

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 – August 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 Donegal, Border Region Ireland/Northern Ireland (ICBAN) 2006

On 7 July 2006, this year's summer meeting of AEBR's Executive Committee took place following an invitation of ICBAN in the historic castle of Donegal. 40 participants represented 17 countries of the EU.



AEBR President Lambert van Nistelrooij, MEP, welcomed the Executive Committee members and the guests. He extended his thanks to ICBAN for the excellent preparation and generous hospitality. He evoked that ICBAN and the neighbouring border areas had received the AEBR Award "Sail of Papenburg 2005" and pointed to the close co-operation between the Irish/Northern Irish border regions and AEBR. The President congratulated the partners at this border on having been given important responsibilities as regards the implementation of the INTERREG programmes. Mary Coughlin, Minister for Agriculture, also welcomed the AEBR Executive Committee. She addressed, in particular, the issues 'rural areas', 'agricultural development' and 'education and training'. Kate Burns, Executive Director of ICBAN, gave a brief overview of the main priorities in cross-border co-operation, emphasising, however, that despite all progress made in Ireland and Northern Ireland so far, major challenges, in particular in the rural border areas, still need to be overcome. The INTERREG programme and the PEACE programme would be the most important sources of financial support. Kate Burns expressed her hope that the good and close cooperation with AEBR will continue in the future. More on: www.aebr.net or www.icban.com



Jens Gabbe

Kate Burns

Mary Coughlin

Martín Guillermo

L. van Nistelrooij

The most important items of the Donegal meeting:

- AEBR's co-operation with the Council of Europe,
- Appointment of a member of the European Parliament responsible for border questions,
- EU regulations on cohesion and regional policy (including territorial co-operation and a legal instrument),
- EU regulation on a Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI),
- AEBR forum "EU Programmes 2007 - 2013", Strasbourg, 2 June 2006,
- Updated Action Programme of AEBR 2006,
- New edition of the map "European Border Regions 2006",
- White Paper on border regions 2006.

➤ AEBR's co-operation with the Council of Europe

Ulrich Bohner, Chief Executive of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, pointed to the long-standing and excellent co-operation with AEBR, thus with Dr. von Malchus, Main Rapporteur on the first conference of border regions of the Council of Europe since the mid 60s and since 1972 also with Mr. Gabbe. The work of the Congress is done in Expert Committees (e.g. Madrid Outline Convention or Balkan). A manual on cross-border co-operation will be published by the Council of Europe in the near future (author: Prof. Charles Ricq).

In cooperation with the Russian government, the Council of Europe plans to set up a "centre for interregional and cross-border co-operation" in St. Petersburg. This should be finalised before November (end of the Russian Presidency). The Norwegian Ambassador of the Council of Europe chairs the working group, which is currently drawing up the statutes for the centre on the basis of a partial agreement of the Council of Europe (at least 16 countries). This partial agreement will also be open to non-members. The centre is not meant to compete with existing institutions.

AEBR decided to continue the co-operation with the Council of Europe and to intensify it as much as possible. AEBR will make content-related contributions towards the establishment of the projected centre in St. Petersburg, provided that the added value of this centre as compared to existing institutions becomes visible beforehand.

➤ **Appointment of a Member of European Parliament responsible for border questions**

In cooperation with the groups in the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, the European Council of the Heads of State and Government and the European Commission, the AEBR will continue the project "Delegate for border questions". To this end, a meeting with politically high-ranking representatives of the European Parliament and representatives of AEBR took place in Brussels on 21 June 2006. The following participated: Vice-President Ingo Friedrich; Prof. Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, Chairman of the EVP Group; Jo Leinen, Chairman of the Constitutional Committee; Elisabeth Schroedter, speaker of the Greens /EFA in the Committee on Regional Development, Transport and Tourism; Elmar Brok, chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Due to unforeseen changes in her agenda, Constanze Krehl was unfortunately not able to attend. The aim is that a Committee of the European Parliament (preferably the Regional Committee) will be tasked with specifically addressing cross-border issues in its working programmes and with appointing a permanent rapporteur. In 2007, it will be checked again whether a Vice-President of the European Parliament might be appointed delegate for border questions.

