

# Annual Report 2014



AGEG - AEBR - ARFE



# **Annual Report 2014**

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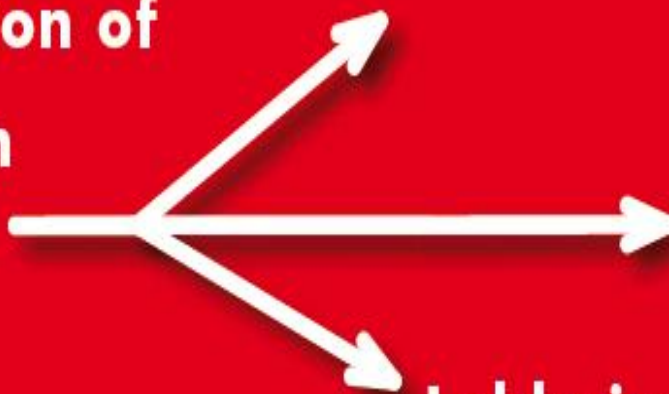
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## Cooperation Across European Borders

**Association of  
European  
Border  
Regions**



**Expertise and Exchange**

**Network and  
Contacts**

**Lobbying and  
Representation**



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# 1 Introduction

**The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) looks back to a very intensive year 2014. The Annual Conference and the General Assembly in Rzeszów, in the Carpathian Euroregion certainly belong to the highlights of the year 2014. As the Annual Conference of the AEBR took place directly before the Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Forum, a miscellaneous programme could be offered to the members and friends of the AEBR including political discussions, a large supraregional fair and numerous cultural highlights.**

Another successful event in 2014 was the Youth Forum, which took place under the title: „New Generation for EU enlargement“ in October in Belgrade. The event was organized by the AEBR together with the European Centre for Peace and Development (ECPD), the Youth Association from Serbia and the Euroregions Nisava and DKMT. Here, we would like to say special thanks to Mrs. Ana Nikolov, who coordinates the Info Centre of the AEBR for the Balkans. She was responsible for the preparation and organization of the Forum, coordinated by the AEBR Task Force on External Borders. In total, about 40 young people participated in the forum that focused on the added value of cross border cooperation for the region of the Balkans.

In 2014, the exchange with representatives of the European institutions was of particular importance for the AEBR. In January already, the President of the AEBR, Karl-Heinz Lambertz participated in a meeting in Brussels with the President of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), Mr. Ramon-Luis Valcárcel. The aim of this meeting was to

discuss about the future of the CoR with the presidents of European regional organisations. In this context, the President of the AEBR recommended to strengthen the exchange between the CoR and the European regional organisations for a better use of synergies and to avoid unnecessary double work.

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

Martín Guillermo Ramírez  
Secretary General

# 2 AEBR in brief

## MISSION

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

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

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

We represent the common interests of our members at national and international parliaments, offices, administrative bodies and other institutions.

We inform European institutions and the public about matters related to cross-border issues and the specific needs of border regions and put forward specific proposals for initiatives and political measures.

## ORGANISATION

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

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

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

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

## BENEFITS FOR MEMBERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# 3 Members and membership fees

**According to the supplementary budget 2014 and the minutes of the General Assembly held in Rzeszów (Poland), the AEBR counted about 100 members at the end of the year 2014 from all over Europe. However, as in various cases the status of associated membership was terminated by the end of the year 2014, the number of members has gone down to 90 by the beginning of the year 2015. In 2014, two new members were admitted: Eurodistrict REGIO PAMINA (DE/FR) and Eurodistrict SaarMoselle (DE/FR) as observer until the year 2016.**

The analysis of the AEBR membership structure indicates that there is still good balance in the Association between the membership of cross-border and border regions from the "old" and "new" European Union member states. Also several border regions from EU neighbouring countries (in particular from Norway, Switzerland, the Russian Federation and Ukraine) are active members of the AEBR. The current aim of the Association is to be better represented in South-East Europe. For that reason the AEBR is trying at the moment to cooperate closer with stakeholders dealing with cross-border cooperation in the Balkans. Moreover, the AEBR has established an Information Centre in Novi Sad (Serbia) in 2014, in order to facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge and to enhance the visibility of the AEBR in South-East Europe. Mrs. Ana Nikolov coordinates this information centre. The effects of globalisation have contributed to the popularisation of the idea of cross-border cooperation in far-away areas. In consequence, the AEBR has been asked several times to support concrete projects in Latin America and West Africa while offering its know-how and knowledge for the development of cross-border strategies, the definition of programmes and the identification of concrete projects. Thanks to the participation in such projects the AEBR was able to further enhance its reputation by some important partners. But, generally speaking, new topics and the greater geographical scope of activities mean greater challenges for the relatively small Secretariat General.

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

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

For next years it is very important to count on new members. To this end, several contacts have been initiated with regional governments and cross-border structures. Consultancy services also offer a good opportunity but, in many cases, part of the work has to be sub-contracted due to our reduced staff. An increase in income through membership fees would be the most suitable solution to the financial constraints of the AEBR, achieving a critical mass of members.



On invitation of the Association Carpathian Euroregion Poland  
the General Assembly and Annual Conference of AEBR 2014  
took place in Rzeszów, Poland



# 4 General Assembly and Annual Conference

## 4.1 General Assembly

**The General Assembly and Annual Conference of the AEBR in 2014 took place on 11th and 12th September 2014 in Rzeszów, Poland. More than 200 participants attended the conference which was organized with great commitment by the staff of the Association of the Carpathian Euroregion Poland. The Association of the Carpathian Euroregion Poland was founded in July 2000 with the objective of creating an own legal personality for the Polish side of the Carpathian Euroregion. It is an organisation of local authorities from the two regions Malopolskie and Podkarpackie. The Polish side of the Carpathian Euroregion has been member of the AEBR since 2011.**

The agenda of the General Assembly included in particular such items as the Activity Report 2013, the Annual Accounts 2013, the Budget for 2015 and a Supplementary Budget for 2014. Moreover, the elections to the Executive Committee were held at the occasion of the General Assembly in Rzeszów. Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the Parliament of German-speaking Community of Belgium, was re-elected for the years 2015 and 2016 as President of the AEBR. Mr. Lambertz opened the General Assembly together with Dawid Lasek, the Deputy Chairman of the Board of the Association of the Carpathian Euroregion. Mr. Lambertz and Mr. Lasek welcomed the participants from the different European border and cross-border regions. In their opening addresses, they referred in particular to the future of European territorial cooperation and the current challenges for the Association of European Border Regions and the Carpathian Euroregion.

On the occasion of the meeting in Rzeszów, the General Assembly confirmed the membership of two new AEBR members:

### **Eurodistrict REGIO PAMINA (DE/FR)**

The Eurodistrict REGIO PAMINA is organized as local cross-border association based in France. Current themes and project initiatives are discussed by three thematic committees and are included in the Assembly of the association.

