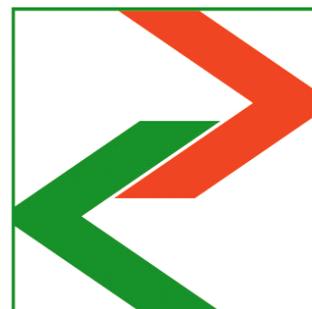


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Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
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DRAFT

**AEBR Position Paper on
the Future EU Strategy 2020
(Post-Lisbon Strategy)**

**(To be delivered to the EU Commission
up to the 15th January 2010)**

Preliminary remark

The Heads of State and Government decided in 2000 in Lisbon to turn the European Union until 2010 into the „most competitive, dynamic and knowledge-base economic area of the world“. In the year 2001; this decision was complemented in Gothenburg by the categories environment and sustainable development. The mid-term review in 2005 revealed already the need of a new orientation for the Lisbon Strategy. The current financial crisis determined the European Commission at the end of November 2009 to present a working document on the future EU Strategy until 2020 and to ask for statements.

The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the oldest European regional organization (1971), represents the interests of over a hundred European member regions and keeps a permanent dialogue with the European institutions in particular. Cross-Border Cooperation, which promotes European integration, facilitates improved cooperation at the EU external borders, and creates evidential adding value to the European process, is a European priority and a political task of the EU.

Unlike other economic areas such as the USA, the relatively small territory of the EU is trenced by a multitude of national borders. They still hinder the implementation of the aims of a consistent Economic area, a comprehensive and inclusive Labour Market, or a joint Research and Knowledge area, linking all over Europe the three sides of the “knowledge triangle” (education, innovation and research).

The AEBR, with the background of its long political and practical experience, is pleased to submit its position paper on the EU 2020 Strategy.

The Association of European Border Regions **welcomes**:

- That the current and future challenges of our society are included in the EU 2020 Strategy, namely demographic change, combating unemployment, enhancing and supporting social cohesion, increasing energy efficiency, as well as taking measures for energy savings handling by efficient use of means of production, thus saving natural resources and raw materials. European border regions are very much affected by many of these challenges.
- The three mentioned priorities:
 - Creating value through growth based on knowledge
 - Empowering people in inclusive societies
 - Creating a competitive, networked and environmentally-friendly society
- The aim to empower people in inclusive societies by enhancing social cohesion, improving the potential of education of EU citizens, and therefore, increasing equal opportunities in the labour market (measures against social dumping to be implemented in parallel).
- The measures to develop a competitive, networked, and environmentally-friendly society, while social, economic and environmental aims should closely be linked together.
- The foreseen measures to modernize transport and energy infrastructures, to decrease CO₂ emissions, to increase the security of transport and energy supplies, as well as a more efficient integration of existing transport networks and carriers.

However, after the review of the document “EU 2020 Strategy”, the AEBR has to state that, although a strategy is mentioned several times, it cannot be really distinguished what really new and strategic is. There is rather a risk of taking sectorial policies to the fore under the umbrella of a “new strategy”, throwing a successful Cohesion Policy to the back seat, and therefore neglecting the essential territorial dimension.

It is worth to mention, that in our opinion, **one of the main reasons why the Lisbon Strategy has not been very successful** so far lies in the fact that it **can not be considered as an “overall strategy” with a comprehensive perspective**. Actually, this is a **“policy-mix” favouring certain sectors while lacking the needed territorial dimension, as defined by the European Territorial Agenda**, to mention just one of the recent examples of strategic territorial approaches. The Lisbon Strategy has even failed to convert the Lisbon objectives into integrated policies at all levels of government (especially the regional and local ones).

We, as European border and cross-border regions, wonder **why the results of the standing contacts between the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions, the Structured Dialogue of the Commission with the associations of the regions and municipalities, as well as their contributions to many EU Reports and Progress Reports on the Future of Cohesion Policy are not taken into consideration.** Actually, we can see that, above all, **only those contributions referring to budgetary issues seem to be considered.** In our opinion, a budget should be **the consequence of political objectives** and should **not be the other way round.** There are many other relevant elements which should have been taken into account, especially the Barca-Report.

