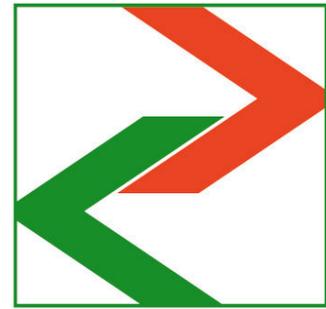


Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab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



"PARTNERSHIP IN A EUROPE WITHOUT BORDERS"

Electronic Newsletter of AEBR – December 2007

This Newsletter of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) will be published quarterly in order to inform the border regions and its friends about the latest news of AEBR, the cooperation in European border and cross-border regions as well as the cooperation with other European institutions and associations.

It is edited in English, French and German.

Introduction

2007 – A successful year for cross-border cooperation

The year 2007 brought about important milestones for cross-border cooperation. The Treaty of Lisbon signed in December strengthened the position of regions in the EU and offers a good legal basis for the future support of all border regions. The opening of the Schengen Agreement means great advantages for many Europeans, especially the citizens in border areas. The DG REGIO of the European Commission has opened the discussion on the future (after 2013) of the EU Cohesion Policy. Also the AEBR participates in this dialogue and has reached till now that "cross-border cooperation" is still being considered within these discussions.

During its Annual Conference the AEBR encouraged discussions on innovation in rural cross-border areas and worked out very good objectives and measures. In December the project "RFO – Change on Borders", which is based on an idea of the AEBR, has been finished successfully. Together with the Committee of the Regions the deliberations on the further development of the EGTC have been intensified. In general the AEBR cooperated very well with the other regional organisations at European level and strengthened this cooperation. The publication "Cooperation between European Border Regions - Review and Perspectives" (originally drafted as white paper) has been finalised. The planned date of publication for the German and English versions is March 2008.

The Treaty of Lisbon

The "Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community" has been signed on 13 December 2007 in Lisbon. It contains, especially with the Articles 2 (Aims) and 158 (Economic, social and territorial cohesion), important legal bases for the future support of all border regions in Europe.



Source: The Council of the European Union

Further Information on the Treaty of Lisbon, as well as the text of the Treaty itself, are available on the website of the Council of the European Union: <http://consilium.europa.eu> .

Freedom of travel within the EU opened to 24 states in total – a triumph of freedom!

Since 21 December 2007 400 million citizens enjoy freedom of travel within the EU. Already in 1995 the Schengen Agreement abolished border controls in 15 European countries. This includes also border controls at the borders of the two non-EU countries: Norway and Iceland. With the opening of the borders to many Central and Eastern European member states now the border controls are abolished for nine further countries: Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia and Malta. With the abolishment of the controls between old and new EU member states, a very early aspiration of the AEBR has been met: the border regions at the borders concerned have celebrated this "historic moment" as a "triumph of freedom"!

The future of European Cohesion Policy

In connection with the "4th Cohesion Forum" Commissioner Danuta Hübner has started a public consultation on the future of EU Cohesion Policy in September 2007. The aim of the Cohesion Forum and the consultation is to gather ideas and contributions on how the EU Cohesion Policy could be adapted to the new challenges, how its results could be improved in order to maximise its impact in the future. Further information is available on the following website: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.htm.

Within this subject area the AEBR is focussing especially on cross-border cooperation. Therefore the AEBR has published a draft discussion paper on "the future of cross-border cooperation". The paper shall be developed further in close cooperation with the Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the border regions. It contains political, economic and socio-cultural arguments as well as suggestions for improvement. The AEBR has sent this discussion paper to its members and will soon publish an updated version on its website after receiving feedback and comments. Till now especially the chances for border regions through improved cooperation have not

received enough attention. There is substantial potential for development through cross-border cooperation.

The AEBR has made a short summary of the 4th Cohesion Report. It emphasises the importance of the report and gives indications on its direct significance for the future approach of the AEBR. The discussion paper and the summary of the 4th Cohesion Report are available upon request from the AEBR Secretariat General. The Fourth report on social and economic cohesion is available here:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion4/pdf/4cr_en.pdf.

