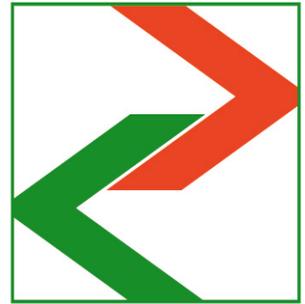


Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab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



ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN BORDER REGIONS (AEBR)

ANNUAL REPORT 2006

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1. Introduction

During the year 2006 important steps were taken at European level for future support of cross-border cooperation due to the advancement and adoption of the regulations

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

It was very meaningful for the cross-border cooperation at the external borders of the EU that AEBR President Lambert van Nistelrooij was co-rapporteur in the “Committee on Regional Development” in the European Parliament on the new Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument of the EU.

Important personal changes took place in the Secretariat General as after 20 years Mr Jens Gabbe retired from his position as Secretary General and his successor Mr Martín Guillermo-Ramírez took up the office in October 2006.

2. Member Structure

By the end of 2006 / beginning of 2007, AEBR had 99 members representing more than 200 border regions all across Europe. The difference between the number of members and the number of border regions is due to the fact that cross-border regions comprise several national border regions. Furthermore, large-area cooperation structures such as ARGE Alp, Nordic Council, Carpathian Euroregion etc. include border regions in several states as members.

The membership structure reveals a balanced ratio of border/cross-border regions in both the “old” EU and the new member states. As up to now, AEBR has the position that its area of operation ends, for the time being, at the new EU external borders (including the neighbouring regions in Russia, Belarus, the Ukraine, Moldova and the neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean area). A larger working area can not be effectively handled in terms of workload, content and financing with the present number of staff and the current membership fees.

Between 01.01.2006 – 31.12.2006, the following new members were admitted:

- Hungarian part of the Carpathian Euroregion (H)
- Union of Cyprus Municipalities (CY)
- Těšínské Slezsko – Śląsk Cieszyński (PL/CZ), Observer
- REGIO PAMINA (DE/FR), Observer
- Region of Veneto (IT), Observer

This shows that AEBR is still attractive in the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ EU.

3. AEBR General Assembly and Annual Conference 2006

3.1 General Assembly

On 23 and 24 November 2006, the General Assembly and Annual Conference were held in Pamplona, Region of Navarre, Spain. More than 200 participants from 29 states attended this event, which was very well prepared and organised by the Government of Navarre.

The General Assembly mainly dealt with the Annual Report, the Annual Accounts 2005 and the budget for 2007. Furthermore, the Executive Committee 2007/2008 was elected. Mr. van Nistelrooij was re-elected President of AEBR. The following list provides an overview on the composition of the new Executive Committee.

AEBR - Executive Committee 2007/2008 (elected by AEBR's General Assembly in Pamplona on 23 November 2006)

President:

Mr. Lambert van Nistelrooij, MEP, Committee on Regional Development

1st Vice-President:

Mr. Heider, Vice-President Région Alsace, France

Vice-Presidents:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Border area</u>
Ms. Backgren	Österböttens förbund / Kvarken Rådet	Finland/Sweden/Norway/Russia
Ms. Pallero Espadero ¹	Extremadura/ Alentejo/ Centro	Spain/Portugal
Mr. de Buck	Euregio Scheldemond	Belgium/Netherlands
Mr. Charakidis	Euroregion Nestos-Mesta	Greece/ Bulgaria
Mr. Iacop	Regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Italy/ Slovenia/ Austria
Mr. Kolck	Ems Dollart Region	Germany/Netherlands
Ms. Lackner-Strauss	Euregio Bayerischer Wald/ Böhmerwald	Austria/ Germany/ Czech Republic
Mr. Maïtia	Pyrenean Region / Aquitaine	France/Spain
N.N.	N.N.	Poland/

Honorary Presidents:

Mr. Ahrens, former President
Mr. Vallvé, former President

Honorary Members:

Mr. Mitterdorfer, former member
Mr. Gabbe, former Secretary General

Treasurer:

Mr. Willeme, EUREGIO (Netherlands/Germany)

¹ Following regional elections in Extremadura Ms Pallero Espadero replaced in July 2007 Mr Sanchez Amor

Members:

Name	Organisation	Border Area
Mr. Möller	Øresundskomiteen	Denmark/Sweden
Ms. Kunsemüller ²	Sønderjylland-Schleswig	Denmark/Germany
Mr. Ronkainen	Tornedalen	Sweden/Finland/Norway
Mr. Hyttinen	North Karelia/ Euregio Karelia	Finland/Russia
Mr. Greif	Euroregion Elbe / Labe	Germany/Czech Republic
Mr. Friese	Euregio Spree-Neiße-Bober	Poland/ Germany
Mr. Skamarocius	Euroregion Nemunas	Lithuania/Poland/Belarus
Mr. Kulik	Euroregion Nysa	Poland/Czech Republic/Germany
Mr. Hermansson	County of Värmland	Sweden/ Norway
Mr. Molloy	NorthWestRegionCrossBorderGroup	Ireland/Northern Ireland/Great Britain
Mr. Eurlings	Euregio Maas-Rhein	Netherlands/ Germany / Belgium
Mr. Weiß	Euregio Bayerischer Wald/Böhmerwald	Germany/Czech Republic/Austria
Mr. Haberkorn	Euregio Egrensis	Germany/Czech Republic
Mr. Steinmaßl	Euregio Salzburg/ Berchtesgadener Land/ Traunstein	Austria/ Germany
Mr. Muñoa	País Vasco	Spain/France
n.n.	Catalunya	Spain/France
Mr. Gómez-Reino Lecoq	Galicia	Spain/Portugal
Mr. Valverde Gomez	Castilla y León	Spain/Portugal
Mr. Luther	Bozen/Südtirol	Italy/Austria
Mr. Jakob	RegioTriRhena	Switzerland/France/Germany
Mr. Attaguile	Regione Siciliana	Italy
Mr. Staudigl	ArGe Alp	Austria/Germany/Switzerland/Italy
Ms. Laszlo Major	Carpathian Euroregion (HU)	Poland/Hungary/Ukraine/Slovak Republic/Romania
Mr. Papademetriou	Euroregion Nestos-Mesta	Greece/Bulgaria
Mr. Tatsis	Border Region Delta-Rhodopi	Greece/Bulgaria
Mr. Girard	CAFI	France/Italy
Mr. Požarnik	Slovenia	Slovenia/Italy/Hungary/Croatia/Austria
n.n.	Euroregion Pomerania	Poland/Germany/Sweden
Mrs. Csókasi	Euroregion DKTM	Romania/Hungary/Serbia
Mrs. Purcaru	Giurgiu Local Council	Romania/Bulgaria

Chairman of the Advisory Committee:

Mr. Frhr von Malchus, Unna/Germany

Auditors:

Mr. Jungk, Austria
Mr. Sammer, Germany

Observer:

Mr. Bohner, Council of Europe, Strasbourg/France
Mr. Klipp, Assembly of European Regions
Mr. Radvilavicius, Nordic Council of Ministers (Denmark/Norway/Sweden/Finland/Iceland)

Representative in case of prevention:

Name	Representing	Organisation/Region
Mr. Barrau	Mr. Maïtia (not as Vice-Pr.)	France/ Spain
Mr. Leenen/Mr. Aaberg	Mr. Möller	Øresundskomiteen
Mr. Gammelgaard ³	Ms. Kunsemüller	Sønderjylland-Schleswig
Ms. Comelli ⁴	Mr. Iacop (not as Vice-Pr.)	Region Friuli-Venezia Giulia
Mrs. Defrancesco	...	Province Trento
Mr. Rainer	Mr. Luther	Bozen/ Südtirol
Mr. Leskinen	Mr. Hyttinen	Euregio Karelia

² Ms. Kunsemüller was nominated as member of the Executive Committee in July 2007

³ Mr. Gammelgaard was nominated as member of the Executive Committee in July 2007

⁴ Following elections in the region Friuli Venezia Giulia Ms Comelli replaced Mr Ambrosi

Mr. Patri	Ms. Lackner-Strauss (not as Vice-Pr.)	Euregio Bayer. Wald/Böhmerw.
Mr. Preußcher	Mr. Greif	Euroregion Elbe/Labe
Mr. Greiter	Mr. Staudigl	Arge Alp
Mr. Krebs	Mr. Willeme (not as treasurer)	EUREGIO
Mr. Neef	Mr. Kolck (not as Vice-Pr.)	Ems Dollart Region
Mr. Zubiaur/ Mr. Hueso	Mr. Muñoz	Navarra / Pais Vasco
Ms. Rainha/Mr. Corrales	Mr. Pallero Espadero (not as Vice-Pr.)	Extremadura
Mr. Martín Mallén/Ms. Colomina ⁵		Aragon / Catalunya
Mr. Cao Fernandez	Mr. Gómez-Reino Lecoq	Galicia
Mrs. Maria José Gato ⁶	Mr. Valverde Gomez	Castilla y León
Mr. Evers	Mr. Eurlings	Euregio Maas-Rhein
Mr. Sammer	Mr. Weiß	Euregio Bayer. Wald/ Böhmerwald
Ms. Petrick	Mr. Friese	Euregio Spree-Neiße-Bober
Mr. Oberdorfer/Mr. Jakl	Mr. Haberkorn	Euregio Egrensis
Mr. Jankowski	Mr. Kulik	Euroregion Nysa
Mr. Melander	Ms. Backgren (not as Vice-Pr.)	Österböttens Förbund/Kvarken Radet
Mr. de Pauw	Mr. de Buck (not as Vice-Pr.)	Euregio Scheldemond (B/NL)
Ms. Arthurs/ Ms. Mullan	Mr. Molloy	NorthWestRegionCrossBorderGroup
Mr. Westman	Mr. Ronkainen	Bothnian Arc Association (S/F)
Mr. N.N.	N.N.	Euroregion Pomerania (PL/D/S)
Ms. Renner ⁷	Mr. Požarnik	Slovenia