The measures **to be taken against the current crisis** and the **new challenges** have to **integrate strong sectorial policies** in the long term **into a coherent European Strategy**, in which the **regional and local authorities have to play a major role.**

The Association of European Border Regions (cannot recognise in the draft supplied the significance of policies for a territorially integrated development) furthermore misses the active contribution of European cities and regions to endorse the aimed strategy Post-Lisbon. European social, cultural and economic diversity, historically conditioned in a small territory, has to be faced as a great potential to be better exploited and developed thanks to the Post-Lisbon Strategy. This applies especially to regions and cities near the EU internal borders. This Post-Lisbon Strategy could be effectively implemented through joint actions of local and regional actors based on adjusted cross-border development concepts. European current challenges can rather be faced more flexibly and accurately by means of a common strategic development framework, which should give scope to the European regional diversity; than by a centrally organized allocation of funds, e. g. in policy areas like transport, energy or research.

For this reason, the Association of European Border Regions asks to take into account the following recommendations in the following deliberations to elaborate a Post-Lisbon Strategy.

- An enlarged EU needs territorial cohesion and a **consistent implementation of the bottom-up principle** with due regard to subsidiarity and partnership, and **participation of all actors.**
- The **Territorial Agenda** clearly **requests** that it is **necessary to coordinate** not only the **member states policies**, but also the **EU-policies and between both.**
- Therefore, a coherent and long-term policy must include **all essential areas of EU policies** and guarantee a better coordination between them than in the past: territorial planning, cohesion, regional, agricultural and social policies, etc.
- The **sectorial policy areas** of the EU have to be **better synchronised**, taking into account the **territorial dimension.**
- One European priority is to ensure its cohesion and regional policy to define **strategic guidelines** and secure the **strategic coherence of programmes.** All other important matters should be realized by the regional and/or local level in partnership with the national and European levels and the social partners.

- Territorial cohesion offers the **opportunity** to **strengthen** the role of **regional and local authorities** and **other actors** in the implementation of the EU-policies.
- **Territorial cooperation** in connection with **spatial planning** at European level **contributes to territorial cohesion** and **helps to solve the spatial fragmentation of the EU**, the inconsistencies and the lack of coherence caused by national differences. Only then, **new challenges** like climate change, ageing of society, and coherence of renewable primary products to be used for food and energy (close connection between territorial and cohesion policies) **can be better faced**.
- Within territorial cooperation, **cross-border cooperation** should obtain **first political priority further on**, and remain a political objective by itself which should be strengthened.
- Cross-border cooperation is mostly affected by territorial cohesion. If there is **no cohesion along the European borders** then it would be very **difficult** to realize European **integration** and **territorial cohesion as a whole**.
- **The regions**, i.e. the regional and territorial component of the Cohesion and Structural Policy, should be granted a fair significance in the Post-Lisbon Strategy.
- **The cities – not only big ones but also small towns in rural areas** – as engines of European economic, social and cultural development, must be assigned a major role to implement such Post-Lisbon Strategy. If European municipalities and regions could place their potentialities in the new European strategy, this should be seen clearly in line with the Principle of Subsidiarity. On the contrary, with the “EU Territorial Agenda” and the “Leipzig Charter for Sustainable Urban Development”, the responsible European ministers jointly with the European Commission, have already provided the route to follow.
- Border regions at the internal borders of the EU have played an important pioneering role up to now in the process of European integration. Therefore they should be granted a higher significance in the aimed Post-Lisbon Strategy. Cross-Border Cooperation can sustainably foster the main objectives of this new strategy through a qualitative “jump” because their potentialities have not been exploited by far. It is about cross-border research, development & innovation, healthcare or regional transport networks. Furthermore, the enlargement of the Schengen area to the EU old external and new internal borders creates completely new requirements, and they should be taken into account. So, the Post-Lisbon Strategy will that why appeal border regions within the EU, and prepare them for the new cooperation possibilities.