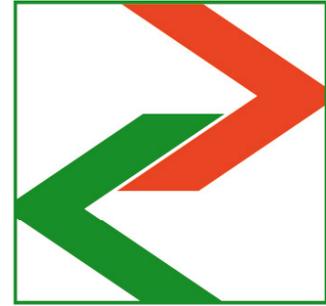


Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab (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”

AEBR’s electronic newsletter – April 2006

This Newsletter of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) will be published quarterly in order to inform the border regions and their 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.

This newsletter is published in English, French and German.

AEBR’s Executive Committee meeting in Bordeaux on 3 March 2006

On behalf of the President, the Vice-President of AEBR, Mr. Heider, opened the Executive Committee meeting and expressed his thanks to the Aquitaine Region for the excellent preparation of the meeting and the generous hospitality.

Mr. Maïtia welcomed the Executive Committee members, mentioning that the Committee met in the Region Aquitaine for the first time. He stressed that the Aquitaine Region is proud of its good neighbourly relations with Spain. The Working Community of the Pyrenees (CTP) was founded as early as in 1984 following Spain’s accession to the European Union. Most recently, a consortium for implementing projects in accordance with the Spanish-French State Treaty has been established within the framework of the CTP. In addition, the Aquitaine Region has been the Managing Authority for INTERREG A since the start of the most recent INTERREG Programme. Mr. Maïtia mentioned that France hopes for a duplication of the funds for cross-border cooperation as from 2007. In addition to INTERREG, the Aquitaine Region has a joint account with the Basque Region and the Region of Navarre. This account is designed for supporting joint projects. Recently, a cross-border trade unions’ council has been established. Mr. Maïtia emphasised that the Aquitaine Region regards AEBR as an excellent platform for exchanging experiences made in cross-border cooperation and for becoming active at European level.

In his welcoming speech President Rousset called on AEBR to continue the work it has so successfully carried out during the past 35 years. He emphasised that cross-border cooperation continues to play a key role in Europe. In view of the failure of the EU Constitution, the border regions, in particular, must campaign for a revitalisation of the process because the people living in border regions know about the opportunities and problems of the EU due to their close neighbourhood. President Rousset mentioned public transport, healthcare and cooperation between SMEs as some examples. He emphasised that the Aquitaine Region will continue to support AEBR.

The Executive Committee discussed inter alia the following issues:

- European Cohesion and Regional Policy as well as the legal instrument of the EU,
- Maritime Cooperation,
- Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme: Communication from the Commission „More Research and Innovation – Investing for Growth and Employment: A Common Approach“ (COM(2005)488 final),
- Communication from the Commission „Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme Modern SME Policy for Growth and Employment“ (COM(2005) 551 final),
- Report of the European Parliament’s Committee on Regional Development on the role of territorial cohesion in regional development (A6-0251/2005 final),
- Report of the European Parliament’s Committee on Transport and Tourism on new prospects and new challenges sustainable European tourism (A6-00235/2005 final),
- Cross-border healthcare.

More: www.aebr.net

Danuta Hübner: Agreement on the EU’s financial framework is good news for Europe

Danuta Hübner, Member of the European Commission responsible for Regional Policy, welcomed in the past weeks and months several times the agreement on the EU’s financial framework, which she described as good news for Europe and the Cohesion Policy. At the same time, she also pointed out that the resources made available would be insufficient to meet the objectives set for the years to come. Furthermore, she emphasized that the year 2005 was a successful one, paving the way for more employment and growth. On the occasion of a forum held in Stockholm, Ms. Danuta Hübner stated: “Cooperation across borders is vital for a competitive Europe!” Therefore, she asked several times to strengthen the territorial cooperation, as this would promote cross-border use and planning of social and

economic infrastructure, enable implementation of transnational environmental protection programmes and transport networks and exchange of experience and knowledge between the regions.