**Eurodistrict SaarMoselle (DE/FR)** as observer for two years

It is the main target of the partners in the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) „Eurodistrict SaarMoselle“ to build a cross-border agglomeration that would be able to better face the challenges of the structural change on both sides of the border Saar/Moselle.

The General Assembly also treated the plan of the German Federal Government regarding the introduction of a private car toll. A statement was elaborated which was sent to the Federal Government and the responsible ministries of the federal states saying: “Since decades, the AEBR was trying successfully to make up underdevelopments in the border regions with European and own financial funds. The introduction of the currently announced toll on all roads would be opposed to this in future and would represent an additional obstacle to the cross-border cooperation. Therefore, the AEBR claims to take the special needs and objectives of cross-border regions into consideration during the current debate.” Following the inputs of some AEBR members, this Association’s strong lobby towards the German Government, some federal states and neighbouring countries, plus the actions undertaken by some Euroregions, raised a high awareness about this issue.

After the European Commission also raised considerable concerns and has introduced Treaty violation proceedings against Germany, the plans for the introduction of a toll for passenger cars on German motorways has been stopped.



AEBC President and  
AEBC Secretary  
General with the  
host of the AEBC  
Annual Conference  
2014, Dawid Lasek  
and his team

More than 200  
participants  
attended the AEBC  
General Assembly  
and Annual  
Conference 2014



## 4.2 Annual Conference 2014

### **‘Innovation and Research – Cross-Border Regional Development through Public-Private Partnership’**

**The Association of European Border Regions organized its General Assembly and Annual Conference 2014 in Rzeszów, Podkarpackie Voivodship, Poland, hosted by the Polish Association of the Carpathian Euroregion. More than 200 participants attended the Annual Conference of the AEBR in Rzeszów. The main topic of the AEBR Annual Conference 2014 was ‘Innovation and Research –Cross-Border Regional Development through Public-Private Partnership’. This topic was chosen in view of the current challenges in the European regions and in close cooperation with the host region.**

In the framework of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, innovation and research are of particular importance, taking into account that innovation does not mean only high-tech solutions and top research on computing, mechatronics, sustainable energy and so forth, but also a new approach of “traditional” fields, such as tourism, leisure or agro-food products.

In cross-border regions innovation and research offer a large scale of possibilities: creation of a larger market, new sources of employment, attraction of enterprises and business spin-off effects, which are a precondition for successful cross-border cooperation, as the creation

of good environmental and framework conditions for innovation and research. Innovation and research at top level also need good international contacts (universities, research institutions, enterprises, etc.).

Cross-border regions should develop a joint strategy in this field, with concrete proposals for sustainable implementation and further development of cross-border cooperation. Border regions can benefit from smart specialization on both sides of the border, and should strengthen their participation not only in European networks dealing with cross-border cooperation (the AEBR), but also in specialized networks such as ERRIN, and others.







The winner of the Cross Border Award in 2014 was the „SME Crossborder Cluster Stimulation Programme (GCS)” of Euregio Meuse-Rhine

Cross Border Award “Sail of Papenburg” was endowed for the first time in 2002 in Papenburg, in the region where it was devised, the Ems Dollart Region





## 4.3 Bestowal of the AEBR Award 2014

**Topic of the AEBR Award 2014 was "Innovation and Research - Cross-Border Regional Development through Public-Private Partnership". Johannes Hahn, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, was patron of the Sail of Papenburg 2014. In total, 9 applications were submitted from different European border and cross-border regions. The international jury finally decided to award the „SME Crossborder Cluster Stimulation Programme (GCS)“ of Euregio Meuse-Rhine, because this project shows outstanding initiatives for cross-border development through public-private partnerships, which can be an example for other cross-border regions in Europe. The award was handed over on the occasion of the AEBR Annual Conference on 12 September 2014 in Rzeszów/Poland.**

Some key facts about „SME Crossborder Cluster Stimulation Programme (GCS)“:

- The GCS cross-border cluster stimulation programme is the extension of the Top-Technology Cluster initiative (TTC). TTC is a joint cross border initiative to support technology-oriented companies, especially SMEs, to find the right partners and to establish sustainable business cooperation across the borders.
- GCS finances cross-border open innovation projects between technology-oriented small and medium-sized enterprises in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine area since 2011.
- Innovation projects are understood as cooperative projects of SMEs (as defined in the EU recommendation 2003/361) in the field of industrial research and experimental development.
- The Business Development Support track aims at supporting the development of concrete demand driven innovation projects that can lead to added value through organising in-depth-interviews, structured generation of ideas and pooling of business innovation experts and specialists.
- The fund is aimed at SMEs in the fields of health/life sciences, high-tech systems as well as advanced materials/chemistry. Knowledge institutions and large companies can also participate.
- In the past period GCS has supported 22 projects with €4.7 million. Total project costs were €3.2 million. 87 parties participated in these projects.



AEBR Executive  
Committee  
meeting in Drama,  
Euroregion  
Nestos-Mesta  
(Greece) in March  
2014

AEBR Executive  
Committee  
meeting in  
Joensuu, Finland  
in June 2014



## 5 AEBR Executive Committee

**In 2014, three meetings of the AEBR Executive Committee took place: on 28th March in Drama (Euroregion Nestos-Mesta, Greece), on 7th June in Joensuu (Finland) and on 11th September in Rzeszów (Carpathian Euroregion, Poland).**

The discussions in the Executive Committee in 2014 focused in particular on the future of territorial cooperation 2014-2020. Following the approval of the new EU regulations on cohesion policy and territorial cooperation at the end of the year 2013, the AEBR elaborated several working papers and comments for the realisation of the new regulations. In particular, the Association gave concrete recommendations regarding the approval of new INTERREG A programmes, which were sent to the GD Regional Policy and Urban Development. Here, the AEBR especially asked DG REGIO to take intensively the advantage of the possibilities opened by the new regulations and the new regulation for delegated acts on the approval of the INTERREG A programmes to avoid weak points, which had been detected in the previous programming periods. It was recommended, to request for each submitted programme a detailed description of the programme management together with an explanation about when the regional/local actors are involved, which role they assume (responsibility according to bottom-up approach) and which rights they will have (eg. right to vote).

On the occasion of the meetings of the Executive Committee, the Secretary General of AEBR, Martín Guillermo Ramírez, also

presented current and finalised projects of the association. Further subjects discussed by the Executive Committee members were: the implementation of the Directive on cross-border healthcare, developments at the external borders of the EU, research and innovation and the implementation of RIS3 in cross-border areas, languages in border regions as well as the challenges of cross-border labour markets, particularly for the youth. The Executive Committee also discussed organisational and internal affairs, such as events of the AEBR, working contents, financial affairs, the Advisory Committee, the Task Forces and the future prospects of the AEBR.

