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ANNUAL REPORT 2011

ELABORATION:  ANNA WINKLER, AEBR
               MARTÍN GUILLERMO RAMÍREZ, AEBR

GERMAN TRANSLATION: BEHLERT & BEHLERT

FRENCH TRANSLATION: FRANÇOIS PANAGET

SUPPORT:  EDGARS DZIRKALIS, AEBR TRAINEE

LAYOUT:  ANNA WINKLER, AEBR

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1 INTRODUCTION

The year 2011 was extraordinary for the Association of European Border Regions. First of all, the 2011 Annual Conference and General Assembly was organised for the first time in the territory of the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the AEBR celebrated its 40th anniversary, which was honoured during the conference in Kursk with a festive ceremony and film presentation.

Europe has seen a lot since the day of the AEBR’s foundation in 1971 at the Westphalian Anholt castle by the representatives of ten particularly active border regions. It was a long way up to the present moment, where some two hundred euroregions, working communities, eurocities, eurodistricts and EGTCs stake out European boundaries within and without the EU. All those bodies greatly contribute to European integration. Therefore, one of the key goals of the AEBR is and shall be the representation of interests of border and cross-border regions at the European and national level.

I would like to thank all our members and partners for their support and active cooperation in the execution of our projects and initiatives. Without their help, we would not be able to fulfil all those tasks described in this report. In this context, one should primarily remember about the activities of the AEBR’s task forces, established upon the initiative of individual members to deal with the issues of cross-border healthcare and external borders that ardently support the initiatives of the Secretary General and share their professional knowledge and experience. Take for example the summer seminar for youth organised for the third time in 2011 thanks to the prominent assistance of the members of the task force for EU external borders. The theme of this meeting was primarily cross-border cooperation in the areas of the European Union’s external borders.

The AEBR also implemented many other projects. For instance, the Secretariat General successfully participated in some EU tenders referring to cross-border cooperation in Latin America and West Africa. The acquisition of these projects enabled establishment of broader cooperation with the European Commission, which positively assessed the AEBR experience and achieved results, helping to further increase AEBR’s importance at the European level. One also cannot forget about the financial effects of execution of these contracts, which have a particular incidence in our staff costs. Having comparatively low administrative expenses, in 2011 the AEBR managed to acquire EU grants for the approximate sum of €350,000. Some of these tasks could be completed in the same year, but most of them were planned for execution in 2012. What is also worth mentioning is the project for the enhancement of the information available to cross-border employees living and working in European border regions, which was approved for implementation by the European Commission at the end of 2011.

The acquired projects played an important part in the financing of the AEBR Secretariat General’s activities, particularly in view of the fact that the crisis related to the debt of some European states had a negative impact on the AEBR’s budget as well. In the forthcoming years, the Secretariat General intends also to participate in EU tenders in order to be able to meet the growing expectations and more demanding challenges. The services provided by the AEBR will be constantly subject to optimisation, and communication with its members and partners of the organisation will be enhanced. Considering these plans, in 2011 the Secretariat General conducted a survey for the Association’s members in order to learn which subjects were currently of greatest importance to the European border regions and what the representatives of these regions expected of the AEBR.

On the basis of the survey’s findings, the AEBR prepared a road map which specifically determined the key areas of AEBR’s interest and the priorities of its activities in the following years. The Territorial Agenda and the European Union’s cohesion policy shall also be the main priorities of the AEBR in the future, particularly in the context of highlighting the importance of cross-border cooperation for the entire social, economic and territorial cohesion in Europe. We hope that we will win new partners who will support our ideas and activities. For this reason, I would like to ask all members and friends of our association to take every opportunity to popularise information about the AEBR and its main ideas. Our visibility is also crucial to guarantee our future work.

Martín Guillermo Ramírez
Secretary General
2 AEBR IN BRIEF

MISSION

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

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

We enable the exchange of professional knowledge and information in order to define and direct common interests and offer suitable solutions to 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 making decisions in agreement with the

SECRETARY GENERAL, who is accordingly authorised and privileged for representation purposes.

BENEFITS FOR MEMBERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

AEBR members can take advantage of the media made available by the Association (website, newsflash, 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 society’s needs to contribute to the rise of mutual understanding and tolerance and to help overcome the existing barriers between Europe’s population and the citizens of neighbouring states.
3 MEMBERS AND MEMBERSHIP FEES

At the turn of 2011/2012, the AEBR had 96 members originating in nearly 200 border regions from all over Europe. In 2011, six new members were admitted, including the first region from Armenia, EuroCaucasus Euroregion. Other AEBR members newly admitted in 2011 included the Pro Europa Vaiadria Euroregion (German side), the German-speaking Community of Belgium, Duero-Douro EGTC (PT/ES), the Polish side of the Carpathian Euroregion and the Euroregion Donbass (RUS/UA).

As evident from the enclosed diagram, the number of Association members has stabilised after the rapid rise at the beginning of the 1990s resulting from the political transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. The difference between the number of members and the number of border regions stems from the fact that the territory of cross-border regions often covers several border regions in different states, and large territorial unions include numerous border regions from many countries.

The analysis of the AEBR membership structures indicates that there is still some balance between the presence of representatives of cross-border and border regions from the “old” and “new” European Union member states in the Association. The AEBR still holds the opinion that the area of its current activities ends with the new external borders of the EU (including the neighbouring regions in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Mediterranean states). One should also note that these states make great efforts to strengthen cross-border cooperation within their structures, both at the regional and national level. Progressing globalisation contributes 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 American and African continents. Some regions from Russia and its neighbouring states that are not European Union members have already been admitted as AEBR members. But, generally speaking, the greater geographical scope of activities means greater demand 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 changes taking place at the 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 present employment in its structures and the available proceeds from membership fees.

In previous years, the proceeds from AEBR membership fees did not reach the expected level. The rise in the fee introduced in 2008 did not have any effect. The membership fee is a disproportionately high burden, particularly for smaller cross-border units from economically poor areas. For this reason, one of the AEBR task forces presented the proposal of a new method of membership fee calculation. This method shall give greater consideration to the population and economic power of the region when calculating the fees, which shall help to distribute the burden of fees more proportionately between the richer and poorer members of the AEBR.
4 GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

4.1 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In 2011, the General Assembly and Annual Conference of the AEBR took place from 22 to 24 September in Kursk (Yaroslavna Euroregion, Russian Federation). Prepared and conducted in a highly professional manner by the authorities of the Kursk Oblast, the conference was attended by approx. 200 participants. Within the Yaroslavna Euroregion, the Kursk Oblast closely cooperates with the neighbouring Ukrainian Sumy region. The Yaroslavna Euroregion was officially established in 2007. It covers a surface area of 54 km² and is inhabited by 2.5 million people on both sides of the border.

The main points in the General Assembly’s agenda included the report about activities for 2010, annual accounts 2010, budget for 2012 and supplementary budget for 2011. In addition, the AEBR members discussed the directions to be followed by the Association’s strategy in the future. The discussion was primarily based on the AEBR road map for the following years and the draft communication strategy for the Association.

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the AEBR and Minister-President of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, together with the representatives of the region organising the conference, i.e. the Yaroslavna Euroregion, opened the Assembly and warmly welcomed the participants from all over Europe in Kursk. In his speech, the AEBR President referred, in the first place, to the future of the European Territorial Cooperation and the possibilities of cooperation under the Eastern Partnership.

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

- **PRO EUROPA VIARDINA Euroregion (German side)**
  Since 1993, the PRO EUROPA VIARDINA Euroregion has been supporting Polish-German cooperation along the Oder River line. The Latin name symbolises the Euroregion’s involvement in the fulfilment of the idea of a “unified Europe upon the Oder River”.

- **German-speaking Community of Belgium**
  Similarly to two other official communities, i.e. the French and Flemish, the German-speaking Commu-
4.2 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

FORUM: „BORDER POLICY AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION“ ON 21ST SEPTEMBER 2011 IN MOSCOW

On the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference in Kursk, on 21 September 2011 in Moscow, the Association’s Forum on “Border management and cross-border cooperation” was organised in collaboration with the delegation of the European Union to Russia.