3.2 Symposium

Two events took place after the General Assembly: A **symposium** on “**Future Cross-Border Cooperation in Practice**” focusing on the practical needs of border regions was held on Thursday afternoon, followed by the Annual Conference: “Territorial Agenda – a glance into the future of our EU” as a political event on Friday. Special checklists for project and programme management served as basis for two round tables, which dealt with the following topics:

- **EU Programmes on cross-border cooperation**

Chair: José-Ángel Zubiaur, Director General for European Affairs and Planning, Navarra (E)

Introduction and presentation of a programme checklist

- *Jens Gabbe, Secretary General of AEBR*

Elaboration of programmes (incl. financing)

- *Harald Krebs, EUREGIO (NL/D)*
- *Anastasios Alexandridis, INTERREG Management Authority (GR)*

Management of programmes

- *Eamon Molloy, North West Region Cross-Border Group (Ireland/Northern Ireland)*
- *Mariusz Kasprzyk, Joint Technical Secretariat INTERREG IIIA PL/SK (PL)*

Monitoring and evaluation

- *Klaus Luther, Tyrol/South Tyrol (A/I)*

The special case of the external borders of the EU

⁵ Ms Colomina replaced Ms Repullo

⁶ Ms Gato replaced Ms Ferreiro

- *Iwona Kur, NEEBOR network, Regional office of the Warmian-Mazurian Voivodship in Brussels (PL)*

• **The secret of cross-border PROJECTS - Best practice and hindrances**

Chair: *François Maïtia, Vice-President of AEBR, Vice-President of the Regional Council of Aquitaine (F)*

Introduction of a project checklist

- *Jens Gabbe, Secretary General of AEBR*

Old internal and external borders:

- *Eric Jakob, Managing Director of Regio Basiliensis / RegioTriRhena (CH/D/F)*

- *Ignacio Sánchez Amor, 1st Vice-President of Junta de Extremadura and Vice-President of AEBR (E)*

New internal borders:

- *Kosta Evmerides, President, Euroregion Nestos-Mesta (GR/BG)*

- *Brigitta Laszló Mayor, Carpathian Euroregion (HU/SK)*

External borders

- *Gintaras Skamarocius, Euroregion Nemunas (LT/PL/BLR/RUS)*

- *Alberto Morillas Fernández, Secretariat General for External Affairs, Junta de Andalucía (E)*

3.3 Annual Conference

The Annual Conference 2006 had the motto: “**Territorial Agenda – A glance into the future of our EU**”.

Welcome addresses were given by:

- *Lambert van Nistelrooij, MEP, President of AEBR (NL)*
- *Miguel Sanz Sesma, President of Navarre (E), Working Community of the Pyrenees*
- *Gerhard Stahl, Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions (CoR)*
- *Yavuz Mildon, President of the Chamber of Regions, Council of Europe, (TR)*

Under the chairmanship of **Lambert van Nistelrooij**, MEP, AEBR President, the following representatives took part in the first political round table session on the Territorial Agenda:

- *Danuta Hübner, Commissioner responsible for Regional Policy, European Commission*
- *Ulrich Kasparick, Member of the German Bundestag, Parliamentary State Secretary for Transport, Building and Urban Affairs (D)*

⁷ Ms Renner replaced Mr Suvorov

- **Elmar Brok**, MEP, Chairman of the Committee on External Affairs, European Parliament (D)
- **Jean-Paul Heider**, Vice-President of the Region of Alsace (F) and Vice-President of AEBR
- **Franco Iacop**, Vice-President of the Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (I), Vice-President of AEBR and representative of the Assembly of European Regions (AER)

In the afternoon round table session on “**The territorial agenda in cross-border practice**”, chaired by **Marc de Buck**, Co-President of Euregio Scheldemond, First Deputy of the Province of East Flanders (BE), Vice-President of AEBR, the following representatives contributed to the topic:

- **Gabriele Lackner-Strauss**, President of Euregio Bayerischer Wald/Böhmerwald, Vice-Head of Upper Austria (AT), Vice-President of AEBR
- **Sture Hermansson**, Managing Director of Länsstyrelsen Värmland (SE)
- **Jerónimo Gómez Ortigosa**, President of Federación Navarra de Municipios y Concejos (FNMC), Mayor of Los Arcos (E)
- **Ivo Piry/Primož Ilesic**, Government Office for Local Self Government and Regional Policy (SI)

Towards the end of the Annual Conference, the following **final declaration**⁸ was unanimously adopted:

⁸ Final Declaration of AEBR's Annual Conference on 24 November 2006 in Pamplona, Region of Navarre (ES)

Annual Conference of AEBR
Pamplona / Navarra (ES)
24 November 2006
Territorial Agenda
- A glance into the future of our EU -

FINAL DECLARATION

I. The Association of European Border Regions states that:

- The basic aims of the Territorial Agenda are supported, e.g.:
 - To improve the competitiveness of Europe in view of globalisation,
 - To prevent geographical concentration by means of a polycentric development with due regard to metropolitan regions and urban areas,
 - To make a better use of territorial resources (inclusively the regional diversity) for the aims of growth and employment,
 - To improve the consideration of the effects of EU enlargement and the relations at the external borders of the EU,
 - To mitigate challenges related to climate changes, energy and raw materials sources as well as aging and migration on the labour market.
- Moreover, the Territorial Agenda rightly underlines that all endogenous potentials (metropolitan regions, urban centres, towns, rural areas etc.) should be used, and a new understanding of the „territorial governance“ and co-operation, as well as mutual consideration of local, regional, national, and European policies is necessary.
- These territorial trends and challenges influence in particular border regions, due to e.g.:
 - the national and sometimes even European peripheral location,
 - cross-border effects related to climate and environment,
 - the risk of becoming solely a transit zone through Trans-European Networks,
 - the risk of aging and migration from rural areas,
 - increasing energy prices (in rural areas a car is often the sole and most important means of transport),
 - the effects of EU enlargement (former external borders and borders between new EU member states have become internal borders and new external borders have emerged).

II. Before finally adopting the Territorial Agenda, the AEBR asks for substantial improvements in order to better comply with the political context of this agenda and with its aims:

- The Territorial Agenda should lead to political added-value. Therefore, it is necessary to coordinate not solely the policies of member states, but also the policies of the EU.
- Political aims should be formulated more clearly in order to demonstrate a close connection between the territorial and cohesion policy. Regional policy contributes primarily to a European territorial policy. Therefore, the Territorial Agenda should go deeper into the corner stones of regional policy 2007-2013 and their strategic orientation.

- In addition to territorial cooperation, which is certainly important, the other European policies, which have an even stronger macroeconomic and macro-territorial influence, have to be pointed out as well. In this sense competition policy should be considered, too.
- Territorial cohesion has been included as third dimension in the draft Treaty for a European Constitution, and is a politically accepted aim of the EU since then. It goes beyond the economic and social cohesion. It refers to the whole area of the EU, in particular to all border regions whilst the poorest areas have priority.
- Considering the global challenges and effects (e.g. closing down or relocation of many production facilities, buyout of / stake holding in European key companies by investors from non-EU member states, severe shortcomings in the energy transport networks) the priorities of the Territorial Agenda seem to be rather small-scale. Thus, a large-scale priority is necessary considering Europe as an integrated system. As important aspect of the territorial cohesion the spatial fragmentation in the EU should be surmounted and incoherencies resulting from national differences should be eliminated with the aim of an integrated Europe (see also the ESPON long-term scenarios till 2030). This refers to:
 - o raw materials supply and processing (energy sector, steel) in the EU,
 - o mergers on European level and not in accordance with the national antitrust legislation,
 - o national competitiveness in globally important technological developments,
 - o the necessity of a large-scale risk management (e.g. as regards arid regions or floods that often hit regions across borders).
- As the competence of neighbouring states for spatial development ends at the border, in the overall part the importance of cross-border relations is mentioned. However, in the sector-specific plans these relations are mostly missing and thus should be included in the future, e.g. crucial centres across borders (the possibility of a cross-border metropolitan region), potentials of universities and research facilities, health care facilities of supra-regional importance, risk sources (nuclear facilities, hazardous waste sites), potentials of cross-border networks of municipalities related to supply and a supra-regional cultural offer, etc.
- The experiences of INTERREG A-Programmes with cross-border development concepts and strategy papers should be taken into account (see the thematic ESPON/INTERACT study "Spatial visions and scenarios"). As regards the aims of the Territorial Agenda it is spoken about mutual consideration of local, regional, national and EU policies.
- According to ESDP and the „Territorial Agenda 2007“ from the EU member states should be demanded:
 - o Elaboration of cross-border approaches and concepts related to spatial development (spatial development concepts) as well as their consideration in national spatial development and sectoral planning,
 - o Cross-border co-operation on a regular basis with regard to spatial development planning and measures,
 - o Elaboration of joint cross-border regional – and if reasonable – land utilisation plans as the most far-reaching form of cross-border spatial development policy.
- While mentioning the obstructive effects of the border in the „Territorial Agenda“ it's necessary to better work out the optimal use of territorial potentials by means of cross-border co-operation as regards the priorities and actions for the future (it's spoken almost only about transnational co-operation):

