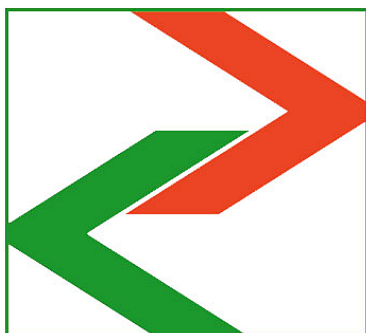


ANNUAL REPORT 2009



Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab (AGEG)
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CONTENTS:

1 INTRODUCTION.....	3
2 AEBR IN BRIEF	4
3 MEMBERS' STRUCTURE	6
4 GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE.....	7
4.1 General Assembly.....	7
4.2 Annual Conference	8
4.3 Bestowal of the AEBR Award 2009.....	11
5 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE	12
6 MAIN SUBJECTS IN 2009	14
6.1 European Cohesion and Structural Policy	14
6.2 European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)	15
6.3 Eastern Partnership	16
6.4 Languages in border regions	16
6.5 Cross-border rural, mountain and maritime regions.....	17
6.6 Transeuropean transport policy	18
6.7 Decentralised cooperation	19
6.8 Climate change	19
7 TASK FORCES OF THE AEBR.....	20
7.1 Task Force on cross-border healthcare	20
7.2 Task Force on external borders	21
7.3 Task Force on strategic issues	22
8 EVENTS.....	23
9 CURRENT PROJECTS	26
9.1 EUREGIO II.....	26
9.2 ULYSSES.....	27
10 CONTACTS WITH EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS	28
10.1 European Parliament	28
10.2 European Commission.....	28
10.3 Committee of the Regions.....	29
10.4 Council of Europe. The Congress of Regional and Local Authorities	30
11 COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS	31
11.1 The European regional associations.....	31
11.2 New cross-border structures	31
11.3 New (and old) relationships.....	32
12 AEBR TASKS AND SECRETARIAT GENERAL	33

Annual Report 2009

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1 INTRODUCTION

The financial crisis originated in the United States became a world economic crisis in 2008-2009, with direct effects on European national economies but also in public and private budgets. The effects on European Funds in next programming period are still to be known and the debates have been profound at all levels. In 2009, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) analyzed and discussed with relevant stakeholders the **sustainability and future challenges** for European border and cross-border regions. Therefore, many activities in 2009 focused on the future of the European Structural and Cohesion policies and in this context on the perspectives for cross-border cooperation.

Consequently, the AEBR Executive Committee paid much attention to this. And most notably when **Commissioner Danuta Hübner** asked **Professor Fabricio Barca** to report on the results and challenges of European Cohesion Policy. This report, published in summer 2009, made obvious that there are still considerable differences between EU states with regard to the implementation of the European cohesion policy, and there are still many challenges to face.

Accordingly, in its opinion on the Barca Report, the AEBR requested a **more qualitative impact of programmes and projects**, as well as **facilitated management and audit procedures**. Furthermore, it is important that also in the next programming period the technical assistance in the programmes includes the direct **exchange of experiences** between more and less advanced border regions.

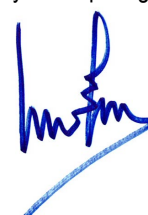
Which added value the exchange of experiences and know-how creates for border regions can be confirmed most of all by European border regions, in particular in they are **active members of the AEBR**, using the services that AEBR offers. They include in particular a broad knowledge on cross-border cooperation that is continually extended through the works of the **Advisory Committee** and the **AEBR Task Forces**. As representatives of European Institutions are involved in the work of the Advisory Committee, it is ensured that, first of all, the lobbying of the AEBR always reacts to the latest developments at the European level and, secondly, the AEBR takes part in all relevant debates at the European level.

AEBR contacts with **political institutions at the European level** were quite intensive and fruitful in 2009. The cooperation with DG Regio, and particularly with the **Director General Dirk Ahner**, was very satisfactory. And also with the Commissioner for Regional Policy, Mrs Danuta Hübner and her successor, **Mr Pawel Samecki**, regular meetings took place. Commissioner Samecki was one of the keynote speakers during the AEBR Annual Conference 2009 that took place in the beginning of November in Ghent (Euregio Scheldemond), dealing with the topic: „**Cross-border cooperation after 2013. Regional answers to current European challenges.**“

More than 220 representatives of border and cross-border regions came to Ghent in order to discuss the future of the territorial cooperation. Along with the commissioner Pawel Samecki also the President of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), **Mr Luc van den Brande**, participated in the Conference. His participation confirms the good working relations between the AEBR and the CoR, based on a joint action plan with a systematic exchange of views. In this context it is worth to mention the contributions of the AEBR to special CoR events, like the **Prague Summit of Regions and Cities** (5-6 March), or the specific CoR event organised on the occasion of the **World Climate Summit in December 2009 in Copenhagen**. Regarding the latter, many AEBR members followed the call of the Secretariat General and sent brief video messages with their contributions to face climate change.

Natural environment and sustainability are particularly important for border regions, as very often positive results in these fields of action are possible only if the neighbouring region on the other side of the border supports own efforts and projects.

The European added value of CBC is obvious. However, national policies ignore this fact because it is difficult to disaggregate cross-border cooperation results from general ones in most border regions. Thus it is that also in the future the voice of border regions should be raised not only in Europe but also at national level by AEBR members. And the AEBR is ready to keep on guiding this process.



Martín Guillermo-Ramírez
Secretary General

2 AEBR IN BRIEF

MISSION

- ➔ Our mission is to act for the benefit of all European border and cross-border regions in order to highlight their particular problems, opportunities, tasks and projects.
- ➔ We initiate, support and coordinate the cooperation of European border and cross-border regions throughout the continent and create networks for specific purposes to facilitate cooperation and the exchange of experiences.
- ➔ We exchange know-how and information in order to formulate and coordinate our common interests and to offer adequate solutions for day-to-day border problems.
- ➔ We represent the overall interests of our member regions towards national and international parliaments, bodies, authorities and other institutions.
- ➔ We inform European political bodies and the public about cross-border issues and the special concerns of border regions and propose political lines of approach and action.

ORGANISATION

The organs of AEBR are: General Assembly, Executive Committee, Secretary General.

- ➔ The **GENERAL ASSEMBLY** is the highest body. Functions: election of the president, the executive committee, admission and exclusion of members, determination of contribution fees.
- ➔ The **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE** is elected for 2 years. It includes: the president and vice-presidents, the treasurer and at least twenty members representing border and cross-border regions, taking into account the regional balance.
- ➔ The tasks of the Executive Committee are the passing of basic statements of AEBR, collaboration with European and national institutions, organizations and societies, as well as the appointment of the Secretary General.
- ➔ The **PRESIDENT** is the most senior AEBR representative and represents it externally. He has the right to take decisions, in agreement with the **SECRETARY GENERAL**, who has proxy and is authorized to represent the Association.



Executive Committee meeting in Evora (Portugal), May 2010

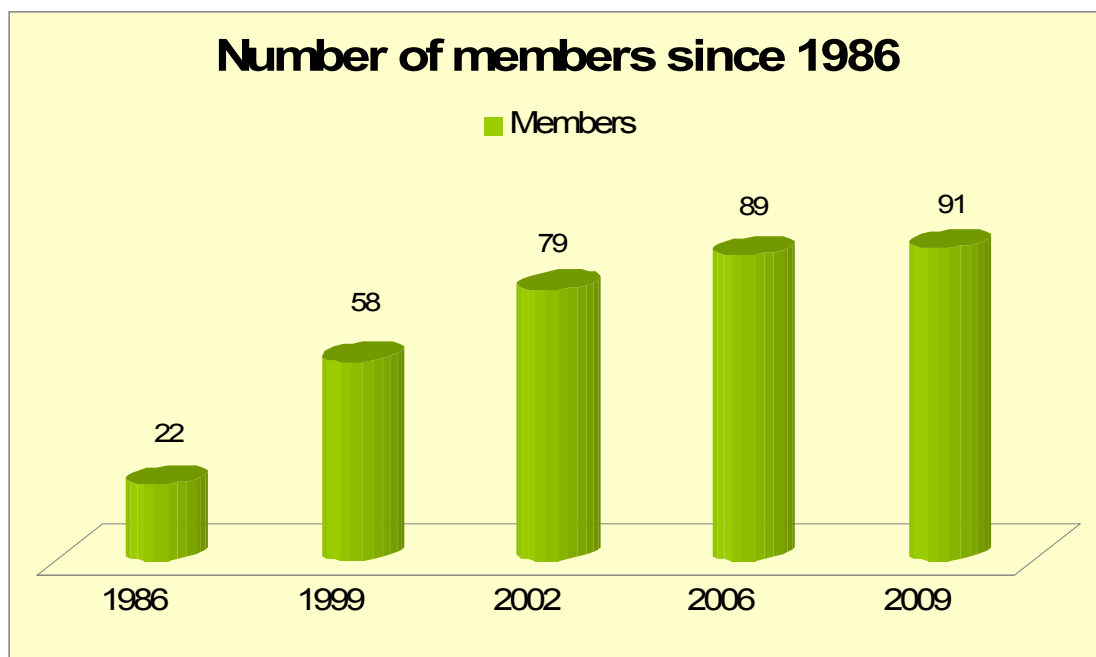
HIGHLIGHTS 2009



3 MEMBERS' STRUCTURE

By the end of 2009, the AEBR had 91 members representing almost 200 border regions across Europe. After a high increase in the early 90ies in the course of the political upheaval in Central and Eastern Europe, the number of members has remained steady. The difference between the number of members and the number of border regions

is due to the fact that, in many cases, cross-border regions comprise several national border regions. Furthermore, large-area cooperation structures as the Working Community of the Alps, Nordic Council of Ministers, Carpathian Euroregion, etc. include as members border regions from several states.