The AEBR represents the interests of all European border and cross-border regions. Thanks to the association's efforts the subject "cross-border cooperation" does not lose its relevance and it is regularly on the agenda of the European institutions. It is a growing priority in Brussels, despite of its absence in some occasions. When this happens, the AEBR reacts highlighting its relevance and drawing attention of relevant institutions and authorities. The AEBR brings together partners from different border regions, which can exchange their experiences and information and can learn from each other. It also acts as mediator in conflict situations and promotes quick and easy solutions when border problems arise.

# 6 Important topics in 2014

## 6.1 European Cohesion Policy

**In July 2014, the European Commission published the 6th report about the economic, social and territorial cohesion. In the report, special focus was held on the consequences of the economic crisis. It had very strong influence on the national and regional budgets. For example, public investments have decreased considerably all over Europe during the years 2008 – 2013. Crisis-stricken countries such as Greece or Spain even registered a decline of 60 per cent during this period.**

The AEBR wrote a statement about the 6th cohesion report which was forwarded to the partners of the association at the European Commission and to selected members of the European Parliament. In its statement, the AEBR reminds of the fact that the general provisions for the ERDF, ESF and the cohesion policy for the years 2014-2020 define two main objectives: Investment for Jobs and Growth as well as European Territorial Cooperation. It is understandable that main attention in the report is paid to the 1st objective (also due to its much higher financial volume). However it is difficult to understand why territorial cooperation (and in particular its main component: cross-border cooperation) is hardly taken into account and considered in the summary and in chapters 1 to 7. Only in chapter 8 this topic is briefly mentioned in one of the subchapters. Even in the index, there is no title including the subject „territorial cooperation“.

From the point of view of the AEBR, the second main objective of the cohesion policy „European territorial cooperation“ might get much higher attention in future cohesion reports by a corresponding consideration with regard to quality and quantity, still remaining obstacles and the efforts

to overcome them, particularly legal and administrative ones. The European border and cross-border regions have got the potential to become even more effective and to produce best-possible results during the current programming period 2014 –2020 and can thus make an important contribution to overcome the crisis by an intelligent, inclusive and sustainable cross-border growth.





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

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



Due to the rather negative opinion in the EU Commission and the Parliament the continuation of Small Project Funds and “People-to-People projects” under INTERREG V was more than uncertain. Thanks to the AEHR and its political interventions (intensive exchanges with the responsible EU Commissioner and the Director General for Regional and Urban Policy as well as with the spokespersons of the political groups in the Committee on Regional Development in the EU Parliament and at the Committee of the Regions) as well as the concrete demonstration of the added value of Small Project Funds these cross-border actions are still possible and can be implemented by many of our members.

„People-to-people projects“ (small projects) have proved to be successful instruments for sustainable regional development of cross-border areas that create added value. They strongly promote and facilitate important cooperation in legal and

administrative questions as well as cooperation between institutions and citizens. They create the necessary conditions for the establishment of functional networks by stakeholders from both sides of the border, the exchange of knowledge and experiences, the analyses of common problems, the elaboration of joint solutions and, in particular, the elaboration of real cross-border projects by public, private, non-governmental and academic stakeholders.

Accordingly, they prove to be an engine accelerating current and future cross-border cooperation in socio-cultural field, but also regarding the economy and the infrastructures. Particularly through „People-to-people projects“ (small projects) European funding policy becomes visible and tangible for citizens: cross-border cooperation in daily life means a practical and operational Europe being perceived by the citizens living in border areas, more than one third of the total population of the Union.

## 6.3 European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

The AEBR Secretariat General is actively involved in the activities of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) focusing on the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation and pays much attention to all actions and decisions referring to EGTCs launched at European and national level. It is particularly worth to mention the work developed by the EGTC Platform, which facilitates the exchange of experiences and implements numerous activities. You will find more detailed information on the website of the platform: [www.cor.europa.eu/egtc](http://www.cor.europa.eu/egtc).

On 26th June 2014, a workshop of the EGTC platform took place in Brussels with representatives from existing EGTCs, national authorities and experts to deal with territorial cooperation questions. The workshop especially had the purpose of exchanging information as well as discussing the new regulations for the cohesion policy during the programming period 2014-2020 and the modifications included in the EGTC regulation.

Among the speakers were Mr. Herwig Van Staa, President of the Landtag of the Austrian Federal State of Tirol as well as Mr. Joachim Zeller, Member of the European Parliament and

rapporteur on the new EGTC regulation. The seminar counted on about 80 participants representing existing and planned EGTCs, regional and local authorities as well as some scientific institutions.

Jens Gabbe, the Chairman of the AEBR Advisory Committee represented the AEBR in the workshop. During his contribution, Mr. Gabbe underlined the added value which the EGTCs and similar structures are creating by assuming important cross-border tasks. Mr. Gabbe recommended to involve from the beginning on all important actors, especially representatives of the national authorities as well as local and regional politicians to ensure getting the necessary support for the foundation of an EGTC.



## 6.4 External borders of the European Union

In 2014, the AEBR made a strong effort to strengthen its involvement at the external borders of the EU and far beyond. The cooperation with border areas at the external borders has been further developed in the past years. Several meetings with representatives of border regions at the external borders of the EU took place in the framework of the Task Force on External Borders (TFEB). Of particular importance were in this context events organised in June 2014 in Finland in cooperation with the member regions of the AEBR North Karelia and South Karelia.



**Meeting of the Task Force External Borders in Parikkala in June 2014**

On Friday, 6th June, a meeting of the Task Force External Borders took place in Parikkala (South Karelia). Members of the TFEB visited the border with the Russian Federation and discussed with the border guards about further development of the border area and border facilities.

On Saturday, 7th June 2014, the Regional Council of North Karelia/ Euregio Karelia hosted the AEBR Executive Committee meeting in Joensuu. In the afternoon, a videoconference was organized with stakeholders in Latin America, Africa and Europe to promote the African Borders Day as an International Day of Integration across National Boundaries.

On 8th June (Sunday) a round table was organized in collaboration with the Association of Borderland Studies (ABS) related to world-wide cross-border cooperation. From 9th to 14th June, the ABS (Association of Borderland Studies) organized its I World Conference in Joensuu and St. Petersburg. The AEBR took part in several events of the ABS.

An important initiator of activities at the external borders of the EU within the AEBR is the

Information Centre of the AEBR at the National University of Economics in Kharkiv coordinated by Mr Eduard Syromolot. The Information Centre has in particular the task to facilitate the cooperation between border regions from Ukraine, Russia and the European Union, to initiate and implement cross-border projects, to strengthen the role of local authorities while developing cross-border cooperation concepts as well as to further develop the activities of the Euroregion Slobozhanschina.