The participants were welcomed by Etienne Claeye, Head of the Department for Cooperation of the European Union and Russia at the delegation of the European Union to Russia, who also opened the discussion, which was chaired by the AEBR Secretary General, Martín Guillermo Ramirez. Claeye presented programmes concerning cooperation of the EU with the Russian Federation and especially emphasised the potential of modernisation initiatives.

Igor Mozgo, representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, informed the participants about the interregional and cross-border cooperation initiatives that the ministry has already implemented. Dr. Christian Gsodam, representative of the Committee of the Regions, presented the initiatives of CoR related to the involvement of regional and local territorial units in integrated cooperation platforms promoted by the Committee of the Regions as part of cooperation with the EU’s neighbouring states (ARLEM in the Mediterranean area and CORLEAP under the Eastern Partnership). Dr. Rebeca Steiman from the University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) reported on the present situation along Brazilian borders, which face similar problems to those encountered along the borders of the Russian Federation.

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the AEBR and Minister-President of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, and Fernando Valenzuela, ambassador and head of the delegation of the European Union to Russia, closed the forum’s session and summed it up in their relevant speeches, which emphasised the necessity of cooperation between the European Union and the Russian Federation. Furthermore, Valenzuela put forward some interesting proposals for initiatives aimed at the activation of regional territorial units from Eastern and Western Europe. President Lambertz also stressed the importance of cross-border cooperation for regional development and the resulting benefits for the inhabitants of border regions.

The Forum was attended by eighty representatives of border and cross-border regions from all over Europe. The event culminated with the adoption of the “Memorandum of cooperation between the AEBR and the Federal Agency for the Development of the State Border Facilities of the Russian Federation (Rosgranitsa)”. In this context, the primary goal will be the attempted intensification of exchange of information concerning the management of customs clearance and control along the borders and the impact of border controls on the development opportunities of border regions. This should enable the gathering of greater knowledge about successful practices of integrated management of border control and cross-border cooperation.
The AEBR Annual Conference in Kursk was attended by 200 representatives of border and cross-border regions from 22 states. The motto of the Annual Conference 2011 was: “Pan-European cross-border cooperation: European Union, Russian Federation, neighbouring states and candidates for EU accession”. Upon the request of the host region, the conference agenda also included the subject of “Sustainable development in border regions: innovations, infrastructure and scientific foundations of the economy”.

The AEBR Annual Conference was officially opened on 22 September by Aleksandar Mihajlov, governor of the Russian Kursk Oblast, and Victor Cherniavsky, deputy governor of the Ukrainian Sumy Region. The inauguration session was also attended by Vladimir Lebedenko, representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, D. Fiskin, representative of the Ministry of Regional Development, Gennady Plokhikh, Vice-Governor of Kursk, S. Shilo, Federal Inspector in Kursk, Natalia Romanova, Deputy President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities at the Council of Europe, and Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the AEBR and Minister-President of the German-speaking Community of Belgium.

The results of the conference were included in the resolution summing up this year’s edition of the conference. Its contents focused mainly on the importance of cross-border cooperation for territorial cohesion.

One of the main goals of border regions still remains the sustainable development of their territories and the overcoming of present difficulties that evolve with time:

- First of all, the goal is to reduce and remove local barriers and prejudices common among the people. This is a way to eliminate barriers, border controls and prejudices against neighbours and to build bridges instead.
- The newly gained freedom increases mobility. People cross borders going to work, to study or going on holiday trips. This generates new questions and problems, such as issues related to labour laws and tax laws applicable to cross-border employees or issues related to health insurance of patients who wish to be treated on the other side of the border.
- The third pillar of activities may be the management of integrated cross-border regions. Border regions devote much more attention to self-promotion than territorially uniform areas in order to increase their identifiability and attractiveness against the background of European competition.

Satisfying the demands and expectations of all European border regions requires continued work on the implementation of the current “territorial cooperation” objective that should gain even more in importance.
At the meeting held on 17 and 18 June 1971 at the Ahnholt Castle (EUREGION, Westphalia/ Germany), representatives of 10 European border regions decided upon the founding of permanent cooperation of such territorial units under the name of the “Association of European Border Regions (AEBR”). Today, the AEBR has approximately 100 members from all over Europe.

The celebrations in Kursk were attended by the representatives of five out of ten founding regions. These were:
- EUREGIO (DE/NL)
- Ems Dollart Region (DE/NL)
- Euregio Rhine-Waal (DE/NL)
- Upper Rhine Region (CH/DE/FR)
- Alsace Region (FR)

During the celebrations, the regions’ delegates had the opportunity to congratulate the Association, briefly present its history and wish everyone the best for the future.

Günter Alsmeier, President of EUREGIO, reminded that the AEBR “has always played a pioneering role, such as attracting the attention of the European forum in Brussels to the special challenges faced by European border and cross-border regions, facilitating contacts with other border regions and participation in continent-wide cooperation projects thanks to its extraordinary structure, as well as pointing to new prospects....” At the end of his speech, Alsmeier presented the representatives of the Association with several symbolic gifts: a compass and a headlamp, so that it would never deviate from the set course.

In his speech, Ulrich Francken, member of the board of the Euregio Rhine-Waal, thanked the AEBR for its work. He emphasised his hopes that “the AEBR will successfully represent the interests of border regions and serve as a thought exchange platform in the future.”

Jean-Marie Belliard, member of the council of the Région Alsace, observed that “… since Alsace became an AEBR member, its partnership connections with other units have been steadily developing. The activities of the AEBR are unique, as their scope covers nearly all border regions in Europe and offers an effective lobby within the arena of European institutions ..... Considering the prospects concerning lobbying and execution of projects, the Alsace Region assesses its membership in the AEBR as a crucial benefit from the perspective of visibility within the European arena and development of its areas .... Finally, one also needs to say that, as a region, Alsace is pleased to continue its membership in the AEBR and also treats the Association as a promoter of border and cross-border initiatives expressed through specific projects. It is the advocate of the member regions within the European forum.”

In his speech, Eric Jakob, Executive Director of REGIO BASILIENSIS, reminded that REGIO BASILIENSIS and the Euroregions situated along the Dutch-German border had been the first European organisations focusing on the development of cross-border regional cooperation. The Association of European Border Regions was established upon the initiative of these regions to serve as a lobbying instrument within the forum of the European Union and individual states. In the context of the present situation, Jakob considers the organisation as “hopefully not the only guardian of the fire spurring people on to fundamentally fight for a Europe open to the voice of citizens and following the principle of pragmatism.”

Bernhard Bramlage, President of the Ems Dollart Region and Vice-President of the AEBR, focused in his speech upon the many activities and successes of the AEBR in connection with the Community’s INTERREG initiative, introduction of the new objective “European Territorial Cooperation” and the current debate on the Europe 2020 Strategy, etc. Bramlage ended his speech with best wishes on the 40th anniversary of the AEBR. At the same time, he reminded that “for the benefit of citizens of border regions, it is necessary to work incessantly for further development of economic and cultural cross-border cooperation.”

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary, the AEBR published a special brochure (available at the AEBR’s website: www.aebr.eu) containing congratulations and wishes sent by prominent representatives of European institutions, as well as numerous members and well-wishers of the AEBR.
4.3 BESTOWAL OF THE AEBR AWARD 2011

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 cooperation. Considering the fact that the AEBR celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2011, the motto for the competition in 2011 was: “40 years AEBR – 10 years cross-border award. How did your region contribute to encourage cross-border cooperation in Europe?”. The award was bestowed in 2011 to the Øresundskomiteen for the project “33 Hindrances, Challenges and Opportunities – the Øresund Model 2010”. Main objective of the project is to create a brand new model framework that would help to eliminate existing cross border hindrances and to promote free movement of workers and cohesive labour market between Sweden and Denmark.

Special award was also given in 2011 to Euroregion Spree-Neisse-Bober for the project “The bridge of Markosice – fire brigades unbounded!”. The close cooperation of volunteer fire brigades from Gross Gastrose in Germany and Markosice in Poland has the aim to guarantee the fastest possible support with accidents, major incidents or catastrophes in the area of the Euroregion Spree-Neisse-Bober. Dr. Reinhold Kolck, Chairman of the Jury, thanked all applicants that have painted together a picture of the great achievements of cross-border cooperation in Europe.