The membership structure reveals a balanced ratio of border / cross-border regions in both the „old“ EU and the new member states. The AEBR has kept a strong position to extend its operations across the new EU external borders (including the neighbouring regions in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and the neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean area). There is a strong movement to strengthen Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) in these countries, both at regional and national levels. The effects of globalisation, as well as other increasing challenges, spread CBC far beyond up to the Caucasus, in the Arctic, and as far as in the American continent and in Africa. Some new members from the Russian Federation and neighbour-

ing states outside the European Union have already been accepted as full members. In general, a larger working area extend in front of us, adding a new challenge to our meagre Secretariat.

The AEBR should analyze carefully its current work-load: the production of opinions and position papers, the follow-up of European, national and regional issues, the organization of events and the participation in projects; and cross this information with the organizational and financial reality of the Association, in particular its present level of staff and income.

In 2009, the following regions have got their full member status in the AEBR:

- Euroregion Slobozhanschina (RU/UA)
- Euroregion Yaroslavna (RU/UA).

4 GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

4.1 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly and Annual Conference in 2009 took place on **5-7 November** in **Ghent (Euregio Scheldemond)**. More than 220 participants from 24 different countries participated in the conference that was very successfully prepared and organised by the Euregio Scheldemond. In the past twenty years the Euregio Scheldemond has successfully promoted cross-border cooperation between the two Belgian provinces of West and East Flanders and the Dutch province Zeeland. Since 1991 the cooperation has been financially supported by the European Union through the INTERREG programme, facilitating the implementation of more than 250 projects in the region.

Some of them dealt with the subject of the cross-border labour market. On request of the host region, this was placed as an additional topic on the agenda of the Annual Conference. The General Assembly mainly dealt with the Annual Report 2008, the Annual Accounts 2008, the Budget 2010 and the Supplementary Budget 2009. The Secretary General reported also on the work of the Task Force on financial and strategic issues that was founded on the initiative of the AEBR Executive Committee in Burg (Euregio Spree-Neiße-Bober) in summer 2009. The aim of this Task Force is to develop new ideas and solutions in order to ensure the sustainability of the AEBR from the financial and organisational points of view.



„Cross-border cooperation can be compared with a large patchwork of different fabrics. Border regions are the ‘seams’ of Europe, and everybody knows that a patchwork is only as strong as its ‘seams’. Not least because of this experience, it is my deepest conviction that border regions play a crucial role, as laboratory and motor, in the continental development of Europe.“

Karl-Heinz Lambertz

Initially, the agenda of the General Assembly included the election of the new President. The election became necessary, as the previous AEBR President Mr Lambert van Nistelrooij resigned from this function in summer 2009. Due to the fact that it was not possible to find an adequate candidate for this function until the General Assembly, the election could not take place as at initially planned. AEBR Vice-presidents, constituted as electoral college, asked **Mr Karl-Heinz Lambertz**, Minister-President of the German-speaking Community of Belgium for this position. The nomination of the new AEBR President took finally place in February 2010 on the occasion of the Executive Committee meeting of the AEBR in Oulu (Bothnian Arc).

President Lambertz is member of the Committee of the Regions and *rapporteur* of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on cross-border cooperation. He chairs a Congress' Working Group on Interregional Cooperation (GT-CIR), which includes Cross-Border Cooperation as a main topic, while contributing to the creation and sustainability of several Euroregions in Eastern Europe, the Adriatic and the Black Sea). He has a long experience in the field of territorial cohesion and cross-border cooperation, particularly relevant for the German-speaking Community of Belgium, and represents his region in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine and the Great Region.

4.2 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The topic of the Annual Conference of the AEBR in 2009 was: „**Cross-border cooperation after 2013: Regional answers to current European challenges.**“ Right at the beginning of the conference on 5th November, the Commissioner for Regional Policy, Mr Pawel Samecki, made a speech that dealt with the currently high important topic of the future European Cohesion and Regional policies. Apart from the Commissioner Samecki, also the President of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), **Mr Luc van den Brande** and the Director General of the DG REGIO (European Commission), **Mr Dirk Ahner** delivered keynote speeches during the Conference.



Source: DG REGIO

The Commissioner for Regional Policy, Mr **Pawel Samecki**, ensured in his keynote speech that also in the future the European border regions will be of high importance for the European cohesion policy. Through the close cooperation with the neighbour, border regions are visible symbols of the practical meaning of the European Union in the day-to-day life.

Mr Samecki stressed **the positive economic effects** that the European cohesion policy generated in the past, admitted, however, that there are still some problems to solve, in particular as regards **the financial management**

The Association of European Border Regions could welcome in Ghent high-ranking representatives of the European institutions and border regions (from the left): Jean-Paul Heider, 1st Vice-President of the Region Alsace and 1st Vice-President of the AEBR; Luc van den Brande, President of the Committee of the Regions; Dirk Ahner, Secretary General of the DG REGIO, European Commission.



Source: DG REGIO

Great interest met the keynote speech of **Mr Dirk Ahner** that focused especially on the current consultations and debates referring to the future of the European cohesion and regional policy. Mr Ahner reminded the audience that despite the progress in the European integration the national boundaries still have a strong impact on the everyday life of citizens in border regions. Borders are dividing lines separating different administration and education systems as well as labour markets, and even in the civil and environment protection it is not always possible to develop joint strategies with the neighbouring countries. **Consequently, it is highly important to further enhance cross-border cooperation in the future.**

According to Mr Ahner, following aspects are particularly important in regard to the future territorial cooperation:

- ➡ The **strategic dimension** must be further improved in the territorial cooperation and it must be reflected also in each individual programme. Accordingly, the preparation of the programmes should start as early as possible in order to have enough time for a broader strategic discussion.
- ➡ It must be ensured that funding from different programmes is used in a complementary way and that in this way **more efficiency and coherency** is achieved in regional and cohesion policy.
- ➡ The results of the territorial cooperation, often very difficult to quantify, must become visible to the public through consolidation of the project results in a systematic way in the regions and through external communication.



*More than 220 regional representatives took part in the Annual Conference of the AEBr in Ghent.
(Source: DG REGIO)*

The morning session of the conference on 6th November dealt with the main topic of the Annual Conference 2009: „**Cross-border cooperation after 2013: Regional answers to current European challenges.**“ Five experts from different border regions discussed under the chairmanship of **Dr Reinhold Kolck** about the future of cross-border cooperation and the challenges that European border regions have to tackle. The chairman of the AEBr Advisory Committee, **Mr Jens Gabbe**, introduced the topic. In his brief speech he stressed the importance of cross-border cooperation for regional development and the European integration process and referred to the social, institutional, economic and cultural added value that the cooperation across border generates.

In general, the Annual Conference of the AEBr in Ghent offered the participants the opportunity to highlight how Cross-Border Cooperation has added value to the construction of a political Europe, while linking communities together across every European border line. Despite some logistical difficulties, including a strike of the Belgian Railways, all European institutions, some member states, most of European border and cross-border regions and academicians, enterprises and other interested stakeholders met in this very well organized event by the Euregio Scheldemond.

Following a proposal of the host region the afternoon session (The Case of the Host) dealt with the topic “Cross-border Labour Market”. In the middle of the economic crisis many things are to be reviewed, including new conditions for labour markets. On the other and, after the liberalisation of the remaining national labour markets in the EU in spring 2011, this will gain further importance. Seven experts discussed under the chairmanship of **Mr Marc de Buck**, Vice-President of the AEBR and 1st Deputy of the province East Flanders about the opportunities of cross-border cooperation regarding labour market, current trends in different border areas as well as still existing obstacles.



Source: DG REGIO

Bearing in mind current global and European challenges the Executive Director of Regional Management Upper Austria, Mr Wilhelm Patri, gave the regions the advice to redefine themselves in a new way: *„Regions should perceive and define themselves rather as complementary areas of central regions. Moreover, regions must create new functional and/or settlement areas. This can be achieved only if the environment, society and economy are in balance. Regions need a dynamic economy, ecological supportability, social balance as well as spiritual and cultural identity.”*



Reported on their experiences with cross-border labour market (from the left): Harald Krebs, Executive Director of the EUREGIO; Marten Wiersma, Deputy of the province Zeeland; Marc de Buck, 1st Deputy of the province East Flanders and Vice-President of the AEBR; Hans de Jonge, Chairman of the EURES Cross Border Euregio Scheldemond

(Source: DG REGIO)

The results of the conference are included in the **Final Declaration of the Annual Conference 2009**. It underlines in particular the contribution of territorial cooperation, especially cross-border cooperation, to the European integration process and territorial cohesion:

- ➡ **Territorial cooperation** in connection with **spatial planning** at European level **contributes to territorial cohesion** and **helps to solve the spatial fragmentation of the EU**, the inconsistencies and lack of coherence caused by national differences. Only then the **challenges** of globalisation, climate change, ageing of the society, coherence of renewable primary products (for usage of energy and food, close connection between territorial policy and cohesion policy) **can be better faced**.
- ➡ Within territorial cooperation, **cross-border cooperation** should obtain **first political priority further on** and remain a political objective by itself which should be strengthened.
- ➡ Cross-border cooperation is mostly affected by territorial cohesion. If there is **no cohesion along the European borders** then it would be very **difficult** to realise European **integration** and **territorial cohesion as a whole**.
- ➡ Therefore, cross-border co-operation is a **cornerstone of European integration and territorial cohesion**.
- ➡ In the long term, **cross-border cooperation** within the framework of territorial cohesion remains one of **the few European Union's instruments** that can reach citizens and regions in the enlarged Europe, and **realise subsidiarity and partnership** in a manner **closer to the people**.
- ➡ Consequently, EU support programmes for cross-border cooperation must also be applied Europe-wide for **all border regions** and **solve all border problems** (not merely those of an economic nature) which exist now or in the future.