Other activities of interest were the launching event of the Carpathian Strategy Project in Nyíregyháza (Hungary) on 21st March; the study trips to Western Balkans from Kecskemét (HU) to Novi Sad, Belgrade and Pirot in Serbia on 23-26 March, and in Belgrade and Sarajevo on 24-26 September, the AEBR Forum "CBC in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea Area" held in Kavala on 27th March; the Platforma Seminar in Tbilisi (Georgia) on 14-15 May; the meeting of the CoR's CORLEAP (Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership) in Tbilisi on 29th September, and the Platforma Mediterranean Conference on 10-11 November in Rome.



## 6.5 Cross-border labour market

**In 2012 already, the AEBR paid particular attention to the subject of cross-border labour market and implemented a project supported by the EU that resulted in the elaboration of concrete proposals for the improvement of information services for frontier workers. In 2013, the Committee of the Regions approved an own opinion on the subject: Frontier workers – Assessment of the situation after 20 years of the internal market: problems and perspectives, which was presented by the President of AEBR and President of the PES Group in the Committee of the Regions, Karl-Heinz Lambertz. The AEBR was actively involved in the elaboration of this opinion.**

In 2014 as well, the AEBR was engaged in the subject of the cross-border labour market. In particular, the AEBR participated as partner in the project: „ComUnYouth“ (Combating Unemployment among Youth) which was supposed to be realized by the end of 2015. Unfortunately, the project had to be stopped ahead of time due to political reasons. A project partners' meeting was organised in Tallinn on 27th February, and some other activities were organised during the year. One of the last events in the framework of the project was the seminar: „Mobility of the labour market in cross-border regions –New possibilities and risks“ which took place on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2014 in Hamar / Norway. The seminar mainly treated the following questions: What are the biggest obstacles for the mobility of the labour market? Does the labour mobility represent a risk or a chance for the

employees? How can border regions cooperate with each other to overcome existing obstacles for the mobility of the labour market successfully? Can the mobility of the labour market be an effective instrument to prevent migration from the border regions and to motivate especially young people to stay in the border regions?

Another focus during the seminar was the subject of youth unemployment. Here, regional approaches of policy and examples of concrete measures to fight against youth unemployment were presented and discussed. Martín Guillermo Ramírez, Secretary General of the AEBR, who also participated in the seminar, presented a survey about the measures on European level and the situation in different member states of the EU.



**Stakeholders of the "ComUnYouth" project in Tallinn in February 2014**



# 7 Task Forces of AEBR

## 7.1 Task Force on External Borders

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

Main activities of the Task Force in 2014 included in particular:

- Working meeting of the Task Force on the occasion of the AEBR Executive Committee meeting in Kavala, Greece on 26th March 2014
- The seminar about the situation of border crossings at external borders of the EU on 6th June 2014 in Parikkala, Finland;
- The working meeting of the Task Force on the occasion of the AEBR General Assembly in Rzeszów on 11th September 2014;
- The AEBR Youth Forum „New Generation for EU Enlargement“ in October 2014 in Serbia.

In addition to these activities, a meeting was organized on 24th February 2014 in St. Petersburg with representatives of the Ukrainian and Russian border regions. Main subjects of the agenda were, the European Neighbourhood Programme in the new programming period 2014 –2020, the 72 hour regulations for the entry to Kaliningrad and into the Kaliningrad Region, activities of the information centre of the AEBR in Kharkiv (Ukraine) as well as the organization of the youth forum in 2014.

In 2014, the Task Force on External Borders was actively involved in the realisation of the project „Combating Youth Unemployment“. The target of the project was the improvement of the employment situation of young people in border regions in the Northern and Baltic states as well as in the North West of Russia. Here, the project should have

encouraged young people to take over an active role in fighting against unemployment and also concrete measures to be taken. To realise the objectives of the project, also companies from the Nordic and Baltic countries as well as from the North Western part of Russia were going to be involved in coping with the problem of youth unemployment. Unfortunately, the project had to be aborted at the beginning of 2015 due to different effects of the EU-Russia relationship affecting the office of the Nordic Council of Ministers in Petrozavodsk (Russian Federation) after more than one year of implementation. Several meetings were organised and an early exchange of information about patterns in the participating countries was made.



## 7.2 Task Force External Borders - Youth Forum 2014

**The European Centre for Peace and Development (ECPD) of the University for Peace established by the United Nations, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and Youth Association of Serbia (OSS) organised in cooperation with the Euroregion Nisava and Euroregion Drina from 25 to 30 October in Serbia the Youth Forum ‘New Generation for EU Enlargement.’**

The Forum was organised in coordination with the ECDP X International Conference on Reconciliation, Tolerance and Human Security in the Balkans “The new Balkans and the EU: Peace, Development, Integration.”

Analysing the situation in the Balkans and results of projects dealing with cross-border cooperation reconciliation, tolerance and human security as preconditions for maintaining peace in the Balkans, it can be concluded that, although the Balkans' capacity for changes and innovations in the area of cross-border cooperation at the local and regional level is constantly growing, there is a lack of young leaders in the border areas who can initiate and implement the cross-border projects and prepare the new generation for the EU Enlargement. Cross-border cooperation is one of the crucial factors influencing the achievements of the economic, social and territorial cohesion within Europe, especially relating to the borders between the new and the old member states, between the new member

states, as well as between the new EU member states and their neighbouring countries. For almost half century cross-border cooperation has been recognized as a very powerful tool for maintaining peace and building good neighbourly relations between the European borders.

In this context, the forum aimed at providing young people with a deeper understanding of the circumstances in which they live and to enable them to develop common initiatives and projects for assuring a positive prospect for young people in the border regions of Europe.

As a result of this Forum, the AEBR established stronger relations in Western Balkans, and opened an Information Centre in Belgrade, in coordination with the Youth Association of Serbia, shifted in 2015 to Novi Sad, at the premises that the CESC (Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives) has in the capital city of Vojvodina.



## 7.3 Task Force on Culture

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

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

In 2014, several activities of the Task Force Culture were organised. Some of the most important activities were

- 30th January 2014: Working meeting of the Task Force Culture in Brussels;
- 9th to 10th April 2014: Conference of the Task Force Culture in Padborg, Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig;
- 16th to 17th October 2014: Meeting of the Task Force Culture in the Culture Area Great Region, Eupen.

Persons working in the cultural and creative sector from different local and regional cultural scenes as well as representatives from large European cultural networks participated in the meetings of the AEBR

Task Force Culture. Good examples for the cross border cultural work have been presented and also new possibilities for cooperation have been explored. Here, it became evident that, if the creative potential of different border regions shall be brought together and be used and the access to cultures through borders shall be developed, not only persons working in the cultural sector must be brought together but also the so-called “facilitators”. These are cultural actors and representatives of cultural networks from border regions knowing at best the cultural scene but also the political and economic instruments of their regions. The Task Force Culture of the AEBR is trying to find these „facilitators“ to encourage them to bring persons from the cultural sector together with cultural projects from different border regions.