- Cross-border co-operation is a corner stone of European integration and territorial cohesion.
- It creates a European, political, institutional, economic and socio-cultural added value (see the AEBR paper: Added value of cross-border co-operation).
- It has concretely contributed to the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy already (see the AEBR paper on Lisbon Strategy), as cross-border co-operation always adds value to national measures due to:
 - ❖ additionality of cross-border programmes and projects,
 - ❖ synergies through cross-border co-operation,
 - ❖ joint research and innovation,
 - ❖ cross-border networking,
 - ❖ exchange of best practice and know-how,
 - ❖ spin-off effects by overcoming borders,
 - ❖ efficient cross-border resource management.
- If obstructive effects of the border are as significant as indicated in the agenda, which demands an even more intensive cross-border and transnational co-operation, then it should be checked in the half-time of the programming period 2007-2013 if sufficient funds are available for that purpose.
- The dialogue with the European regional organisations on the "Territorial Agenda" that has been initiated on the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference on 24th November 2006 in Pamplona should be continued and serve as integral element while further developing this important document.

III. The implementation of the Territorial Agenda in cross-border practice requires the provision of appropriate European and national conditions.

- Thanks to the final adoption of EU regulations on European cohesion and regional policy as well as territorial co-operation (inclusively legal instrument) various instruments are available at the European level for the period 2007-2013.
- Nevertheless, the consideration of the political aims of territorial cohesion and Territorial Agenda in sectoral policies at European and national level must be improved in the future.
- At national level better conditions can be provided, e.g. through:
 - The application of the European grouping for territorial co-operation as soon as possible (EGTC),
 - Consideration of cross-border spatial development concepts (that are available in many cross-border regions already) in national spatial planning with the aim of a genuine region-specific planning across borders;
 - Inclusion of cross-border co-operation structures at regional / local level in this planning on a regular base,
 - Transfer of tasks to such cross-border co-operation structures (the responsible national bodies have further on the competence);
 - Facilitation of cross-border environment and risk management, e.g. joint water supply, sewage disposal, waste disposal, joint water management along rivers, cross-border disaster prevention and cross-border rescue (a fire engine can be seen as a dutiable good at the external borders!!!).

IV. It's necessary to make people aware of daily border problems over and over again.

Besides, opportunities resulting from the statements of development-oriented national spatial strategies should be used for individual sectoral policies of regional development, e.g. as regards infrastructure and transport, research and innovation, environment and tourism.

While implementing sectoral policies it's essential to demand future-oriented statements in national spatial strategies for cross-border co-operation. According to ESDP, that is based on national spatial strategies and the Territorial Agenda 2007 for the aim of a sustainable spatial development of border regions, particular attention should be paid to the following cross-border tasks:

- It is necessary to strengthen the endogenous regional potentials across the borders;
- The strength of the regions on both sides of the border, not in the sense of administrative and national borders, but in the sense of economic borders, has to be the initial point;
- The thinking in terms of „concentration, complementarity, competitiveness and creation of a critical mass“ is as important as thinking in terms of „knowledge, cognition and finances “ (e. g. public/private cooperation or cooperation between knowledge facilities/economy, specialised training facilities and SMEs);
- Thus, there can be a mutual cross-border enhancement. Good examples are in this case cross-border research sceneries or “life sciences” regions;
- Development of joint transport and telecommunication infrastructure;
- Provision of public and private services across borders;
- Organisation of cross-border labour markets;
- Preservation and sustainable use of natural resources (in particular in mountain regions, coastal areas, wetlands etc.),
- Preventive measures as regards the effects of pollution.

V. In order to work more closely as regards sustainable spatial development, cross-border co-operation between regional and local authorities should be necessarily intensified in the future, through:

- Precise analysis of current and future problems related to spatial development;
- Analysis of legal obstacles affecting cross-border co-operation in planning;
- Cross-border co-ordination of all planning and measures related to spatial development on a regular base;
- Ongoing cross-border information and spatial monitoring supported by socio-economic spatial development analysis;
- Promotion of joint development concepts in all cross-border areas (in particular in South, Southwest, Central and Eastern Europe);
- Implementation of development programmes (e.g. INTERREG) on the basis of separate agreements adopted by all parties involved;
- Development of cross-border sectoral development plans (e.g. for transport, tourism, free space and settlement development);
- Identification of important urban regions (urban networks) up to cross-border European metropolitan regions in border areas;

- Co-operation at regional and local level in cross-border interdependent areas of larger centres and in fragmented urban centres;
- Analysis of fields of action in spatial planning policy in border areas;
- Identification of protected areas, habitat connectivities and cross-border nature parks as well as cross-border landscape architecture;
- Elaboration of rescue programmes in order to improve environment;
- Separate cross-border planning for regions, which are particularly affected by the planned expansion of (Trans-European) transport axes;
- Coordination of local planning in border municipalities;
- Moreover, it would be desirable for the medium-term future to elaborate joint cross-border regional plans directly binding for all public planning as the most far-reaching form of cross-border spatial development providing the base for cross-border local planning. All measures related to spatial development and regional policy should be included in “Regional cross-border development concepts” and “Operational Programmes” in the future in order to facilitate the enforceability. Good examples of such planning are given among others at the German-French-Swiss, the German-Dutch, the German-Polish and the German-Czech border within the framework of INTERREG IIIA. In these cases a future-oriented cross-border co-operation takes place at regional level between the spatial development and regional policy.

AEBR, Pamplona, 24 November 2006

3.4 Bestowal of the AEBR AWARD 2006

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

In line with the motto ‘*Experiencing Europe = cross-border cooperation - regional and local actors mobilise the citizens –*’, the award was bestowed upon **Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia (IT)** for the project ‘**The teaching of the citizenship**’. The award was handed over by Commissioner Danuta Hübner and the Chairman of the AEBR Jury Dr. Reinhold Kolck. All competing applicants received certificates.

For the first time, a **special award** was given to a personality having rendered outstanding services to cross-border cooperation.

The awarded personality was Mr Elmar Brok, Chairman of the “Committee on Foreign Affairs” and member of the European Parliament since 1980. In the run-up to the elections to the European Parliament then he got in touch with EUREGIO in order to get some information on current European and in particular cross-border issues and to get an idea of them preferably from the practical side.

While dealing intensively with the regional policy in the aftermath Mr Elmar Brok paid particular attention to cross-border co-operation, e.g. especially along the German-Dutch border area as regards drug policy. But also in the following years in the course of the EU accession of the new

border areas in Spain, Portugal and Greece and later on in Austria and Scandinavia he was particularly committed to this subject.

In the last decades Elmar Brok has done his utmost for the benefit of cross-border co-operation not only of Westphalia with the Netherlands but throughout all Europe. This is true not only as regards the launching of INTERREG-programmes but also the PHARE-CBC-programme in Central and Eastern Europe. It certainly was not easy to launch an initiative of the European Parliament in order to reserve some part of the total PHARE-volume for the special purpose of cross-border co-operation. This had a substantial influence on the decision-making in the accession countries as regards the allocation of funds.

Today, he draws particular attention to the role of the new external borders. The New Neighbourhood Programme is more region-friendly, includes an own section dealing with cross-border co-operation and in this way contributes to a flexible and practical implementation of cross-border co-operation at the new external borders of the EU.

In spite of being involved in “big” European policy and global politics Mr Elmar Brok has always stayed in contact with the basis and supported the cross-border co-operation as factor promoting European integration and a contribution to territorial cohesion. He always accompanied the postulates of AEBR in a positive way, albeit critically questioning them. His intuition as regards political developments or as he always says: “the political little nose” has certainly helped him and us in this case. Last but not least: the support of the AEBR proposal to nominate a delegate of the European Parliament for border issues.

The participation of Mr Elmar Brok in the AEBR Annual Conference 2004 in Szczecin, shortly after the accession of 10 new member states to the EU as well as his coming to our Annual Conference to Pamplona in 2006 underlines his commitment to cross-border co-operation.

3.5 Leave-taking of the Secretary General Jens Gabbe, Introduction of Mr. Martín Guillermo Ramírez as new AEBR Secretary General

After 36 years of activity for the European border regions (1972-1998 for EUREGIO, 1972-2006 for AEBR) Mr Gabbe was officially bid farewell on 24 November 2006 in Pamplona, Navarre/Spain. Very moving and recognising speeches were addressed to Mr Gabbe by Commissioner Hübner, State Secretary Kasparick, Mr. Mildon as President of the Chamber of Regions of the Council of Europe, Gerhard Stahl, Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions and other high-ranking representatives of European authorities, but also by

President van Nistelrooij and Honorary President Vallvé as well as Mr. Willeme, President of the council of EUREGIO.

