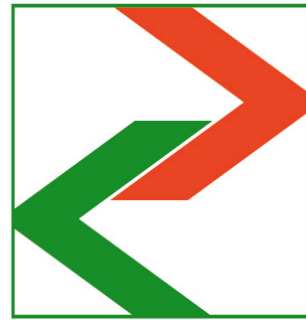


Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)  
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)  
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)  
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)  
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)  
Europæiske grænseregioners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

---



# ***ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN BORDER REGIONS (AEBR)***

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2004**

## CONTENTS

1. Introduction .....	3
2. Member structure .....	4
3. Membership fees .....	5
4. AEBR General Assembly and Annual Conference 2004.....	7
4.1 General Assembly.....	7
4.2 Annual Conference .....	11
4.3 Bestowal of the AEBR AWARD 2004.....	13
5. Executive Committee.....	14
6. Main themes 2004.....	15
6.1 European cohesion and regional policy (incl. future of cross-border cooperation) 15	
6.2 EU legal instrument on decentralised cross-border cooperation.....	18
6.3 Review of the Trans-European networks .....	18
6.4 New framework for the assessment of lesser amounts of state aid .....	19
6.5 RFO Change on Borders .....	20
6.6 Daily border problems in Europe.....	21
7. Contact with European bodies .....	22
8. Future work content and other affairs of the General Secretariat.....	24
9. General Secretariat .....	25

## **1. Introduction**

The year 2004 was of fundamental importance to cross-border cooperation and to AEBR.

The EU set the decisive course for the period 2007 – 2013 by presenting draft regulations concerning European cohesion and regional policy, the legal instrument on decentralised territorial cooperation, and the neighbourhood and partnership as well as pre-accession programmes.

For AEBR, the following was of particular significance:

- Last-minute retention of cross-border cooperation in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe;
- Territorial cooperation – and with it also the cross-border cooperation – were given a political significance, which means that they remain a political EU priority;
- The creation of an EU legal instrument on decentralised territorial cooperation will prospectively lead to a legal guarantee for cooperation;
- The cooperation at the future external borders and at the borders to accession countries does not lead to disadvantages for border regions within the EU.

Three important questions had to be solved within AEBR:

- Who will become the new President?
- Where will be the seat of AEBR?
- Who will succeed the Secretary General?

Joan Vallvé, who had been AEBR President and Member of the European Parliament for many years, was not re-elected to the European Parliament and therefore had to give up the presidency. A competent successor was found with Lambert van Nistelrooij, MEP.

Important steps were taken with regard to the seat and the succession of the Secretary General.

Also in the course of the year 2004, AEBR dealt with regularly recurring issues of cross-border cooperation as well as current themes in Europe and their effects on cross-border cooperation. The study „Towards a new Community Legal Instrument facilitating public law based Trans-European Cooperation among Territorial Authorities in the European Union“ was finalised and submitted to the EU. The INTERREG IIIC project „RFO Change on Borders“ deployed its manifold activities.

## **2. Member structure**

By the end of 2004 / beginning of 2005, AEBR had 92 members representing more than 200 border regions all across Europe. The difference between the number of members and the number of border regions is due to the fact that cross-border regions comprise several national border regions. Furthermore, large-area cooperation structures such as ARGE Alp, Alps Adria, Nordic Council, Carpathian Euroregion etc. include border regions in several states as members.

The membership structure reveals a balanced ratio of border/cross-border regions in both the present EU and the associated countries. As up to now, AEBR has the position that its area of operation ends, for the time being, at the new EU external borders (including the neighbouring regions in Russia, Belarus, the Ukraine and Moldova). The present number of staff and the current membership fees are just sufficient to handle this area of operation in terms of workload, content and financing.

Between 01.01.2004 – 31.12.2004, the following new members were admitted:

Hedmark Fylkeskomune (Norway)  
Euregio Pskov-Livonia (Latvia/Lithuania/Russia)  
Euregio Danube-Körös-Maros-Tisza (DKTM) – (Hungary/Romania/Serbia&Montenegro)  
Kommunalverband Skåne (Sweden) as part of Euroregion Pomerania

### 3. Membership fees

The AEBR membership fees are as follows:

I.	Larger organisations comprising several large regions	8.000 Euro
II.	Regions	
	a) according to the definition of the EU and the Council of Europe the first stage below the national state (large regions)	4.000 Euro
	b) border regions (below IIa) as regional/local structures	1.500 Euro
III.	Cross-border Structures	Addition of the relevant national contributions per border region according to IIa) + b)
IV.	Observers	500 Euro

**The following applies to border regions in Central and Eastern Europe outside the EU:**

- Border regions with direct EU borders are considered to be in a position to pay the complete membership fees as specified above.
- Border regions at borders between EU candidate countries and to NIS countries pay 2/3 of the membership fees specified above.
- Border regions in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria pay 50% of the membership contributions specified above.
- Concrete periods for the temporary reduction of the contribution for Central and Eastern European members shall be fixed for each individual border region.

Most of the up-to-now unclear issues on the status and the membership fee rate of the individual national partners of a cross-border region could be settled. However, it has to be stated that the auditors and the treasurer complain about a bad moral with regard to effecting payments, which results in high outstanding amounts for the past years and in the present year to delays of 6 - 9 months.

AEBR's annual budget amounts to € 400.000. The travel expenses amount to approx. € 60.000 per year.

The personnel (Secretary General, 1 full-time employee, 1 employee working 2/3, 1 accountant working 50 %, 1 full-time employee for an EU - project) is extremely short-staffed.

The AEBR is one of the five big European organisations representing regional and local authorities. Both the EU and the Council of Europe frequently invite the AEBR on an equal footing with the other organisations. Therefore, AEBR has to render corresponding services.

In order to enable an approximate comparison, the following information on two other European organisations is given:

Annual budget:	€ 1,8 Mio.	€ 2,3 Mio.
Travel expenses:	more than € 200.000	more than € 130.000
Staff members:	21	16

The membership fees are approximately 4 times higher than the fee rates of AEBR.