## 8 Interesting events

### 5th – 6th November 2014: Plenary Session of the Working Community of the Pyrenees in Andorra

**The Working Community of the Pyrenees held its XXXII Plenary Session on 5th and 6th November 2014 in Andorra. Main topic of this session was ‘Frontera: Territorio de Oportunidades’ (Border: A Territory of Opportunities).**

In the morning of 5<sup>th</sup> November, the Executive Committee held its meeting. The Presidents of the 8 partner regions of the Working Community met in the afternoon, followed by a press session. The second day started with a presentation of **Gilbert Saboya Sunyé**, President of the Working Community of the Pyrenees and Minister for External Affairs of the Government of Andorra, as well as President of the Andorran CBC Agency. Afterwards, the proposal for the territorial cooperation programme Spain-France-Andorra (PROGRAMA DE COOPERACIÓN TERRITORIAL ESPAÑA-FRANCIA-ANDORRA 2014-2020) was presented. The planned programme focuses mainly on improving mobility of goods and people, revitalization of the business, promotion and preservation of the environment, prevention of natural hazards and climate change issues.

AEBR Secretary General **Martín Guillermo Ramírez** was invited to take the floor in the plenary session. He thanked for having been invited and explained the long way from initial CBC actions until now, very close to commemorate 25 years of

Interreg. It has not been easy, particularly when decentralized CBC sometimes clash with the traditional concept of sovereignty and obsolete national views about the border. On the other hand, even in a United Europe still exist many obstacles for mobility across borders: small transport links, taxation, social security issues, recognition of diplomas, etc. In border areas, a Common Market is growing, but a Single Market is far from having been achieved. CB regions are laboratories of European integration, and their cooperation provide a solid base for the construction of the European House.

Some AEBR full members were represented in this Plenary: Vice-president **Francois Maitia** (Aquitaine), **Mikel Antón** (Basque Country), **Marc Carballido** (Midi-Pyrénées). Representatives of Catalonia, Aragón, Navarra and Languedoc-Roussillon also took the floor. They pointed out some of the current challenges of the CTP and several solutions: the need to reinforce business cooperation, establishing a collaborative competition, the visibility of the processes in the Pyrenees, the importance of the Pyrenean Observatory of Climate Change etc.





## 4th - 5th December 2014, Rome: ESPON Seminar "Territories Acting for Economic Growth: Using territorial evidence to meet challenges towards 2020"

On invitation of the ESPON 2013 Programme, Jens Gabbe, Chair of the AEBR Advisory Committee, took actively part on behalf of AEBR in the ESPON seminar "Territories Acting for Economic Growth: Using territorial evidence to meet challenges towards 2020", which was held on 4th and 5th December 2014 in Rome. The event was co-organised by ESPON and the Italian EU Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Jens Gabbe took part in a workshop entitled "Building and using Integrated Territorial Services" as speaker. This workshop aimed at presenting interesting strategies at regional level, for polycentric metropolitan regions and in cross-border cooperation.

Mr. Gabbe presented the ESPON Ulysses Project by highlighting conclusions and recommendations, e.g. on how targeted research projects could be managed in a better way and, on the other hand, how border and cross-border regions could put decentralised development strategies into practice. The benefit of the project for all involved partners

was evident: almost all regional specific assessments and data fact sheets were taken into account in the development of the new INTERREG A programmes or new projects. Four stakeholders even elaborated their own development strategies, based on the recommendations of the Handbook on decentralised development strategies, which is also a result of the ULYSSES project. The electronic version of the Handbook is available on request to the General Secretariat of the AEBR.

You can find more information about this event and about ESPON on the website: [www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu).



## 28th January 2014, Düsseldorf: Final conference of the INTERREG IVC project „Brain Flow“

About 90 representatives of regional and local authorities, the education and business sectors, among others also the Secretary General of the AEBR, Martín Guillermo Ramírez, came together at the final conference of the INTERREG IVC project „Brain Flow“ on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2014 in Düsseldorf to discuss best practices and recommendations on how to ensure the effective and successful retention and (re-) attraction of talents in European regions.

In his opening speech the Minister of Economic Affairs, Energy and Industry of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia Mr. Garrelt Duin highlighted the steadily advancing demographic change and the adverse effects of the increasing shortage of good qualified labour force affecting all sectors of the local and regional economy. He further emphasised the necessity to actively involve all regional and local actors and the urgency to develop well functional instruments and implement tailor-made solutions to counter the loss of highly skilled and the mismatch between the demand and supply.

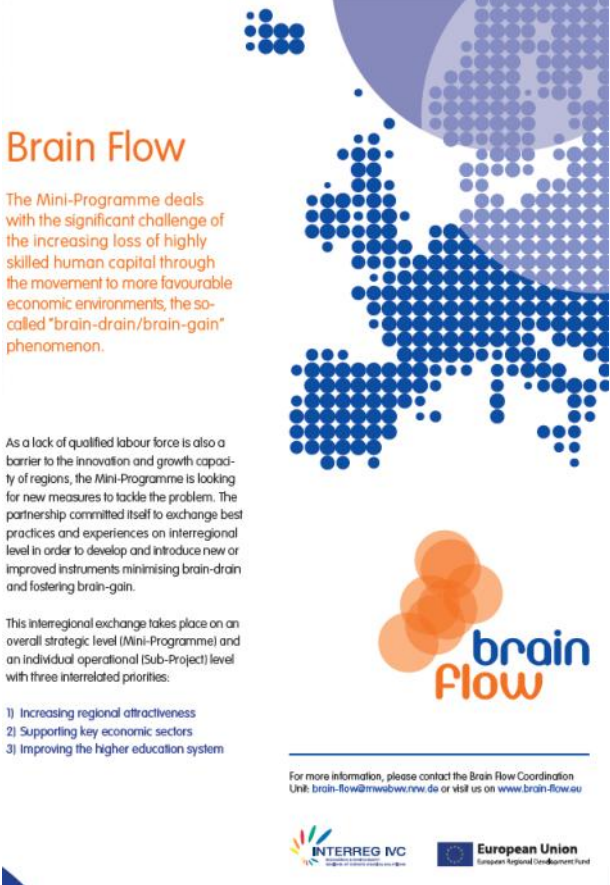
Mr. Thomas Wobben gave the Committee of the Region's (CoR) perspective on how regions can effectively learn from each other. He further shared with participants the variety of opportunities and platforms for ex-change regional actors can use.