More on: http://europa.eu.int/comm/commission_barroso/hubner/focus/focus_en.cfm

New Guidelines on National Regional Aid 2007 - 2013 published

On 23 December 2005, the European Commission adopted a notification stating under which circumstances state aid with regional aims are compatible with the common market. This document reforms the Guidelines of 1998, in which the rules for the current funding period 2000 - 2006 are fixed. The guidelines are applicable in every sector of the economy apart from the fisheries sector, coal industry and the agricultural sector. The Commission assumes that the implementation of these guidelines will lead to important modifications in the regulation on regional aid in the EU. According to its opinion, these modifications are necessary in order to re-focus state aid on the most deprived regions, while allowing for the need to improve competitiveness of the EU, the Members States and the regions.

More on: http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/state_aid/regional/

European Cohesion and Regional Policy – Financial Perspective 2007-2013

On the occasion of AEBR's Executive Committee meeting in Bordeaux, Mr Martín Guillermo Ramírez, Deputy Secretary-General, gave a report on the financial perspective 2007 – 2013. Territorial cooperation includes cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. Territorial cooperation receives 2.4% of the available funding, i.e. €7.5 billion. Of this amount, 77% is spent on cross-border cooperation, 19% on transnational cooperation and 4% on interregional cooperation. Around €5.8 billion is earmarked for cross-border cooperation (€2 billion more than for the period 2000-2006). This amount is equivalent to the EU's contribution to Spain's Objective 1 labour market programme alone.

Funds are allocated per Member State on the basis of the total population of all the country's eligible border areas. Cross-border cooperation takes place at NUTS III level.

AEBR welcomes the designation of the consideration of cross-border cooperation as a priority. The promotion of all border areas on the basis of demographic figures for the respective national border areas must also prompt the allocation of corresponding funds. Notwithstanding the need to prioritise the new EU Member States and the EU's former external borders, the EU's past internal borders must receive adequate funds for their cooperation, for they too continue to suffer major problems.

Important publications of the Economic Policy Committee and the European Commission (DG ECFIN)

The Economic Policy Committee and the European Commission (DG ECFIN) have published a report entitled "The impact of ageing on public expenditure: projections for the EU25 Member States on pensions, health care, long-term care, education and unemployment transfers (2004-2050)", (Special report 1/2006). This report, containing country overviews that were elaborated by the national authorities, is also for border regions of interest. The report is available on the homepages of the Economic Policy Committee and the Directorate General for Economy and Finances of the European Commission. Furthermore, the most important publications on other significant affairs such as e.g. the Lisbon agenda, structural indicators, and European labour market can be downloaded from those pages as well.

More: http://europa.eu.int/comm/economy_finance/epc/epc_publications_en.htm
http://europa.eu.int/comm/economy_finance/publications/eespecialreports_en.htm

Concentrated efforts of AEBR to amend the draft regulations on the regional fund and the territorial cooperation

The Secretary General pointed to the fact that AEBR had suggested improvements to the texts including, in particular, the following:

- replacement of the phrase "one programme per border" by "one programme with sub-programmes per border" and, for certain far advanced regions, "one programme per cross-border region".
- definition of the term cross-border project. Financial contributions from partners from both sides of the border are pivotal for genuine cross-border projects, given that providing funds automatically results in the partners' active participation in terms of contents, staff and organisation.
- joint eligibility (the considerable differences regarding eligibility in the individual countries might otherwise result in the failure of cross-border projects).

There is a certain chance that these suggestions will be accepted, given that, other than the regulations on the general provisions governing cohesion policy and the cohesion fund, the provisions governing the regional fund and territorial cooperation need to be decided by both the European Council of the Heads of State and Government and the European Parliament.

Maritime Cooperation of the Border Regions

The AEBR elaborated a comprehensive position paper on this issue. There, it was pointed out that maritime cooperation was already substantially expanded in the recent years, above all by the adoption of the 150-km limit. NUTS III applies in principle to cross-border cooperation, both at terrestrial and maritime borders. This is negotiable neither for the European Council, nor for the European Commission or European Parliament.