## **4. AEBR General Assembly and Annual Conference 2004**

### **4.1 General Assembly**

In 2004, the AEBR General Assembly and the Annual Conference were held in Szczecin/Poland, Euroregion Pomerania (D/PL) on October 7 and 8. More than 210 participants from 26 states attended this event. The event was very well prepared and organised by Euroregion Pomerania.

The General Assembly mainly dealt with the Annual Report, the Annual Accounts 2003, the budget for 2005 and the elections of the Executive Committee members.

In his address, the President looked back over his last eight years in office. He said that for him, this was a special General Assembly. After eight years he was stepping down as President of AEBR after losing his political mandate in the European Parliament. Back in 1985, as a representative of the Catalan government he had worked with AEBR, the President at the time being Dr Ahrens and the Association being run by Mr Hausmann. During his time with the Association he had come to appreciate, in particular, the work done by Dr Briener, Dr von Malchus and Mr Gabbe. In those days, German had been AEBR's only official language. Comparing that situation with the present-day structure of AEBR's members and the wide variety of languages used, the great strides that had been made could not be praised to highly.

Dr Ahrens had nominated Mr Vallvé to succeed him as AEBR President and in 1996, the year of AEBR's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Rheine/EUREGIO, Mr Vallvé had been elected. He recalled that in 1995, AEBR had been the first European regional organisation to hold a General Assembly in one of the accession countries, indeed in Szczecin, where the General Assembly was now meeting once again almost 10 years later. Since these two General Assemblies in Szczecin, a number of important decisions had been taken during his presidency.

For many decades, AEBR had been involved in the work of the Council of Europe and the European Union. Mr Vallvé recalled the seven conferences on cross-border cooperation held by the Council of Europe, the most recent having taken place in Timisoara in October 1999. Particularly noteworthy at EU level was the consideration given to cross-border cooperation first in the Amsterdam Treaty and subsequently in the European Constitutional Treaty, as well as the continued importance of territorial cooperation and, alongside it, cross-border cooperation as European priorities (despite the fact that the number of Community Initiatives over the period up to 2006 had been reduced from 13 to four and that from 2007 onwards, there would be only three priorities). AEBR had always underlined the importance of regional and spatial-development policy in Europe. In the future, it would be important to continue supporting all border regions since all continued to face a number of problems. Cross-border cooperation was not considered a national priority, but was above all an extremely important aspect of EU integration. He highlighted the importance of a new legal instrument, for which AEBR had laid the foundations in its study submitted to the European Commission.

AEBR currently had close to 90 members representing almost 200 border regions throughout Europe. The EU itself had grown in size, from 15 to 25 Member States. At the same time, the proportion of the Union covered by border regions had increased from 36% to over 42%, and the percentage of the population living in border regions had risen from 27% to 32%.

Mr Vallvé thanked his predecessor, Dr Ahrens, and all the members of the Executive Committee for their loyalty, and commended the Secretariat General for their solid cooperation. He also hoped that his successor, Mr Lambert van Nistelrooij would receive the same valuable support. Mr van Nistelrooij was a member of the European Parliament and its Regional Policy Committee. He also had many decades of experience working in the field of cross-border cooperation and regional policy.

Mr Vallvé wished AEBR every success in the future and in overcoming the major challenges facing the Association with respect to both the EU's former internal borders, its new external borders and the maritime borders of the Mediterranean. He emphasised the need to maintain contacts outside Europe, citing as an example the links forged with FUNPADEM (the Foundation for Peace and Democracy) in Costa Rica and in Africa. He concluded his address with a quotation from an article written by Dr Ahrens entitled *Freundschaft über die Grenzen* (Friendship Across Borders): "The border regions are the cement used to build the house of Europe. The success of such cross-border cooperation is vital if we are to establish a solid union. In this sense, the future of Europe still depends on its former borders."

In his address, Mr Schelberg thanked the President for his tireless and fruitful efforts on behalf of all the members during his eight years at the top of the Association of European Border Regions. He recalled that Mr Vallvé had played an active role in the Association long before being appointed to the Executive Committee. He had enjoyed many successes during his eight years as President of AEBR, though Mr Schelberg did not intend to list them all, preferring instead to honour at the President as a person. Mr Vallvé had, he pointed out, always acted fairly in his work on the Executive Committee and in the General Assembly, had sought out compromises and in so doing had remained mindful of the interests of all parties. At the same time, when necessary he had also demonstrated decisive leadership. In this respect, his knowledge of various languages had certainly been extremely useful. Mr Schelberg said he had always marvelled at the ease with which Mr Vallvé had been able to switch between different languages depending on who he was talking to. This ability had helped to establish mutual understanding and a climate of trust during discussions. Furthermore, the President had also put forward persuasive arguments to successfully represent AEBR's interests at the highest level in negotiations with the EU (the President of the European Commission, Commissioners Wulf-Mathies and Barnier and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe) and with the European Parliament's Regional Policy Committee.

The results of the Spanish elections to the new European Parliament meant that Mr Vallvé could no longer continue as President of AEBR. Both Mr Vallvé himself and the Executive Committee would have preferred him to stay on, and the situation was very difficult for all concerned. But that feeling too reflected the esteem in which Mr Vallvé was held and indicated how highly his work was valued. Mr Schelberg wished Mr Vallvé and his family every success in the future.

The Secretary-General thanked Mr Vallvé for his 20 years of personal cooperation with AEBR. Together with Galicia, Mr Vallvé had opened the door to Spain and its many fascinating border regions, which were today a pillar of AEBR cooperation. As a representative of Catalonia, he had served in various capacities on AEBR's Executive Committee and set out several markers, e.g. initiating the first AEBR General Assembly held in Spain in 1988 and opening a branch office in Catalonia. In 1996, when a successor was needed for President Ahrens, extensive discussions with Mr Vallvé in Brussels convinced him to stand as a candidate. As the first Spanish President of AEBR, Mr Vallvé had succeeded in linking Southern Europe and its border regions into AEBR. During his presidency, the Association had more than doubled its membership.