Together with the AEBR President, Mr Karl-Heinz Lambertz, he handed over both prizes to the awarded regions.

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**WINNER OF THE AEBR AWARD 2011: ØRESUNDSKOMITEEN (DK/SE)**

**PROJECT „33 HINDRANCES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES – THE ØRESUND MODEL 2010“**

**IMPLEMENTATION: 2010-2012**

**PROJECT OBJECTIVES:**

- Increasing integration on the part of business community in the Øresund Region by developing cooperation between companies and other actors involved;
- Creation of common picture and list of the particular business and labour needs and conditions;
- Establish closer collaboration in order to jointly resolve cross-border obstacles regarding business and labour market.

**ACTIVITIES:**

- Eight round-table meetings and interviews with business leaders, employers, employees in order to identify the cross-border obstacles affecting business in the Øresund Region.
- Formation of a working group consisting of representatives from the regional Danish and Swedish authorities and representatives of the Nordic Council of Ministers

**WINNER OF A SPECIAL PRIZE IN 2011: EUROREGION SPREE-NEISE-BOBER**

**“THE BRIDGE OF MARKOSICE – FIRE BRIGADES UNBOUNDED!”**

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Establishing good contact between the fire brigades and cooperation in education of fire-fighters;
- Cooperating in case of emergency

**MAIN ACTIVITIES REGARDING THIS CO-OPERATION:**

- In nearest future a German-Polish fire brigade base will be situated in Gross Gastrose;
- Parties are celebrated together, village parties and private ones;
- Common competitions and exercises are organised;
- Language courses are offered to fire fighters;
- Fires, which are daily occurrences in the dry pine-woods of the German-Polish border region in summer, are extinguished together. Meanwhile, the technology is compatible: German hoses fit into Polish pumps.
5 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In the year 2011 four meetings of the AEBR Executive Committee took place: on 4th February 2011 in Tabor, Euregio Silva Nortica (CZ), on 3rd June 2011 in Gotse Delchev, Euroregion Nestos-Mesta (BG), on 22nd September 2011 in Kursk, Euroregion Yaroslavna (RU), and on 1st December 2011 in Vaasa (FI).

Following the elections to the Executive Committee on the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference in Dundalk, the composition of the Executive Committee changed a little. Accordingly, in the first meeting in the year 2011 that took place in Tabor, the new Vice-Presidents and members of the Executive Committee had the chance to present themselves.

The year 2011 was a year of retrospection of achievements and contributions in the field of European integration and co-operation. Also this was a year where particular attention was paid to the strategic development of the AEBR. In order to make the AEBR more attractive for its members, a survey took place in spring 2011, in which the expectations, wishes and needs of AEBR members were analysed. The results of the survey were discussed with the members of the Executive Committee on the occasion of its meeting in Gotse Delchev. As a consequence, it was agreed to:

- take care of the format of the different meetings: more dynamic discussions in Executive Committees and General Assemblies, with fixed timing and avoiding long financial discussions;
- better content-related Annual Conferences, fora and workshops, oriented to the delivery of accurate information, project possibilities and the exchange of good practices;
- and the communication with members is to be improved by using new tools and platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, ...).

Further topics included the future of INTERREG, cross-border healthcare, external borders of the EU, research and innovation, languages in border regions as well as cross-border labour market. The Executive Committee also treated organisational and internal issues, such as AEBR events, work contents, financial matters, advisory committee, task forces and the future perspectives of the AEBR.

The AEBR defends 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 SUBJECTS IN 2011

6.1 EUROPEAN COHESION POLICY

The AEBR kept its contacts with the European Commission in 2010/11, in particular with the holder of the "Regional Policy" portfolio.

On 11th May 2011 the President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, attended for the first time the plenary session of the Committee of the Regions (CoR). He is paying attention to the concerns of local and regional authorities, as it could be seen in the reference included in the Conclusions of the Council on the EU2020 Strategy.

Commissioner Johannes Hahn met on 12th May 2011 the presidents of the outermost regions to guarantee that their specific allocations within the EU Cohesion Policy will be kept in the future, despite of the creation of an intermediate category of regions. The Commission already included this new category in the Fifth Cohesion Report, being applicable to regions under threat of losing EU support and those with a GDP between 75-90 % of EU average. This new category would replace current "phasing in" and phasing out" regions (Structural Funds, Convergence Objective).

The AEBR does not see major problems with the introduction of this "transition" region category. The European Parliament has also shown its support to the creation of the intermediate category of regions in the future cohesion policy, as well as on some degree of conditionality, a strong monitoring of irregularities, and the system of thematic priorities.

In October 2011 the Commission adopted a draft legislative package which will frame EU Cohesion Policy for 2014-2020. The new proposals are designed to reinforce the strategic dimension of the policy and to ensure that EU investment is targeted on Europe's long-term goals for growth and jobs ("Europe 2020"). The AEBR agrees, in principle, with the Commission’s proposal, and also acknowledges most remarks posed by the European Parliament. However, in the draft legislative package no reference was made to cross-border structures and their role in the integration across European border areas. Instead, a misbalanced attention to the urban dimension and a growing interest in interregional and transnational cooperation make the AEBR worry about the impact of these mainstreaming approaches in future cross-border programmes.

In its opinions elaborated for the European Commission the AEBR underlined in particular the substantial contribution of cross-border cooperation to territorial integration and territorial cohesion (cement of the European house) as well as the high European, political, institutional, economical and socio-cultural added value it creates.

As a general consideration and, 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 a great progress, especially in those fields that CBC is complicated or real cross-border results are hampered 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, too many priorities, insufficient real cross-border character of projects, a non-defined joint eligibility and management description, as well as the need to enhance stakeholders’ participation. In addition, improvements and simplifications in the programme implementation and monitoring are 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 EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY

AEBR President Karl-Heinz Lambertz participated in the meeting with European Commission President José Manuel Barroso, the President of the Committee of the Regions, Mercedes Bresso, and the leaders of the European associations of local and regional authorities on 16 June 2011 in Brussels. Main focus was put on better involvement of municipalities and regions in terms of economic recovery and the Europe 2020 strategy, the forthcoming reform of the EU budget and the future of regional policy. This meeting focused also on the post-2013 EU financial framework and future challenges that require new and effective solutions.

The local and regional leaders stressed that the new EU budget must be “substantial” if it is to respond to the challenges ahead and to support economic recovery. A fair share of the upcoming budget should be dedicated to cohesion policy. Local and regional leaders also underlined that the Europe 2020 strategy must create a sense of “ownership” among all levels of government, as a large number of the strategy priorities concern local and regional authorities. Committee of the Regions President, Mercedes Bresso replied to the doubts coming from local and regional representatives, saying and confirming that cohesion policy saves its priority in EU agenda and cohesion policy is irreplaceable in terms of European integration, and local and regional authorities should be empowered in order to deliver Europe 2020 targets. All representatives agreed on the need for a more flexible and coherent budget, capable of meeting the goals of the tomorrow’s Europe.

Main key determinants used to describe the importance of reforms and proper evaluation of regional contribution are: solidarity between regions, partnership in terms of neighbourhood policy and subsidiarity in terms of governance, and it was agreed that all those determinants and values are the root of Political Europe. Without solidarity, partnership, Europe would have been no more than an economic free trade area. This solidarity is currently being undermined by issues related to financial stability and the overall amount of the EU budget.

Also regional representatives asked for supporting a system of governance in terms of partnership. “European, national, regional and local authorities must cooperate in a spirit of partnership if we hope to successfully address the challenges Europe is currently facing. Furthermore meaning of border regions as connections and space of relations between European countries is very relevant. Border regions should develop themselves as a space for changes, challenges and growth”, stressed the AEBR President and Minister-President of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, Karl-Heinz Lambertz.