4.3 BESTOWAL OF THE AEBR AWARD 2009

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 2009 in the city of Papenburg. In line with the motto of the Annual Conference 2009 "Cross-border cooperation after 2013: Regional answers to current European challenges" the award 2009 was bestowed to the **Euregio Scheldemond** (BE/NL) for the project: **Bio Base Europe: Innovation and Training for a sustainable bio-based economy**. The award was officially handed over by the chairman of the jury, Dr Reinhold Kolck.



Winners of the AEBR award "Sail of Papenburg" 2009

Bio Base Europe is a Belgian, Dutch and European research and training effort to help the transition from a economy based on fossil resources into a sustainable bio-based one, with the support of Interreg. It is a pilot plant for a variety of bio-based processes and a training facility for process operators in various bio-based industries (<http://www.biobaseeurope.org/>).

5 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Meetings of the AEBR Executive Committee in 2009:

- ➡ 13th March 2009 in Linz, Upper Austria (A)
- ➡ 5th June 2009 in Burg, Euroregion Spree-Neiße-Bober (D)
- ➡ 18th September 2009 in Salamanca, Castilla y León (ES)
- ➡ 5th November 2009 in Ghent, Euregio Scheldemond (B).

Throughout 2009 the Executive Committee dealt in particular with the following topics:

- ➡ European cohesion and structural policy
- ➡ European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)
- ➡ Territorial Agenda of the European Union
- ➡ Cross-border healthcare
- ➡ Trans-European Transport Policy
- ➡ Cross-border rural areas
- ➡ Eastern Partnership and Cross-border cooperation at the external borders of the EU
- ➡ Cross-border cooperation in mountain areas
- ➡ Cross-border cooperation in maritime regions
- ➡ Climate change and sustainable development.



AEBR Executive Committee in Burg (Germany) in June 2009

Source: Euroregion Spree-Neiße-Bober



AEBR Executive Committee in Salamanca (Spain) in September 2009

Extensive reports were given on these topics. The Executive Committee discussed them and elaborated special recommendations and remarks concerning cross-border cooperation. On that basis, the Association worked out sets of arguments and requests for European and national institutions. AEBR members received written information about these recommendations as well as on the reactions of the European and national levels (successes or failures of interventions).

Furthermore, the Executive Committee also treated organisational and internal issues, such as AEBR events (special fora), work contents, financial matters, advisory committee, task forces on health and external borders, and future perspectives of the AEBR. In line with the General Assembly decisions, it has been repeatedly stressed by the Executive Committee that AEBR should remain an autonomous organisation, both in terms of funding and contents. In order to ensure the continuity of the AEBR work in the future, it is particularly important that the necessary financial and human resources are available and that the AEBR does not lose its current status as a highly appreciated partner at the European level.

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.

The AEBR gathered most cross-border initiatives until 1990. Then, many new cross-border structures in Central and Eastern Europe were created after the fall of the Iron Curtain, and the AEBR was the first organisation asked for professional support and expertise. Now it is time **to develop a strategy for the future of the Association** that enables the Association to remain attractive for its members also in the future, that new members are gained, and that it is still perceived as a reliable and important partner by the political institutions at the European, national and regional level.

6 MAIN SUBJECTS IN 2009

6.1 EUROPEAN COHESION AND STRUCTURAL POLICY

The AEBR kept its contacts with the European Commission in 2009, in particular with the holder of the "Regional Policy" portfolio. This year was the last one of the fruitful mandate of Mrs. Danuta Hübner, and the first part of a short but enthusiastic mandate of Mr. Paweł Samecki. During her period in office as Commissioner for Regional Policy, Mrs Hübner increased her efforts to better involve **regional and local authorities as well as regional organisations in the political debates** at the European level. Due to her initiative to launch a debate on Territorial Cohesion (Green Paper, 2008) a representative of the Italian Ministry for Economy and Finances, Mr Fabrizio Barca, elaborated an accurate report dealing with the results and challenges of the European cohesion policy.

The Barca Report proposes the concentration on 3-4 key priorities (receiving 65% of the funds), a new strategic framework, a new contractual relationship „EU-member states“ and calls for a complementary, innovative and flexible spending policy, incentive-promoting experiments as well as a better involvement of the regional / local level. The importance of the territorial cooperation is stressed in the report as well, but it should support the achievement of the objectives defined by the key priorities. The most important message of the report is that **all** regions can contribute to the realisation of the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy, however, not to the same degree. It is, thus, necessary to take the regional differences better into account. The report corresponds in general with the expecta-

tions of border and cross-border regions as well as the AEBR as regards the necessary developments in the future. The AEBR elaborated comments on the report that were discussed by the Executive Committee on the occasion of its meeting in Salamanca in September 2009. The AEBR also established a fruitful dialogue with Prof. Barca, who offered very good recommendations, stressing in particular the need to obtain results for the life of citizens, even if they are difficult to measure by decision-makers.

On 25th June 2009 the European Commission published its **Sixth Progress Report** on Economic and Social Cohesion, focusing on creativity and innovation as main elements to overcome the current economic crisis. This report highlighted factors to boost creativity and innovation both in more and less developed regions, including technological and many non technological forms of innovation (such as society building, cultural processes and innovation in services). It also provided a synthesis of the current debate on territorial cohesion. The AEBR elaborated for its members a summary of this report from the perspective of territorial cooperation.

This whole process was accompanied by regular meetings with Director General Dirk Ahner. The focus of the discussions were the qualitative improvement of programmes and projects (CBC best practices), the involvement of social partners, the allocation of EU funds directly to border areas, the amelioration of Interreg procedures, and EGTCs.



Commissioner Hübner commented: „The Barca Report confirms that the Cohesion Policy is a central pillar of the European integration process. It recognises that all regions should be able to realise their potential in terms of economic development and that all citizens should benefit from the policy, wherever they live. The report confirms that the reforms we have already introduced over the past few years are the correct ones. It also opens new, bold avenues which will widen our perspective on the renewal of the policy.“

Source: European Commission

6.2 EUROPEAN GROUPING FOR TERRITORIAL COOPERATION (EGTC)

The CoR has committed itself to observe the developments in individual member states regarding the implementation of the EGTC regulation, and to examine the foundation process of particular EGTCs. For this purpose, an **Expert Group on EGTC** was established at the CoR to monitor the adoption and implementation of provisions at member state level, and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences. The AEBR Secretariat General is actively involved in the activities of this Expert Group and pays much attention to all actions and decisions referring to EGTC taken at European and national level.

Based on reports from member states and the exchange with DG REGIO and the CoR, the Advisory Committee of the AEBR has continuously updated the available information on EGTC and has used the first experiences in implementing the new legal instrument of the EU in its comments and opinions. Documents on EGTC elaborated by AEBR have been regularly distributed to members of the Executive Committee and member regions interested in the subject. The documents include in particular proposals for the revision of the regulation on EGTC elaborated in summer 2009 by the AEBR.

In 2009 the AEBR took part in events dealing with the EGTC, for example:

- ➡ on 31st March 2009 in a **conference of the Committee of the Regions** on the perspectives of cross-border cooperation that took place in Brussels.
- ➡ on 8th October 2009 in a **workshop of the Committee of the Regions on EGTC** organised on the occasion of the Open Days taking place in Brussels,

In 2010, EGTCs have also been the focus for many events at the Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament. The Spanish Presidency organized with the AEBR a related Conference in May and, during the Open Days 2010, a high level workshop has reviewed the legal framework. The MOT has also developed a project on EGTCs within UrbAct.

Some new EGTCs were founded in 2009. Here are two examples:

KARST-BODVA EGTC	
BORDER:	Hungary / Slovakia
FOUNDATION:	February 2009
AIMS:	The EGTC is the successor of the Euroregion Kars founded in 2001. The aim of the EGTC is to promote cooperation between the member regions and to strengthen the economic and social cohesion. The elaboration and implementation of joint projects and strategies should support the achievement of the objectives of this EGTC.