The adoption of the Salamanca Paper in 1997 and the foundations laid for territorial cooperation in 2000 had been particularly important. Both documents had been extremely influential on today's European policy on structural funds. Mr Vallvé had publicised AEBR's objectives in the European Parliament, the European Commission and on countless visits to individual border regions. He had taken a strong personal interest in border regions and cross-border cooperation and had worked to promote them with skill, political acumen, humanity and great eloquence. The Secretary-General thanked him personally and on behalf of his colleagues at the Secretariat General for his loyal cooperation.

The Secretary-General had hoped that in two years' time Mr Vallvé would have been announcing his, the Secretary-General's, retirement but the situation had now been reversed. He expressed his profound regret at seeing Mr Vallvé stepping down and said that AEBR had been extremely fortunate to have had Mr Vallvé as its President.

Afterwards, Mr. Schelberg addressed the audience and suggested that Mr. Joan Vallvé be appointed Honorary President of AEBR:

“Mr. Joan Vallvé, who had served as President of the AEBR for 8 years (1996–2004) had with his political mandate of a Minister of the Region of Catalonia and as Member of the European Parliament significantly influenced the development of cross-border cooperation in Europe: In his function as Member of the European Parliament, above all in the committee of regional policy and external relations, he paved decisively the way for European Structural Funds, European Community Initiatives, the enlargement of the EU, etc. He focused the political interest again and again on particular concerns, problems and chances of the border regions. During the time of his Presidency, the „mediterranean dimension of cross-border cooperation” was successfully involved into the pan-European strategy of AEBR. Accordingly, the number of South-European members grew considerably in this time.”

Afterwards, the elections took place and Mr. Vallvé was unanimously elected Honorary President of AEBR.

**President**

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

**1st Vice-President:**

Mr. Heider, Vice-President Région Alsace, France

**Vice-Presidents:**

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

**Honorary Presidents:**

Mr. Ahrens, former President

Mr. Vallvé, former President

**Honorary Members:**

Mr. Schelberg  
Mr. Mitterdorfer

**Treasurer:**

Mr. Willeme, EUREGIO (Netherlands/Germany)

**Members:**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Border Area</u>
Mr. Radvilavicius	Nordic Council of Ministers	<b>Denmark/Norway/Sweden/ Finland/Iceland</b>
Mr. Olofsson	Øresundskomiteen	<b>Denmark/Sweden</b>
Mr. Westman	Tornedalen	<b>Sweden/Finland</b>
Mr. Hyttinen	North Karelia/ Euregio Karelia	<b>Finland/Russia</b>
Mr. H.-J. Evers	Euroregion Elbe / Labe	<b>Germany/Czech Republic</b>
Mr. Skamarocius	Euroregion Nemunas	<b>Lithuania/Poland/Belarus</b>
Ms. Khomyuk	Euroregion Bug	<b>Poland/Ukraine/Belarus</b>
Mr. Kulik	Euroregion Nysa	<b>Poland/Czech Republic/Germany</b>
Mr. Hermansson	County of Värmland	<b>Sweden/ Norway</b>
Mr. Molloy	NorthWestRegionCrossBorderGroup	<b>Ireland/Northern Ireland/Great Britain</b>
Ms. Kunsemüller	Sønderjylland/ Schleswig	<b>Denmark/ Germany</b>
Mr. Eurlings	Euregio Maas-Rhein	<b>Netherlands/ Germany / Belgium</b>
Mr. Friese	Euregio Spree-Neisse-Bober	<b>Poland/ Germany</b>
Mr. Weiß	Euregio Bayerischer Wald/Böhmerwald	<b>Germany/Czech Republic/Austria</b>
Mr. Haberkorn	Euregio Egrensis	<b>Germany/Czech Republic</b>
Mr. Steinmaßl	Euregio Salzburg/ Berchtesgadener Land/ Traunstein	<b>Austria/ Germany</b>
Mr. Muñoz	Pais Vasco	<b>Spain/France</b>
Ms Obiols	Catalunia	<b>Spain/France</b>
Mr. Gamallo Aller Galicia		<b>Spain/Portugal</b>
Mr. Valverde Gomez	Castilla y León	<b>Spain/Portugal</b>
Mr. Luther	Bozen/Südtirol	<b>Italy/Austria</b>
Mr. Jakob	RegioTriRhena	<b>Switzerland/France/Germany</b>
Mr. Attaguile	Regione Siciliana	<b>Italy</b>
Mr. Staudigl	ArGe Alp	<b>Austria/Germany/Switzerland/Italy</b>
Mr. Valentin	Alpen Adria	<b>Austria/Germany/Italy/Hungary/ Slovenia/Croatia</b>
Ms. Laszlo Major	Carpathian Euroregion	<b>Poland/Hungary/Ukraine/Slovak Republic/Romania</b>
Mr. Papademetriou	Euroregion Nestos-Mesta	<b>Greece/Bulgaria</b>
Mr. Tatsis	Border Region Delta-Rhodopi	<b>Greece/Bulgaria</b>
Mr. Girard	CAFI	<b>France/Italy</b>
Mr. Suvorov	Slovenia	<b>Slovenia/Italy/Hungary/ Croatia/Austria</b>
Mr. Profir	Iasi, Euroregion Upper Prut	<b>Romania/ Moldova, Ukraine</b>

**Chairman of the Advisory Committee:**

Mr. Frhr von Malchus, Unna/Germany

**Auditors:**

Ms. Quiros, Aragon/Spain  
Mr. Jungk, Austria

**Observer:**

Mr. Mudrich, Council of Europe, Strasbourg/France  
Mr. Klipp, Assembly of European Regions