While presenting the Annual Report for the last time during the General Assembly on Thursday Mr. Gabbe recalled that at the time when he had taken over the Secretariat General, there were only 15 members with a budget of approx. 10.000-12.000 DM. Now, AEBR had more than 96 members, comprising more than 200 border regions in Europe. The budget 2007 would amount to approx. € 400.000. The AEBR would now be one of the five principle European regional organisations, which were regularly invited by the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Council of Europe. The membership structure would be balanced, which means that there was not only a good distribution between the “old” and the “new EU”. Members from both areas could still be won.

As regards the future, Mr. Gabbe elucidated some important basic principles and experiences:

- AEBR would have to continue its activities for all border regions in Europe. Despite different interests to be taken into account, an overall strategy at European level would remain indispensable in order to have success. This overall strategy would have to be represented by all those speaking on behalf of the AEBR and should be based on AEBR's statutes, the Charter and the Action Programme for border regions. Anybody speaking for AEBR should not prioritise regional interests.
- In spite of an overall strategy and the representation of all border regions, geographic and region-specific particularities (e.g. mountainous areas, maritime areas, regions at external borders) would have to be taken into account. With due respect for the necessary priority of the poorest border regions (above all in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Mediterranean area), one must not forget that the border regions at the old internal borders would still be facing problems and therefore be in need of EU-assistance. It would be important that AEBR kept a balance and offered services for all border regions (in line with the particular interests).
- AEBR's lobby at European level in the name of all border and cross-border regions was up to now very successful (see new EU regulations on European Cohesion and Regional Policy, on Territorial Cooperation with a special chapter for border regions, on the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Programme with a special chapter for border regions, on the legal instrument, and many more). This lobbying should be continued at European level (European Commission, European Parliament, European Economic and Social Committee, other large European regional organisations) with the support of many partners.
- Not everything could be managed in a central way by the Secretariat General in Gronau. To this end, a decentralised support rendered by the members would be necessary, which could best be done by a regional contact point in each Member State.
- AEBR fora proved their value (e.g. dealing with the legal instrument, health services, universities and rural areas). They should be continued.

- The issue of regional groupings or thematic working groups would have to be discussed in the Executive Committee further on under the condition that each one of these groupings elects a chairman from the Executive Committee of AEBR, in order to ensure that the coordination with the overall strategy of AEBR remained secured.
- The quality of the content-related work of AEBR would be important for the members and also at European level. Otherwise, AEBR could quickly lose its importance.
- Given that the Secretariat General had not many staff-members in comparison to other organisations, it would be important to concentrate on content-related priorities. Quality in respect of contents means that one would first of all deal with facts and then develop a political opinion, and not vice versa.
- Public Relations in favour of AEBR could not centrally be done in Gronau. This would have to be done at national/regional level by the members, i.e. by informing about decisions of Executive Committee meetings or General Assemblies, and about new publications or statements. These details should be presented to the media by the relevant border regions in connection with regional issues of their cross-border situation.
- The attempt of placing AEBR in European Media from Gronau would be doomed to failure right from the beginning. It would unnecessarily bind staff and financial capacities, thus restraining important services of AEBR to the benefit of the members as well as lobbying at European level.
- General Assemblies and Executive Committee Meetings should certainly be an occasion for publicity in the host border region, and this particularly in cooperation with the relevant host. This would, however, only be of regional/local significance. This publicity would not have influence on someone being elected into the AEBR Executive Committee as representative of a border region or as politician. Here, the activities in the home region would be decisive.
- Border and cross-border regions should cooperate with local, regional, national and European Politicians even more than up to now. Given that border regions make policy, they also need politicians, who have to be informed, prepared, and provided with solution proposals. There would be much space for improvement, particularly at national level. The negotiations of the European Commission with its Member States would often be crucial in many issues. The officers preparing the decisions would be insufficiently controlled by the politicians at national level.
- Members should absolutely make use of the time, in which EU funding is available for cross-border cooperation, in order to establish solid cross-border structures, which have to be backed financially for the long term (Noah built the ark when the weather still was fine!).
- AEBR would depend on partners, in Europe, at national level, and – as in recent years – also on partners that had been active for AEBR in the past in order to take advantage of their

experiences and to take some weight off the shoulders of the Secretary General, who has only a few staff-members at his disposal (AEBR's Advisory Council).⁹

⁹ Minutes of the General Assembly of AEBR on 23 November in Pamplona

4. Executive Committee

The Executive Committee met on:

- **3 and 4 March 2006, Bordeaux, Aquitaine Region, France**
- **7 and 8 July 2006, Donegal, Border Region Ireland/Northern Ireland**
- **22 and 23 September 2006, Wrocław, Lower Silesia, Poland**
- **23 November 2006, Pamplona, Region of Navarre, Spain**
- **8 and 9 December 2006, Plauen, Euregio Egrensis, Germany**

During the year 2006, the Executive Committee dealt with the following topics:

- Succession of the Secretary General
- European Cohesion and Regional Policy
 - Financial Perspective 2007-2013
 - Regulations
 - EU's legal instrument
- EU Regulations on
 - European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
 - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
 - Cohesion and Regional Policy
- Commission Communications:
 - More Research and Innovation – Investing for Growth and Employment: A Common Approach (COM(2005)488 final)
 - Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme Modern SME Policy for Growth and Employment (COM(2005)551 final)
 - Keep Europe moving – Sustainable mobility for our continent, Mid-term review of the European Commission's 2001 Transport White Paper [SEC(2006)768], COM(2006)314 final]
 - Putting knowledge into practice: A broad-based innovation strategy for the EU (COM(2006) 502 final)
- European Parliament Reports on
 - The Role of Territorial Cohesion in Regional Development (A6-0251/2005 final)
 - New prospects and new challenges for sustainable European tourism (A6-00235/2005 final)
- European Parliament's Delegate for Border Questions
- Centre of the Council of Europe in St. Petersburg
- Cooperation with ESPON and INTERACT
- Trans-European transport networks

- INTERREG IIIC project “RFO Change on Borders”
- Cross-border health care
- University Cooperation
- Several AEBR documents
 - Revision of the Action Programme
 - White Paper on European Border Regions
 - Map of European Border Regions
- AEBR Award ‘Sail of Papenburg’ 2006
- Autonomy of AEBR
- Financial Issues

Extensive reports were given on most of the topics. The Executive Committee discussed them and elaborated special recommendations and remarks concerning cross-border cooperation. On that basis, demands on the European and national levels were worked out. The border and cross-border regions received written information about the recommendations and the reactions of the European and national levels (successes or failures of interventions).

Furthermore, the Executive Committee also treated organisational and internal issues, such as AEBR events (special fora), work content, financial matters, advisory committee and future tasks and perspectives of AEBR.

It has been repeatedly stressed by the Executive Committee that AEBR should remain an autonomous organisation, both in terms of funding and contents. The work carried out by AEBR is indispensable in view of growing tendency towards renationalisation in cross-border cooperation and in view of the necessity to make sure that all border regions will continue to receive EU assistance even after 2013.¹⁰

¹⁰ Minutes of the meeting of AEBR’s Executive Committee on 23 November 2006 in Pamplona

5. Main Themes 2006

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

The Secretariat General closely followed up the elaboration of the European regulations, in particular on the provisions governing the regional fund and territorial cooperation. Various improvements worked out in agreement with the Executive Committee were presented to DG REGIO and the European Parliament (Committee on Regional Development) for consideration.

AEBR's proposals were related in particular to:

- the replacement of the phrase "one programme per border" by "one programme with sub-programmes per border" and, for certain regions, "one programme per cross-border region",
- definition of the term cross-border project,
- joint eligibility.

The regulations on cohesion and regional policy were adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in July 2006.

In the second half of 2006 following direct discussion with the European Commission the availability of funds for border regions after 2013 was addressed. Accordingly, arguments showing why support for cross-border co-operation must continue after 2013 and why all border regions need assistance should be submitted as early as year-end 2007.¹¹

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

Due to the fact that AEBR elaborated the basic studies for both the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission, AEBR was strongly involved in that subject. In 2006 the Secretariat General and the AEBR President were in particular in close contact with the members of the Committee on Institutional Affairs (first of all with the Chairman, Mr Jo Leinen) and the Committee on Regional Development in the European Parliament as well as the Committee of the Regions.

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

¹¹ Minutes of the AEBR Executive Committee Meeting in Bordeaux on 3 March 06 and Donegal on 7 July 06

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

The EU regulation on the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) was finally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in July 2006.

5.3 Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)

The Regulation laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument was adopted by the European Parliament and Council in October 2006.

Since the publication of the first draft regulation on the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Programme (the Secretary General of AEBR was member of the Committee of Wise Men of DG RELEX), the AEBR regularly called for an own status of cross-border cooperation within the ENPI (which has finally been realised by means of the independent chapter III). The AEBR furthermore pointed out that the regulation has to be written more from the involved European border regions point of view, and that EU border regions should not be put into a worse position than up to now.