Participation in Dialogue Meetings

In November and December 2007 the AEBR has been represented in two meetings of the Structured Dialogue between the European Commission and the Associations of Regional and Local Authorities. Konstantinos Tatsis, member of the AEBR Executive Committee, took part in the dialogue meeting with the Vice-president of the Commission Margot Wallström on 29. November 2007 about the Commission Legislative and Work Programme 2008. In his question he was focussing on the special needs of (rural) border areas, and the particular case of external EU borders.



On 18 December 2007 Lambert van Nistelrooij, President of the AEBR, addressed the Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner regarding the Communication between DG RELEX, national ministries of foreign affairs and border regions at EU external borders. The topic of the dialogue meeting was „The regional and local dimension of the Neighbourhood Policy“.

The contributions to the meetings are published here:

<http://www.cor.europa.eu/document/activities/associations/QUESTIONS%20MORNINGSESSION.pdf>

http://www.cor.europa.eu/de/activities/meeting_dialogue_waldner.htm .

Comments by the AEBR on the INTERREG IVC Programme Manual by EU Commission

On 25 September 2007 the Commission published the INTERREG IVC Programme Manual. The Secretariat General of the AEBR made a summary of its main elements and commented on it. The aim of this summary is to familiarize the partners in the border and cross-border regions with the main elements of the new INTERREG IVC Programme on interregional cooperation. The summary and commentary can be requested from the AEBR Secretariat General. The Programme Manual is available on this website:

http://www.interreg4c.net/load/2007-09-26_IVC_Programme_Manual_Final.pdf.



*Lappeenranta (FIN)
Source: Regional Council of South Karelia*

AEBR General Assembly and Annual Conference 2007

On 13-15 September 2007 the General Assembly and Annual Conference of AEBR took place in Lappeenranta (South Karelia, Finland). The Executive Committee meeting and the following General Assembly dealt with the internal organisation of the AEBR, its main topics and future events.

The "Yaroslavna" Euroregion (RUS/UA) joined the AEBR as new member.

Main topics of the Annual Conference were: The new Neighbourhood Policy of the EU and Innovative solutions for rural cross-border areas.

The new Neighbourhood Policy of the EU

The discussions on the new Neighbourhood Policy of the Community on the first day of the conference was opened by Emma Udwin, Member of the Cabinet of the EU-Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy that explicated tasks, objectives and challenges of the European Neighbourhood Policy from the point of view of the European Commission. The position and expectations of the Finish and Russian government as regards the future Neighbourhood Policy and cross-border cooperation were briefly presented by Paavo Väyrynen, Minister of Foreign Trade and Development (FIN) and Sergey Miroshnikov, Representative of the Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation (RUS).

The event and the documents developed by the AEBR have been very useful for the establishment of the AEBR Task Force "External Borders". Further articles in this newsletter report on the activities of this Task Force.



*Paavo Väyrynen, Minister of Foreign Trade and Development (FIN)
Source: Regional Council of South Karelia*

Innovative solutions for rural cross-border areas

The second day of the conference focused on the subject: "Innovative solutions for rural cross-border areas." Several regional representatives reported on their experiences and presented some successful projects in rural areas, here also the winner of this year's Award "Sail of Papenburg" the Euregio Rhine-Waal.

On the development of rural areas the AEBR developed trendsetting and for the border regions very helpful papers. They address the European, national and also regional level. The result of the conference is a working paper on the best support of rural areas through EU funds in border areas which points out that next to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) also the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) are available for cross-border activities and cross-border projects in rural areas.

The mentioned documents are available upon request from the AEBR Secretariat General.

Award "Sail of Papenburg" 2007

During the AEBR Annual Conference 2007 the Award "Sail of Papenburg" 2007 has been awarded to the Euregio Rhein-Waal. The winner received the Award from Lambert van Nistelrooij (MEP), President of the AEBR and Mr Reinhold Kolck, Vice President of the AEBR. The patrons of the award 2007 are the President of the Committee of the Regions, Michel Delebarre, and the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering. The motto of the Award 2007 is "Innovative concepts and projects for the development of rural areas in Europe's Border Regions 2006 and 2007-2013". During the OPEN DAYS in Brussels the winner, the Euregio Rhein-Waal, and the winning project have been presented to the public during a press

The Award "Sail of Papenburg" is being endowed by the Ems Dollart Region and awarded yearly. It is the only European Award for outstanding achievements in cross-border cooperation and is neither connected to EU membership nor to membership in the AEBR. Information on the Award "Sail of Papenburg" 2008 (topic, application etc.) will most probably be available in May 2008.