**Representative in case of prevention:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Organisation/Region</b>
Mr. Barrau	Mr. Maitia (not as Vice-Pr.)	France/ Spain
Mr. Ambrosi	Mr. Iacop (not as Vice-Pr.)	Region Friuli-Venezia Giulia
Mrs. Defrancesco	...	Province Trento
Mr. Rainer	Mr. Luther	Bozen/ Südtirol
Mr. Puttonen/Mr. Kokkonen	Mr. Hyttinen	Euregio Karelia
Mr. Patri	Ms. Lackner-Strauss (not as Vice-Pr.)	Euregio Bayer. Wald/Böhmerw.
Mr. Greiter	Mr. Staudigl	Arge Alp
Mr. Tecza	Ms. Khomyuk	Euroregion Bug
Mr. Krebs	Mr. Willeme (not as treasurer)	EUREGIO
Mr. Neef	Mr. Kolck (not as Vice-Pr.)	Ems Dollart Region
Mr. Zubiaur	Mr. Muñoa	Navarra
Ms. Teresa Rainha	Mr. Sanchez Amor (not as Vice-Pr.)	Extremadura
Mr. Cao Fernandez	Mr. Gamallo Aller	Galicia
Mrs. Berta Ferreiro	Mr. Valverde Gomez	Castilla y León
Mr. Evers	Mr. Eurlings	Euregio Maas-Rhein
Mr. Sammer	Mr. Weiß	Euregio Bayerischer Wald/ Böhmerwald
Mr. Oberdorfer/Mr. Jakl	Mr. Haberkorn	Euregio Egrensis
Mr. Jankowski	Mr. Kulik	Euroregion Nysa
Mr. Gammelgaard	Ms. Kunsemüller	Sønderjylland/ Sleswig
Mr. Melander	Ms. Backgren (not as Vice-Pr.)	Österböttens Förbund/Kvarken Radet
Mr. de Pauw/Mr. van Trigt	Mr. de Buck (not as Vice-Pr.)	Euregio Scheldemond (B/NL)
Mr. Ronkainen	Mr. Westman	Tornedalen (Sweden/Finland)

The General Assembly unanimously adopted the revised charter on European border and cross-border regions as well as the action programme for implementing the charter.

Furthermore, the General Assembly dealt with the topic „The EU's legal instrument for a decentralised cooperation of regional/local authorities”. The session was chaired by Per Unckel, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers. AEBR Secretary General Jens Gabbe presented the study that was elaborated for the European Commission. The following persons participated in the debate:

- **Uno Aldegren**, Regional Government Commissioner, Region of Skane
- **Elena Ciarlo**, C.A.F.I.
- **Klaus Luther**, Chief of Cabinet of the Province of Bolzano/South Tyrol, Europaregion Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino (I/A)
- **Juraj Muravsky**, Ministry of Interior, Slovakia
- **Bengt Westman**, President of Tornedalsradet (S/FIN/NO).
- **Sjaak Kamps**, Deputy Managing Director of Euregio Rhein-Waal (NL/D)

#### 4.2 Annual Conference

The Annual Conference 2004 had the motto: „New ways towards a new Europe“.

Welcome and opening addresses were given by:

- **Dariusz Szymczycha**, State Secretary, Office of the President of the Republic of Poland
- **Danuta Hübner**, Member of the European Commission
- **Zygmunt Meyer**, Marshall of Western Pomerania, Szczecin (PL)
- **Mirosław Mikietyński**, President of Euroregion Pomerania
- **Günther Krug**, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Member of the Berlin House of Representatives
- **Joan Vallvé**, President of AEBR

A political forum on „New ways towards a new Europe – European community of values and European Constitution” followed. Under the chairmanship of Danuta Hübner, Member of the European Commission, the following speakers discussed the topic:

- **Vladimir Egorov**, Governor of Kaliningrad
- **Elmar Brok**, MEP, chairman of the committee for foreign affairs, human rights, common safety and defence policy, European Parliament
- **Peter Straub**, President of the Committee of the Regions, Brussels
- **Graham Meadows**, Director General, DG Regio, European Commission (to be confirmed)
- **Zygmunt Meyer**, Marshall of Western Pomerania, Szczecin (PL)
- **Jenő Boros**, Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hungary
- **José María Muñoa Ganuxa**, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Basque country (E)

Three further round tables dealt with the following special topics:

**Round Table 1: New ways towards a new Europe - European Cohesion Policy**

**Chairman:**

**Marc de Buck**, Vice-President of AEBR (Belgium), Euregio Scheldemond (NL/B)

**Participants:**

- **Ignacio Sanchez Amór**, 1. Vice-President of the region of Extremadura (E)
- **Urpo Moisio**, Director, South Karelia (FIN) Brussels Office
- **François Maïtia**, 1. Vice-President, region Aquitaine (FR)
- **Robert Schrötter**, Manager of the EU Coordination Unit of Upper Austria
- **Kyriakos Charakidis**, Vice-President of AEBR, Vice-President of Euroregion Nestos-Mesta (GR/BG)

**Round Table 2: New ways towards a new Europe – the territorial cooperation**

**Chairman:**

**Dr. Reinhold Kolck**, Vice-President of AEBR, Vice-President of the Ems Dollart Region (D/NL)

**Presentation of AEBR’s position:**

**Jens Gabbe**, Secretary General of AEBR

**Participants:**

- **Klaudia Khomyuk**, Director, Euroregion Bug Secretariat (PL/UKR/BLR)
- **Pentti Hyttinen**, Director, Euregio Karelia (FIN/RUS), Regional Council of North Karelia (FIN)
- **Dagmar Liskova**, Vice-chairman of Euroregion Bílé-Biele Karpaty (CZ/SK)
- **Kate Burns**, Chief Executive Officer of ICBAN (Ireland/Northern Ireland)
- **Eric Jakob**, Managing director of Regio Basiliensis, RegioTriRhena (D/F/CH)
- **José-Angel Zubiaur Careño**, Director General for European Affairs & Planning, Gobierno de Navarra (E)

***Political Round Table: New ways towards a new Europe - cross-border cooperation as integration factor***

**Chairman:**

**Göke Frerichs**, Vice-President of the European Economic and Social Committee (D)

**Participants:**

- **Zbigniew Zychowicz**, Senator, Vice-President of AEBR (PL)
- **Jean-Paul Heider**, 1. Vice-President of the Region of Alsace, 1. Vice-President of AEBR
- **Franco Iacop**, Minister of the Regional Government of Friuli-Venezia Giulia (I)
- **Dmytro Poble**, Director, Foreign Trade and Investment Policy Department, Odessa Region State Administration, Euroregion Lower Danube (UKR/RO/MOL)
- **Elvira Saint-Gerons**, Director of Junta de Andalucia's representation in Brussels
- **Jochen Bethkenhagen**, Head of the Department for Internal and European Affairs, Ministry of Justice and for European Affairs of the Federal German State Brandenburg

The Annual Conference adopted a **final declaration** (see **annex 1**).