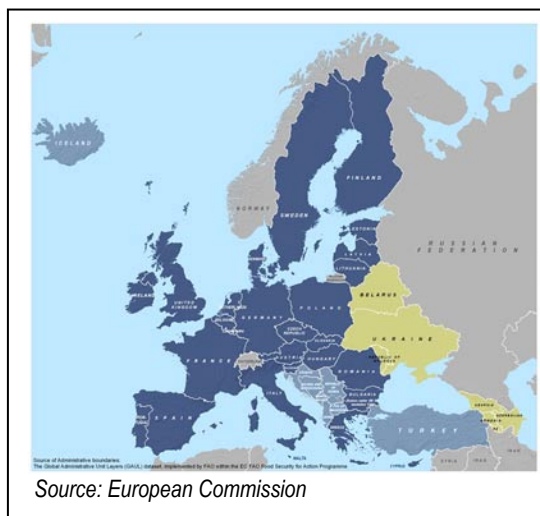
ARCHIMED EGTC	
BORDER:	MEDiterranean ARCHipelago
FOUNDATION:	July 2009
AIMS:	Members of the EGTC are Italian, Spanish and Cyprus partners, involving the Balearic Islands, Cyprus and the Island of Sicily. Its Convention came after the signing of a Statute of Cooperation in July 2009 between the three partners.



6.3 EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Eastern Partnership was repeatedly on the agenda of the EU in 2009. This initiative, started by the European Union in March 2009, has the aim to enhance the cooperation with national states from Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus that in the course of the EU enlargements moved closer to the Union. Concretely, the cooperation with **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine** should be strengthened and the political, economic and social reforms in these countries supported. First Eastern Partnership Summit took place on **7th May 2009** in Prague.

A forum of the Committee of the Regions took place in the beginning of July 2009, and the AEBR was asked to prepare a contribution. Thanks to the participation in this forum the cooperation between the AEBR and the DG RELEX has been further enhanced focusing on cross-border cooperation and the management of border crossings.



The AEBR has already elaborated some documents and proposals dealing with these subjects that are regularly used in the discussions at the European level. The Association has also taken part in conferences dealing with this subject, as it was the case of the V Annual Conference “CBC in the Russian Federation, the EU and Norway”, organized in September 2009 in St. Petersburg with the Presence of high representatives from the Russian Federation, the Governments of the coastal countries with the Baltic Sea, the European Union and many participants from the sub-national level, development agencies, etc.

AEBR members in countries of the Eastern Partnership have facilitated a strong involvement of the Association in these processes. Regular participation in activities organized particularly in Ukraine, let the Association to be a relevant partner both by the regional and the national levels. In 2009, the AEBR Task Force on External Borders has grown in presence, activity and members, please see appropriate section of this report (section 7.2).

6.4 LANGUAGES IN BORDER REGIONS

On 29th April 2009 the AEBR had a meeting with MEP Grażyna Staniszewska (PL) in order to demonstrate the importance of the language of the neighbouring country in border areas and to discuss the possibilities to support financially language projects in border regions. Furthermore, on the occasion of the Annual Conference in Ghent in November 2009 a workshop dealing with this subject took place again under the chairmanship of Mr Ruud Halink (Talenakademie, NL). This workshop offered the opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences and to present language initiatives implemented already in different border regions. One example is the German-Czech Language Campaign of the EUREGIO EGRENSIS that has been successfully implemented since 2005 in the border area Bavaria-Saxony-Bohemia.



The language campaign of the EUREGIO EGRENSIS has the aim to promote a better awareness for the importance of language knowledge for the development of the region. The reservation towards the language of the neighbouring country shrinks enormously the development possibilities that cross-border cooperation offers for citizens. Accordingly, the Czech / German language campaign has the aim to improve the intercultural skills within the EUREGIO.

The language campaign includes the following priorities:

1. Increased awareness, convincing, increased demand. The status of the language of the neighbouring country should be improved through intensive cooperation with media and other disseminators (lobbying).
2. Presentation, documentation and dissemination of good practices, improved exchange of experiences. Manifold language initiatives, services and projects already implemented should be documented and disseminated.
3. More language courses and technical support. The aim of the EUREGIO EGRENSIS is to increase the number of language courses or at least to keep it at a constant level.

Source: www.euregio-egrensis.de

6.5 CROSS-BORDER RURAL, MOUNTAIN AND MARITIME REGIONS

Cross-border rural areas

Following a forum of AEBR on rural areas that was organised in cooperation with the EuRegio Salzburg-Berchtesgadener Land-Traunstein in the Monastery of Seeon in March 2007, this topic has regularly been discussed by the AEBR Executive Committee. *Landrat* Hermann Steinmaßl elaborated a working paper on rural development, which is regularly updated, in order to illustrate the particular challenges and problems of rural areas.

Besides, the AEBR has prepared a summary of the **resolution on complementarities and coordination of cohesion policy with rural development measures** approved by the European Parliament in March 2009. The Association keep also following up the debates on the Common Agricultural Policy and its growing chapter on rural development.

Conclusions of the resolution of the European Parliament on complementarities and coordination of cohesion policy with rural development measures:

- **Rural development policy** has a **huge influence** on territorial cohesion.
- For this reason rural development **measures** should **not be separated** from **cohesion and regional development policy** again.
- This policy is better than the CAP to assist **non agricultural aspects of rural development** (e.g. training, education and infrastructure).
- **Integration of rural development policy into cohesion- and development policy** is only possible if rural development receives adequate funding and that this funds are used **in line with the objectives set out** for rural areas.

Cross-border mountain areas

Thanks to the initiative of the representatives of the Pyrenees, the Alps and the Carpathians within the AEBR Executive Committee the specific challenges and problems of cross-border cooperation in mountain areas are regularly discussed in the AEBR Executive Committee. In addition, the AEBR has contacted other networks representing

mountain areas in order to check the cooperation possibilities. In this context the AEBR's intention is to cooperate closer with the **European Association of elected representatives from Mountain Regions**, and organize a joint Forum in 2011 to analyze current challenges and future development perspectives in these very sensitive areas.

Cross-border maritime regions

Due to the fact that 22 member states of the European Union are maritime or island states, and 40% of the population in the EU live in maritime regions, the subject of Maritime Cooperation is of high importance at the European level. In order to enhance the cooperation between different platforms and networks dealing with maritime cooperation the Committee of the Regions initiated the foundation of a new body, **the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM)**. After a long process, very much related to the Union for the Mediterranean, finally more than 70 representatives from 30 different states in the Mediterranean participated in the inaugural meeting that took place in January 2010 in Barcelona (originally planned

in May 2009). The Region of Andalucía represents the AEBR in this new body. Mr Manuel Chaves, former President of the region, was appointed as the representative of the AEBR in 2009. In the meantime, Mr. Chaves was appointed Vice-President and Minister of Territorial Policy of the Spanish Government. His successor in Andalucía, **Mr José Antonio Griñán Martínez**, is now the official representative of the AEBR in the ARLEM.

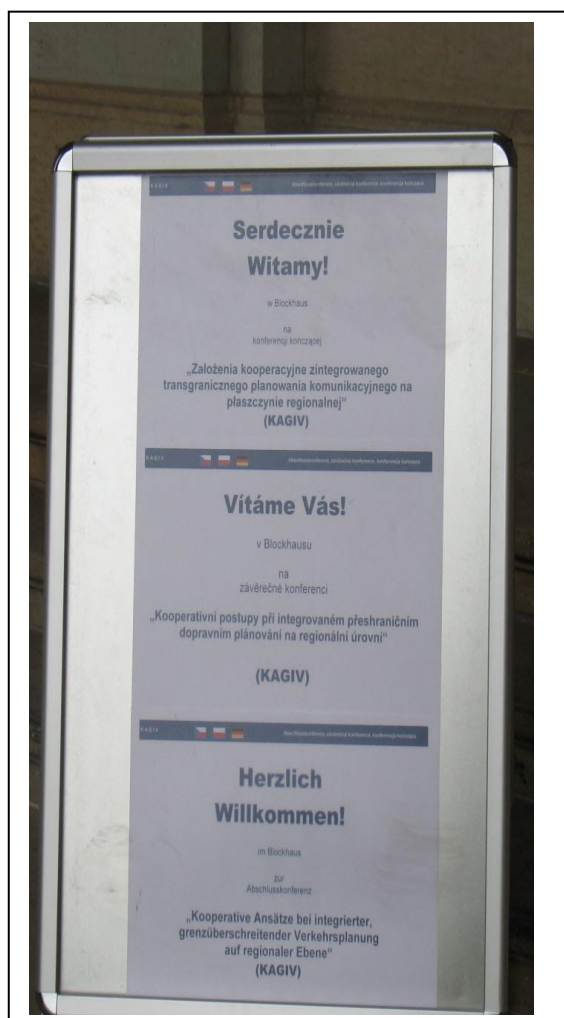
On the occasion of the European Maritime Day a **stakeholder conference** dealing with maritime policy was organised in Rome on 19-20 May 2009. Mr Francesco Attagui (Sicily) represented the AEBR in this conference.

6.6 TRANSEUROPEAN TRANSPORT POLICY

Right from its foundation (1971), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) took a very close interest in issues related to transport policy in border regions. Many border areas have suffered for decades from their peripheral location (national, sometimes even European) resulting from missing transport infrastructure. Only with the removal of economic, social, cultural, traffic and legal barriers and 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.

