the former Director General for Regional Policy with the European Commission, Mr Dirk Ahner, was welcomed as a further member of the AEBR Advisory Committee. The meeting was organized in Brussels in order to discuss with representatives of European Institutions the future cohesion policy of the EU and in this regard primarily territorial cooperation. The European institutions were represented by Mr Moray Giland and Mr Jose Antonio Ruiz de Casas of DG REGIO as well as Mr Christian Gsodam and Mr Alfonso Alcolea from the Committee of the Regions. As the discussed topics are particularly relevant for the future work of the AEBR, the President of the AEBR, Mr Karl-Heinz Lambertz, also participated in the meeting. The talks concerned particularly the decisions of the European Parliament on new regulations as well as on the Commission paper 'Important Aspects of the Joint Strategic Framework'. Further items on the agenda referred to EGTCs, the situation on the outer borders of the EU as well as proposals of the AEBR on the future of territorial cooperation at the EU internal and external borders.



SECRETARIAT GENERAL

The Executive Committee of the AEBR is regularly informed about the developments in the Secretariat General. In the beginning of the year 2013, the following persons have worked at the offices of the AEBR in Gronau (Germany):

- ♦ Cordula Pandary (Office Coordination)
- ♦ Marie-Lou Perou (Projects and communication)
- ♦ Anna Winkler (Project coordination and finances)
- ♦ Petra Doods (Finances and staff)

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.

Nadja Ait-Laouad and Bianca Gabbe have left the AEBR Secretariat General after the conclusion of several projects in the year 2012.

They have provided very valuable work for the Association in the past years, and have markedly contributed to all questions and requests of the members and partners of the AEBR being answered quickly despite the great work load.

At times, students of diverse fields interested in cross-border cooperation and European topics do their practical training with the AEBR.

The EUREGIO continuously supports the Secretariat General with human and material resources. Moreover, in the year 2012 the AEBR could also use the material and human resources of the representation of the region Extremadura in Brussels. In this way the AEBR could participate in more meetings, conferences and events in Brussels.

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.

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.

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 already launched in 2009. It was also possible to provide on-line the meeting documents of the board members and the Member Assembly of the AEBR. The new 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. The Secretariat General intensified in 2012 its efforts to improve the communication with the members of the AEBR and other partners. The basis for this is a new communications strategy of the AEBR, developed in the year 2011 based on a survey among the AEBR members. This **communications strategy** includes concrete proposals for the improvement of the visibility of the AEBR and better communication with the members and partners of the association. Besides, the AEBR showed since then stronger presence in the social networks



(in particular on **Facebook** and **Twitter**). The members and partners of the AEBR may follow in particular the activities of the **Outer Borders Task Force** on Facebook. The Task Force has founded their own Facebook group, which is very active and regularly publishes new photographic and film material on current events, initiatives and plans.

Cross Border Award wurde von der EDR ins Leben gerufen

Sail of Papenburg: Zwei Gewinner

edr Berlin. Bereits zum elften Mal wurde im November die Auszeichnung für herausragende grenzübergreifende Zusammenarbeit, der Cross Border Award „Sail of Papenburg“, von der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG) verliehen. Der Award ist eine herausragende europäische Auszeichnung, die im Jahr 2002 von der EDR in Papenburg ins Leben gerufen wurde.

Anlässlich der Mitgliederversammlung der AGEG fand die diesjährige Ehrung jetzt im Auditorium Friedrichstraße in Berlin statt.

Das Thema der Versammlung und der Award-Ausschreibung lautete: „Grenzübergreifende Arbeitsmarktmobilität – Erfahrungen, Probleme, Herausforderungen“.

Dr. Reinhold Kolck aus Emden betonte: „In den Bewerbungen waren gute Konzepte für einen durchlässigen grenzübergreifenden Arbeitsmarkt gefragt.“ Kolck, früherer langjähriger Vorsitzender der EDR, ist Vorsitzender der „Sail of Papenburg“-Jury.

Bei der Bewertung der Projekte durch die Jury ergab sich nach der Punktevergabe ein Gleichstand zwischen zwei Projekten, so dass in diesem Jahr

Förderung binationaler Ausbildungsgänge im Mittelpunkt.

