



SAIL OF PAPENBURG
cross border award

Association of European Border Regions
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Application form "AEBR-Cross Border Award" 2011
Deadline: 31.07.2011

Please, fill in the grey gaps and return this form by e-mail!

40 YEARS AEBR – 10th CROSS BORDER AWARD:

How did your region contribute to encourage cross-border cooperation in Europe?

1. General information

1.1 Applicant border / cross-border region:

Euroregion Spree-Neisse-Bober

1.2 Title of the cross-border cooperation measure* [project(s), programme(s) / strategy(ies) (free definition of the subject: politics, culture, economy, etc.)]:

The bridge of Markosice – fire brigades unbounded!

1.3 Period:

1999 til 2011 (continuing)

1.4 Lead Partner:

Volunteer fire brigade Gross Gastrose

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1.5 Partners:

Volunteer fire brigade Markosice

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1.6. Financing of the cross-border cooperation measure (e.g. INTERREG):

Since 2003, 16 small meeting projects (total project costs 60.242,88 Euro) have been funded in the course of INTERREG 3 A and 4 A by the Small-Project-Fund of the Euroregion Spree-Neisse-Bober. The projects were applied for by both the German and Polish partners in the German agency of the Euroregion Spree-Neisse-Bober in Guben and/or the Polish agency of the Euroregion Sprewa-Nysa-Bóbr in Gubin and carried out together (see documentation for the detailed project list).

In the course of INTERREG 4 A, an application was made also concerning the funding of the investment project "Construction of a German-Polish fire brigade base Gross Gastrose through reconstruction and extension of an existing building" (total project costs 1.203.714 Euro). On this project, a decision is due to be made during the next meeting of the German-Polish steering committee in October 2011.

1.7 Links to other projects, measures and/or programmes (only if applicable):

The contacts and cooperation of the volunteer fire brigades Gross Gastrose and Markosice are part of a synchronized general concept of the territorial authorities in the border region on the German and Polish sides of the Euroregion Spree-Neisse-Bober responsible for fire protection, the districts Krosno-Odrzanskie and Zary on the Polish side and Spree-Neisse on the German side as well as the towns Zielona Góra and Cottbus as authorities dealing with environment and civil protection. The goal of the concept is the guaranty of fastest possible support with accidents, major incidents or catastrophes in the area of the Euroregion Spree-Neisse-Bober. In this way, a contribution is made to the protection of natural, cultural and infrastructural resources in the common border region through improved and raised cross-border actionability and utilizability of the units of fire and civil protection.

On the basis of an agreement of cooperation and mutual assistance in the fields of fire and civil protection as well as rescue services signed on 5th September 2008 by the districts Krosno-Odrzanskie, Zary, Zielona Góra and Spree-Neiße and the towns Cottbus and Zielona Góra, varied measures are realised. To them belong common exercises, education, a common alarm and response regime and a concept of building of cross-border supply and supplement units. During the INTERREG 3 A period, 2.5 millions Euro could be used to fund the education centre of the volunteer fire brigade in Forst (Lausitz) or for the purchase of service vehicles for the fire brigades in Spremberg, Forst (Lausitz) and Doebern as well as for the occupational fire brigade Cottbus only on the German side of the Euroregion.

2. Contents

„The bridge of Markosice“ – it is the symbol of an unusual but still usual story of two villages. Gross Gastrose and Markosice are situated on this side and on the other side of the Neisse, divided by a river and the results of the most awful of all wars. On both sides of the border live people that had been forced to leave their native places in the result of the Second World War brought upon Europe's nations by the Germans. Escape and dissipation – the people on both sides lived between hope and trepidation for decades, without meeting, without knowing about each other. But still so close that they were able to look from church tower to church tower, between them the border river and a bridge which was destroyed within the last days of the war and can't be located on any map.

Then the turn, in the big and small politics: 1999 some fire fighters from Gross Gastrose went on the way to their Polish neighbours to Markosice in order to get to know them. Since then, they have been building together, stone by stone, their very own European house, without pressure from the government, without mandated friendship, just because they wanted it themselves.

Detours were cut short unbureaucratically: the Neisse was crossed with rubber dinghies or on foot. The neighbours were visited, not always legally as the Neisse still was the border between two states. However, the borders between Germans and Polish don't exist any longer since Poland joined the Schengen Agreement on 21st December 2007. Almost over night, the bridge was made accessible, still provisionally, but in a way that shortened the distance to the other side of the Neisse. The bridge should be built up again properly. This is the dream of everyone.