The Executive Committee actively accompanied the discussions on ENPI at European, national and regional level in the year 2006 and offered a good platform for exchange of information and experiences as well as for articulation of postulates.

Moreover, since its foundation in December 2005 the AEBR is closely cooperating with the Network of Eastern External Borders Regions (NEEBOR) that has the aim to:

- Promote the visibility of eastern external border regions,
- Disseminate best practices,
- Activate organisations on both sides of the border,
- Facilitate the utilisation of financing instruments and
- Improve networking.

5.4 Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)

For the period 2007 – 2013, a total amount of 11,565 billion Euros is available in the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). IPA applies to candidate countries (Turkey, Croatia, Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia) and potential candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia with Kosovo).

IPA aims at assisting the Stabilisation and Association Process for the European course (each country to be judged on its own merits). Basic reasons for IPA are as follows:

- Improved efficiency of the Community's External Aid,
- Creation of a general instrument,
- Accession talks opened with Turkey and Croatia as well as candidate status granted to FYROM,

- All other Western Balkan countries are considered as *potential* candidate countries,
- Stabilisation and Association Process for the European course (each country to be judged on its own merits),
- Clear distinction between candidate countries and potential candidate countries,
- The components Transition Assistance, Institution Building and Cross-Border Cooperation are accessible *to all beneficiary countries*.
- The components Regional Development, Human Resources Development and Rural Development are accessible only to candidate countries accredited to manage funds in a decentralised manner (preparation for the time after accession).

Thanks to the intervention of AEBR and the Committee on Regional Development of the European Parliament, a special chapter on cross-border cooperation was added to IPA with the following results:

- The cross-border cooperation component may support all countries of the Western Balkan and Turkey in cross-border, and, where appropriate, transnational and interregional cooperation among themselves and between them and the Member States.
- In the event of cross-border cooperation with Member States, the rules governing the financial contributions of the ERDF and this Regulation shall be relevant.
- Cooperation will be coordinated with other Community instruments for cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation.
- In the case of cross-border cooperation with Member States, this component covers the regions on both sides of the respective borders (therefore no ERDF-programmes!).
- Under certain conditions, this component may also be used to finance capacity and institution building as well as investment (in line with the aims of article 9).
- In case of cross-border programmes with EU Member States, only the latter can be assigned the implementation in line with the principle of shared competences (Regulation EG Euratom No. 1605/2002 and the new Regulation).¹²

5.5 Cross-border healthcare¹³

Health care provision is a global social task with extensive regional consequences. In principle, health care provision sets out to:

- optimise the quality of administered treatment and quality of life;
- create health care networks.

Both these aims are particularly important for border regions where health services are only available to areas limited to national borders.

The first attempts to provide cross-border health care date back as far as the 1970s, especially along the German-Dutch border and Upper Rhine, but today almost all border regions located at the EU's internal or external borders are concerned with this topic. AEBR is aware of nearly 400

¹² AEBR (Ed.): White Paper on European Border Regions, Gronau 2006/2007

¹³ AEBR Position Paper on Cross-Border Health Care, March 2006

specific projects in this area, and there are probably many more hitherto unknown activities going on as well.

Many of the border areas grappling with this issue have set up health-related working groups at Euroregion level, which not only exchange information and offer advice, but also actively develop specific concepts and projects and go on to implement them. Many neighbouring border areas have already concluded fixed cooperation agreements, especially at project level, but in some cases general agreements have been reached (e.g. in Värmland, between Sweden and Norway). The scope of issues covered by such cross-border cooperation ranges from medical treatment and prevention to cooperation in emergency management and rescue services, to tele-medicine, research, training, advanced training and continuing training, quality assurance, and so forth. Many European border areas have already concluded national agreements covering cooperation in the areas of emergency management and the provision of rescue services.

AEBR has been involved as partner in the EU project "EUREGIO – Evaluation of border regions in the European Union" (project management and coordination: North Rhine-Westphalia Institute of Public Health (Iögd)), has collaborated as Helpdesk in the RFO "Change on Borders" (in which important projects in the health care sector were implemented) and is constantly in touch with the senior body of experts known as the European Hospital and Healthcare Federation (HOPE).

Based on its previous experience with cross-border health care provision and findings that have emerged in this connection, AEBR elaborated a position paper with an initial overview of the underlying:

- reasons for cross-border health care provision;
- opportunities for cooperation;
- problems involved;
- potential solutions; and
- role to be played by Euroregions and similar bodies.

Reasons for cross-border cooperation

The treatment of patients across national borders, i.e. the advent of 'Euro-patients' and 'Euro-doctors' is no longer a pipedream. Health care managers on both sides of a border - supported by border and cross-border regions - are working on the provision of cross-border health care for patients in spite of facing various financial, structural, political, cultural and nationally imposed obstacles.

In many instances, such cooperation is mainly prompted by emergencies, difficulties in gaining access to special medical services in the immediate vicinity of a border, and so on. But in addition to handling frequently urgent individual cases, there are various other reasons for establishing ever closer, longer-term cooperative links. These reasons include:

- patient waiting lists;

- potential utilisation of free capacity on the opposite side of a border (e.g. human resources, medical facilities and large-scale equipment, assignment of human resources and vehicles in civil protection and rescue);
- reciprocal use of specialist medical services;
- economic factors;
- reciprocal use of highly qualified staff;
- the need to pool experience and exchange information;
- the need for cross-border data or information on risk factors or the public health situation (e.g. to draft cross-border health reports);
- the rise in behaviour by children and youngsters that jeopardises their health, a phenomenon that is triggering cross-border activities in the health promotion and preventive healthcare sectors;
- the need to boost self help.

Often, the fact that border regions frequently cover just a semicircular half of a potential health care provision area and patient population prevents them from reaching the 'critical mass' that would enable them to provide costly medical services or facilities. However, this so-called critical mass can only be attained by cooperating with partners just over the border in question.

Opportunities for cooperation in cross-border health care provision

There are extensive opportunities for cross-border cooperation regarding the provision and promotion of health care and preventive health care.

I. Health care provision:

- shared logistics, e.g. with respect to bed management, stocks of drugs, spare parts for medical equipment, and so on.;
- hospital administration (bookkeeping, and so forth);
- laboratories;
- blood banks;
- X-ray facilities;
- pharmacy systems;
- patient and staff care;
- electronic aids;
- data processing and analysis;
- the training of highly qualified (and preferably bilingual) staff;
- pathology;
- facilities caring for the elderly and rehab clinics;
- telemedicine (e.g. offering advice, operations, transplants, and so on);
- access to electronic patient data anywhere and at any time;
- centres of excellence (e.g. for cardiology, gynaecology, X-rays);
- international (EU-wide) health insurance card.

II. Preventive health care and the promotion of health:

The development of methods and the implementation of preventive health care programmes;

- the training, advanced training and continuing training of multipliers (like teachers, educators, and so on);
- building networks;
- drafting information material (for teachers, parents, and so on), initiating prevention campaigns;
- helping socially disadvantaged children and youngsters.

Many activities are geared towards children and youngsters, and addiction prevention features prominently in many such cross-border projects. Additional key topics in the promotion of health include following a healthy diet, getting enough exercise and enhancing motor skills.

Problems and obstacles associated with cross-border health care

The main problems standing in the way of cross-border health care provision are:

- safeguarding quality standards;
- ensuring continuity of treatment and care;
- divergent price structures;
- language-related problems;
- the lack of cross-border chip cards;
- the existence of different social systems;
- the existence of different operation plans, standards, radio frequencies etc. in civil protection and rescue.

In addition there are many other more minor obstacles (as pointed out in the EU project EUREGIO – Evaluation of Border Regions in the European Union), namely:

- Financial problems;
- red tape and bureaucratic application procedures;
- conflicts of interest and legal problems;
- different structures, skills and support programmes on both sides of the border;
- data protection problems;
- difficulties in finding partners for projects, cooperation agreements, and so forth;
- the lack of cooperation agreements, etc.;
- dependency on the personal commitment of the actors involved.

Initial attempts at solutions for cross-border cooperation in the health sector and supportive factors

The main areas where solutions could be found are:

- the establishment of interchangeable social security (equal treatment on the other side of a border and its financing);
- cross-border health insurance;
- international agreements and contracts;
- specific cooperation agreements between the sponsors of health care facilities and projects (e.g. hospitals, laboratories, and so on.);
- private-public partnerships, especially in financing;
- non-profit-oriented cooperation;
- shared investments (reaching a certain 'critical mass', cost benefits, specialisation, the creation of health care facilities in border regions, which cannot be established there under national policy);
- cross-border model projects implemented in conjunction with companies, health insurance companies and trade unions;
- cross-border centres of medical competence: centres for specific organs, parts of the body, etc. such as the heart, the back, vascular diseases, joints or tumours;
- cross-border diagnostic and therapy centres;
- the development of information for patients and service providers (leaflets, Web portals, etc.);
- pooling experiences and exchanging information with other border regions;
- cross-border operation plans and training in civil protection and rescue;
- the development of shared cross-border needs assessments and programmes by Euroregions and similar bodies in cooperation with regional and/or local backers of health care provision on both sides of the border.