"The Commission must now send a clear signal to economic policymakers and citizens. The future budget has to reflect the EU’s new ambitions and the irreplaceable role of cohesion policy in supporting public and private investment. It must empower local and regional authorities, and must support their efforts to deliver the Europe 2020 targets."

Mercedes Bresso, President of the Committee of the Regions
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 EGTC launched at European and national level. It is particularly worth mentioning the work developed by the CoR EGTCs Platform to activate the exchange of best practices and many other activities, especially through the social networks. The Advisory Committee of AEBR has continuously updated the available information on EGTC and has used the experience in dealing with cross border issues, to give an assessment on EGTC success.

On the occasion of the Conference on EGTC and Multi-level Governance organised in Budapest/Gödöllő on 21st-23rd March 2011, the AEBR Secretary General Martin Guillermo Ramirez moderated the session „The advantages of networking, fostering of EGTC establishment and territorial cooperation.” A lively exchange of views took place amongst the following networks: the French MOT, the Hungarian CESCI, City Twinning, ISD and the CoR’s EGTC Platform. A representative of the Hungarian government was the rapporteur. Main challenges for cross-border cooperation and the opportunities opened by the EGTCs were presented from different points of view, with a main agreement on the need to include some reforms in the regulation on the EGTC, taking into account questions of liability and staff, as well as the facilitation of EGTCs at the external borders of the EU.

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.

- The 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.

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<tr>
<th>FOLLOWING NEW EGTC WERE FOUNDED IN 2011:</th>
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<tr>
<td>06/2011 Arrabona EGTC (Hungary and Slovakia)</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.arrabona.eu">http://www.arrabona.eu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>09/2011 EGTC Europaregion Tirol- Südtirol-Trentino (Austria and Italy)</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.europaregion.info">http://www.europaregion.info</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>06/2011: The EGTC Linieland van Waas en Hulst is a partnership between Flemish (Belgian) and Dutch provinces and municipalities</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.interwaas.be/">http://www.interwaas.be/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>01/2011: Bánát Triplex Confinium (Hungary, Romania, Serbia)</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.btc-egtc.eu">http://www.btc-egtc.eu</a></td>
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6.4 EXTERNAL BORDERS AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

In 2011, the AEBR made a strong effort to highlight and develop 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 celebration of and participation in events in Moscow and other parts of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia. The General Assembly and Annual Conference of the AEBR in Kursk were of great importance while increasing the presence of AEBR in this area.

The EU Member States at the external borders and the Eastern neighbouring countries are developing their territorial approaches. The Russian Federation and its cross-borders 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. In Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia encouraging news come regarding the constitution of cross-border structures and the launch of new strategies. But nevertheless partnership should be strengthened and the political, economic and social reforms in these countries supported.

On 25th May 2011 the European Commission presented the priorities and directions of the renewed European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). They are included in the communication “A new response to a changing Neighbourhood”, which emerged as a result of the ENP review launched in July 2010. The document envisages to develop the EU-partner states economic relations, to strengthen Eastern and Southern dimensions of the ENP and to provide greater support to the EU’s neighbours in building democracy. Eastern Partnership definitely needs to be strengthened, which is crucial for the further expansion of EU-Eastern Partners relations, despite the economic crisis which the EU is now facing.

The progress in implementing the objectives of the Eastern Partnership were discussed on the occasion of several conferences and working meetings that took place in 2011 at European level. The second Eastern Partnership summit was held in Warsaw on 29-30 September 2011. The summit was attended by heads of states and governments and representatives of the EU and by 32 delegations from the EU’s member states and the Eastern Partnership countries. On the agenda, there were mainly questions related to policy implementation and further steps to take in order to build deep and sustainable democracy in those countries.

In the final declaration of the summit the participants underlined that the Eastern Partnership must be significantly strengthened and committed to stepping up its implementation, with the objective of building a common area of democracy, prosperity, stability and increased interactions and exchanges. They also agreed that the achievements and the progress of the Eastern Partnership must bring direct and clearly perceived benefits to the citizens of partner countries, and they committed to enhancing their efforts to make the Eastern Partnership visible to all.
6.5 RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

Move towards innovation-based sustainable growth is main priority of the EU as a response to ever growing globalisation. The aim here is to improve the competitiveness among European regions through research and innovations producing high value-added services and goods in order to compete in global scale economies and markets more evenly. It is time to bring European economy back on track by implementing smart and sustainable policies in order to provide growth.

Major aspect behind all this is the need for more effective use of available funding instruments in order to contribute in field of economic sustainability and growth. But it should not be forgotten that e.g. lifelong learning programmes also international and even inter-regional co-operation in field of education, research and also environment should be taken into account and should be implemented in innovative policies which are crucial for regional development.

Main challenge for the EU is to create a European research area, perfectly developed, functioning and working in networks. Implementation of funding instruments lies in hands of different level authorities and administrations; the main discourse regarding funds is between regional level and national level, power sharing and competences. And this is a new working field and challenge for AEBR.

The II Forum “R&D and Innovation in Cross-Border Areas”, held in Vigo, Galicia/Spain on 5th and 6th April 2011, attracted more than 80 participants from different European Institutions, border regions, universities, and the economic sector. The first session dealt with opportunities for cross-border regions on R&D and innovation. The first session was followed by a Colloquium, in which the participants had the chance to discuss with the panelists about procedures and instruments to promote innovation in border regions, the need to use proper indicators to measure performance, and the territorial dimension of innovation.

The second session dealt with on-going initiatives, which are aimed to serve as pilot projects or networks to be extended to other European areas. In the third session, examples of good practices were presented. And the final fourth session focused on permanent structures of cooperation. Martin Guillermo Ramirez, Secretary General of the AEBR, and Jesús Gamallo Aller, Director General for External Relations and the EU, Xunta de Galicia (ES), summarised the results of the forum and closed the meeting. On 6th April, the participants of the forum had the chance to join a study visit to the City of Culture in Santiago de Compostela.
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 realise border-crossings first (this causes a pull effect to the national centres, while in the interior the realisation of such infrastructures is slowing down towards the border). Above that, transeuropean transport axes can only unfold their full potential (European, national, and regional) when coincidental good regional links are realised. In fact, good links to large-scale axes improve the accessibility of a border region (location factor) and the mobility (prevention of migration).

In cooperation with the Vaasa city, on 1st December 2011, a seminar on the future of cross-border transports took place in Vaasa (Ostrobothnia). AEBR members and host organizations debated on particular aspects of transports in the Kvarken area and on the announced TEN-T proposals.

The future Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) will consider as priority infrastructures 82 seaports, 37 airports, 46 border crossings with non-EU countries and 82 urban areas.

The list is contained in the draft regulation presented by the EU Commission on 19th October 2011, together with the proposal to establish the future infrastructure fund, the “instrument for interconnection in Europe”, announced in the Financial Perspective 2014-2020. The whole TEN-T network should be in place by 31st December 2050, but there is a priority network which is to be implemented by 31st December 2030.

The core network will be organized by corridors, covering at least three modes of transport (and at least one seaport) and must cross at least three EU Member states. Each member state will be involved in at least one corridor. Also a preliminary list has been set up regarding “European Mobility Corridors and Transport Core Network Projects”, “Energy Corridors” and “Broadband Target Areas and European Digital Service Infrastructures Corridors”. All those preliminary ideas have been assessed by European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and in few cases EESC had announced some of the objectives are unrealistic.
6.7 ROAMING

The problem of inadvertent roaming charges occurs on a large scale in border regions, which results in many citizens facing unnecessarily high phone bills. If a signal is not sufficiently strong, a cell phone will switch automatically to a more powerful network. In border regions it often happens that this network is foreign, in which case a customer pays for roaming.

A second problem, which citizens in border regions face, has to do with the accessibility of the emergency call centers. If a phone switches to a foreign network, calls will also be diverted to an emergency call center in the respective Member State. Luckily, in some border regions the control rooms cooperate very well. It will connect a caller with an officer that could help him in his own language in order not to lose time. However, this is not always the case, which might result in unpleasant and even life-threatening situations.