**4.3 Bestowal of the AEBR AWARD 2004**

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

In line with the motto „**Creating the future together – successful cross-border concepts**“, the award was bestowed upon EUREGIO (D/NL). Commissioner Danuta Hübner and the Chairman of the AEBR Jury Dr. Reinhold Kolck handed the award over.

## 5. Executive Committee

The Executive Committee meetings were held on:

- **5/6 March 2004 in San Sebastian, Basque Country**
- **18/19. June 2004 in Passau, Euregio Bayerischer Wald – Böhmerwald, Germany**
- **3 September 2004 in Joensuu, Euregio Karelia, Finland**
- **7 October 2004 in Szczecin, Euroregion Pomerania, Poland**
- **10/11 December 2004 in Ghent, Euregio Scheldemond, Belgium**

The following issues featured on the Executive Committee's agenda in 2004:

1. Draft treaty establishing a constitution for Europe
2. AEBR study for the European Commission "Decentralised cross-border cooperation – developing legal instruments for community cooperation"
3. 3. Cohesion Report of the European Commission
4. Draft regulations of the European Commission on:
  - a. the future European cohesion and regional policy
  - b. a legal instrument for decentralised cooperation
  - c. the European neighbourhood, partnership and pre-accession programmes
5. Future of cross-border cooperation (incl. maritime cooperation)
6. Dialogue of the European Commission with the associations of regional and local authorities on contents of EU policies
7. Services of general interest
8. Charter of European border and cross-border regions as well as action programme for implementing the Charter
9. White Book on European border regions
10. Daily border problems
11. AEBR affairs (Fora, regional groupings, work contents, secretariat general, financial issues)

On most of these topics, comprehensive reports were submitted to the Executive Committee, which discussed them and then drew up specific recommendations and tips regarding cross-border cooperation, which were subsequently developed into demands aimed at both the European and national authorities. The border and cross-border regions would be notified in writing of the recommendations and also of the reactions at European and national level (i.e. whether or not intervention had proved successful).



## 6. Main themes 2004

### 6.1 European cohesion and regional policy (incl. future of cross-border cooperation)

The AEBR commented in detail on the third cohesion report as well as on the draft regulations regarding European cohesion and regional policy etc, which could be summarized as follows<sup>1</sup>:

*The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) welcomes the draft Third Report on Economic and Social Cohesion and notes that extensive portions thereof are largely in keeping with the EU objectives associated with a new, forward-looking, well-targeted cohesion policy with clear statements.*

*AEBR thanks the European Commission for taking on board numerous ideas, proposals and practical suggestions emanating from AEBR, which was given an opportunity to discuss them with the Commission at numerous meetings and hearings (including in joint discussions together with the other regional organisations).*

*AEBR welcomes the intention to create a new territorial cooperation objective, in which cross-border cooperation will take pride of place.*

*The challenge for the years after 2007 consists in developing for an enlarged EU, new and flexible policies for structural funds, cohesion and community initiatives which meet the manifold interests of the entire European Union despite technical and financial priorities. An enlarged EU needs territorial cohesion and a consistent implementation of the bottom-up principle with due regard for subsidiarity and partnership.*

*An in itself coherent and long-term policy from 2007 onwards 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. In view of the consequences of the European integration and globalisation, this policy must promote in a strengthened way a polycentric development of the community territory.*

*The cohesion policy (Art. 158 EU Treaty) serves the interest of the whole Community, not only the financial support of the poorest regions. Therefore a cohesion policy for the entire EU is necessary and not only a shifting or concentration of financial means.*

*Besides the clear added value of cross-border cooperation (its contribution to European integration, overcoming remaining disadvantages at borders), only now at today's internal borders and only later on at the EU's external borders are the conditions (infrastructure, genuine cross-border structures, a legal instrument for decentralised cooperation) to be created that will enable the full exploitation on a cross-border basis of potential for economic growth and opportunities in areas including the environment, innovation, tourism, cooperation between social institutions.*

*Border areas, which will account for 42% of the surface area and 35% of the population of the enlarged Union, are therefore of crucial importance with respect to boosting the Union's future growth potential.*

<sup>1</sup> AEBR opinion with regard to the third report on economic and social cohesion by the European Commission, adopted by the AEBR Executive Committee on 5 March 2004

What is more, so far the key European tasks of cooperation and integration have been fulfilled using comparatively modest INTERREG resources applied to the entire EU (EU funds for the national labour market programme (Objective 1 for Spain only) amount to roughly €5 billion), reaching citizens to be reached in a unique way.

On the basis of 20 years of experience in cross-border cooperation and practically all INTERREG A and PHARE-CBC programmes since 1990, AEBR sees the:

- Necessity of a legal instrument on decentralised cross-border cooperation,
- Necessity of maintaining „cooperation incl. cross-border cooperation across the whole EU“ as a priority in the 3rd cohesion report,
- Necessity of qualitatively improving INTERREG A as from 2006 by means of an EU definition in a future independent INTERREG communication with regard to the following essential points:
  - ❖ What is a cross-border programme?
  - ❖ What is a cross-border decentralised structure (i.e. not a ministry or other national institution)?
  - ❖ What is a joint account (to which all EU-funds as well as national and regional co-financing amounts are transferred and which cannot nationally be divided afterwards)?
  - ❖ What is a genuine joint cross-border project (involvement of partners from both sides of the border with regard to content, organisation, staff and financing)?
- Moreover, the necessity of ensuring:
  - ❖ An independent INTERREG communication, which overcomes the disadvantages of the present connection to the Structural Funds Regulation,
  - ❖ INTERREG programmes as European task, not as part of national mainstream-programmes (danger to the objectives of INTERREG),
  - ❖ Allocation of EU funds per border, if possible per programme,
  - ❖ An obliging agreement of the INTERREG partners - to be submitted with the programme - on responsibilities, liability, decisions etc. as well as prior definition of eligible actions and costs in the programmes.