In cooperation with the Region Aragon, the AEBR organized a political forum on cross-border transport networks in Zaragoza in **September 2008**. The results of the forum were used in several working documents of the AEBR including in particular the opinion of the AEBR on **the Green Paper of the European Commission: „TEN-T: A policy review. Towards a better integrated transeuropean transport network at the service of the common transport policy.“** As regards the future transport policy of the EU the AEBR has included in its opinion following requirements:



- The **future position** of the Commission vis-à-vis national governments has to be clearly defined within TEN-T.
- „**Outline Plans**“ (network schemes for all kind of transport) should preferably be developed by the EU (in cooperation with the member states), as in this way also the national transport policies can be better coordinated.
- A long-term network planning helps to **improve the connection between border and peripheral regions and central areas of the EU**, so that they can more efficiently tackle new challenges (climate change, energy supply, need of new infrastructures, connections at the new borders, etc.).
- **Priority projects** within these “Outline Plans” and long-term network planning should generate a **European added value**.
- As the needs of international infrastructures have to be better taken into account, **an isolated national planning is rather obsolete**. **Changes of political priorities in a member state** may not cause that investments in an international corridor are hindered or **measures in the neighbouring country** have to be postponed.

The II AEBR Forum on **Cross-Border Transport** has been organized in Huesca (Aragón) in 2010, within the framework of the Spanish Presidency of the EU. As in the previous occasion, the Forum could illustrate a major practical example, the Central Crossing of the Pyrenees, a strategic proposal by the regions involved.

6.7 DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION

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 us, demanding a stronger involvement of the Association in current debates and processes to strengthen cross-border cooperation in different parts of the world, namely Latin America and the African continent. In fact, this has happened all the time with EU Accession countries before 2004, and this is also the case of the Russian Federation, the Neighbourhood countries and other Mediterranean nations.

On the other hand, any European regions, including some AEBR members, have their own agencies for cooperation with third countries. This regional international development agencies play a very important role in promoting the cooperation with the sub-national level in countries where decentralization processes and subsidiarity are very weak or absent at all. The main aim is to promote territorial approaches to development in order to make actions more effective, by involving regional and local actors from the very beginning in development processes.

In order to have a proper coordination amongst European regional and local authorities working in this field, **PLATFORMA** (the European Platform of Regional and Local Authorities for Development) was created in 2008 and it is set up under the European Commission NSA-LA (Non State Actors – Local Authorities) call for proposals. The main objectives of Platforma are:

- Better acknowledgement of the action of local and regional authorities (LRA) in development cooperation.
- Set up of a solid dialogue between European LRA and EU institutions in charge of Development Policy.
- Promotion of an efficient decentralized cooperation.

Another structure, the Forum of Global Associations of Regions (**FOGAR**), was constituted in 2007, and the AEBR was one of the founder organizations, together with the CPMR. In 2009 the FOGAR was still growing awareness in different parts of the world, and the AEBR was taking part in different activities through the active participation of several members of the Association, namely the Basque Country and Aquitaine. In 2009 memoranda of understanding were signed between the FOGAR and the United Nations agencies UN Development Programme and the FAO).

6.8 CLIMATE CHANGE

2009 was full of global debates and awareness about world challenges, but probably the main (and less successful one) was the debate on Climate Change. The **Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change** in search of a world agreement full of expectations, really added nothing really relevant to the Kyoto Protocol. In any case, this frustrating experience should not keep our views out of reality. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) organized a special event in Copenhagen on 16th December 2009 to show European regions' and cities' point of view on Climate Change, and the AEBR had the chance to make some proposals as well. We decided to save resources and did not travel to Copenhagen, but made a virtual campaign. Several AEBR members answered very actively and shot small videos presenting their views on daily issues, their proposals and attitudes towards Climate Change. More than thirty contributions are already in YouTube, and many of our recommendations can be implemented right now, by everyone, as they mostly refer to change citizens' behaviour, the cheapest, lightest, and fastest way to face this challenge.

This link to CoR website includes information on the 16th December event (including the AEBR's contribution):
<http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/EventTemplate.aspx?view=detail&id=fe9fcfe2-f707-44bf-bf38-0025e8b42e20>

And here you can see the CoR's video:

<http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/PressTemplate.aspx?view=detail&id=c387257a-2aec-442d-9f6b-9ac645ad1930>

In YouTube (channel "aebr1971") you can see the video contributions by AEBR members:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/AEBR1971#g/u>

And, we also prepared four microsites in different languages including links to the videos and relevant documents:

In English: <https://sites.google.com/site/aebrcontributionclimatechange/>

In French: <https://sites.google.com/site/arfechangementclimatique/>

In German: <https://sites.google.com/site/beitragderagegklimawandel/>

In Spanish: <https://sites.google.com/site/arfecambioclimatico/>

Thank you very much for your engagement: Alentejo (PT), Sønderjylland-Schleswig (DK/DE), North Karelia (FI), Euroregion Slobozhanschina (UA/RU), University of Belgorod (RU), Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) (IE/UK), Euregio Yaroslavl - Kursk Oblast (RU), EUREGIO (DE/NL), Twente University (Enschede, NL), the AEBR Team and the Office of Extremadura in Brussels!

And please, do not forget that if you are an AEBR member and still wish to upload your contribution in YouTube, please do by using the login information already sent to you from AEBR Secretariat in Gronau. This AEBR campaign was not closed, as the challenge will prevail and the world is not ready to make clear steps yet.

7 TASK FORCES OF THE AEBR

7.1 TASK FORCE ON CROSS-BORDER HEALTHCARE

The Task Force on cross-border healthcare was founded on the occasion of the Annual Conference of AEHR in Lappeenranta (Finland) in 2007 by a strong input of the Province of Limburg (Euregio Meuse-Rhein). 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 cross-border healthcare and to initiate joint projects and other activities. Besides, that Task Force elaborates joint opinions and position papers on cross-border healthcare that the AEHR uses for its lobbying at the European and national level.

The activities of the AEHR Task Force on cross-border health included in 2009 in particular:



*Photos: impressions from the III
AEHR Forum on CB Healthcare
Source: Regio Basiliensis*

- Preparation and organisation of the **3rd AEHR Forum on cross-border healthcare** in cooperation with REGIO BASILIENSIS, the district of Lörrach and the Federal State Baden-Württemberg, that took place in Lörrach on 10th December 2009.

More than 150 participants took part in this conference and had the opportunity to present various projects from different EU states as well as the Basel region. Moreover, the second Swiss pilot project between Liechtenstein and the canton St. Gallen was presented during the forum.

- Implementation of the project dealing with cross-border healthcare **EUREGIO II: "Healthcare in cross-border regions from the patients' perspective"** that is based on the experiences of the project EUREGIO I finalised in May 2007. The aim of the project is to stimulate and promote cross-border healthcare in border regions, by fostering the usability of various existing instruments and methods, and analyse further needs and gaps.
- **Several working meetings took place in 2009** in order to monitor the implementation of the manifold activities of the Task Force and to initiate new projects: Brussels (February), Maastricht (May and October), Linz (July) and Lörrach (December).
- On 28th January 2009 the AEHR had a meeting with **Commissioner Vassiliou** in Brussels. Main subject discussed was the draft of a directive of the EU Commission on patients' mobility¹. Moreover, the possibility of a closer cooperation between the DG Health and the AEHR was explored. The Commissioner was highly interested in the exchange with the AEHR, following a regular exchange between the AEHR and her Cabinet until the end of her duties as Commissioner for Health. Contacts initiated afterwards with her successor..
- In June 2009 the AEHR forwarded to Commissioner Vassiliou a position paper of the AEHR on cross-border healthcare including the opinion of the Association on the new directive of the EU Commission on patients' mobility and demonstrating the role of border regions while enhancing the cooperation in healthcare in Europe.
- The AEHR took part in several meetings organized in this regards by European institutions (namely the CoR) and other organizations, as it was the case of the think-tank Friends of Europe. The Association also takes part in different projects, as the EurSafety HealthNet.

In October 2010, the AEHR agreed with the patients organization EPECS (European Patients' Empowerment for Customized Solutions) to establish regular contacts and prepare joint proposals, position papers and projects for the benefit of European patients, particularly in border areas.

¹ After several ups and downs, this draft Directive has received a further input by the European Council in 2010

7.2 TASK FORCE ON EXTERNAL BORDERS



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 sub-areas: North-West External Borders, Eastern External Borders and Mediterranean and Black Sea.

Related themes are also dealt with by AEBR members, as they constitute main topics in certain border areas: migration policy, as an authentic European issue and not only a national priority; intercultural dialogue; and maritime cooperation and safety. Several seminars have been planned and organised already by this Task Force coordinated by Mr. Johannes Moisio (Region of South Karelia).

Following events took place in **2009**:

- ➔ On 13-18 July 2009 the 1st Youth Forum of the AEBR in Trieste (on the invitation of the region Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy)

Ten participants from Estonia, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Russia and the Ukraine, chosen from numerous applicants, took part in the Youth Forum of the AEBR. During the forum the Task Force on External Borders organized a workshop focusing on cross-border cooperation. In the organization of the workshop were involved: Johannes Moisio (South Karelia, Finland), Laura Comelli (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy), Doede Sijtsma (Province of Gelderland, the Netherlands), Sarunas Radvilavicius (Nordic Council of Ministers), Ekaterina Shibalova (municipality of St. Petersburg) and Martín Guillermo-Ramírez (AEBR).