Das zweite ausgezeichnete Projekt ist in der österreichischen Region Mühlviertel sowie in Süd-Böhmen in Tschechien angesiedelt und heißt „Regio Talent“. Das dortige Gebiet hat mit einem Abzug qualifizierter Arbeitskräfte zu kämpfen, während den Firmen häufig diese Mitarbeiter fehlen. Durch das Projekt sollen zwei Ziele erreicht werden: die Steigerung der Arbeitsqualität durch Steigerung der Lebensqualität. Die Initiatoren der Fachhochschule Oberösterreich entwickelten dazu einen Lebensqualitätsindex und eine „Talent-Landkarte“.

„Beide Projekte zeichnen sich durch umfangreiche Strategien aus, die den Menschen in der grenzübergreifenden Arbeitsmarktreion zu Gute kommen und die gleichfalls beispielhaft für andere Regionen in Europa sein können“, sagte Dr. Reinhold Kolck. Die Jury unter seinem Vorsitz besteht aus Vertretern von zwölf EU-Mitgliedsstaaten.

Insgesamt waren 15 Projekte zur diesjährigen Vergabe des Cross Border Awards „Sail of Papenburg“ eingereicht worden. „Durch die Beiträge aus unterschiedlichsten europäischen Grenzregionen zeigt

der Cross Border Award „Sail of Papenburg“ das Projekt „Labour Market Mobility“ von der Region Galicia-Norte de Portugal. In diesem portugiesischen Projekt stehen die Anerkennung von Berufs-

Výroční konference pracovního společenství evropských hraničních regionů (AGEG) proběhla v roce 2012 v Berlíně Jahreskonferenz der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG) tagte 2012 in Berlin

De juryvoorzitter Dr. Reinhold Kolck, WVEG-president Karl-Heinz Laatz und AGEG-secretaris generaal M. Laatz (links) overhandigden de oorkonde van de winnaars van de „Sail of Papenburg“ (3e van links) en Xosé L. Lago (rechts) namen de prijs in ontvangst namens de regio Maas-Rijn en de regio Midden- en Oost-Nederland. Plaatsvervangend voorzitter van de regio Maas-Rijn, Willem Patricius, werd geïntroduceerd door de directeur van de regio Maas-Rijn, Willem Patricius.

Der Jury-Vorsitzende Dr. Reinhold Kolck, AGEG-Präsident Karl-Heinz Laatz und AGEG-Generalsekretär M. Laatz (links) überreichten die Urkunde der Gewinner des „Sail of Papenburg“ (3. von links) und Xosé L. Lago (rechts) nahmen den Preis entgegen. Stellvertretender Vorsitzender der Region Maas-Rhein, Willem Patricius, wurde von der Geschäftsführerin der Region Maas-Rhein, Willem Patricius, vorgestellt.

Předsednictví mobility na trhu práce – zkušenosti, problémy, výzvy – to byla hlavní téma letošní výroční konference AGEG. Více než 200 delegátů a odborníků přijelo do Berlína, kde si ra zažehajevacím jednání mohli vyčíst no. it referáty o aktuálním vývoji evropské kohezní politiky, výzvách v hraničních regionech a speciálně o bariérách na trhu práce.

Přednášeli zde například generální ředitel Evropské komise GD Regio Walter Doffa a Markus Pieper z výboru regionálního rozvoje Evropského parlamentu.

Představiteli se zde například Region Sønderjylland – Schleswig, Oberrheinkonferenz, Euregio Maas-Rhein a rovněž Velký region, které společně vytvořily kooperační přeshraniční síť, ve které od roku 2009 pracují na odstranění překážek mobility. Tím vznikla opravdová evropská přidana hodnota.

Kromě jednání se konala řada workshopů, a byla to byla spolupráce kandidátských měst, která se ucházela o titul hlavní města kultury. Regiony s německou účastí se scházely rovněž na pracovních setkáních, aby se shodly na nadcházejícím pracovním programu. Jako mluvčí zde byl zvolen Peter Hansen, aby koordinoval 16 těchto hraničních regionů a jejich společné úkoly.