More: www.aebr.net

European Neighbourhood, Partnership and Pre-Accession Instruments not yet sound

In a letter to Commissioner Danuta Hübner, AEBR President Lambert van Nistelrooij and Jens Gabbe, Secretary General of AEBR referred to the particular problems of the new programmes of the EU. It was the initial intention of the Neighbourhood and Partnership programme to improve the situation at the external borders, and this also above all for the neighbouring border regions in third countries. It was not intended to put the EU border regions into a worse position, as they have been in good hands in INTERREG up to now. Therefore, the following was emphasised in that letter:

- The EU regions at the External Borders really worry about the quality and the content of cross-border cooperation as of the year 2007.
- There is the danger that EU programmes cannot be finalised in time (due to the fact that many questions concerning responsibility, liability etc. have not yet been settled).
- The good experiences with cross-border cooperation made under INTERREG IIIA must not be endangered by the new EU programmes (ENPI und IPA) as of 2007 (strong involvement of the regional level with regard to programme elaboration and implementation, project quality, range of funding possibilities).
- The EU regions at the external borders claim emphatically that the responsibility for neighbourhood and partnership programmes, at least as regards the cross-border sector, be put on DG REGIO, as this is the only way to avoid that these EU regions will be in a worse position concerning cross-border cooperation that up to now.

The AEBR urged DG REGIO to take these arguments into consideration.

European Commission Proposal for a Directive on the assessment and management of floods

On 18 January 2006, the European Commission presented a proposal for a directive on the assessment and management of floods. Given that rivers frequently mark borders or run close to them, this directive is of high interest for border regions. Its aim is to reduce and manage the risk that floods pose to human health, the environment, infrastructure and property. Key elements of the draft directive are the drawing up of flood risk maps for areas facing significant flood risks, coordination in river basins or coastal areas as well as drawing up flood risk management plans. The Commission leaves it up to its Member States to set the necessary level of protection so that they can independently determine protection measures and time schedules for the implementation of the risk management plans.

More on: http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/water/flood_risk/index.htm

INTERREG IIIC Regional Framework Operation (RFO) "Change on Borders" well progressing

The RFO project "Change on Borders" has a four-year-period of validity (2003-2007). 25 border regions, situated in 15 European countries, are involved in this network. Of the total budget covers € 8.2 million, the European Commission finances € 4.9 million. On the occasion of the AEBR Executive Committee in Bordeaux, AEBR Secretary General Jens Gabbe gave a report on the RFO project, its fora and their subtheme working groups as well as individual projects.

More information on the project: www.change-on-borders.net

Cross-Border Healthcare – important task for the future

In the recent months, AEBR has intensively dealt with cross-border healthcare. In cooperation with RegioTriRhena, an AEBR-forum was organised on 27 September 2005. In March 2006, a position paper was published that met with particular interest in border regions. The good quality of the position paper has been acclaimed from all sides. The continuing widening of the catchment areas in the health sector must also include the cross-border level. The projects "e-health" and "Telemedicine" included in the RFO Change on Borders should also be used by other border regions. Furthermore, a pilot project dealing with stationary healthcare, which ran at the German-Swiss border for three years, has clearly shown which problems occur when dealing with health insurance companies that are subject to the territorial principle. The AEBR position paper has the advantage of including a

catalogue of best-practice examples, which serve as recommendations to border and cross-border regions. The AEBR will continuously deal with this subject.

More on: www.aebr.net

Cooperation of universities and higher education institutes in European border areas

In the Bordeaux meeting of the Executive Committee, Dr. v. Malchus provided a first overview of his evaluations of the 2005/2006 surveys. While welcoming the large number of responses, he regretted the fact that he had not received any response at all from certain areas in Europe. Unfortunately, many regions did not comply with the request to send a brief report and submitted documents with more than 100 pages. He added that it is quite time-consuming to evaluate these documents. Upon completion of the evaluation process, Mr. von Malchus will examine which role border and cross-border regions actually play university cooperation. For some university areas in large regions (e.g. Öresund or Southern Upper Rhine) and also for smaller forms of cooperation in rural areas (e.g. Norway/Sweden or EUREGIO), interesting results are to be expected. The comprehensive report, consisting of a text and an overview, will probably be finished in summer/early autumn 2006, and will then be available in German, English and French.