The conference concluded with a contribution by Mr. Michel Lamblin, Programme Director for IN-TERREG IV C, who illustrated the added value of interregional cooperation and the opportunities for regions across Europe to advance this cooperation into the future.

The project „Brain Flow“ has been realised during the years 2010 to 2014. Eight regions from seven different

countries participated in the project: the province Gelderland (NL), the province Overijssel (NL), Hedmark (NO), Navarra (ES), Euroregion Nemunas (LT), Land Nordrhein-Westfalen (DE), Regio Basiliensis (CH) and Värmland (S). You will find more details about the project and its results on the website of the project:

<http://www.brain-flow.eu/>



**Brain Flow**

The Mini-Programme deals with the significant challenge of the increasing loss of highly skilled human capital through the movement to more favourable economic environments, the so-called "brain-drain/brain-gain" phenomenon.

As a lack of qualified labour force is also a barrier to the innovation and growth capacity of regions, the Mini-Programme is looking for new measures to tackle the problem. The partnership committed itself to exchange best practices and experiences on interregional level in order to develop and introduce new or improved instruments minimising brain-drain and fostering brain-gain.

This interregional exchange takes place on an overall strategic level (Mini-Programme) and an individual operational (Sub-Project) level with three interrelated priorities:

- 1) Increasing regional attractiveness
- 2) Supporting key economic sectors
- 3) Improving the higher education system

For more information, please contact the Brain Flow Coordination Unit: [brain-flow@mmsdewenw.de](mailto:brain-flow@mmsdewenw.de) or visit us on [www.brain-flow.eu](http://www.brain-flow.eu)

**INTERREG IVC**  
European Regional Development Fund

**European Union**  
European Regional Development Fund

# 9 Projects

## 9.1 L'AQUA: 'Legends and myths on water for European tourist routes'

**Project l'AQUA started on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2014. It shall run for 18 months.**

**L'AQUA focuses on the tourism potential of intangible heritage in relation to water, establishing a transnational product and route, with its regional sectors, covering in total 8 areas/countries where water and related activities play an important role in their geography and/or history. The new product will in particular take into account sagas, myths, legends and traditions associated to water.**

In this sense L'AQUA has the aim to:

Create and distribute and raise awareness of the rich intangible heritage made of local stories, legends, sagas, characters, where the project partners and other stakeholders from the tourism sector have already accumulated knowledge, and how this heritage can be further exploited for transnational touristic offers, services and products.

Give the opportunity to local communities and tourist companies and organisations and other interested parties for the incorporation and sharing of new stories, legends, sagas, characters and link these to their own tourism offer.

Create the l'AQUA network which manages the transnational product and guarantees the quality and adequacy of the touristic offer through the application and implementation of a standardised methodology and processes.

Stimulate the cooperation between SMEs (and other enterprises) from the tourism sector and with public entities, and support the creation of joint tourism offers, products and services related to myths and legends and other traditions related to water.

Enhance in every stage of the project and route public private partnership and transnational cooperation.

The project partners are:

- AEI Cluster de Turismo de Extremadura - established in Spain
- Cyprus University of Technology - established in Cyprus
- Stichting Business Development Friesland - established in The Netherlands

- Karuskose OIJ - established in Estonia
- Provincia di Terni from Italy
- Velencei-tavi Fejlesztési Nonprofit Kft - established in Hungary
- Universidad de Extremadura / RED Universidades Lectoras - established in Spain
- Partenalia aisbl - established in Belgium
- Fundacion para el Desarrollo Infotecnologico de Empresas y Sociedad - established in Spain
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen - established in Germany
- Junta de Extremadura/Consejería de Economía, Competitividad e Innovación/DG Empresa y Actividad Empresarial - established in Spain

L'AQUA webpage: <http://www.laquaroutes.com/>

L'AQUA on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Laqua/1520171544908870>

L'AQUA on Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/laquaproject>



L'AQUA

LEGENDS AND MYTHS ON WATER

## 9.2 Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Bridge

**The project Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Bridge is implemented by the member region of AEBR, the Association of the Carpathian Euroregion Poland in cooperation with the Association for Development and Promotion of Podkarpackie „Pro Carpathia.” The project is realized under the Swiss –Polish Cooperation Programme, which is a support programme from Switzerland to the enlarged European Union.**



By virtue of the international contract signed on 20 December 2007 in Berne, Switzerland has made available CHF 1 billion for nine countries that joined the European Union on 1 May 2004, including Poland. The Association of European Border Regions supports the implementation of the project as external expert. Services provided by the AEBR include in particular support and advisory services in searching for Swiss partners for the exchange of know-how and best practice as well as assistance in organizing the „Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Forum”, an international fair and conference event taking place once a year in Rzeszów, Poland.

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

and international partnership for the benefit of the growth policy.

The “Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Bridge” promotes and strengthens a rich market of the regional, traditional and ecological products of Podkarpackie, which potential is not used in a proper and sufficient way. It also facilitates establishing international cooperation and creates a possibility for local businesses to become present not only on Polish, but also on foreign markets. The final conference of the project will take place in November 2015.

In 2014, the „Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Forum” took place after the AEBR Annual Conference so that some AEBR members had the possibility to visit the forum and to become acquainted with the region. The President of the AEBR, Mr. Karl-Heinz Lambertz also participated in the opening of the Forum.





### 9.3 Cooperation EU –Latin America: Cross-Border Regional Innovation Systems

The AEBR organised in 2012 and 2013 already on behalf of the European Commission several workshops and information sessions for participants from Latin America that focused on different aspects of EU regional policy and cross-border cooperation. The aim of these seminars was to exchange experiences and to foster the dialogue between the EU and the Latin American countries. By the end of 2013 the AEBR was offered a new contract by the European Commission to organise similar events in 2014.



A group of 12 representatives from Peru and Brazil visited from 7 to 20 September following European regions: Norte de Portugal (Porto), Galicia (Spain), Kraków and Rzeszów (Carpathian Euroregion, Poland) and Extremadura (Spain).

The aim of these visits was to exchange know-how on issues related to innovation systems and cross-border cooperation, such as:

- Management of regional innovation systems and cross-border cooperation, policy monitoring and policy evaluation;
- Methods to support clusters;
- Instruments such as science and technology parks, incubators, technology centers, venture capital programs, actions in the field of energy and environment etc;
- Instruments for inclusion of micro, small and medium sized enterprises in the regional innovation systems (necessary infrastructure, integration into networks, collaborative projects etc.).

The programme of the visit was prepared jointly with all host organisations (Norte Region, the Directorate General for External Affairs of the Government of Extremadura and the Carpathian Euroregion Poland). The projects and experiences that were presented gave the participants insight into the activities and processes promoting innovation and cross-border cooperation at regional level.