- ➔ Working meeting on 18th July 2009 in Udine (Italy) in order to prepare the 2nd Youth Forum of the AEBR that took place in 2010 and other activities
- ➔ Joint meeting of the Task Force on the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference in Ghent in November 2009.



Photos: Impressions from the 1st Youth Forum of AEBR

The cooperation at the external borders of the EU was also mentioned in the meetings of the AEBR Secretary General with Commissioner Danuta Hübner and Director General Dirk Ahner. The AEBR has raised in particular the question of the responsibility for the EU programmes at the external borders that should be transferred from DG RELEX to DG REGIO. The Secretary General of AEBR participated also

in some meetings organised by the Russian Government, in particular the Ministry for Regional Development and the Ministry of External Affairs. In the middle term the role of Euroregions will gain in importance in Russia and the Ukraine. The AEBR can support newly created cross-border structures with its know-how and expertise.

7.3 TASK FORCE ON STRATEGIC ISSUES

The AEBR Executive Committee has discussed in many occasions the future strategy of the AEBR and its sustainability. Firstly, it is important to ensure the availability of **adequate financial resources** in the middle and long term. Without them, the Association will not be able to cope with increasing complexity and the growing number of topics to be covered. Secondly, the Association has to develop **new methodologies** in order to gain new members and to provide tailored services to current members.

In its meeting in Burg in June 2009 the AEBR Executive Committee founded a **new Task Force** in order to look for adequate solutions as regards the future of the AEBR from the financial and strategic perspectives. The mission of the Task Force is to elaborate effective proposals and concepts ensuring adequate funding in the future and improving further on the image of the AEBR as a highly profiled European regional organisation.

The question of the financial security was the priority for the Task Force in 2009. With support of the Austrian side of the Euroregion Bayerischer Wald-Böhmerwald a workshop on this subject moderated by an external consultant was organised in Linz during the summer.

As a result of this workshop a **new tool for the calculation of the membership fees** was elaborated. This new tool is more transparent and takes better into account the varying financial possibilities of every member region. The new fees for cross-border structures takes into account the population and the GDP (in average of the EU-27), while border regions keep a flat rate.

Regarding the strategic approach of the AEBR, it was urgent to improve the communication with the members. On the occasion of the Annual Conference of the AEBR in Ghent a workshop was organized with members interested in the subject, thus providing a good opportunity to present proposals for a better communication strategy of the AEBR. As first result of this workshop a new information tool – **the electronic Newsflash** – has been published by the AEBR since November 2009. In the next step, the AEBR should work **a better image and an increased awareness for AEBR activities to the public**. Concrete measures and concepts in this context have been elaborated and implemented in 2010. They include in particular the finalization of the new AEBR website as well as proposals for an updated corporate design.

In order to improve the communication with its members, since November 2009 the AEBR has published monthly an electronic Newsflash. Also the new homepage of the AEBR finalized in autumn 2010 offers more possibilities for the exchange of experiences and opinions.



8 EVENTS

In cooperation with its members and other partners the AEBR organises regularly conferences and fora 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. Many events took place in 2009, being most relevant the following:

2 FEBRUARY 2009: AEBR FORUM „RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION IN CROSS-BORDER REGIONS“ IN VIGO (GALICIA, SPAIN)

More than 50 experts and political representatives from border and cross-border regions participated in a AEBR Forum organized in the offices of the EGTC Galicia-Norte de Portugal in Vigo, dealing with research, development and innovation. The Forum provided the opportunity to exchange information of the current status and perspectives of cross-border cooperation in research and development and to present best practice examples from different border areas. Such example is **the university cooperation UNISKA** on the Swedish-Norwegian border that has stimulated cross-border research and education in the region for the benefit of the economy and the students. Also the **regional life sciences cluster** in the Euregio Maas-Rhein or the **trilateral BioValley Cluster** in the Upper Rhine region are outstanding projects that demonstrate how cross-border cooperation in research, development and innovation can create added value on both sides of the border. Various cross-border clusters of automobile industry also gathered and offered some clues about new challenges in industrial border areas. A Permanent Forum of R&D and Innovation in Border Regions was established, and a second edition of this Forum is planned for February 2011.



The Xunta de Galicia, the City of Vigo and the Norte Region of Portugal welcomed the participants in the presence of the Spanish Minister of Science and Technology and the Director General of Research (European Commission)

5-6 MARCH 2009: THE PRAGUE SUMMIT OF EUROPEAN REGIONS AND CITIES

The Committee of the Regions organized this Summit with elected representatives of regional and local authorities and European associations at a time when the EU was celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall, Solidarność's victory in Poland and the fifth anniversary of the enlargement of the EU to Central and Eastern Europe. In the conclusions of the Summit the participants affirmed the achievements of the EU, while requesting to be closer to the people. It was expressed a deep concern about the effects of the crisis in European territories, but

also the feeling that only united the EU can overcome the current situation and strengthen our competitiveness. The role and involvement of regional and local authorities in the design and implementation of EU strategies, based on the principles of subsidiarity, responsibility and shared competences was highlighted, as well as the need of a reform based on a more decentralised growth, employment strategy, and cohesion policy, as key instruments to promote real economic growth and maintaining solidarity between citizens.

The Summit also asked:

- the Member States and the European Commission to implement the Lisbon Strategy and its reform, promoting the incorporation of regional reform plans into national strategic plans;
- the Commission to draw up a White Paper on territorial cohesion. The definition, objectives and funding of territorial cohesion should guarantee equity and solidarity between territories and make an effective contribution towards ensuring climate protection and addressing the effects of globalisation and the demographic challenge;
- the European Investment Bank to support the financing and investment capacities of regional and local authorities;
- the Community institutions to improve lawmaking, to reduce administrative procedures and to take account of the principles of proportionality and simplification;
- the national parliaments to listen to the voice of regional and local authorities which are willing to take part in monitoring subsidiarity with regard to European legislative acts having a territorial impact.

Most important European regional and local associations subscribed these conclusions and committed to follow its recommendations.

13-18 JULY 2009: YOUTH FORUM OF THE AEBR IN TRIESTE (REGION FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA, ITALY)

The initiator of the AEBR Youth Forum was the Task Force on External Borders. This forum was organized for the first time thanks to the support of the Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia in July 2009 in Trieste. Ten youngsters from regions located at the external borders of the European Union, both from EU and non-EU members states, chosen from numerous applicants, participated in the forum. The forum gave them good insight into practical cross-border

cooperation and provided a good opportunity to visit interesting institutions, research centres and historic places in the host region. Both, the participants and the organisers evaluated the forum quite positively. Accordingly, directly after the forum the members of the Task Force on external borders met in Udine in order to organise the second youth forum, which was successfully organized in July 2010 in Trieste, again with the support of Friuli Venezia Giulia.



15-16 OCTOBER 2009: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CROSS-BORDER REGIONAL COOPERATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROREGIONS IN ODESSA (EUROREGION LOWER DANUBE, UKRAINE)

In cooperation with the AEBR, the region of Odessa (Ukraine) organised in autumn 2009 a conference on cross-border cooperation, with the presence of high representatives of the regional and the national levels, including the Minister of Regional Development of Ukraine. As the conference focused on the development and promotion of cross-border cooperation in a Euroregion, the host region invited European Euroregions to present their practical experiences and expectations for the future during this conference. Several AEBR member regions participated in the conference.



The Czech-Austrian Euregio Silva Nortica and REGIO BASILIENSIS (CH) that reported on their work, daily problems of cross-border cooperation and the added value of cooperation with the neighbour.

The region of Odessa is also member of a Euroregion. Since 1998 it has cooperated with partners from Rumania and Moldova within the Euroregion Lower Danube. In 2001 this Euroregion joined the AEBR as full member.



10 DECEMBER 2009: CONFERENCE „EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN HEALTHCARE. ADDED VALUE FOR CITIZENS, ECONOMY AND REGION” IN LÖRRACH (BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG, GERMANY)

Following earlier events in September 2005 and February 2008, the third conference on cross-border healthcare took place on 10th December 2009. It was co-organized by the REGIO BASILIENSIS, the Swiss canton Basel and Basel Land, the district of Lörrach in Germany, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Baden-Württemberg, and the AEBR.

More than 150 participants attended the conference, what confirms that the subject of cross-border cooperation in healthcare has gained much importance throughout the last years. Increasing specialisation and extension of catchment areas make cooperation more and more necessary, as otherwise the highest quality standards could not be met. Furthermore, many border areas are quite often hit by the problem of brain drain in the medical sector. By bringing together know-how and material resources some bottlenecks can be avoided in such cases.

Although in most cases cross-border healthcare means more efficiency and quality, there are still many obstacles to overcome in cross-border cooperation.

They refer in particular to different administration and legal systems as well as to missing language knowledge and different practices and uses across the borders. The lack of a European framework, the multiplicity of stakeholders, and many other elements make this very difficult to achieve, but united efforts of borders communities and the interest of European patients will make it real.



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 2007118). 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.**

As final result of the project a **handbook** with important guidelines for an effective use of INTERREG funds in health projects should be elaborated. Besides, guidelines on the use of health technology assessment (HTA) in a cross-border environment should be developed within the project, as well as legal issues related to personal protection data across borders.