Acknowledgement

The AEBR would like to thank the Regional Council of South Karelia and the Municipalities of Lappeenranta and Imatra, as well as the city of Vyborg very much for their warm welcome in their very interesting border region. The AEBR also acknowledges the strong effort made by our Finnish partners to make this event a great success.

Final Conference of the RFO-project "Change on Borders"

More than 150 participants attended the Final Conference of the RFO-project "Change on Borders" that took place on 23 October 2007 in Düsseldorf (North Rhine-Westphalia). While opening the conference the Minister of Economic Affairs and Energy of the State North Rhine-Westphalia, Christa Thoben, welcomed all regional representatives participating in the conference, of which many were involved in the implementation of the RFO-project. She underlined the importance of interregional cooperation within INTERREG IIIIC from the point of view of North Rhine-Westphalia that benefited in manifold ways from the exchange of ideas and concepts.

INTERREG is a "truly European programme" stressed Colin Wolfe, representative of the European Commission (DG Regio), as it brings people together from all over Europe. The strand C plays a special role, which is the interregional exchange of knowledge and ideas. Due to a stronger focus on the objectives of Lisbon and Gothenburg agenda in the new programming period 2007-2013 the INTERREG IVC has become also an important element of the new EU-initiative "Regions for Economic Change."

How important the comparison and exchange of ideas with other regions is, was repeatedly stressed by the participating partners in conversations during the conference and the panel discussion in the afternoon. Now the challenge is to use the gained experiences and created partnerships for the benefit of border and cross-border regions in a sustainable way.

25 European border regions were involved in the RFO-project "Change on Borders" that officially started in September 2003. AEBR actively supported the implementation of the project in its function as RFO-Helpdesk.

For more information please see: www.change-on-borders.net



Main topics for the AEBR in 2008

Cross-border cooperation between universities and research institutes

Cross-border cooperation between universities and research institutes will be the AEBR annual topic 2008. Till now a forum in the region Friuli Venezia Giulia is planned for 3 April 2008, and another forum in autumn 2008 at the Regionalverband Südlicher Oberrhein. The topic will also be dealt with during the AEBR Annual Conference on 16-17 October 2008 in Plauen (D).

Cross-border Health

In 2007 the AEBR Task Force „Cross-border Health“ has been founded with Martin Eurlings (Euregio Meuse-Rhine) as Coordinator. During its first meeting the AEBR members have been very much interested in this subject area. Therefore the AEBR Task Force started a survey in order to get to know the activities, expectations, needs etc. of their members. Next to that, the first newsletter of this Task Force has been published. This work will be continued in 2008.

The first event of the Task Force “Cross-border Health” will be the conference “European Cooperation in the Health Sector” (AEBR Forum II) on 22 February 2008 in Basel (<http://www.regbas.ch/files/Gesundheitskongress220208.pdf>). It will be organised in cooperation with the REGIO BASILIENSIS. The conference deals among other things with patient mobility. On this the EU Commission is working on a draft proposal for a directive, which has not been published yet. The role of the AEBR in this debate will also be dealt with during the conference.