This activity is part of the project “Cross-Border Regional Innovation Systems”, implemented in collaboration with “Infyde Información y Desarrollo”, with information sessions, workshops, and many other activities to implement a cross-border cluster on aquaculture at the border area between Brazil and Peru.

As a result of previous interventions, there have been many “side-effects” showing the good health of CBC in Latin America. The AEBR is following these processes with interest, and offers its expertise to a wide range of public, private and non-governmental players, following the guidelines of several EU Commission’s and Parliament’s initiatives.



# 10 Contacts with European institutions

## 10.1 Committee of the Regions

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

The AEBR participated in 2014 in several seminars and conferences organised by the Committee of the Regions. For example, the AEBR Secretary General Martín Guillermo Ramírez actively contributed to the workshop “CoR platforms and networks facing the future”, which was held on 9 December 2014 in Brussels.

Pavel Branda (Liberec, CZ), CoR Member and member of the AEBR Executive Committee and Advisory Committee, also made a presentation on the occasion of the workshop the EGTC platform. He also underlined the need to make more visible the experience with cross-border projects and initiatives, like cross-border emergency services. Cross-border cooperation is practically out of the 6th Cohesion Report, and this should be improved. In this context Mr Branda recommended the creation of a CoR Intergroup on cross-border cooperation that was officially launched in summer 2015.

Martín Guillermo Ramírez, Secretary General of the AEBR, focused in his contribution on the developments of the EGTC platform and how this platform may contribute to the CoR consultative works highlighting cross-border issues. He reminded that Europe should not only grow upstairs, but also downstairs through subsidiarity in order to get closer to citizens, and demanded a stronger coordination of institutions, platforms, networks and associations in order to be more efficient and visible, getting a stronger impact.

More information about this workshop as well as on different platforms of the CoR can be found on the CoR website:

<https://portal.cor.europa.eu/europe2020/news/Pages/CoR-platforms-and-networks.aspx>



**Meeting between CoR President Valcárcel and the Presidents of European regional associations in January 2014**

## 10.2 European Commission

**Cohesion policy is one of the most important policies of the EU, taking up more than one third of its entire budget. Only the Common Agricultural Policy is provided with more funds. Considering the difficult financial position of certain states, it is absolutely necessary that in the territorial cooperation such priorities are selected that may bring profit to the highest numbers of members, and that provide clear added value within the EU, whereby all regions shall be further on sufficiently supported.**

In 2014, the AEBR was frequently in contact with the Director General for Regional and Urban Policy in the European Commission, Walter Deffaa. He already knows the AEBR since 1988 from his work in the cabinets of the commissioners Alois Pfeiffer, Peter Schmidhuber and Monika Wulf-Mathies. In this regard, an intensive exchange of views has been developed concerning regional policy, especially cross-border cooperation. On 20 May 2014, AEBR Secretary General, Martín Guillermo Ramírez and Jens Gabbe, Chair of the AEBR Advisory Committee, met Walter Deffaa, to discuss the new EU regulations, in particular those on territorial cooperation and EGTC. In this context, territorial effects of the Europe 2020 strategy as well as the question of what kind of contribution could be rendered by cross-border cooperation were addressed. The need to maintain support for small-scale projects was also discussed.

With regard to the expected approval of programmes, AEBR presented some proposals and recommendations to ensure the necessary involvement of the regional/local level in the management as well as joint financing of projects by means of a joint bank account. Director General Deffaa stressed the need to improve the development of indicators (also cross-border indicators) in future so that results and impact of EU cohesion and regional policy could be measured.

On 18th September 2014, President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, met President of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), Michel Lebrun, together with the Presidents of seven major European Regional and Local Associations. AEBR President Karl-Heinz Lambertz attended this meeting.



**Jens Gabbe, Chairman of the AEBR Advisory Committee accompanied the delegation of the Euregio Bayerischer Wald to Brussels in April 2014**



## 10.3 European Parliament

**The AEBR cooperates closely with members of the Committee on Regional Development of the European Parliament. In May 2014, the elections to the European Parliament took place. In its constitutive meeting on 7 July 2014 the Committee on Regional Development elected Ms Iskra Mihaylova as new Chair of the Committee.**

In 2014, the AEBR contacted the spokespersons of the political groups in the Committee on Regional Development among others with regard to the publication of the 6<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report. After careful review of the 6th Cohesion Report, the AEBR has elaborated a position paper, welcoming the general direction of the report, but criticizing the quantitative and qualitative consideration of territorial cooperation. The MEPs that received the position paper of the AEBR were asked to support in the Parliament the proposals of the AEBR.

The European Parliament plays an active role as regards the strengthening of territorial cooperation. The EP has strongly defended the need to improve European territorial cooperation, particularly in the following aspects:

- ? Reinforcing European territorial cooperation as a standalone EU cohesion policy goal,

underpinned by a sound level of funding for the entire period 2014-2020;

- ? Striking the right balance for thematic concentration, to make it strong enough to be in line with the 2020 objectives, but also flexible enough to be adapted to the different needs of cross-border and transnational cooperation;
- ? Improving the management and auditing of programmes, to ensure delivery of good results.

As regards the new programming period 2014 –2020 more flexibility was introduced into the rules by the European Parliament in two ways: by concentrating 80% of the funds on four thematic objectives and leaving the remaining 20% open; and by introducing a flexibility margin of 15% for transferring resources between the cross-border and transnational strands.





## 10.4 Council of Europe. Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

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

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

On 2 December 2014, Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General of the Congress met with representatives of European

Associations of Local Authorities to assess their common priorities and identify areas of future co-operation. The meeting was dedicated in particular to the presentation of the current activities of these organisations as well as the major issues of mutual interest with a view to identifying opportunities for synergies and possible joint actions. The AEBR was represented in the meeting by the Secretary General, Martín Guillermo Ramírez. From other associations participated: Frederic Vallier, Secretary General of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) who was accompanied by Boris Tonhauser, Mathieu Mori, Secretary General of the Association of European Regions (AER) as well as Eleni Marianou, Secretary General of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPRM) and Anna Lisa Boni, Secretary General of Eurocities. Giuseppe de Vita, from the Office of the Lombardia Region in Brussels represented the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE).



# 11 Cooperation with other organisations

**Jointly organized by the Lazio Region, the CPMR Inter-Mediterranean Commission and PLATFORMA, with key collaboration and contribution of the EU Med Programme, the Mediterranean Cooperation Days were held from 10 to 12 November 2014 in Rome. Aim was the development of specific political and technical debates on different aspects concerning the future of the basin. The Mediterranean Cooperation Days brought together representatives of the European Union as well as Institutions and Assemblies from the Mediterranean area.**

AEBR Secretary General Martín Guillermo Ramírez moderated the first discussion group *"Towards a Transformation Agenda of Universal Values"* on 10 November. Guest speakers in this session were Grammenos Mastrojeni, Coordinator for Environmental Issues, Academic Cooperation, and Territorial Cooperation, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Davor Stier, Member of the European Parliament, and Carlo Rossi, Region Lazio, Head of the area in charge of decentralised cooperation.