The first project partners meeting took place **on 9-10 March 2009** in Maastricht. It provided the opportunity to get to know each other and to exchange the experiences on cross-border cooperation in healthcare. During the meeting the project partners analyzed also the different working packages and the necessary steps to achieve the project objectives.

The second meeting of the project partners took place on **25th November 2009**. The meeting was organised in Łódź (Poland) at the same time than the Annual Conference of the European Public Health Association (EUPHA), which dealt with the subject: „Human ecology and health“. The aim of this second meeting was to monitor the project progress and to exchange information on current developments at the European level as regards the debates on a new directive on patients' mobility and cross-border health.

Detailed information on the meeting and other project documents are available on the website of the project coordinator (University of Maastricht): <http://inthehealth.eu/research/euregio-ii>. Particularly worth to mention is the **EUREGIO blog** that can be found on this website. It offers border and cross-border regions the possibility to exchange opinions on the opportunities and challenges of cross-border cooperation in healthcare.



*Outstanding example of cooperation, the first cross-border hospital in Cerdanya (ES/FR)
(Source: <http://www.healthacross.eu/images/HCerdanyaPeralta.pdf>)*

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. It has a project duration of 18 months. 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

10 CONTACTS WITH EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

10.1 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The relationship 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 idea of AEBR to nominate an ombudsman for cross-border issues in the European Parliament finally found support in the Committee on Regional Development. In the beginning of 2009 the Estonian MEP Tunne Kelam was nominated for the function of the "suiveur". He already presented his first report on cross-border cooperation in March 2009. Thanks to the nomination of the ombudsman it is ensured that the developments in border and cross-border regions are regularly discussed in the Committee on Regional Development. Shortly after his nomination for the new function Mr Kelam had a meeting with the Secretary General of the AEBR.

Directly after the election of the new European Parliament in summer 2009 the AEBR contacted the new President of the EU Parliament, **Mr Jerzy Buzek** and the new chairwoman of the Committee on Regional Development, **Mrs Danuta Hübner**.

10.2 EUROPEAN COMMISSION

As regards the contacts to the European Commission the AEBR cooperated very close with the Directorate General on Regional Policy and there, in particular, with the Director General Dirk Ahner. The AEBR was also regularly in contact with the Commissioner in office responsible for Regional Policy. After Commissioner Danuta Hübner resigned from her office due to her candidature to the European Parliament, the AEBR contacted her successor, **Mr Paweł Samecki**. Mr Samecki showed much interest in the cooperation with the AEBR and participated also as keynote speaker in the Annual Conference of the AEBR in Ghent. In the new European Commission, nominated in January 2010, the position of the Commissioner responsible for Regional Policy was taken up by **Mr Johannes Hahn** (AT). (Commissioner Hahn has already received a AEBR delegation in April 2010).

In 2009 the AEBR participated in particular in following events and meetings:

- ➡ 20th January 2009: Working lunch of the regional organisations with the President of the EU Commission Manuel Barroso and the Commissioner Danuta Hübner. During the meeting the AEBR had the possibility to point out its concerns as regards the management of cross-border cooperation at the external borders.
- ➡ 28th January 2009: Meeting with Mrs Androulla Vassiliou, Commissioner for Health. During the meeting the AEBR had the opportunity to discuss with the Commissioner the proposed directive on cross-border health-care and patients' rights. Moreover, the possibility to use the AEBR network in the implementation phase of the directive was also taken into consideration.
- ➡ 26th May 2009: Structured Dialogue with the Vice-President of the European Commission Mrs Margot Wallström dealing with the working programme of the Commission for 2010. Mrs. Hilde Bruggeman (Euregio Scheldemond) represented the AEBR on this occasion.



Working lunch with the President of the EU Commission Barroso, Source: EU Commission



Hilde Bruggeman participating in the Structured Dialogue, Source: EU Commission

10.3 COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

As regards the cooperation with **the Committee of the Regions (CoR)** throughout the whole year 2009 the Secretary General of AEBR was in close contact with the Secretary General of the CoR Gerhard Stahl. This relationship is also facilitated by the regular meetings of the Secretaries General of European regional organisations that are coordinated by the Committee of the Regions. The Commission usually takes part, coordinating in particular the Structured Dialogue and other related activities like the Open Days.

The cooperation with the CoR focused in 2009 in particular on the implementation of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Besides, the AEBR participated in CoR consultations and elaborated opinions on topics like Multi-level Governance, and the new EU Strategy 2020.

The main activity of the year was the **Prague Summit** (see pages 23-24).



Luc van den Brande, President of the CoR participating in the AEBR Annual Conference in Ghent, Source: DG REGIO

In the beginning of 2008 the CoR and the AEBR signed Joint Action Programme that was elaborated by the Secretary General of the CoR, Mr Stahl and the Secretary General of the AEBR. The Action Programme includes following priorities:

- Promotion of Trans-European Cooperation of regions and municipalities in relation with the EGTC.
- Sharing expertise and participation of the AEBR in the works of the CoR and its rapporteurs, especially on the implementation of the EGTC and within the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the border regions' role in achieving the objectives of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies, the future of EU Structural Funds and Cohesion Policies after 2013 (special attention to the 2009 budget review), Cross-Border Health improvement and partnership, and the ENP.
- Dialogue, Communication and Visibility. Special effort to communicate the Lisbon Treaty to the citizens.
- The Structured Dialogue between the Commission and the European and national associations.
- The Territorial Dialogue organized by the CoR with local and regional governments and Member States.
- Organisation of common conferences, seminars and events, including joint activities in the field of communication.

During a bilateral meeting between both Secretaries General (CoR and AEBR) on 19 January 2009, the implementation of the Action Plan 2008-2009 was evaluated, and some small agreements were taken to ameliorate the Plan's performance.

- More attention should be paid to the external borders, especially in the Mediterranean area, but also Eastern partnership is of outmost importance for the EU. The role of technical assistance and capacity building that can be played by the AEBR is to be strengthened. The AEBR and the CoR agree on the need to appoint "all" Territorial Cooperation policies within DG Regio.
- AEBR should keep on doing contributions to the most relevant CoR documents and should be present in some of the CoR working commissions. Its contributions should be more visible on the CoR website
- The CoR should keep on taking active part in AEBR events.

It was decided to prolong indefinitely this action plan, being updated on a yearly basis.

10.4 COUNCIL OF EUROPE. THE CONGRESS OF REGIONAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

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 could not attend the numerous meetings organized by the Council and the Congress, Vice-President Jean-Paul Heider and Mr Pierre Meyer (Alsace), Mr Jens Gabbe (Advisory Committee) and Prof. Charles Ricq (COEUR) represented 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 CBC 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 new President of the AEBR since February 2010, chair 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, particularly to Mr. Lambertz's report on "Border regions as laboratories and motors for development on the European continent".

On the initiative of the German-speaking Community of Belgium a seminar on cross-border culture tourism took place on 18th February 2009 in Eupen that was organized in cooperation with the Congress of Regional and Local Authorities. It focused in particular on the role of culture tourism in the European integration process and in cross-border cooperation.

The participants in the seminar discussed also the economic importance of the cultural heritage and its contribution to the promotion of cultural diversity in Europe. Interesting projects and best practice examples were presented during the seminar. The programme of the seminar included also a round table dealing with the subject: „**Cross-border regions: Driving forces for initiatives and interfaces of cooperation in cultural tourism.**”

After the seminar a meeting of the Working Group of the Congress on Interregional Cooperation took place. During the meeting the chairman of the Working Group, Dr. Karl-Heinz Lambertz, presented a report on the state of cross-border cooperation in Europe.

The subject cultural tourism was also discussed during the 16th Plenary Session of the Congress taking place on 3-5 March 2009 in Strasbourg.



*16th Plenary Session of the Congress in Strasbourg
Source: Council of Europe*

In 2009, the President of the Congress, Mr. Yavuz Mildon, could not take active part in the works because of health problems. Fortunately, Mr. Mildon is recovering and we will enjoy very soon his energy and enthusiasm.

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. Mr. Kiefer will certainly do so as well.

Also in 2010 the AEBR and the Congress have signed a cooperation agreement to better coordinate their actions in favour of Cross-Border Cooperation throughout Europe.

11 COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

11.1 THE EUROPEAN REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

In 2009 the AEBR kept its relationship with other important European regional and local associations as in the past. Regular contacts with the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the network of EU regions with legislative power (RegLeg), the *Association Européenne des Elus de Montagne* (AEM), the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE) and Eurocities. In some cases, common activities have been organized, common papers have been elaborated (in particular regarding relevant EU proposals affecting subsidiarity, territorial cohesion and multi-level governance) and a stronger effort to coordinate actions is in process.

11.2 NEW CROSS-BORDER STRUCTURES

In 2009 new structures for cross-border cooperation have been created within and outside the EU. As already mentioned in previous chapters, there is an ongoing process to create European Groupings of Cross-Border Cooperation within the EU (the regulation is still too restrictive for external borders, where a minimum of two EU members states are requested to participate). And new structures are created outside the EU, with the support of the Council of Europe, some national governments, Western euroregions and the AEBR.