Something clicked between the fire fighters and their families in Gross Gastrose and Markosice:

- Parties are celebrated together, village parties and private ones. No matter if young or old, everyone takes part, the different generations sit on one table. During common excursions, people get to know the other region with its sights and touristic highlights.
- In common competitions and exercises the German and Polish fire fighters pit their strength against and learn from each other.
- The cross-border education of the fire fighters is an important part of the cooperation too.
- Fires, which are daily occurrences in the dry pinewoods of the German-Polish border region in summer, are extinguished together. Meanwhile, the technology is compatible: German hoses fit into Polish pumps.
- During floods at the Neisse, fire fighters and citizens of both villages assist each other, help with equipment, action forces and encourage each other.
- 50 of 120 citizens from Markosice are learning the German language. In Gross Gastrose, children learn Polish in school. The language and traditions of the other partner are also subject of numerous common events.

Hardly a week goes by without someone from Gross Gastrose visiting someone in Markosice or the other way round.

The dramatic experiences of the German Polish history full of change on both sides – escape and dissipation – are overcome and have turned into friendly relations. Good neighbourhood, friendship, cooperation and mutual help in the common European house – this is the goal of the cooperation which works well on a small scale between Gross Gastrose and Markosice and reaches great achievements in the European sense.

The application for funding of the investment project “Construction of a German-Polish fire brigade base Gross Gastrose through reconstruction and extension of an existing building” in the course of INTERREG 4 has been submitted to the regional contact point of the Euroregion Spree-Neisse-Bober in Guben and should be discussed during the meeting of the common German-Polish steering committee in October 2011.

However, most of the German-Polish activities of the citizens of Gross Gastrose and Markosice work at the personal level and are prepared and realised through private initiatives. They have become daily routine in the living together in the border region.

A big investment project “Construction of a German-Polish fire brigade base Gross Gastrose through reconstruction and extension of an existing building” in the course of INTERREG 4 has been prepared and should be granted during the next meeting of the common German-Polish steering committee in October this year and then realised.

3. Contribution of the measure (added value) to the development of the border/cross-border region:
(not more than half a page)

People come together in the common Europe despite a border that had divided countries and nations for decades. In addition there comes the fateful German-Polish history characterized by dissipation and resettlement in result of the Second World War. Through the variety of common activities and events people get to know each other and after the political and state borders, the borders in their minds disappear as well. People understand their surroundings as a common one which they want to form, change and protect together.

Commonality happens in the private, village and communal life. People learn their neighbours' language and traditions.

They work together when fires have to be extinguished, during floods and in civil protection. Because: fire, water and other forces of nature don't know borders. Herewith, the cooperation of the fire fighters of Gross Gastrose and Markosice is an important part of a synchronized general concept for fire and civil protection as well as rescue services in the Euroregion Spree-Neisse-Bober. In this way, they make a long-term contribution to environment protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources in the entire German-Polish Euroregion. Young and experienced fire fighters are educated and trained together within common exercises. The technology is adjusted so that one can help the other. The purchase of new service vehicles, the extension of fire brigade bases, the revision of the common alarm and response regime and a concept of building of cross-border supply and supplement units – all this comes to the benefit of the German-Polish border region and its inhabitants over a long term. For the underdeveloped border region characterized by decline in population and demographic change, unemployment and missing industry, this kind of cooperation is essential for survival.

Especially significant for the common region is however that above all children and young people grow up with neighbourly friendly relations, learn to deal respectfully with and help each other. This European idea has already arrived in the relationship between Gross Gastrose and Markosice. It has to be cherished and further developed and can become normality between Germans and Polish in the cross-border region and all over Europe.

4. Added value for the development of cross-border cooperation at European level
(not more than half a page)

The cooperation of the fire brigades of Gross Gastrose and Markosice is a symbol for friendship and cooperation of Germans and Polish in the heart of Europe. In a very special region with a special history and present, people get closer together, live the European idea in everyday life and in special, extreme situations. What has been done here to overcome the deep ditches of a complicated German-Polish history and current problems step by step on a small scale can give an example for other European border regions.

Exemplary on the European scale is also how the personal initiative of few dedicated fire fighters developed into a long-lasting relation between two small villages, its citizens and their voluntary fire brigades. Not only the results of a dramatic common history like it exists in other European border regions too, is overcome here. Outgoing from personal contacts, resentments towards other nations and prejudices, language barriers and ignorance are overcome as well. The more people know about each other the better they will understand each other in future, the less problems will be there living together.

Additionally, people in the German-Polish border region, far away of the great metropolises and industrial centres, similar to other European border regions, have to face the global challenges of our time: unemployment, structural deficits, demographic change, decline in population in the villages and small towns, environmental problems etc. are just some keywords. Some of these problems like for example fire and civil protection can be better understood and solved together. This is exemplary also on the European level.

5. Further annexes