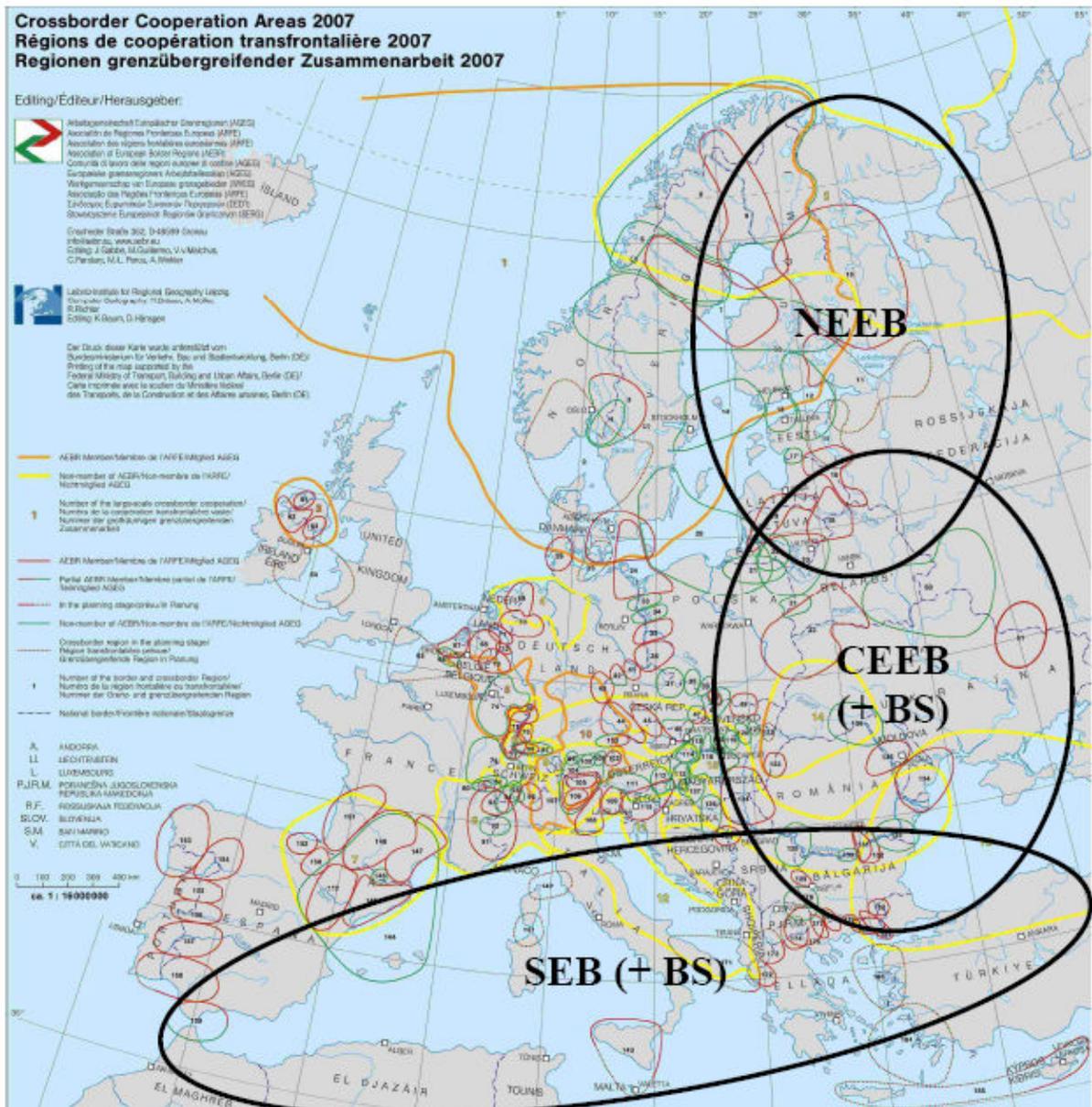
Cross-border cooperation at EU external borders

The Task Force „External Borders“, coordinated by Urpo Moisio (Regional Council of South Karelia), is the second AEBR Task Force created in 2007. The aims of this Task Force are training (especially at the external side of the border), exchange of best practice examples, capacity building, looking for different/new instruments, monitor developments in the implementation of the EU regulation into national laws, the inclusion of non-EU members in the EGTC, research on the situations in the different regions at external borders and looking for instruments/approaches that take into account the different levels of development. This AEBR Task Force decided to make a geographical subdivision of the Task Force (see map):

- Regions in the North East (NEEB, Northern Eastern External Borders)
- Regions in the East (CEEB, Central Eastern External Borders;and BS, Black Sea)
- Regions in the South (SEB, Southern External Borders)

Its first event was the AEBR Forum “The Current Questions of the Border Areas at the new EU External Borders” in Nyíregyháza, Carpathian Euroregion, Hungary on 29 November 2007. The next event, the AEBR Forum “Cooperation in the Mediterranean Area and EGTC” will take place on 13 March 2008 in the Region Sicily.

Border regions interested in the work of one of these two Task Forces could contact the AEBR Secretariat General.