#### **- Especially with regard to maritime cooperation**

The distinction between cross-border, interregional and transnational cooperation and how it also applies to maritime borders

The European Commission has clearly defined cross-border, interregional and transnational cooperation. Cross-border cooperation involves cooperation between directly adjacent areas along a border. In practice this means intensive cooperation on a daily basis between all actors on either side of the border regarding all issues and in all sectors.

It has become evident that this type of intensive cooperation is only possible for a few forms of maritime cooperation. Key elements here include short distances between the shores of border regions, good communications, recently completed fixed connections (such as tunnels or bridges) that to some extent turn the maritime border into a land border, strong relations in the past and similarities between cultures.

Support for coastal regions within the framework of cross-border cooperation should be limited to approximately 150 km, as proposed by the Commission. A certain degree of flexibility can be shown in individual cases. Considerably greater distances cannot be included because actual cross-border cooperation is no longer guaranteed.



**Overall consequences for cross-border cooperation - specific consequences for land borders**

If all or the majority of maritime regions are integrated into cross-border cooperation, coastal regions in Italy, Spain, Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland and other Member States would also be included. This would entail either the funds for cooperation across land borders being significantly reduced and the funding for 'old internal borders' being generally under threat as a result of the need to modify the allocation of resources, or that a high proportion of funds earmarked for transnational cooperation would have to be allocated to cross-border cooperation from 2007, for bilateral maritime cooperation over greater distances is due to be incorporated into transnational cooperation.

The inclusion of all or most maritime border regions in cross-border cooperation does not contribute any added value, since the maritime programmes in question do not meet the conditions for cross-border cooperation. Due to the major distances between them, many regions are unable to engage in anywhere near as intensive cross-border cooperation (see the evaluation).

The inclusion of all or most maritime border regions in cross-border cooperation will inevitably produce negative results in an evaluation (for example because the majority of resources will not be used for cross-border cooperation and the projects could just as easily have been implemented under national mainstream programmes). In the long run, this would damage cross-border cooperation in general and, as a result, hinder progress towards the new political objective of 'territorial cooperation'.

If territorial cooperation, which was only recently deemed a priority by the EU, is to be sustained, it is absolutely necessary to implement convincing, high-quality programmes and projects for cross-border cooperation.

**Good opportunities and adequate resources for maritime cooperation**

Coastal regions should be able to cooperate with neighbouring regions on the other side of the border according to their needs and opportunities, in other words by engaging in either cross-border, interregional or transnational cooperation. Coastal regions could engage in very meaningful and useful interregional or transnational cooperation across greater distances within selected sectors.

This would ensure that future evaluations would find that the implemented programmes and actions were of a correspondingly high quality.

For the same reason we also need the following criteria for distinguishing between cross-border, interregional and transnational maritime cooperation:

- Distances;
- differentiation of content (integrated multiannual programmes for cross-border maritime cooperation and sectoral and/or thematic programmes for bilateral transnational maritime cooperation).

Moreover, this would tally with the situation applying to land borders, where border regions work together in these three different ways depending on the distances involved and the level of intensity of their cooperation.

There are sufficient financial resources for maritime cooperation available in:

- Territorial cooperation:

- on a cross-border basis for certain coastal regions;
- on a transnational basis for bilateral cooperation over greater distances.
- *The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument:*
  - For cross-border cooperation at the NUTS III level;
  - for cooperation at the NUTS II level in sea basins with external borders;
  - and in some instances for cooperation with third countries not eligible for funding (e.g. outermost regions and/or islands and such like).

**It is remarkable that most of the necessities mentioned by AEBR have been considered partly or in total in draft EU regulations or have been taken up in general with regard to maritime cooperation by the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development in 2004 / 2005.**

### **6.2 EU legal instrument on decentralised cross-border cooperation**

AEBR submitted the study in April 2004. AEBR elaborated theses, which are close to the practice, and drew conclusions:

- There was a clear need for an EU legal instrument.
- A solution was needed for cooperation in general, not just for INTERREG.
- To achieve maximum results, the EU had to define specific conditions with which the Member States must comply.
- There was a need for an EU regulation to create direct law.
- That regulation had to enable cooperation at both programme and project level, with flexibility depending on specific national and regional conditions.
- A solution under public law with a special new EU instrument was required (an adaptation of existing binational treaties or EU instruments was not sufficient).

This political and strategic solution with a completely new instrument under European law would create the greatest added value. The study has already developed several articles that contained the basic contents of the new European legal instrument. The important point was that sovereignty rights could not be transferred, since a cross-border special-purpose association could bind only its own members, not third parties. However, the special-purpose association could enable the sovereignty rights of a regional or local authority to be exercised by another territorial, regional or local authority across the border following its guidelines or instructions and acting on its behalf. Furthermore, the cooperation structure could oblige its members, i.e. territorial regional and local authorities, to impose their national authority. The special-purpose association was an *ex novo* structure, meaning one with its own European legal personality and enabling democratic control. For those who did not want the strict legal arrangements applying to a special-purpose association, there was an agreement under public law that was especially suited to, say, interterritorial and transnational cooperation or to keeping the EU and national partners in INTERREG if INTERREG A was developed and implemented in the decentralised legal structure at regional or local level.