The role of Euroregions and similar bodies in supporting cross-border cooperation in the health care sector

Euroregions and similar bodies are not a new administrative level, but an instrument for cooperation. The issue is not so much whether a cross-border structure has authority, but rather how to execute essential cross-border tasks by drawing on the knowledge and health care facilities provided by national governments on both sides of a border.

The members of such Euroregions are mainly regional and/or local authorities. On most decision-making bodies there is parity, for nobody likes being outvoted by their neighbour. Working groups play a decisive role in the respective specialist areas. Many border regions have working groups dealing with cross-border health care issues, whose members include representatives from all partners on both sides of the border in question. There is no parity here, since there may be imbalances regarding levels of know-how, structures and social legislation in individual Member States, so varying numbers of actors may be involved. Collaboration between experts on both sides of a border within these working groups leads to joint projects that generate added value and are funded by the respective partners.

In almost all member states the organisation, planning and financing of health care is not a competence of regional authorities present in euregional bodies, but of the national level. Until recently, it was marginally involved or interested in cross-border health care that concerns only a great minority of the health care activities (less than 1%).

For the most part, Euroregions and similar bodies work with medium-term programmes and strategies with a view to promoting the extensive development of the cross-border region in question. These programmes cover several sectors, e.g. economics or health care, for which an independent sub-programme run over 5-6 years is developed, determining which specific projects should preferably be given priority over this period. So Euroregions and similar bodies also need to secure funds to enable such cooperation.

Furthermore, the task facing Euroregions and similar bodies is to open doors and pave the way for further progress through political lobbying, sounding out legal possibilities, seeking partners, and also convincing decision-makers to support cross-border cooperation.

Many Euroregions support concrete cross-border health care initiatives and projects, especially in those border regions where the benefits of access to the health care provisions on the other side are obvious. Firstly, the euregional support may be financial by facilitating Interreg- and other sources of funding. Secondly, Euroregions are also involved in developing cross-border health care programmes by setting up joint cross-border health care committees and working groups. Besides, Euroregions may stimulate the origin of health care networks, e.g. with hospital and sickness fund actors or even take care of the co-ordination of such networks and their project activities.

Another role of a Euroregion or similar body is to function as a service provider, facilitating the work done by project backers by eliminating cross-border difficulties and enabling attention to be focussed fully on the actual content of the planned cooperation.

In future, as well as providing such services, many Euroregions or similar bodies will face the key task of spreading the word that:

- sharing investments, e.g. in a hospital, a specialist department, a project dealing with the elderly or a rehab centre on a cross-border basis does make sense;
- health care provision in a border area with a rural structure must also be possible, otherwise nobody will choose to live there.

Having said that, it still remains to be clarified what the planning and financial requirements for such cooperation are, and partners need to be found. The fact is that for many investments in border areas, especially in the health care sector, a 'critical mass' can only be attained by bringing in partners from the other side of a border. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that the creation of cross-border 'catchment areas', has a clear knock-on effect on equivalent areas in the respective national hinterlands (e.g. with respect to planning the need for a hospital). This also needs to be taken into account, including in discussions and negotiations between Euroregions and similar bodies; moreover it needs to be clarified with and safeguarded by decision-makers on both sides of the border in question.

Finally, the role of a Euroregion or similar structure can be summed up as follows:

It is a service provider, partner and initiator of activities in cross-border health care provision; it undertakes cross-border planning and runs cross-border programmes, arranges their financing, seeks out common partners and identifies sound joint projects in the health care sector; it has the job of safeguarding cross-border cooperation in the context of health care provision and doing its best to solve any problems arising to the benefit of the respective health care actors.

On 20-21 January 2006 a workshop entitled Cross-border Activities – Good Models for Better Health took place as part of the EUREGIO project with active participation of AEBR that had the aim to promote both exchange of information and experiences and the setting up of networks as well as to further disseminate best practice models. Forums were held with the participants to discuss the needs and possibilities for strengthening cross-border co-operation.

The workshop was attended by about 110 participants from 15 countries who presented their projects in the form of lectures and posters. The documentation of the workshop was published and distributed to the public (also to the members of AEBR).

5.6 Research and innovation in border and cross-border regions

Following the discussion in the Executive Committee with regard to the Communication from the Commission “More research and innovation – Investing for growth and employment: A Common Approach” the AEBR elaborated detailed comments reflecting the particular needs and challenges of border and cross-border regions. They referred in particular to:

- a) New mentality and bottom-up-approach
- b) Own initiative of border and cross-border regions
- c) Cross-border competition
- d) Concrete measures for cross-border cooperation in favour of more research and innovation

Due to the fact that national governments do not prioritise the interests of border regions and do not become active in order to remove existing hindrances between them, the border and cross-border regions need a change in mentality. Therefore, the border and cross-border regions have to show own initiative. It is necessary to bundle the strengths of the regions on both sides of the border. Moreover, strength and powers have to be reflected in a good cross-border „strategic regional programme“, in which a joint strategy for research and innovation should be embedded.¹⁴

5.7 Maritime Cooperation

The maritime cooperation had been a key AEBR concern for decades, albeit in an overall political context and with respect to mutual solidarity between border regions.

¹⁴ Comments of AEBR of the Communication from the Commission “More research and Innovation - Investing for Growth and Employment: A Common Approach” (COM(2005)488 final)

As result of decisions on cross-border maritime cooperation taken by the EU it was now given much higher priority, thanks in part to AEBR intervention and the joint decisions taken by AEBR and CPMR in Taormina. It was important to boost the decentralised level within maritime cooperation, and AEBR – in partnership with the maritime regions – could play a key role in this. So far, maritime cooperation has been dealt with appropriately in the White Paper on European Border Regions. The issue of a practical guide to maritime cooperation should be examined at a later stage. The Executive Committee welcomed the idea of an AEBR forum at which best practices on maritime cooperation could be proposed and recommendations for the future developed.¹⁵

5.8 Transeuropean Transport Networks (TEN)

AEBR has dealt with Transeuropean Networks for 35 years already, as border and cross-border regions with their border crossing points are particularly affected. Extensive comments were elaborated on the White Paper of the EU “European transport policy for 2010: time to decide” as well as “Recommendations for cross-border security and cooperation on the future external border of the EU, taking account of the Schengen Treaty”.

In 2006 the Executive Committee of AEBR discussed in particular the memorandum „Implementing trans-European networks” presented in the end of 2005 by President Barroso and the paper “Networks for peace and development – Extension of the major trans-European transport axes to the neighbouring countries and regions” introduced in November 2005 as report from the “High Level Group” chaired by Loyola de Palacio. In an open letter addressed to the Directorate General for Energy and Transport for consideration the AEBR stressed anew that while implementing the document’s proposal the experiences and services of border and cross-border regions should be used for following reasons:

- The axes for TEN-infrastructures always pass through border and cross-border regions. Theses axes should be taken into account and included in the respective plans of the regional / local level.
- The regional / local level can foster a timely planning and identification of such axes. Border and cross-border regions can facilitate the opening of a joint checkpoint as they talk out and overcome political and citizens’ resistances more effectively etc. and develop simultaneously plans on both sides of the border.
- Solely the regional / local level of border and cross-border regions can create lobby groups on both sides of the border with local / regional / national politicians that commit themselves to the realisation of cross-border motorways / railway networks etc. through acting across all parties, through joint written questions in the parliaments on both sides

¹⁵ Minutes of the AEBR Executive Committee meeting in Wroclaw on 22/23 September 2006

of the border, through development of a cross-border environmental awareness for the accomplishment of trans-European networks etc.

- Border and cross-border regions are most affected by the lack of cross-border infrastructure as it often creates the material precondition for co-operation. Consequently, they have the strongest interest in solving problems and can contribute a lot to it in practice.
- Thanks to their lobbying border and cross-border regions substantially contribute to ensuring sufficient and synchronous allocation of national / regional co-financing on both sides of the border.¹⁶

5.9 Daily border problems / European Parliament's Representative for Border Issues

Citizens living in border regions take on the one hand a positive view of the EU, but on the other hand they know like nobody else the difficulties of the European unification process. The reason for this is that in the problems of the "large EU" can be recognised like in a mirror in the "small Europe" at the borders (caused e.g. by different structures, competencies, tax and social laws, etc.).

Special studies in Scandinavia as well as cognitions of the AEBR clearly demonstrate that there are a lot of daily border problems at the EU's internal and external borders, and this in spite of the European Single Market.