AEBR has followed different initiatives aimed to reduce roaming costs particularly in cross-border areas. Spanish-Portuguese border regions, the Euregio Meuse-Rhine (BE-DE-NL) and other cross-border institutions are very active in finding a suitable solution to reduce the impact of “non-volunteer” roaming on SMEs and individuals.

For a long time, there has been an exhaustive discussion about roaming prices in Europe. In fact, according to many sources, Europeans still tend not to use their mobile phones when they cross borders in the EU because of the prices. The Commission has proposed several “structural” solutions to promote competition on the roaming market. According to Neelie Kroes, Digital Agenda Commissioner, Europeans will be able to choose their operator when using their mobile phone in another EU member state from 1 July 2014 on. Prices for mobile data transfer will be regulated from 1 July 2012, as voice calls and text messages are today.

“There will be practically no difference between national and roaming prices from 2015 on"., said the Commissioner. On July 2014, consumers will have the chance to choose a specific roaming contract, with a different operator, without changing their phone number, without affecting their national services and keeping the same SIM card for national services and roaming.

The main contents of the Commission’s proposal are as follows:

- The current ceiling for a phone call made from a mobile phone in another EU state (€ 0.35 + VAT per minute) will drop to € 0.32 on 1 July 2012, to € 0.28 on 1 July 2013 and € 0.24 on 1 July 2014.
- For calls received elsewhere in the EU, price caps will be kept at € 0.11 on 1 July 2012, but will drop to € 0.10 on 1 July 2013.
- The cap for text messages would drop from today’s € 0.11 per message to € 0.10 per message on 1 July 2012.
7 TASK FORCES OF AEBR

7.1 TASK FORCE OF EXTERNAL BORDERS

Cross-border cooperation at the external borders of the Union is also claiming for more attention of 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 2011 included:

- The organisation of the 3rd AEBR Youth Summer Seminar in Lappeenranta in August 2011 and preparations for the 2012 seminar;
- Participation in NEEBOR Annual Conference in Alexandropolis in March 2011 and meeting with NEEBOR representatives in Brussels in April 2011;
- Planning of projects and examination of project opportunities;
- Exchange of information and experience on European Neighbourhood Programme and Pre-Accession Instrument.

The Task Force of External Borders (TFEB) also met in Vaasa on 1st December, one day prior to the AEBR Executive Committee meeting. Chaired by Johannes Moisio (Chairman of the TFEB), the participants discussed several aspects of cross-border cooperation at the external borders.

As in the previous years, also in 2011 the AEBR Youth Summer Seminar was organised. In 2011 the AEBR Youth Forum took place from 8th to 12th August in Lappeenranta/South Karelia, Finland. All in all, 167 applications were received for the III AEBR Youth Forum. An international jury selected 25 applicants. The aims of this seminar are manifold: To disseminate information on study possibilities abroad in other border regions, to present the principles of cross-border cooperation in European, regional, and local policies, and to encourage the universities at the external borders to be more international and to provide international studies.
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 coordinates this Task Force since 2009 with the aim to improve the exchange of experiences between border regions in the field of crossborder 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.

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 28th February 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.

Another important topic for the Task Force in 2011 was the proposal for a new Health for Growth Programme adopted by the European Commission in November 2011. The future Health for Growth Programme is aimed to protect citizens against cross-border health threats, ensure the sustainability of health care services and improve the health of the population while encouraging innovation in healthcare. Main objectives of this programme are:

- Developing innovative and sustainable health systems;

- Increasing access to better and safer healthcare for citizens;

- Promoting health and preventing disease; and

- Protecting citizens from cross-border health threats.

The field of e-health has gained considerably in importance within the European countries. In 2011, reports on e-health strategies and their implementation in 30 countries in Europe were published. This comprehensive collection of country information constitutes a unique resource for all who are interested in health issues and serves as important database of up to date evidence on e-health progress across Europe, which updates and complements the previous results.

The members of the Task Force participated in 2011 in several conferences and events dealing with cross-border healthcare. Here are some examples:

- 22 June 2011, Nijmegen/The Netherlands: Symposium “Cross-Border Cooperation of German and Dutch Hospitals”;

- 8th November 2011, Brussels: EUREGHA Working Group meeting,

- 15th November 2011, Maastricht: Final Conference of the EUREGIO II project. The project was finalised in November 2011. Its main output is a "Practical Handbook on the effective use of Interreg funding in Cross-Border Health Care”;

- 17th November 2011, Maastricht: Meeting for regional and local health care experts regarding cross-border activities in field of healthcare and accessibility of healthcare.

- 7th-9th December 2011, Groningen (NL): EurSafety Health-Net Symposium 2011

All those steps, meetings and strategies that focus on cross-border healthcare are about fostering conditions for people to enjoy healthy lives and benefit from the healthcare they need; for people to make well informed choices as consumers; for people to live up to their full potential to play a key role in society and in the economy.
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 2011 have been already mentioned on previous pages. Information on further selected events can be found below:

25 JANUARY 2011: CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP “MOVING TOWARDS A CARPATHIAN STRATEGY”, BRUSSELS

In the frame of ongoing debates on the future Cohesion Policy, this workshop intended to launch a debate on the future orientations and propositions for the Carpathian area. It was organised by UNEP Vienna - Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention (UNEP Vienna – ISCC) and European Academy of Bolzano (EURAC Research) with the support of AEBR and AEM (European Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Regions)

During the workshop a discussion paper on the development of a macroregional strategy for the Carpathian area was presented by UNEP Vienna – ISCC. Representatives of the European Union (EU), national experts of the Carpathian countries and the Carpathian regions, and other relevant organisations were invited to discuss the document.

The discussion paper was drafted by UNEP Vienna – ISCC together with the EURAC expert team in Vienna and AEM. It included key recommendations aimed at promoting a more integrated development of the Carpathians through a better coordination of the activities developed by the main actors involved in the region. It Furthermore encouraged the establishment of new initiatives and cooperation instruments, such as European Territorial Cooperation Programme for the Carpathian Area.

3 FEBRUARY 2011: AEBR SEMINAR ON CBC IN CENTRAL EUROPE HELD IN PRAGUE (CZECH REPUBLIC)

60 participants attended the seminar on Cross-border Cooperation in Central Europe, which was organised by AEBR in cooperation with the Czech Ministry for Regional Development and Euregio Silva Nortica on 3rd February 2011 in Prague.

Different departments of the Czech Government presented in the meeting the Czech Strategy 2007-2013, including the distribution of funds and the different regional programmes, as well as their views on the future cohesion policy in Central European countries.

The Carpathians are one of the largest mountain ranges in Europe, shared by seven Central and Eastern European countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic and Ukraine. The mountains cover a territory of 190,000 km², and are one of the most extensive mountain systems in Europe.

A number of initiatives have already been undertaken and multiple challenges have been addressed within different European projects and have strongly encouraged cooperation in this area.

Main topics discussed in the seminar were: Starting points for shaping the position of the Czech Republic for development and form of the programming period 2014+, Cross-border cooperation programmes in Central Europe, Objective 3 - European Territorial Cooperation: Programme Central Europe, INTERREG IVC, ESPON 2013, INTERACT II as well as Regional Development Strategy of the Czech Republic.
3-5 MARCH 2011: THE NETWORK OF EASTERN EXTERNAL BORDER REGIONS (NEEBOR) ANNUAL CONFERENCE, ALEXANDROPOLIS (GREECE)

The Network of Eastern External Border Regions, NEEBOR, was founded in 2005 in Brussels and aims to increase the awareness of EU institutions, member states, regions and local authorities and the civil organizations for the particular weaknesses and strengths of cross-border cooperation at the external borders of the EU.

Through its Task Force on External Borders the AEBR tries to strengthen its cooperation with NEEBOR. A first meeting took place in Brussels on 11th April 2011 between representatives of NEEBOR, the Chairman of the AEBR Task Force on External Borders and the Secretary General.

The 6th Annual Conference of NEEBOR took place from 3rd to 5th March 2011 in Alexandropolis, Greece. Aristides Giannakidis, Governor of East Macedonia-Thrace opened the conference. AEBR Secretary General Martín Guillermo Ramírez delivered a speech on the topic “SMEs and Social Inclusion in European Border Regions.”