The discussion concentrated on three main points:

1. The key political vectors for sustainable development for the Mediterranean area (economic, social and environmental dimensions) from the perspective of the EU, the regional governments and the local governments.
2. The roles local and regional authorities are having in enhancing these political vectors.

3. Key obstacles that local and regional authorities are facing in these roles and how the EU can help remove these obstacles and empower and facilitate such roles.

On the website

<http://www.medmaritimeprojects.eu/article/rome-presentation-event> you can find the full programme of the Mediterranean Cooperation Days 2014 as well as further information the numerous sessions, round tables and working groups that took place during these three days, and most presentations.

Other activities were also organised as well in the framework of Platforma, namely a seminar on Support mechanisms available to Local Authorities with recommendations to better tailor them, including those specifically from the region that come from the Neighbourhood Policy, where First Vice-President of the AEBR, Ms Ann-Sofi Backgren (Council of Ostrobothnia, Finland) and the Secretary General, as well as some experts appointed by the AEBR from Ukraine and the OSCE, took very active part.



# 12 Advisory Committee and Secretariat

## 12.1 Advisory Committee

**The AEBR Secretariat General is supported in particular by the AEBR Advisory Committee. The Executive Committee of the AEBR decided during its meeting in Salamanca in autumn 2009 to nominate Mr Jens Gabbe for the function of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee. In the meeting of the General Assembly in October 2010 the former Vice-President of AEBR, Mr Reinhold Kolck was nominated for the function of the Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Committee.**

The Chairman of the Advisory Committee nominates the members of the Committee. Due to financial reasons, the Committee consists of a small permanent circle of recognised "border experts" with Europe-wide knowledge, proved scientific activities and evaluation experiences. At the end of 2014, besides the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman, the following experts were members of the AEBR Advisory Committee: Thomas Stumm, Haris Martinos, Welf Selke, Pavel Branda, Dirk Ahner, Hans-Martin Tschudi as well as two representatives of the European Commission (DG REGIO) and one representative of the Committee of the Regions as advisory members. In particular cases further experts are invited to the meetings.

In 2014, one meeting of the AEBR Advisory Committee took place. On 21 and 22 May 2014, the AEBR Advisory Committee met in Berlin to discuss current developments

and actions to improve AEBR activities. Chairman Jens Gabbe and AEBR Secretary General Martín Guillermo Ramírez welcomed Reinhold Kolck, Welf Selke, Pavel Branda, Hans-Martin Tschudi and Thomas Stumm for this round of deliberations. The Advisory Committee discussed among others the new EU regulations. The Advisory Committee revised the Statutes of AEBR and the "Charter on border and cross-border Regions". The drafts were sent to the AEBR Executive Committee for decision.

It was also recommended by the Advisory Committee that AEBR continues and fortifies its close cooperation with European institutions and organisations, e.g. with the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, ESPON, INTERACT, Council of Europe, etc.





## 12.2 AEBR Secretariat

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

- Cordula Pandary with 20 hours per week (Communication and AEBR media)
- Marie-Lou Perou with 25 hours per week (Projects and communication)
- Petra Doods with 20 hours per week (Finances and staff)
- Anna Winkler with 18 hours per week (Projects and finances)

Ms Doods and Ms Perou left the AEBR in the beginning of the year 2015. In May 2015 Ms Simone Göcken joined the AEBR Team in Gronau.

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

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

The EUREGIO continuously supports the Secretariat General with human and material resources. Of great help is also the work of the AEBR Info Centres in Kharkiv (Ukraine) and Novi Sad (Serbia) that facilitate

the exchange of information with border regions from the Ukraine and on the Balkans. Both AEBR Info Centres were also involved in the preparation of the Youth Forum in 2014 and elaborated new project ideas. Moreover, in the year 2014 the AEBR could again use the material and human resources of the representation of the region Extremadura in Brussels.

The public relations of the AEBR are still difficult, because there is no AEBR communication officer at the moment. European-wide public relations are nearly impossible on a regular basis. Main instruments of the AEBR as regards public relations are the website ([www.aebr.eu](http://www.aebr.eu)) as well as the newflash. The AEBR uses also actively the social networks like:

- Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/Association-of-European-Border-Regions-AEBR-AGEG-ARFE-1417881991802080/timeline/>)
- and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/SocialnetAEBR>).

The AEBR shares via Facebook and Twitter information on current developments and events focusing on territorial cooperation and in particular on cross-border cooperation. The Task Force on External Borders also actively uses Facebook in order to exchange information and to share important news. The Task Force has created an own group on Facebook. On the Facebook side of the group you can for example find several recordings from the Youth Forum 2014 that were published by Mr Ricardo Santana supporting the AEBR in public relations. More videos dealing with AEBR are available also on You Tube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/AEBR1971/videos>).



# 13 Annual Accounts 2013 and 2014

## Annual Accounts 2013

Detailed plan	Revenue (€)	Expenditure (€)	Balance (€)
A. Overall administration	8.845,71	237.577,78	- 228.732,07
B. Activities	384.157,93	413.091,62	- 28.933,69
C. General financial management (without withdrawal from the reserves)	265.707,46	14.313,58	251.393,88
<b>Total</b>	<b>658.711,10</b>	<b>664.982,98</b>	<b>-6.271,88</b>
Withdrawal from the reserves	6.271,88		6.271,88
<b>Total</b>	<b>664.982,98</b>	<b>664.982,98</b>	<b>0,00</b>

## Annual Accounts 2014

Detailed plan	Revenue (€)	Expenditure (€)	Balance (€)
A. Overall administration	8.098,28	247.111,60	- 239.013,32
B. Activities	138.476,92	220.585,02	- 82.108,10
C. General financial management (without withdrawal from the reserves)	276.164,00	444, 53	275.719,47
<b>Total</b>	<b>422.739,20</b>	<b>468.141,15</b>	<b>-45.401, 95</b>
Withdrawal from the reserves	45.401,95		45.401,95
<b>Total</b>	<b>468.141,15</b>	<b>468.141,15</b>	<b>0, 00</b>

## Sources pictures

Title page (from the left): Association Carpathian Euroregion Poland, Euroregion Nestos Mesta, Johannes Moisio, Euroregion Nestos Mesta

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Page 20: Ana Nikolov, AEBR Info Center for the Balkans

Page 21: Region Sonderjylland-Schleswig (DK/DE)

Page 22: Working Community of the Pyrenees ([www.ctp.org](http://www.ctp.org))

Page 23: ESPON ([www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu))

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**The AEBR Team  
Gronau, October 2015**

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