AEBR Forum “The Current Questions of the Border Areas at the new EU External Borders”

On 29 November 2007 the AEBR Forum “The Current Questions of the Border Areas at the new EU External Borders” took place in Nyíregyháza, Carpathian Euroregion, Hungary. The event has been organised by the AEBR Task Force “External Borders” and the Carpathian Euroregion. The latter comprises regions of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine and Romania.

The participants, mainly coming from external borders of the European Union, discussed the possibilities of the new European Neighbourhood Policy to develop cross-border cooperation at external borders. The situation of the Carpathian Euroregion was analysed in detail as one example of dealing with the challenge of cross-border cooperation at the external borders of the EU.

Next to the general difficulties of cross-border cooperation the participants identified a further obstacle for regions at external borders. Unlike regions within a country or those situated at borders within the EU, the regions cooperating across external borders are involved in external relations of the EU. This includes different departments and ministries and increases the bureaucratic burden. This issue has also been raised by the AEBR, represented by its President Mr Lambert van Nistelrooij (MEP), at the Structured Dialogue meeting with EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner (External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy) that took place on 18 December 2007.

AEBR Executive Committee Meeting in Nyíregyháza

On 30 November - 1 December 2007 the last meeting of the AEBR Executive Committee took place in Nyíregyháza, Carpathian Euroregion, Hungary. Among other things the members of the Executive Committee dealt with the following topics: the future EU Cohesion Policy, INTERREG IVC, cross-border cooperation between universities and research centres, cross-border health, cross-border cooperation at external borders and EGTC. The AEBR welcomes the Lviv Regional State Administration (UA) and the Ipeľ-Ipoly Euroregion (SK/HU) as new members. During the second day of the meeting the members of the Executive Committee took part in a study visit to the Hungarian-Ukrainian border at Záhony (transport center) and visited the cities Munkachevo, Bereghevo and Uzhgorod where they learned about the current cross-border activities in the area.

The AEBR would like to thank the Carpathian Euroregion and its organizing team in Nyíregyháza for the excellent preparation of the Executive Committee Meeting and the AEBR Forum.

Strategic Alliance AEBR – EURO-MOT

During the meeting "Cross-border territories: Day to day Europe" organized in November 2007 in Lille, France, by the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, both organisations signed a strategic alliance agreement within the framework of the constitution of the EURO-MOT. The document has been signed by the President of the AEBR Mr Van Nistelrooij (MEP) and the President of the EURO-MOT Mr Pierre Mauroy, former French Prime Minister.

Main Events 2008

25/01/2008	"50 Years European Integration – 50 Years EUREGIO", EUREGIO, Rheine
22/02/2008	Forum "European Cooperation in the Health Sector ", Basel
13/03/2008	Forum "Cooperation in the Mediterranean Area and EGTC", Region Sicily
14-15/03/2008	AEBR Executive Committee Meeting, Region Sicily
03/04 2008	Forum "Cooperation between Universities", Region Friuli Venezia Giulia
June 2008	AEBR Executive Committee Meeting, Euroregion Evros-Maritsa-Meric, Samothrace Island
7-10/10/2008	Open Days, Brussels
16-17/10/2008	AEBR Executive Committee Meeting, AEBR General Assembly and Annual Conference, EUREGIO EGRENSIS, Plauen
28-29/11/2008	Executive Committee Meeting, EUREGIO, Osnabrück

Decorations

At the beginning of the AEBR Executive Committee Meeting on 30 November 2007 in Nyíregyháza (Carpathian Euroregion) the President of the AEBR Lambert van Nistelrooij (MEP) announced that in the last months three members of the AEBR Executive Committee received high decorations:

On 10 October 2007 the President of the EUREGIO and Treasurer of the AEBR Frans Willeme has been decorated by the German Federal President Horst Köhler with the Federal Cross of Merit;

On 6 November 2007 the former Secretary General and now Honorary Member of the AEBR, Jens Gabbe, received in Strasbourg the "Ordre National du Mérite" of the French Republic;

On 22 November 2007 Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands decorated the Vice-President of the AEBR, Dr Reinhold Kolck, with the "Orde van Oranje Nassau".

The President and the AEBR Executive Committee congratulate them on these high decorations.

Greetings

The President, the Secretary General, the editors of the newsletter and the whole AEBR thank all members and friends of the AEBR for the good cooperation in 2007 and wish everybody a happy and successful year 2008!