More on: www.aebr.net

➤ **EU regulation on cohesion and regional policy (including territorial cooperation and a legal instrument)**

AEBR President Lambert van Nistelrooij, MEP, reported that the European Parliament adopted the regulations on cohesion and regional policy (incl. Legal instrument) and that the regions can now elaborate the programmes for the period 2007 to 2013. Furthermore, it should be thought in how far the legal instrument can be used by the border regions in their cross-border cooperation.

The passed regulations are available in several languages on:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sourcess/docoffic/official/regulation/newregI0713_de.htm

AEBR Secretary General Jens Gabbe regretted that the working 'as a rule one programme per border' will result in increasing centralisation of region-specific (i.e. smaller) programmes, which have been very successful so far (German/Dutch, German/French and Danish/Swedish borders). At the same time, programmes which have been centralised up to now will become more and more decentralised (Spain/Portugal, Ireland/Northern Ireland, and Greece/Italy). The desire to make use of AEBR's strengths in terms of contents has

become obvious in the discussions with the European Commission. Arguments showing why support for cross-border co-operation must continue after 2013 and why **all** border regions need assistance should be submitted as early as year-end 2007. He furthermore stressed that those regions which are feeling safe today (today's former external borders and new internal borders) will have received financial assistance from the EU for more than 10 years in 2014. As early as in 2000, i.e. 10 years after the launch of the INTERREG programme for today's former internal borders, the question came up as to whether it was necessary to continue support for these border areas. Objective 2 should also be used for cross-border co-operation even though this rather constitutes an option for NUTS III areas not covered by INTERREG. Ministries tend to refer to the INTERREG programme when receiving requests for financial assistance from Objective 2 for cross-border co-operation. Thus, an objective-2-funding could rather be applied by NUTS-III-regions, which are up to now not involved in cross-border programmes.

AEBR's Executive Committee welcomed the adoption of the regulation on cohesion and regional policy. The AEBR contributed considerably to the improvements as regards content. It was criticised, however, that the EU programmes for cross-border cooperation are highly bureaucratic, with bureaucracy tying up 30% to 40% of the manpower. The check lists elaborated by AEBR's Secretariat on the operational programmes for both the internal and the external borders will be completed and sent out. They are a useful tool for the elaboration of the programmes and projects in the border regions.

The AEBR Executive Committee calls for a better linking between interregional, transnational and cross-border cooperation, whereas cross-border cooperation should be the basis. It was pointed out that the EU funding could initiate sustainable cross-border projects and a permanent cooperation. Particularly in the case of economic projects, there would otherwise be the danger that the projects do not survive after 3 years. Therefore, a degressive funding is recommended, particularly in the case of economic projects, to make sure that they survive after the funding period.

➤ **EU regulation on the Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)**

AEBR's President reported that this regulation is still in the phase of final elaboration. This EU programme aims at improving good cooperation at the EU's external borders and developing more wealth as of 1.1.2007 by means of a uniform funding instrument and a joint procedure. As also EU border regions are involved, they should not be put into a worse

position as regards the involvement in programmes than up to now in INTERREG programmes. Due to the fact that the programmes have to be worked out by the member states and their neighbouring states in cooperation with the regional level, the border regions have to play a special role. Given that the responsibility is in the hands of DG RELEX, a rather centralised procedure is to be feared. The degree of involvement of the regional/local level has to be increased further, especially since EU border areas are concerned. The specific chapter on cross-border cooperation offers additional opportunities. Given that financial assistance comes from ERDF and RELEX funds, it might happen that ERDF funds which have not been used after three years because of a joint programme not coming into effect might be returned to DG REGIO and then made available to the border regions concerned. The adoption of this regulation is planned for autumn 2006.