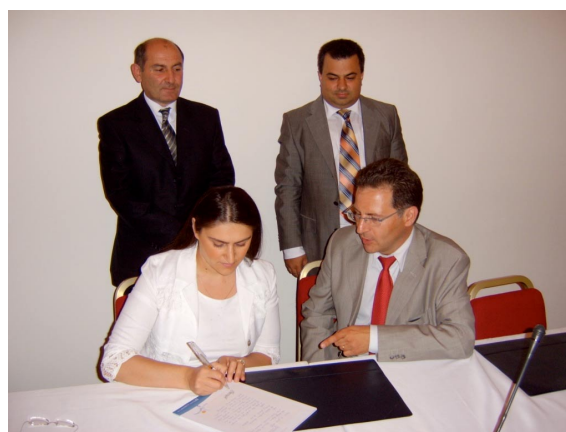
EUROREGION „EURO-CAUCASUS“

AEBR Secretary General Martín Guillermo Ramírez took part in the signing ceremony of the establishment agreement of the “Euro-Caucasus” Euroregion and other related events, which were held on 14 June in Vanadzor (Armenia) and on 15 June in Tbilisi (Georgia). This new Euroregion has been constituted in a very crucial moment for the Caucasus. It has been very much supported by the Euregio Bayerisches Wald-Böhmerwald- Unterer Inn, the German Federal Government and some experienced NGOs. Euro-Caucas gathers municipalities of the Armenian regions Lori, Tavush and Shirak as well as the Georgian municipalities Bolnisi, Ninosminda, Marneuli and Dmanisi.

The establishment of this Euroregion will be of political, economical and cultural great importance for this area, creating new opportunities for cross-border cooperation.

The Armenian side of the Euregio Caucasus signed an agreement with the AEBR in order to organise common activities, promote the exchange of good practises and information, and begin the procedures for the Euregio to become AEBR full member in the near future.

In the summer of 2010, a training seminar was organized for this Euroregion at the Cloister Banz (Bavaria) by the Euregio Bayerischer Wald-Böhmerwald-Mühlviertel. In this occasion, also municipal representatives from Azerbaijan and Turkey were also present, what increases enormously the scope and potentialities of this young Euroregion.



The new Euroregion „Euro-Caucasus“ (Armenian side) and the AEBR sign a cooperation agreement

11.3. NEW (AND OLD) RELATIONSHIPS

The AEBR have strengthened its relationship with stakeholders like the **MOT**, after a stormy period. The activities of **NEEBOR** seem to have slowed down in the last years despite of enjoying an Interreg IV-C project. New cooperation fields are being explored with the **Euro-Institut Kehl**, particularly regarding their expansion to other European border areas (in 2010 an agreement has been signed between both organizations). Regular contacts are established with thematic organizations like **EURISY** (an European association to promote the use of space technologies for development and growth) or **Intermodes** (the international convention for intermodality in passengers transport); with some international organizations, such as the **OECD** and **UN agencies**; and with integration systems like the **African Union**, the Central American Integration System or the **Mercosur**.



NEEBOR

Since the foundation of the **Network of Eastern External Border Regions** (NEEBOR) in December 2005, the AEBR has tried to keep regular contacts with its representatives. The communication and exchange with NEEBOR should have begun to be further strengthened in 2009, in particular due to the initiative of the common AEBR and NEEBOR

members, as well as the AEBR Task Force on External Borders. Efforts in this direction are yet to be stimulated, and cooperation fields to be explored, particularly when more AEBR activity is developed at the External Borders of the EU, and new opportunities are opened within the Eastern Partnership.

MOT

For a long time, the cooperation with the French organisation *Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière* (MOT) was occasional. In 2007, the MOT launched the EuroMOT, a potential European network which seemed to compete with the AEBR in aims and scope. An agreement and further contacts have been developed since then between the AEBR and the MOT, to work together to strengthen CBC in Europe, but the establishment of a EuroMOT (or a similar network) is still seen as an overlapping operation by many AEBR members. It is strongly recommended to cooperate with the French MOT, while EuroMOT should not create misunderstandings in the European cooperation of border and cross-border areas. The Secretaries General of the AEBR and MOT have regular meetings in order to exchange information and points of view, present current activities of the organisations and to prepare joint actions.

The Secretary General of the MOT, Mr Hans-Günther Clev, made also a contribution during the Annual Conference 2009 of the AEBR. Furthermore, the AEBR and MOT forwarded to the Committee of the Regions in a joint letter their opinions on the White Paper on Multi-level Governance in order to stress the importance of multi-level governance for all border and cross-border regions in Europe.



Map of the members of the MOT
Source: MOT website

12. AEBR TASKS AND SECRETARIAT GENERAL

The AEBR is the oldest **European association** of regional and local authorities and has the smallest budget amongst all of them. AEBR debates and exchanges views with other European regional organisations as regards the development of European issues, even though if AEBR is the only one to dealing exclusively with border regions.

The question turns up, if just the content-related quality of AEBR will be sufficient enough to last at the current level in Europe. The political representation must above all be ensured by the President. The external representation during important occasions in the European agenda has been improved with a stronger participation of Vice-Presidents, members of the Executive Committee or other representatives of border regions. They are more and more ready to represent AEBR during meetings organised in and by the EU.

When talking about European border areas, the AEBR means all border regions, within and outside the EU (and being AEBR members or not). Even if the interests and priorities are different between regions, there are no general conflicts of interests for European border and cross-border regions. The AEBR focuses its main interest on members paying their membership contribution and they receive most of AEBR energy. However, European support must be provided to all border regions when discussing general European policy issues.

On the other hand, the support to the AEBR by member regions has been further improved. In addition, members of the Executive Committee have participated at and have been involved in events to a greater extent or have carried out *ad hoc* operations, especially at political level.

The circle of persons in a relatively short notice or temporarily has still remained limited. Whilst an increased participation of members and the **AEBR Executive Committee** in our Network would be very desirable indeed, this creates problems in practice, as **all are active on an honorary basis**. Should members and representatives of the Executive Committee increase their activities, a uniform stand of AEBR in public remains absolutely necessary, i.e. the principle and philosophy of the cross-border cooperation – as stipulated in the AEBR Statutes, the Charter and the Action programme, the Practical Guide and many other documents – should in this case also be uniformly supported.

The 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.

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 (Jaques Robert, Thomas Stumm, Haris Martinos, Christian Haefliger) as well as one representative of the European Commission (DG REGIO) and the Committee of the Regions.

The activities of the Advisory Committee in 2009 included in particular the debate and preparation of the following outputs:

- ➡ Evaluation of the applications for the AEBR award „Sail of Papenburg“ 2009
- ➡ Elaboration of an opinion on the Green Paper of the European Commission: “TEN-T: A policy review. Towards a better integrated transeuropean transport network at the service of the common transport policy”
- ➡ Revision and specification of the project proposal “Cross-border development strategies” for ESPON
- ➡ Elaboration of a contribution for the consultation of the Committee of the Regions referring to a new strategy for sustainable growth (Lisbon Strategy after 2010)
- ➡ Elaboration of an opinion on the Green Paper of the European Commission on territorial cohesion
- ➡ Elaboration of an opinion on the Barca Report
- ➡ Elaboration of proposals for the revision of the regulation on the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)
- ➡ Elaboration of a thematic summary dealing with the Eastern European Partnership Programme from the perspective of the cross-border cooperation
- ➡ Elaboration of a thematic summary of the Sixth Progress Report on Cohesion of the European Commission from the perspective of territorial cooperation
- ➡ Preparation of the Final Declaration of the AEBR Annual Conference 2009.

SECRETARIAT GENERAL

The Executive Committee of the AEBR is regularly informed about the developments in the Secretariat General. Following employees worked in our offices by the end of 2009: one office coordinator (part-time), two foreign language secretaries (full-time and part-time), one accountant (part-time) and a secretary general (full-time). Assistance was provided by an additional staff member working from home (telecommuting). The EUREGIO continuously supports the General Secretariat with human and material resources.



AEBR employees during the AEBR Annual Conference in Ghent (from the left): Anna Winkler, Cordula Pandary and Nadja Ait Laouad.

Did not come to Ghent: Marie-Lou Perou (in 2009 on parental leave), Petra Doods and Bianca Gabbe

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 over important developments within the AEBR and at the

European level. By using the AEBR Newsflash also the members of the AEBR have the possibility to present important news from border and cross-border regions to the public. Several member regions of the AEBR have followed already the request of the Secretariat General and have presented their region in the Newsflash. Also in the future it can be always used by the members to publish interesting information from border and cross-border regions.

The AEBR members can also use the website of the AEBR as information medium. The website was completely redesigned in order to offer more possibilities for communication and exchange of information. Some internet fora have been already launched in 2009. Moreover, since 2009 the documents for the meetings of the Executive Committee and the General Assembly are also available online. In October 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. In 2009 the AEBR co-organized in Münster a press conference with the District of Münster and the EUREGIO (DE/NL) on the occasion of the elections to the European Parliament, where candidates from different political options were invited to offer their views on Cross-Border Cooperation.

In 2009, a strong effort has been done to strengthen the communication of the AEBR with its members and with the exterior. On the occasion of the AEBR General Assembly and the Annual Conference in Ghent a workshop on the future communication strategy of the AEBR was organised in order to get new ideas and proposals for improvement.

We would like to thank all persons, AEBR members and partners, institutions, organizations and other entities that have cooperated, supported and got somehow involved in our activities. Without their active involvement it would have not been possible to develop our plans and achieve our objectives.

The AEBR Team

Gronau, October 2010