### **6.3 Review of the Trans-European networks**

The goal of the European Commission's proposal of 1 October 2003 was to use these proposals for additional main priority infrastructure projects in the Alps, the Pyrenees and the Baltic Sea to secure agreement on these new guidelines for a trans-European network in the European Constitution and Council. The European Commission would be presenting the following major proposed amendments:

1. A supplementary list of projects from 2001 citing new additional projects and proposals for supporting cross-border high-speed routes;
2. the setting of priorities in the European transport network by declaring selected sub-sections of the network to be 'of European interest' eligible for increased support of up to 30% of the total cost;
3. designation of 'European coordinators' for projects of European interest to strengthen the operational and financial coordination amongst the Member States;
4. expansion of the prospect of realising these trans-European networks between 2010 and 2020.

AEBR Statement:

The 2010 deadline for the trans-European networks was not tenable. Until then, €400 billion had been provided. The new time frame was geared towards 2020, by which time €600-800 billion would be required. The bulk of the investments would occur in 2004-2010, since otherwise financing costs would spiral out of control. The investments in the TEN were expected to provide environmental relief amounting to €200 billion. Greater coordination in the TEN projects would make sense since this could eliminate many objections and appeals.

**6.4 New framework for the assessment of lesser amounts of state aid**

Although this subject is not specifically cross-border, the border and cross-border regions are directly concerned. Therefore, AEBR elaborated the following statement:

1. *AEBR broadly welcomed the Commission proposals on a new framework for the assessment of lesser amounts of state aid, since the new system set relatively simple and flexible upper limits on amounts of state aid:*
  - *Beneficiaries would receive 30% of project costs;*
  - *companies would have cap of €1 million;*
  - *Member States would receive 5% of any aid (excluding the agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture, and transport sectors).*

*These guidelines would apply without exception throughout the EU.*
2. *However, these EU-wide rules on small amounts of state aid fail to take into account the underlying geographical and structural differences between Europe's regions and border regions, as a result of:*
  - *Specific geographical factors, such as, for example, mountainous, maritime and sparsely populated regions;*
  - *varying degrees of accessibility (peripheral regions, islands, maritime regions and mountain regions);*
  - *different population and settlement densities;*
  - *major disparities between regions and border regions in terms of economic structure, employment, research and development, innovation, and human and technical capacity, as dwelt on in depth in the EU's cohesion reports.*

*These differences affected border regions in quite specific ways since the latter had to deal with the burden presented by the presence of borders and the barrier effect that these could create. Against this backdrop, AEBR called for the guidelines to take greater account of geographical differences between regions.*
3. *AEBR called for the principle of spatial differentiation to be incorporated into the new system of guidelines for monitoring small amounts of state aid by:*

- *Raising the upper limit on aid for recipients in the present Objective 1 areas and after 2006, those in objective areas for convergence from 30% of project costs to a maximum of 40%;*
  - *raising the upper limit on aid for beneficiaries in areas facing specific geographical and structural difficulties, such as relatively inaccessible regions (e.g. border, mountainous, peripheral and sparsely populated regions) from 30% of project costs to a maximum of 35%;*
  - *adopting proposals for an upper limit on aid for beneficiaries in other regions, apart from a possible reduction in the upper limit on aid to less than 20% of project costs in relatively well-developed regions.*
4. *AEBR also asked for checks to be carried out as to whether in those Member States where per capita GDP was less than 75 points (Index EU25=100), which is almost all the new Member States, the upper limit on "relatively small amounts of state aid" could be raised to a total of 6 or 7% of any aid (with the exception of the agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture and transport sectors), since this would increase the range of support available to border regions in these Member States.*

### **6.5 RFO Change on Borders**

The project was approved in September 2003 and project activities started in December 2003/January 2004. Lead Partner is the Land Nordrhein-Westfalen. 28 partners are involved, and AEBR acts as helpdesk. This RFO has very ambitious aims.

Future strategies for cross-border cooperation will be developed in three fora:

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

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

- The environment;
- cross-border structures;
- cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
- supplier-producer relations;
- cooperation between universities;
- innovation and technology;
- biochemistry and agriculture;
- cooperation between schools;
- minority issues;
- tourism.

The first annual conference took place on 1 March 2004 in Düsseldorf. First project ideas were developed, and the following projects were approved in 2004:

- Language Bridges – LABS
- Euregios and New Neighbourhood – Regional, institutional innovations and EU instruments of cross-border cooperation on post-enlargement external border – REGBOUR

- Strengthening economic potentials at border regions by means of cross-border business parks - SEP

### **6.6 Daily border problems in Europe**

The Nordic Council of Ministers has been the first extensive organisation, which has worked on cross-border cooperation, to however sort out legal problems. The Scandinavian governments obviously didn't see any problems at the end of the 90's. Everything was running well at the borders. On the other hand there is a hotline in Scandinavia that is called 'Hello North' which can be used by the citizens to report problems. The number of inquiries and unsolved problems in many fields is high. Younger civil servants in ministries hardly knew, what the Nordic Council of Ministers had decided in 1967. Therefore cross-border cooperation is a process that has to be worked on continuously. If there are many difficulties in Scandinavia despite the good conditions, there have to be even more difficulties in the rest of Europe.

The report about problems called 'Boundless North' was presented in 1999. An analysis of the problems with a comparison of what the civilian thinks and the opinion of the authorities followed in 2001. A check up was carried out to find out, which equipping was at the service provider's disposal to cope with border problems and to check their attitude towards civilians. The Norrback report, on which the member of the committee Westman had been working on, dealt with social issues of commuters, mobility and acceptance of school and diploma exams. As there are huge differences in the opinions of civilians and the authorities in the matter of border problems (often a lack of knowledge about long time existing contracts), a plan for reduction was carried out at the beginning of 2003 that had to be followed by an annual report. The Nordic Council of Ministers invited all the relevant partners and border regions to have a part in the elimination of the problems. The former Prime Minister of Denmark Poul Schlueter became special emissary to ensure a lasting political treatment of this issue in the Nordic area, e.g. the discussion of his report at the end of 2003 in the Nordic Council. This manner of action could be exemplary to other parts of Europe.

The Nordic Council of Ministers is represented in the executive committee of the AEBR. That certainly influenced the integration of the Scandinavian countries into the EU and the cross-border cooperation in a positive way. There was a mutual inspiration in the issue of solving daily border problems.