The citizens on both sides of the border are directly concerned by these problems in their daily life and in their coexistence across the borders. They request solutions for their problems and contact the regional/local level in this regard, although the causes for these problems are most of the time of European or national nature.¹⁷

- Representative for border issues in the EU

Following a meeting with the Special Envoy of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the former Minister President Poul Schlüter, during the Executive Committee Meeting in Passau (18 June 2004), the Secretariat General contacted the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the European Parliament, Mr Elmar Brok, the Chairman of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Mr Jo Leinen, Vice-President Ingo Friedrich, Mr Pöttering, spokesman of the European People's Party and European Democrats in the European Parliament as well as members of the Committee on Regional Development Ms. Krehl (Socialist) and Ms. Schroedter (Green), asking them to consider the question as to whether it would be desirable to have a delegate for border questions of the European Parliament. On 21 June 2006 the AEBR organised a meeting in the European Parliament dealing exclusively with this ques-

¹⁶ Comments of AEBR on the Palacio Report of 28th February 2006

¹⁷ Letter to the President of the European Parliament, Josep Borell of 16 January 2006

tion. Moreover, the President of the European Parliament Josep Borell Fontelles and the Vice-President of the European Commission Margot Wallström were addressed with the request to examine if it would be possible to nominate an authorised representative for border issues at European level.

In cooperation with the groups in the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, the European Council of the Heads of State and Government and the European Commission, AEBR will continue the project "Representative for border issues". The aim is that a Committee of the European Parliament (preferably the Regional Committee) will be tasked with specifically addressing cross-border issues in its working programmes and with appointing a permanent rapporteur. In 2007 it will be checked once again whether a Vice President of the European Parliament might be appointed representative for border issues.¹⁸

5.10 Co-operation with ESPON and INTERACT

In the end of 2006 the Executive Committee addressed the future cooperation with ESPON, INTERACT and further organisations. Meetings with representatives of ESPON and INTERACT took place in November 2006 resulting in agreements on closer collaboration. It was agreed with INTERACT that through AEBR experts (Secretary General, Advisory Committee, representatives from border regions of AEBR) should be invited to workshops. There is a possibility to submit an AEBR-application for a network within INTERACT.

Co-operation with ESPON has been arranged in order to bring the possibilities of ESPON in line with the wishes of our members.

It was agreed that:

- The AEBR informs its members and also border and cross-border regions that are not members of our organisation about the new possibilities of a targeted analysis offered by ESPON with regard to issues concerning several cross-border areas.
- In order to take into account the wishes of border and cross-border regions in due time, it's necessary to hear from border and cross-border regions in which areas comparable data material is of need. This could refer to individual regions or a group of border regions.
- The AEBR elaborates in co-operation with ESPON a list with necessary comparable key data for cross-border co-operation.
- In a special forum for border and cross-border regions in the beginning of 2007 ESPON will introduce its work plan 2007-2013 and the particular services. Studies of ESPON are funded by 100%.¹⁹

In order to take the specific needs of border and cross-border regions into account they were asked in written to send the Secretariat General their comments and proposals regarding the future co-operation with ESPON.

¹⁸ Minutes of AEBR Executive Committee Meeting in Donegal on 7 July 2006

¹⁹ Mailing to border and cross-border regions of 16 October 2006

5.11 Centre of the Council of Europe in St. Petersburg

In co-operation with the Russian government, the Council of Europe decided to set up a centre for inter-regional and cross-border co-operation in St Petersburg. These plans had to be finalised before November 2006 (end of the Russian Presidency). The working group was chaired by the Norwegian Ambassador at the Council of Europe.

In principle, the Committee of the Regions and AEBR have agreed to participate in setting up and operating a centre of this kind. AEBR is not in a position to make a financial contribution and would, instead, contribute to the contents, given that it is the only European regional organisation dealing with cross-border issues. Looking back on more than 35 years of successful work, AEBR has gained significant experience in this field. AEBR can make an important contribution to the centre's success by bringing in its know how and expertise.²⁰

The Executive Committee of AEBR authorised the Secretariat General to pursue the matter with a view to avoiding the doubling-up of financing and work and supporting the creation of the Centre in St. Petersburg in such a way that it could perform work that was useful to the border regions and so that AEBR could be involved in this work.²¹

5.12 RFO Change on Borders

The project was approved in September 2003 and project activities started in December 2003/January 2004. Lead Partner is the Land Nordrhein-Westfalen. 25 partners are involved, and AEBR acts as helpdesk. This RFO has very ambitious aims.

Future strategies for cross-border cooperation have been developed in three fora:

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

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

- the environment;
- cross-border structures;
- cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
- supplier-producer relations;
- cooperation between universities;

²⁰ Working Paper concerning the Council of Europe Centre in St. Petersburg of October 2006

²¹ Minutes of the AEBR Executive Committee meeting held on 22 September 2006 in Wrocław

- innovation and technology;
- biochemistry and agriculture;
- cooperation between schools;
- minority issues;
- tourism.

The third annual conference combined with two Thematic Forum meetings took place on 22-25 March 2006 in Syros, South Aegean Region (GR).

In the fourth and last call from 20 March to 19 May the project proposal: Risk and Innovation was submitted and approved.

Moreover, 4 Thematic Forum meetings took place in 2006 offering a unique interregional platform for exchange of experiences and information on specific cross-border issues:

- 21 March 2006 on island Syros (GR): "Regional and inter-regional co-operation of SMEs",
- 22 March 2006 organised by the Region East Macedonia and Thrace on island Syros (GR): "European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)",
- 16/17 June 2006 in Papenburg (DE): "Tourism and cultural / natural heritage - new tourism strategies for border regions"
- 30 November / 1 December 2006 in Strasbourg (F) and Basle (CH): "Education and Training in border regions."

5.13 Political Fora of AEBR

AEBR Political Fora deal first of all with thematic issues.

More than 40 representatives of border and cross-border regions participated in the AEBR Forum on "EU Programmes 2007-2013" on 2 June 2006 in Strasbourg, Région Alsace (F).

This Forum provided in particular the opportunity to prepare the Symposium: "Future cross-border cooperation in practice (EU programmes and projects)" that took place within the scope of the Annual Conference of AEBR on 23-24 November 2006 in Pamplona.

The Programme of the Forum was as follows:²²

- ITEM 1** Opening and Welcome
Jean-Paul Heider, 1st Vice-President of AEBR, Vice-President of the Region Alsace Jens Gabbe, AEBR Secretary General
- ITEM 2** Proposal for a regulation of the EU on Regional Policy and Cohesion
Dirk Peters, DG REGIO, European Commission

²² Programme of the AEBR Forum "EU Programmes 2007-2013" on 2 June 2006 in Strasbourg (F)

- ITEM 3** Legal Instrument of the EU (EGTC)
Dirk Peters, DG REGIO, European Commission
- ITEM 4** Elaboration of EU programmes
Presentation of the Checklist and explanations by *Jens Gabbe, Secretary General*
Keynote speaker: *Patrice Harster, Regio Pamina (F/D)*
Subjects:
 - Joint programme development
 - Decentralised responsibility – Instruments + Liability
 - Ex-ante Evaluation
 - Co-Financing at project level
Comments:
Franco Iacop, Vice-President of AEBR, Regional Minister, Friuli-Venezia Giulia (I)
Tobias Schneider, INTERREG IIIA, Alpenrhein-Hochrhein-Bodensee (D/AT/CH)
- ITEM 5** Agreement for the implementation of a cross-border programme –
Presentation of the Checklist and explanations by *Jens Gabbe, Secretary General*
Keynote speaker: *Harald Krebs, Executive Director, EUREGIO (D/NL)*
Subjects: Necessary accompanying structures
 - Cross-border structures
 - Cross-border partnership
 - Joint working process
 - Cross-border working groups (role of the social partners)
 - (Joint) secretariat (pro active role)
Comments: Christian Preußcher, Executive Director, Euroregion Elbe/Labe (D/CZ)

The meeting was also attended by Aguibou Diarra (Ministry of Territorial Administration and Local Communities of Mali), and by Laurent Bossard of the OECD. AEBR has been in regular contact with both for some time. Vice-President Heider had represented AEBR in a conference held in Nigeria.

Mr Diarra reported on cross-border cooperation between six states in west Africa, which was based on an agreement that had been approved by all those involved at both national and regional level. He said that observatories were being set up in the border regions and that several projects had already been carried out. The aim was to set up an Association of African Border Regions. A partnership with AEBR and the EU would be useful in this connection.²³

5.14 Publications

- *White Paper on European Border Regions*

During the General Assembly held on 23 November 2006 in Pamplona, Navarra (ES) a final draft version of the “White Paper on European Border Regions” was presented and distributed to border and cross-border regions as well as European Institutions for comments.

While publishing the “White Paper on European Border and Cross-Border Regions” the AEBR would like to provide an overview of the 40-year-history of the formation of cross-border cooperation, the difficulties that had to be surmounted as well as the most important achievements and large successes.²⁴

- New Edition of the Map of Border Regions

Members and friends of AEBR were addressed in 2006 with the request to send their modification proposals for the new edition of the Map of Border Regions. Till November 2006 the Secretariat General received ca. 125 modification proposals covering approx. 50% of the 150 border regions addressed.

It was repeatedly pointed out that this would not be a map on INTERREG, interregional cooperation or town twinning, but an AEBR map of cross-border regions.²⁵ Due to financial reasons, the decision was taken to publish the map in 2007 within the scope of the German Presidency.

- Report on Cross-Border Cooperation of Universities

Following a survey of July 2005 the chairman of the Advisory Committee, Mr. von Malchus, a first overview of his evaluations regarding the cross-border co-operation of universities. While becoming the large number of responses, he regretted the fact that he had not received any response at all from certain areas in Europe.