Přednášeli opět například generální ředitel Evropské komise GD Regio Walter Doffa a Markus Pieper z výboru regionálního rozvoje Evropského parlamentu.



Grenzübergreifende Arbeitsmarktmobilität – Erfahrungen, Probleme, Herausforderungen war das Thema der diesjährigen Jahreskonferenz der AGEG in Berlin.

Über 200 Delegierte und Fachleute kamen nach Berlin, wo neben aktuellen Entwicklungen der europäischen Kohäsionspolitik Herausforderungen in Grenzregionen und speziell Barrieren auf dem Arbeitsmarkt diskutiert wurden. Es referierten z.B. der Generaldirektor der Europäischen Kommission, GD Regio, Walter Doffa und Markus Pieper vom Ausschuss für Regionalentwicklung des Europäischen Parlaments.

Hier konnte die Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig gemeinsam mit der Oberrheinkon-

ferenz, der Euregio, der Euregio Maas-Rhein sowie der Großregion das Kooperationsprojekt Grenznetz vorstellen, in dem seit 2009 gemeinsam an Mobilitätsbarrieren gearbeitet wird und somit ein echter europäischer Mehrwert entstanden ist.

Neben der Tagung fanden mehrere Workshops – u.a. auch zur Kooperation von Kandidaten statt, die sich als Kulturhauptstädte beworben haben. Die Regionen mit deutscher Beteiligung fanden sich ebenfalls zu einem Arbeitstreffen zusammen, um das kommende Arbeitsprogramm abzustimmen. Hier wurde Peter Hansen als Sorecher gewählt, um die 16 Grenzregionen und deren gemeinsame Aufgaben zu koordinieren.

PHOTOS

- Page 2: Images of the AEBR, the AEBR German Group and the municipal association 'Trakyakent'
- Page 6: DG REGIO Director general, Walter Deffaa, at the AEBR Annual Conference
- Page 8: Eric Jakob (REGIO BASILIENSIS) and Peter Hansen (Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig)
- Page 10: AEBR Award ceremony in Berlin
- Page 12: Executive Committee meeting in Istanbul. Source: host „Trakyakent“ and AEBR seminar at the Committee of the Regions
- Page 13: Executive Committee meeting in Istanbul. Source: host „Trakyakent“
- Page 14: AEBR seminar at the Committee of the Regions
- Page 15: source: AEBR
- Page 17: Founding of the Euroregion Dniester. Source: Euroregion Dniester
- Page 18: Open Days Workshop on CB labour market. Source: Extremadura region and AEBR Annual Conference
- Page 20: Corridor 2. Source: EUREGIO
- Page 21: NEEBOR conference in Kirkenes. Source: Johannes Moisio and AEBR Youth forum in Trieste
- Page 22: Commissioner Johannes Hahn during his visit to Wales. Source: European Commission
- Page 23: source: European Commission
- Page 24: ARLEM General Assembly in Bari. Source: Committee of the Regions and NEEBOR conference in Kirkenes. Source: Johannes Moisio
- Page 25: Founding of the Europaregion Donau-Moldau. Source: Europaregion Donau-Moldau
- Page 26: Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Forum 2012
- Page 28: SCULTBORD seminar in Blagoewgrad
- Page 29: Visit at the Institute of European Regions with the group from Latin America
- Page 31: Project workshop in Kraków
- Page 32: source: European Commission
- Page 33 : AEBR seminar at the Committee of the Regions
- Page 34: AEBR President Karl-Heinz Lambertz visits the EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn. Source: European Commission
- Page 35: President of the EU Parliament Martin Schulz. Source: European Parliament
- Page 36: Uwe Mohr, Project director of Poliglotti4.eu and Martín Guillermo Ramírez, Secretary general of the AEBR at the signing of the joint statement. Source: Johannes Moisio
- Page 37: AEBR Advisory Committee meeting on October 10th, 2012, in Brussels
- Page 38: AEBR employees in the Summer of 2012

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**The AEBR Team
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