It was a great honour for AEBR that the special emissary for border issues, Mr Poul Schlueter, former Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Denmark, gave his report about his work.

In the past, AEBR has regularly dealt with daily border problems and drafted a list (structured according to different topics).

The Executive Committee decided to update this list and to evaluate the report of Poul Schlüter. Moreover, the European Parliament was requested to nominate a special representative for border issues, who should be vested with the necessary competencies and funds.



## **7. Contact with European bodies**

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

Contacts to the European Parliament were intensified after the elections due to the fact that a "Committee on Regional Development" was recreated. A lot of its members are well-known to AEBR. By this, the cohesion and regional policy has received a political basis. Other important dialogue partners of AEBR are the "Committee on External Affairs" and the "Committee on Constitutional Affairs".

Where the European Commission was concerned, AEBR enjoyed close, solid relations with the Regional Policy DG, and, at the political level in particular with the new Commissioner Danuta Hübner and Director-General Graham Meadows. The regular discussions held with the directors Ms Helander and Mr. Leygues, as well as with the responsible Heads of Unit Mr. Bougas and Mr. Poulsen have to be pointed out.

With regard to EU enlargement questions, Mr. Elmar Brok, Chairman of the "Committee on External Affairs", was the most important dialogue partner.

The European Commission's first dialogue (in the presence of President Prodi) with the European associations of regional and local authorities took place on 10 May 2005. President Vallvé spoke as AEBR representative.

Cooperation dating back to the 1960s with the Council of Europe was enhanced. AEBR attended numerous Council of Europe seminars in Central and Eastern Europe, and had took part in the Council of Europe's Congress of Local & Regional Authorities of Europe. AEBR was a permanent member of the main committee of the CLRAE and in the Committee of Experts for Cross-Border Cooperation.

AEBR is the Council of Europe's main partner in the preparation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Conference of European Border Regions, taking place in Lutsk/Ukraine, Euroregion Bug (Poland/Ukraine/Belarus) in the year 2005.

Also in the year 2004, cooperation between the big European associations of regional and local authorities (AEBR, CPMR, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Eurocities, AER, and REGLEG) had furthermore increased and positively developed.

The five leading European associations of regional and local authorities forwarded their views in joint position papers to the European Heads of State and of Government, the European Convention, the European Parliament, and the Committee of the Regions. Subjects were the European Constitutional Treaty, the new political dialogue with the European Commission with the regional organisations, European cohesion and regional policy, transeuropean networks, services of general interest and so on. The joint statements received a very well consideration.

Furthermore, a joint declaration on the future of the European Union was adopted in Vienna on 3 May 2004 on invitation of the ARE. AEBR was significantly involved in the elaboration of the declaration.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2004, a conference, jointly organised by AEBR and CPRM, took place on Sicily. Main topic of this event was territorial cooperation. In the past two years there has been an intensified cooperation between the two organisations. It emerged that in

issues of territorial cooperation the CPMR is a natural partner of the AEBR. The AEBR is mainly concentrating on cross-border cooperation while the CPMR has the interregional and transnational cooperation in focus. Both are dealing with maritime border areas but at different point of views. Over and above that both organisations agree to the issues of the European regional and cohesion politics, to the trans-European nets etc.

Nearly all AEBR ideas with regard to cross-border (and also maritime) cooperation were incorporated into the final declaration of Taormina.

The cooperation with the Committee of the Regions has grown closer, and the European Economic and Social Committee is a dialogue partner in individual questions.

In cooperation with the CoR, an action plan was developed for 2004 gearing to monitoring the Third Cohesion Report, and AEBR's participation in selected COR task forces in support of its rapporteurs. Furthermore, other areas of cooperation were cited, such as tourism, the provision of essential public services, implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, cultural diversity and minorities, and the Neighbourhood Programme. A COR Open Day was held in September. There, the Land Baden-Württemberg and AEBR jointly organised a workshop on the prospects of trans-European cooperation, in particular in connection with the future of the INTERREG programme.

## **8. Future work content and other affairs of the General Secretariat**

### **Work contents of AEBR:**

- Lobbying at European level (European Parliament / European Commission / Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee etc. as well as the Council of Europe, the Stability Pact and the Nordic Council of Ministers),
- Cooperation in the definition of EU funding instruments and Operational programmes,
- Networking between border regions (regional groupings),
- AEBR forum on political topics of special interest to border regions,
- Advice and support for border regions,
- External representation of AEBR in Europe,
- Cooperation with the big European associations of regional and local authorities.

AEBR as the oldest European association of regional and local authorities has the smallest budget compared to the other associations. Alongside the Secretary General, the following staff members were working in the head office in 2004: 1 full-time employee, 1 part-time employee (66%), 1 accountant (50%) and 1 full-time employee for RFO Change on Borders. AEBR competes with other European regional organisations as regards the treatment of European issues, even though if AEBR is the only one to bother about border regions.

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

### **Affairs of the secretariat general**

#### **- Seat of AEBR**

Following a recommendation of the Executive Committee, the General Assembly adopted in 2003 requirement profiles of a future seat of the secretariat general.

Three regions applied for the AEBR seat.

In 2004, no decision could be taken with regard to the seat.

#### **- Succession of the Secretary General**

Following a recommendation of the Executive Committee, the General Assembly adopted a requirement profile in 2003. Six persons applied within the time limit set. The applications were closely examined and missing documents were requested.

On the basis of an overview, the Executive Committee was given a first indication for an evaluation of the candidates. Five candidates presented themselves on the occasion of the Executive Committee meeting in Ghent, Euregio Scheldemond, Belgium on 10 December 2004. The Executive Committee selected a first and a second candidate for further negotiations.



## 9. General Secretariat

The Executive Committee is continuously informed on developments in the general secretariat. At the end of 2004, the following staff members were working in the general secretariat:

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

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

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

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

**Annex:** Final declaration of the AEBR Annual Conference held in Szczecin

F:\DATA\334 AGE\Geschäftsberichte\2004\Geschäftsbericht 2004 GB.doc