The Secretariat General asked once again border and cross-border regions to send reports that in addition to universities might involve also individual departments and colleges of higher education.²⁶

The Report on cross-border cooperation of universities should be finalised in 2007.

6. Contact with European bodies

For many decades, AEBR has nurtured contacts with the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Contacts to the European Parliament were intensified, above all via the “Committee on Regional Development”. A lot of its members are well-known to AEBR. By this, the cohesion and regional policy has received a political basis. Other important dialogue partners of AEBR are the “Committee on External Affairs” and the “Committee on Constitutional Affairs”.

Where the European Commission was concerned, AEBR enjoyed close, solid relations with the Regional Policy DG, and, at the political level in particular with Commissioner Danuta Hübner

²³ Summary report on the proceedings of the AEBR Forum - EU programmes 2007 to 2013, 2 June 2006, Strasbourg

²⁴ AEBR (Ed.): White Paper on European Border Regions, Introduction, Gronau 2006/2007, p. 5

²⁵ Minutes of AEBR's General Assembly held in Pamplona on 23 November 2006

and Director-General Graham Meadows. The regular contacts with the directors Ms Helander and Mr. Leygues, as well as with the responsible Heads of Unit Mr. Bougas and Mr. Peters have to be pointed out.

With regard to external borders and relationships with third countries, Mr. Elmar Brok, Chairman of the “Committee on External Affairs”, was the most important dialogue partner.

The AEBR actively participated in the Structural Dialogue meetings with the European Commission:

- on 15 June 2006 with Commissioner Margot Wallström: “EU Communication Policy and Plan D” (AEBR represented by José Maria Muñoa Ganuxa, member of AEBR Executive Committee),
- on 20 June 2006 with Commissioner Ján Figel: “The European Policy of education and culture: its contribution to the success of the Lisbon Strategy – the role of regions and cities” (AEBR represented by Lambert van Nisterlooj, President of AEBR),
- on 7 December 2006 with President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso: “The Commission’s Legislative and Work Programme for 2007 (AEBR represented by Franco Iacop, Vice-President of AEBR).

Moreover, on 23 January 2006 the Secretary General of AEBR Jens Gabbe, the Deputy Secretary General Martín Guillermo-Ramírez and the President of AEBR Lambert van Nistelrooij met Commissioner Hübner in Brussels in order to discuss the concerns and proposals of AEBR as regards the new programming period 2007-2013.

As regards the cooperation with the Committee of the Regions (CoR) throughout the whole year 2006 the Secretary General of AEBR was in close contact with the Secretary General of CoR Gerhard Stahl. Moreover, he participated in the meetings of the Secretaries General of the Committee of the Regions, the Associations of Regional and Local Authorities and the CLRAE of the Council of Europe organised on 23 January, 12 June and 7 November 2006 in Brussels.

Besides, in January 2006 the CoR-AEBR Action Plan was signed by Mr Stahl, Secretary General of CoR and Jens Gabbe, Secretary General of AEBR defining the cooperation priorities for the future. In early 2007 a report on the implementation of the action plan has to be presented to the Bureau of the Committee of Regions, as well as to the Bureau of AEBR.

²⁶ Minutes of the AEBR Executive Committee Meeting in Bordeaux on 3 March 2006

Cooperation dating back to the 1960s with the Council of Europe was enhanced. AEBR attended numerous Council of Europe seminars and had taken part in the Council of Europe's Congress of Local & Regional Authorities of Europe. AEBR was a permanent member of the main committee of the CLRAE and in the Committee of Experts for Transfrontier Cooperation. In 2006 main issue as regards the cooperation with the Council of Europe was the Centre for inter-regional and cross-border cooperation planned by the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Russian Federation in St. Petersburg.

Also in the year 2006, cooperation between the big European associations of regional and local authorities (AEBR, CPMR, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Eurocities, AER, and REGLEG) had furthermore increased and positively developed. On 25 September 2006 AEBR organised a meeting in Gronau with Secretaries General of European Associations. Further meetings should regularly take place.

Contacts with members of the European Economic and Social Committee concerned mostly individual questions.

7. Structures and working methods of AEBR

Work contents of AEBR:

AEBR as the oldest European association of regional and local authorities has the smallest budget compared to the other associations. Alongside the Secretary General and till October 2006 also Deputy Secretary General, the following staff members were working in the head office in 2006: 1 full-time employee, 1 part-time employee (66%), 1 accountant (50%) and 1 full-time employee for RFO Change on Borders. AEBR competes with other European regional organisations as regards the treatment of European issues, even though if AEBR is the only one to bother about border regions.

The question turns up, if the content-related quality of AEBR alone will be sufficient to endure at European level. A political representation must above all be ensured by the President. The external representation during important occasions in Europe has been improved. Vice-Presidents, members of the Executive Committee or representatives of border regions are more and more ready to represent AEBR during meetings organised in and by the EU.

Since 1987, the AEBR has grown continuously. Due to this development, it was necessary to deal with aspects such as structures and working contents etc. In 1987, AEBR had approximately 15 members. In 1995, there were already 50 members and in 1999 ca. 75. Today, AEBR counts 99 members (representing nearly 200 border areas). The current budget amounts to approx. 400.000 €.

Since 1996, the member structure, which was originally concentrated on the former EU of 6 + Spain, has considerably changed. Border regions from Greece, Ireland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway have joined the AEBR as well as numerous border regions from Eastern and Central Europe and the Balkans. Till the end of 2006 there were no AEBR members in England and Portugal. The number of French, Italian and Scandinavian members could be improved.

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

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

of EU projects, but AEBR should not depend upon the above and remain, first and foremost, a political spearhead.

The term of European border areas when used by AEBR applies to all areas, within and without the EU. A different structure of interests is evident here, but no fundamental conflict of interests. Members paying subscription fees are in the foreground of interest of AEBR. On the other hand, support has to be offered to all border regions. In view of the reorientation in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the new cooperation possibilities with the Mediterranean area the border regions there have undoubtedly been the focus of attention for a while. On the other hand, AEBR has played a very decisive role in the revision of the Community Initiatives (of Interreg-IIIa, PHARE CBC, TACIS CBC in particular, but also with regard to transnational and interregional cooperation) and also in the developments in the field of territorial cooperation including the neighbourhood or pre-accession programmes. AEBR has, effectively and to the immediate benefit of border regions, acted on the internal and external borders of the EU (see anchoring of cross-border cooperation in the European Constitutional Treaty, involvement in the preparatory work and comments on the draft Territorial Agenda adopted under the German Presidency in 2007).

The support for AEBR from the member regions could be further improved. In addition, members of the Executive Committee could participate at and be involved in events to a greater extent or carry out ad hoc fields of duties politically. The circle of persons available for a relatively short time or temporary - as politically necessary – has remained limited yet. Whilst an increased participation of members and the AEBR Executive Committee in the network would be very desirable indeed, this creates problems in praxis, as all are active on an honorary basis. Should members and representatives of the Executive Committee increase their activities, a uniform stand of AEBR in public remains absolutely necessary, i.e. the principle and philosophy of the cross-border cooperation – as stipulated in the AEBR Statutes, the Charter and the Action programme, the Practical Guide and many other documents – should in this case also be uniformly supported. The praxis often reveals that this is unfortunately not the case.

- **decentralised or centralised**

When Jens Gabbe volunteered to manage AEBR as Secretary General in 1986, he made acceptance of the job conditional on not having to take care of everything from Gronau. At the time, various regions, including Catalonia, Alsace, Sønderjylland and Friuli-Venezia-Giulia were kind enough to offer to serve as representations abroad. In the meantime, the number of members has increased considerably, as has the geographical area covered by

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

- **Mass meetings**

In the past, AEBR has held a General Assembly once a year and also organised an Annual Conference. These events are very expensive to stage, costing around € 80.000 - 100.000 - a price which not every border region can readily honour. For this reason we intend to stick to having just the one Annual Congress. Only special circumstances could make additional meetings of all the border regions necessary (for instance a meeting scheduled with a European Commissioner in Brussels).

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

- **Additional national and regional meetings**

In order to introduce the new Secretary General Martín Guillermo-Ramírez additional meetings with member regions of AEBR were organised in 2006 (Polish-German Border, Czech-German border, Scandinavia, German-Dutch border).

Such regional meetings could be organised on regular basis once a year for areas as Southern Europe, Southwest Europe, Central Europe, Northern Europe, and Northwest Europe. The topic "Regional Groupings" yet has to be discussed within the Executive Committee.

- **AEBR's public relations work**

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

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

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

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

8. Secretariat General

The Executive Committee is continuously informed on developments in the general secretariat. At the end of 2006, the following staff members were working in the general secretariat:

- a foreign language correspondent (2/3 working time)
- a foreign language secretary
- a project worker for RFO Change on Borders
- an accountant (part-time)
- a secretary general

The EUREGIO continuously provides organisational and ideational support to the general secretariat.

The public relations of AEBR are still difficult, because there is no staff member for this work at the moment. European-wide public relations are nearly impossible. The website www.aebr.net as well as the electronic Newsletter "Partnership in a Europe without borders" facilitate public relations.

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