The conference had the aim to bring up the social dimension of the development of SMEs in cross-border areas in the Eastern External Border Regions of the EU. The current economic crisis worldwide makes even more evident the need for regional development, especially in sensitive regions such as those of NEEBOR. In addition, the Annual Conference also operated as a forum for the second Round Table of Universities - which was successfully launched on the occasion of the Annual Conference 2010 in Presov- further enhancing the expertise and potentials of participating universities for prospective cooperation in NEEBOR related issues.

Source: NEEBOR Homepage

15-16 JUNE 2011, CROSS-BORDER REGIONAL FORUM, HALDEN, ØSTFOLD REGION, NORWAY

Cross-Border Regional Forum is an annual meeting between the Nordic cross-border regions and the Nordic Council of Ministers. It provides a good opportunity for border regions to exchange experiences and to build networks. The main topics for the meeting in 2011 were the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) and the daily border obstacles.

About 40 representatives of Nordic border regions and the Nordic Council of Ministers came to Halden. Secretary General of AEBR, Martín Guillermo Ramírez was also invited to the meeting. In his presentation he briefly presented the current activities of the AEBR and the association’s contribution to the debate on EGTC and the future of territorial cooperation in Europe.

The Forum was organised by the Nordic Council of Ministers in cooperation with Østfold-Bohuslän-Dalsland Cross-Border Committee. The cooperation Østfold-Bohuslän-Dalsland dates back to 1980. It was launched with the aim to promote the development of this area and to create a platform for the exchange of information and expertise referring to cross-border cooperation and daily border problems.

In order to facilitate mobility within the Nordic Countries, the Freedom of Movement Forum was created. It is a political body, set up by the Nordic governments to foster freedom of movement in the Nordic Region for individuals as well as businesses. In dialogue with the governments, the forum aims to identify, prioritise and suggest solutions for concrete obstacles between the countries. The Forum is run by a Chairperson appointed by the prime ministers, and the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Secretary General. The forum also consists of a representative from each of the Nordic countries including Åland.
This conference – funded by the EU INTERREG programme and organised by the Centre for Cross Border Studies – was partly a product of the Transfrontier Euro-Institut Network (TEIN). This new EU Leonardo programme-funded network brings together cross-border research and training institutes, and university departments dealing with cross-border cooperation, in 10 European Border Regions. TEIN members come together to (among other things) exchange good practice of cross-border cooperation in their regions; work on joint products such as impact assessment toolkits and toolkits for training cross-border cooperation project managers; work to ensure that the latest research on cross-border cooperation is disseminated to European institutions, governments, regional administrations and other key actors; and guarantee the quality of cross-border training in Europe by working to develop a unified certification system.

On 5 October 2011, AEBR welcomed a delegation of mayors and elected representatives from the Euroregion Nisava. The meeting has opened new perspectives of networking with other AEBR members. The Euroregion Nisava was especially interested in sharing experiences, good practices and taking advantage of other Euroregions’ expertise.

The agreement on the foundation of the Euroregion Nisava was signed on 16th June 2005 in the city Pirot, in the Republic of Serbia. Members of the Euroregion are municipalities around the Pirot district in Serbia and Sofia-city district in Bulgaria. The Nisava Euroregion vision is increased understanding and tolerance among neighbours and citizens by building partnerships between the districts of Pirot in Serbia and Sofia in Bulgarian area. The basic mission and objectives of the Euroregion are support and coordination of regional development and cross-border cooperation in the spirit of tolerance, good neighbourly relations and friendship between the two nations.
9 CURRENT PROJECTS

9.1 EUREGIO II

The project EUREGIO II: „Solutions for improving healthcare cooperation in border regions“ was approved by the European Commission within the Health Programme in 2008 with a project duration from 1st December 2008 to 30th November 2011 (grant agreement No 20071118). It draws on the experiences of the project EUREGIO I finalised in May 2007. It focuses, however, not on the collection of information on cross-border activities (this was the main focus of EUREGIO I), but deals rather with the needs of patients in border regions and the possibilities to improve cross-border cooperation in healthcare.

In the year 2011, the project partners concentrated on the finalisation of all project activities. Particular attention was paid to the elaboration of the handbook and the guidelines on the use of HTA. Two project meetings took place in 2011.

On 30th and 31th May 2011 a project meeting in Sofia (Bulgaria) took place. On the occasion of the meeting, the project partners presented the results achieved so far and discussed organisational questions. Moreover, a workshop was organised in Sofia focusing on the implications of the legal landscape for the cross-border healthcare in Europe. In this context, an analysis of the Community law in the field of cross-border healthcare took place.

On 15th November 2011 the final project conference took place in Maastricht. The topic of the conference was the future of cross-border healthcare in Europe. The speakers focused on three aspects, particularly important in the field of cross-border healthcare: inequalities, law and technology.

The output of the project includes three practical publications:

- A report on the legal impacts and data protection rights in the provision of cross-border health care services
- A Handbook for the effective use of EU Structural Funds,
- A guide for the use of Health Technology Assessment (HTA) within the decision making process in border regions,

Target groups for these publications include stakeholders in border regions and those (potentially) involved in the planning and implementation of cross-border health activities in border regions. A further target group includes public health officials and those involved in health service management and the provision of health insurance.

As conclusion from the project the participating partners underlined that there is no one universal solution to cross-border health care challenges that can be drawn upon. However it is useful to learn from the experiences of similar projects, paying particular attention to the fact that different contexts apply in different border regions. EU funds play a crucial role in the promotion of cross-border cooperation in border regions. In some of the regions EU-funding has become a driver of cross-border activities; in other regions cross-border cooperation started out of an urgent need, with almost no or little reliance on EU funds. In yet other regions, cross-border initiatives are regarded as a possibility to increase the available budget for health-specific topics. But even without EU-funding cross-border cooperation in border regions is a necessity. Though EU-funding has been hugely beneficial the challenge now is to look beyond the dependence on EU-funding in charting a future path for cross-border health and in guaranteeing the sustainability of cross-border health cooperation.

Detailed information on all project meetings, interesting presentations and other project documents are available on the website of the project coordinator (University of Maastricht): http://inthehealth.eu/research/euregio-ii.
9.2 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 1-2 August 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.

By launching this innovative experimental project idea that makes use of applied research results from ESPON as a yardstick for cross-border spatial development planning, the involved stakeholders had aimed at achieving the following objectives:

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 practice in the field of cross-border spatial development also by using cross-border strategies for preparing future INTERREG 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. On the occasion of a meeting of the project partners on 3rd July 2009 that was attended also by Mr Mehlbye last details and the necessary further steps were discussed. The project was approved in the beginning of 2010.

On the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference in Ireland on 20th October 2010 the first project meeting took place. It provided the opportunity to discuss with the project partners all activities and to present the added value of the project for the involved regions. In the year 2011 two project meetings took place. On 8th March 2011 the region Alsace hosted the project stakeholders in Strasbourg. A second meeting took place on 21st November 2011 in Barcelona.

The following partners participate in the ULYSSES project: region Alsace (FR) as Lead Partner, REGIO BASILIENSIS (CH), Regionalverband Mittlerer Oberrhein (DE), Regionalverband Südlicher Oberrhein (DE), EUREGIO (DE/NL), Prefecture Drama-Kavala-Xanthi (GR), region North Karelia (Fi), region Navarra (ES), region Alentejo (PT), region Extremadura (ES), Öresundskomiteen (DK/SE), Euroregion Duna-Körös-Maros-Tisza (HU/RO/RS), city of Szczecin (PL), EuRegio Salzburg - Berchtesgadener Land – Traunstein (DE/AT), Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (IT), Working Community of the Pyrenees (ES/FR), Euroregion Nemunas (LT), Ems Dollart Region (DE/NL). The AEBR has the function of Help Desk in this project.

Source: www.espon.eu
9.3 SCULTBORD

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

The GRUNDTVIG Programme has the aim to enhance 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 2011 two project meetings took place. On 1-2 September 2011 the second project workshop was organised in Greece. The theme of this workshop meeting was „Best practices and experience of the agencies of the Municipality of Kavala in adult cultural education“. Mr. Anastasios Smirloglou, Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of Kavala, welcomed the participants of the cultural cross-border workshop in the Mosque of Halil Bey. On the second day of the meeting all participants of the workshop visited the Municipal Tobacco Museum of Kavala.