More: www.aebr.net

High interest in Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN)

Mr. von Malchus reported in Bordeaux on the Trans-European Transport Networks, and above all on the large projects approved by the European Council and the European Parliament. The European Commission published a report on this subject, which can be downloaded in English and French:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/ten/transport/external_dimension/hlg/2006_02_17_tent_consultation/index_en.htm

At the end of the year 2005, Commission President Barroso addressed a communication on "Implementing the Trans-European Networks" to the Commission. In this communication, a Commission report on the status of "Implementation of TEN projects" has been announced for the end of 2006. AEBR decided in its Executive Committee meeting on 3 March 2005 to submit a precise opinion on this report, which concerns approx. 20 border regions with European corridors. Furthermore, the Executive Committee decides to carry out a survey in the 20 border regions concerned in order to be able to submit a precise opinion on "Implementing the Trans-European Networks" by year-end 2006. More on: www.aebr.net

The EU's Plan D: Communicating Europe – Going Local!

Europe's border regions have intensively dealt with this question for many years! Already in 2004, a call for proposals was published. The border regions have made positive experiences with these info points. On the one hand, they provide information about EU policies and their impact on the region. On the other hand, they can be used for communicating the regions' requests to the EU. There will be a new call for tenders in 2008.

AEBR recommends its members to submit an application for an info point within the framework of the programme "Communicating Europe – Going Local".

AEBR asked its members in a circular dated 29 March 2006, to complete and return a EU-questionnaire (e-mail: PlanD@cor.eu.int), which deals with questions of the topic "Communicating Europe – Going Local".

AEBR Annual Conference and General Assembly in Pamplona (ES) on 19/20/21 October 2006

This year, the General Assembly and the Annual Conference will take place in Pamplona / Spain. Three blocks are foreseen besides the General Assembly (special invitation for members only!):

- EU programmes and projects: future programme and project management (for members and other interested parties);
- Territorial Agenda;
- Research and Innovation.

More on: www.aebr.net

AEBR Award 2006

This year, the AEBR award "Sail of Papenburg" will be bestowed again. The call will follow soon!

More on: www.aebr.net

Nordic Council of Ministers develops new strategy for the cooperation of border regions in the years 2006 – 2008

The new strategy for cooperation of border regions 2006 - 2008 aims particularly at reducing border barriers (e.g. due to different administration structures, physical communication barriers, differences in cultural background), which hinder every-day cross-border

cooperation. Furthermore, research, industrial innovation and information between the border regions should be improved.

More on: [www.norden.org/reg/sk/FINAL_strategi_2005.pdf\(SV\)](http://www.norden.org/reg/sk/FINAL_strategi_2005.pdf(SV))

BEN = "Baltic Euregional Network" in action

The BEN project with 35 partners in 9 countries of the Baltic Sea area (Baltic Sea Region = BSR) was officially launched on 26/27 September 2005. Lead Partner is the Nordic Council of Ministers (NMR) with its Lithuanian office. The AEER will be involved in this project. During the integration phase, BEN will carry out more than 30 different seminars, events and meetings, develop a website, publish a best practice guide, prepare an electronic library containing important studies, and implement other instruments for the network. AEER's Executive Committee member Sarunas Radvilavicius is chief coordinator of the BEN project. In cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers, its office in St. Petersburg and the European Commission, BEN organised an East-West seminar on cross-border cooperation at the external borders of the EU in Vyborg on 21/22 February 2006.

More on: www.benproject.org - www.norden.org

Next newsletter of the AEER

All border/cross-border regions are requested to submit short pieces of information (ca. 10 - 15 lines) either in English, French or German (if possible also indicate corresponding links), which could be important for the next edition planned to be published in June 2006. Furthermore, please let us also know if you have a newsletter that could be mentioned in the annex.

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