More on: www.aebr.net

➤ **AEBR Forum EU Programmes 2007 – 2013”, Strasbourg, 2nd June 2006**

Following the request of AEBR’s Executive Committee, a special forum dealt with “The future of cross-border programmes 2007 - 2013 in the framework of Territorial Cohesion”. Jean-Paul Heider, first Vice-President of AEBR and Vice-President of the Region of Alsace, chaired this forum, which took place in Strasbourg on 2 June 2006. The representative of the European Commission’s DG REGIO, Mr. Dirk Peters, commented on the “Proposal for a EU-Regulation on Regional and Cohesion Policy” and the “Proposal for a regulation on the EU’s legal instrument (EGTC)”. AEBR’s Secretary General Jens Gabbe presented checklists on the elaboration, agreements and implementation of cross-border EU programmes. Harald Krebs, Managing Director of EUREGIO, reported on the practical implementation of these checklists in successful EU programmes and projects. Further speakers were: Patrice Harster, Regio PAMINA; Tobias Schneider, INTERREG-III A Alpenrhein-Hochrhein-Bodensee; Franco Iacop, Regional Minister of Friuli-Venezia Giulia; Christian Preußcher, Euroregion Elbe/Labe. The forum was attended by approximately 40 representatives of European Border Regions and lead to interesting discussions, in particular on the new legal instrument, the checklists and cooperation structures. Important results can be obtained from AEBR’s office.

More: info@aebr.net

➤ **Up-date of AEBR’s Action Programme 2006**

After the EU enlargement in 2004 and due to recent developments in the EU’s policies, it became necessary to update AEBR’s Action Programme. The Secretariat General of AEBR has therefore, in particular also with regard to the “Strategic Guidelines for the period 2007-

2013” in the year 2006 and the new EU regulation on the “European Grouping on Cross-Border Cooperation (EGTC)” updated the Action Programme.

After its adoption by the Executive Committee in autumn 2006, the updated Action Programme will be presented to the General Assembly for final adoption. Afterwards, it will be available for download on AEBR’s homepage: www.aebr.net

➤ **New edition of the map “European Border Regions 2000”**

The cross-border cooperation structures in the European Regions have considerably changed in the past 5 years due to the EU enlargement and the EU funding in the framework of INTERREG. In order to assess changes in the new spatial borders or names of the euroregions or similar structures, the Secretariat General has started a survey among its members. A number of further enquiries became necessary. The results are currently being processed and put into table form for cartographic editing. AEBR is currently looking for financial funding for the cartographic editing and the printing of the map “European Border Regions 2006”.

➤ **White Paper of Border Regions 2006**

In 2006, the Secretariat General of AEBR elaborated the draft White Paper on Border regions, which is now almost finally formulated. It will contain the following chapters:

- Motives for cross-border cooperation,
- The Association of European Border Regions as umbrella organisation,
- Types of border regions in Europe,
- Added value of cross-border cooperation,
- Results of cross-border cooperation,
- Future of cross-border cooperation.

The annex contains a presentation of AEBR’s members, a list of the Executive Committee members and a chronology covering the time since its foundation. The chapter “Types of border regions in Europe” still has to be elaborated. The Secretariat General of AEBR surveyed its members in this regard, asking for feedback until 20 September 2006. The White Paper is planned to be available as electronic version until the General Assembly 2006.

The future of Europe's Border Regions – Congress in Saarbrücken

On invitation of the Prime Minister of Saarland, Mr. Peter Müller, a congress took place in Saarbrücken on 5 July, dealing in particular with the contribution of cross-border cooperation to the strengthening of cohesion and the Lisbon strategy. Some 150 high-ranking politicians, representatives of European border regions and experts met in Saarbrücken, in order to discuss experiences and development possibilities for cross-border cooperation in Europe. AEBR was involved in the preparations. Key speeches were given by Prof. Dr. Danuta Hübner, Member of the European Commission/Commissioner for Regional Policy on the subject: "A New Strategy for European Border Regions", and by Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble, Federal Minister for Internal Affairs, on the topic: "Border areas at the gateway of regional, national and European Policy". In a final declaration, available in three speeches, the expectations for the future of border regions in Europe have been formulated.

"Saarbrücken Declaration" - Download: www.aebr.net

Further information: www.saarland.de

AEBR General Assembly and Annual Conference 2006

Please note that this event had to be postponed due to political and technical reasons!!

New date: 23 – 25 November 2006

Venue: Pamplona, Region of Navarre, Spain

F:\DATA\334 AGEG\Publikationen\Newsletter\Nr 9\English16Aug06.doc