The third project workshop took place on 27th October 2011 in Mérida, Spain. The topic of the 3rd workshop was: “Encouraging people to know our neighbours.” The first session of the workshop was held at the Regional Parliament of Extremadura in order to show the mechanisms that regional institutions of Extremadura put in practice to spread the Portuguese culture in this Spanish region. The participants of the workshop were invited to two roundtables in which best practices of encouraging adults especially to come to know their neighbours have been presented. These practices aim to bring people closer together and to discuss cultural barriers as language and different administration systems. A better knowledge of the neighbouring country, its language and its culture helps to improve the relations not only at a social or cultural level but very often it also helps to improve the economical development.
The AEBR participated in a tender of the EU Commission for the elaboration of a study on challenges and opportunities of cross-border cooperation in West Africa. The AEBR won the tender and signed in November 2010 the contract amounting in total to 60,000 Euro with the EU Commission. The project was finalised in the end of 2011.

The EU Commission (DG Regio) promoted the elaboration of the study within the framework of the European Parliament’s call for **putting EU regional policy into a stronger international context** and for more cooperation with third countries. The study elaborated by AEBR was aimed to quantify main obstacles for cross-border cooperation in West Africa, while highlighting several good opportunities, in order to propose **a road map for the next years**.

In the course of the study, many cross-border cooperation initiatives, projects and programmes have been found, with either a specific or a general purpose. In West Africa there is already a complex network of institutions and platforms that implement cross-border actions. They sometime overlap but, together and coordinated, including their partners within and outside the African continent, could make a very efficient use of available resources, and get even more funding to implement a West African Border Programme. In this sense, this study is particularly intended to offer a clear picture to the organisations promoting regional economic development in the area with a view to how best to allocate resources to promote regional integration and interregional cooperation.

Cross-border cooperation in Africa is a reality in many border areas, being promoted principally by supra-national organizations, but the implementation at national or sub-national level is still very weak in most of the cases. Most relevant actions have been made by the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The African Union has adopted several political and legal instruments to manage border issues, including the establishment of a Conference of Border Ministers and the implementation of the African Union Border Programme (AUBP) since 2007 with the support of the German cooperation. In the study elaborated by the AEBR, most relevant political initiatives, main studies elaborated by prestigious African scholars and organizations, and significant cross-border cooperation examples have been analyzed. The AEBR has taken into account the EU-AU partnership and some concrete European-African contacts already made in this field. The AEBR has also explored the expertise developed by local and international (mainly French) NGOs, by national agencies, and by international organizations, including several UN agencies. It is particularly worth to mention the case of the Sahel and West Africa Club of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the growing involvement of European networks like the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT). All of them have periodical contacts with the African institutions and organizations involved, but the European Union is the most expected partner to definitely get involved in the launching of an ambitious, sustainable and effective Programme of Cross-Border Cooperation in Africa, including regulatory, training and financial support, in the framework of the African Union.

Cross-border socioeconomic dynamics in West Africa have a potential for integration that is still underestimated, despite of the various obstacles faced. Joint management and preservation of natural resources, rationalization of trade networks and control of illegal trafficking, joint capitalization of export goods, coordination of security forces and emergency teams, support to local radio networks, handling of refugees and displaced people, are just a few examples of fields in need of a cross-border approach at a ground level, and they have an extraordinary potential to increase sustainable human development in these areas. But also huge transnational projects are to be supported, like delimitation / demarcation of borders, or the implementation of transport networks, as well as the consolidation of current political initiatives to normalize and extend cross-border cooperation all over the African continent. The inclusion of this approach within the European Development Fund would be a necessary input to make the proposed road map a reality.
9.5 CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE PARANA DELTA RIVER

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 Argentinean and Paraguyan banks. In this context, in cooperation with local stakeholders (in particular the COMIP, a Joint Argentinean-Paraguyan 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 amounting to 60.000 €. The contract with the EU Commission was signed in the end of September 2011. The study should be finalised in autumn 2012.

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

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 organizations 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 organization 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.
9.6 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 workplaces 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 has a duration of 13 months started officially on 1st December 2011. On 14th December 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 information are available in European border regions (for employers, workers and job seekers) in the context of cross-border labour market?

- Which information services are available in European border regions 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 concentrate in particular on following questions:
  - 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 should focus on the elaboration of concrete recommendations and proposals for the improvement of the advisory services for cross-border workers. These specific recommendations should be addressed to political decision makers at European and national level. They should be included in a final report that should be 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.
10 CONTACTS WITH EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

10.1 COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

The AEBR took part in many consultations of the Committee of the Regions on topics of interest for European border regions. The main documents produced are always included as annexes to the meetings of the AEBR Executive Committee, and usually are also included on the AEBR website and in the Newsflash. Very important is the organization of the Structured Dialogue between the Commission and the Associations, coordinated by the Committee of the Regions, being the most relevant event the yearly lunch of President Barroso with the Presidents of the Associations. In 2011 the meeting of President Barroso with European regional organisations took place in June 2011. The AEBR was represented by its President, Mr Karl-Heinz Lambert.

The AEBR is regularly invited to conferences and other events dealing with territorial cooperation that are organised by the Committee of the Regions. In the end of January 2011 representatives of the AEBR participated in the Conference on European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation. The conference took place in Lille on Thursday 27 January, which marked the third anniversary of the creation of the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, the first EGTC to be set up in Europe, and at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels on Friday 28 January 2011, for the launch of the Committee’s EGTC Platform.

The EGTC Platform incorporates both existing EGTCs and those in preparation, along with members of the Committee of the Regions Expert Group, public organisations and associations active in the field of European territorial cooperation and other experts and stakeholders interested in this area of action. The AEBR is actively involved in the activities of the EGTC Platform.

Besides, the AEBR takes also regularly part in the meetings of the Technical Platform for Cooperation on Health launched by the Committee of the Regions in June 2010. The Platform is a forum, which aims at promoting the involvement of local and regional authorities in the European Health Strategy. It was created in order to facilitate the exchange of information and expertise in this field.

10.2 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The relations with the European Parliament were intensified, above all through its Committee on Regional Development, where many members keep good contact with the AEBR. By this, European cohesion and regional policies have received a stronger focus on cross-border cooperation The members of the European Parliament use occasionally the expertise of AEBR in their opinions and working documents.


The key statements of the report were as follows:

- A clear emphasis on the European added value of the European territorial cooperation and its potential as a source of competitiveness;
- An increase of its funding to 7% of the overall budget of the cohesion policy;
- Retaining the current structure of Objective 3, and the current emphasis on the cross-border component, which meets the local needs of cross-border population catchment areas;
- An allocation of funding for each programme of territorial cooperation on the basis of harmonised criteria, so as to provide a strategic, integrated response to the needs and specificities of each territory;
- An integration of the European territorial cooperation in all levels of strategic planning: European, national, and regional in connection with the Europe 2020 Strategy;
- Incentive measures to involve regional operational programmes in cross-border or transnational priority projects like Trans-European Networks (TEN-T);
- A deeper coordination between the transnational strand and macro-regional strategies;
- A simplification of the implementation by adopting a separate regulation;
- A better use of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC);
- A wider visibility and readability of European territorial cooperation programmes towards local representatives, local administrations and citizens.

The AEBR contributed to this report by submitting several proposals.
10.3 EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The celebration of the Fifth Cohesion Forum in Brussels on 31 January and 1st February 2011 let the AEBR confirm that the main claims of the association are included in the general recommendations of the 5th Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, and they are strongly supported by the Commission, the Parliament and the Committee of the Regions. The excellent dialogue promoted between the institutions and different European stakeholders had lead to a wide participation and a better knowledge about the expectations of the citizens in the EU. The AEBR elaborated a Position Paper on the 5th Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion that was forwarded to the European Commission in the scope of its consultation on the conclusions of the report. Also several AEBR members and partners reacted to this consultation.

Cohesion is one of the EU largest policies, with more than one third of the EU budget. Only the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is bigger. At the end of June 2011 the Commission presented its Budget Proposal, the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2014-2020. In this time when some Member States are facing severe fiscal challenges, it is crucial that European cooperation focus on areas bringing benefits to most of them with a clear EU added value, while keeping a reasonable support to all territories. The AEBR met Director General Dirk Ahner in the middle of June 2011, and Commissioner Johannes Hahn on the 18th of July in order to exchange first impressions on the proposed Multi-Annual Financial Framework. The AEBR could see that there are no revolutionary changes, but there is an increasing focus on transnational and interregional cooperation, while cross-border cooperation can suffer from the relevance paid to macro-regional strategies, unless cross-border structures and border regions are better involved in the planning of national and macro-regional strategies.

On 5 December 2011, the Committee of the Regions hosted the Structured Dialogue on the reform of EU structural funds with Regional Policy Commissioner Johannes Hahn, Employment Commissioner László Andor and representatives of associations of regional and local authorities. AEBR President Karl-Heinz Lambertz commented on behalf of our association on the proposals on the structural funds regulations, outlining the future architecture of cohesion policy after 2013 (see the photo below).
The cooperation of European border regions with the Council of Europe dates back to the 1960s and remains quite intensive. 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, 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. Constructive 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 2010, Mr. Andreas Kiefer (AT) has been nominated Secretary General of the Congress, after a long and successful period under Mr. Ulrich Bohner (DE), who took regularly part in AEBR meetings. The AEBR is regularly in contact with Mr. Kiefer.

On 18th March 2010 the AEBR and the Congress signed a cooperation agreement. The aim of this agreement is to bundle strengths and to use the achieved synergies for the benefit of European regions.
11 COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

11.1 COOPERATION AGREEMENT WITH AFRICAN UNION

Cross-Border Cooperation climbs in the Global Agenda. The AEBR, as many other European regional Associations, has to be aware of the process of globalization. Even if we do not pay attention to the global dimension of territorial cooperation in general, and cross-border cooperation in particular, other partners within and outside Europe come to the AEBR, demanding a stronger involvement of the Association in current debates and processes to strengthen cross-border cooperation in different parts of the world, in particular on the African continent, in Latin America and Asia.

The Secretary General of the Association of European Border Regions, Mr. Martín Guillermo, signed on 29th March 2011 in Brussels a collaboration agreement between the Association and the African Union during a working lunch held with Mr. Aguibou Diarrah, former Ambassador of Mali and currently in charge of the African Union Border Programme. The agreement aims at exchanging information and experiences between both entities. Furthermore, the AEBR, that has expressed in this document its support to the border programme of the African Union, will implement training initiatives in the field of cross-border cooperation on this continent.

Martin Guillermo Ramirez and Aguibou Diarrah participated also in the second Assises of Decentralised Cooperation for Development. Organized by the CoR and held on the 29th and 30th of March in Brussels, this conference has allowed representatives of local and regional authorities from the European Union and the developing countries to debate the different perspectives of the cooperation for development. Representatives from all European institutions have participated, as well as authorities from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Furthermore, the Secretary General of the AEBR had meetings with representatives of the DG Development and Cooperation in order to show the European Commission different initiatives in the field of cross-border cooperation, as well as to exchange points of view on its implementation in other parts of the world.

As founding member the AEBR is, in particular, involved in the activities of the network PLATFORMA. On 28 and 29 March 2011 PLATFORMA network organised two events to celebrate its first two years of existence. A reception took place on 28 March 2011 in Brussels, during which the publication “Decentralised Development Cooperation – European perspectives” was presented.
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. Along with the chairman and the vice-chairman following experts worked in the Advisory Committee at the end of the year 2011: Thomas Stumm, Haris Martinos, Christian Haefliger, 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.

In the year 2011 one meeting of the Advisory Committee took place in Brussels on 28th January. On the occasion of this meeting a very rich debate on the state-of-the-art of the cohesion policy, territorial development and cross-border cooperation was developed by the members of the Advisory Committee with the presence of the AEBR President Karl-Heinz Lambertz and representatives of the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions. The AEBR position on the 5th Cohesion Report was discussed, as well as current AEBR projects (ULYSSES, EUREGIO II) and some other AEBR initiatives were presented. Further key issues were: the involvement of the AEBR in the Eastern Partnership initiative, follow up of the Directive on Cross-Border Health, new project proposals for Interreg IVB Central Europe (CROSS-ADD) and North-west Europe (PROMETEUS).

The activities of the Advisory Committee in 2011 included in particular the debate and preparation of the following outputs:

- Evaluation of the applications for the AEBR award “Sail of Papenburg” 2011
- Assistance in implementing the ULYSSES project launched in the scope of the ESPON Programme
- Elaboration of contents and applications for the projects INTERREG IVB CROSS-ADD and PROMETEUS
- Support in preparing the study on the perspectives of cross-border cooperation in West Africa for the European Commission
- Elaboration of a statement on the proposal for a regulation on the Cohesion Fund
- Elaboration of a statement on the proposal for a regulation amending the first regulation on the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation
- Elaboration of a statement on the proposal for a regulation on specific provisions concerning the ERDF and the investment for growth and jobs goal
- Elaboration of a contribution to the questionnaire of the Council of Europe on removing obstacles and promoting good practices on cross-border cooperation
- Elaboration of a statement on the proposal for a regulation on the European territorial cooperation
- Preparation of the final declaration of the AEBR Annual Conference 2011.
SECRETARIAT GENERAL

The Executive Committee of the AEBR is regularly informed about the developments in the Secretariat General. At the end of the year 2011 following persons worked for the AEBR in the office in Gronau (Germany):

- Martin Guillermo Ramírez (Secretary General)
- Cordula Pandary (Office Coordination)
- Marie-Lou Perou (Projects and communication)
- Anna Winkler (Project coordination and finances)
- Nadja Ait Laouad (Administration and communication)
- Petra Doods (Finances and staff)
- Bianca Gabbe (Advisory Committee and projects).

Occasionally, students of different fields of study interested in cross-border cooperation and European issues absolve a traineeship at the AEBR.

The EUREGIO continuously supports the General Secretariat with human and material resources. Moreover, in the year 2011 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 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 monthly 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 Newsslash 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. Moreover, since 2009 the documents for the meetings of the Executive Committee and the General Assembly are also available online. In autumn 2010 the new AEBR website has been activated.

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 2011 its efforts to improve the communication with the members of the AEBR and other partners. In spring 2011, a survey was carried out among the AEBR members in order to better meet the needs and expectations of the members in the future. As result, a communication strategy was elaborated for the AEBR including 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).

From the left: Bianca Gabbe and Cordula Pandary (top row), Nadja Ait Laouad, Martin Guillermo Ramírez and Petra Doods (in the middle), Anna Winkler and Marie Lou Perou (bottom row)
OTHERS ABOUT THE AEGR

Jahreskonferenz der AGE in Kursk, Euroregion Yaroslavna
Výroční konference AGE v Kursku, Euroregion Jaroslavna

Over 300 delegates from 14 countries of the region from 19 countries of the region were present at the AGE conference in Kursk, which is the center of the region. The conference took place in the city of Kursk on 21-24 September 2011.

Aktuelle

Autoridades buscan el desarrollo transfronterizo

Anfizaron experiencia de Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas de Europa, ARF.

MARTIN GUILLERMO RAMOS,

La Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas de Europa, ARF, tiene el objetivo de favorecer el desarrollo socioeconómico y cultural de las regiones fronterizas, promoviendo la cooperación transfronteriza.

La AFEE es una asociación de autoridades de las regiones fronterizas, que tiene como objetivo promover el desarrollo socioeconómico y cultural de las regiones fronterizas, promoviendo la cooperación transfronteriza.

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PHOTOS

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- Page 8: Photo on the left: Martin Guillermo Ramírez, Dr. Christian Gsodam, Jens Gabbe and Dr. Reinhold Kolck, Source: František Bina; Photo on the right: Signature of the memorandum on cooperation, Source: Johannes Moisio
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