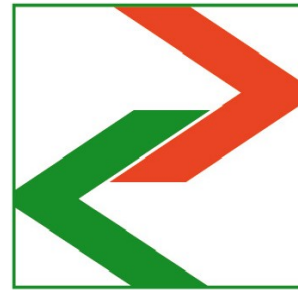


Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab (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' electronic newsletter – January 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 (average circulation 1600).

Executive Committee of AEBR: European citizens recognise the importance of cross-border cooperation



On 9 December 2005, AEBR's Executive Committee met in Maastricht, Euregio Maas-Rhein, in the same room in which the Maastricht treaty had been signed in 1992. Commissioner Frissen emphasised the manifold good experiences of many years that the Euregio has made with cross-border cooperation in this triangle (BE/DE/NL) and the AEBR.

President van Nistelrooij stressed in this opening address that the rejection of the European Constitution in the Netherlands and France had showed how difficult it was to get citizens interested in European issues. However, cross-border cooperation had demonstrated that it was possible!

The Executive Committee dealt in Maastricht with the following main topics:

- Cross-border cooperation in the health system;

- 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);
- Commission Communication "Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme Modern SME Policy for Growth and Employment" (COM (2005) 551 final);
- Report from the European Parliament, Committee on Regional Development, on the role of territorial cohesion in regional development (final A6-0251/2005);
- Report of the European Parliament, Committee on Transport and Tourism, on new prospects and new challenges for sustainable European tourism (final A6-00235/2005);
- Development of the European legal instrument;
- Language networks in border areas.

AEBR Secretary General retires in October 2006 – Martín Guillermo Ramírez will become new Secretary General



On 9 December 2005, the Executive Committee elected the Spaniard Martín Guillermo Ramírez as successor of Jens Gabbe. Mr. Guillermo had already worked for a period of 7 years with the Executive Committee as representative of the Spanish Region of Extremadura and six years in the LACE project. He was, for example, responsible for the Spanish version of the "Practical Guide to cross-border cooperation", a publication of the European Commission that had been elaborated by AEBR.

He has gained extensive practical and theoretical experiences at the Spanish/Portuguese border and also in other European border regions and in almost all activity fields of AEBR. Mr. Guillermo is currently graduating at his university in Mérida and he will start his training period in AEBR's Secretariat General within the next weeks.

Euregional experiences = aims, tasks, working method

On the occasion of the "Seminar on euregional experiences", which was organised by Generalidad de Catalunya and AEBR in Barcelona on 5 September 2005, AEBR Secretary General Jens Gabbe pointed out both the present and future role of Euroregions and similar

structures in the European and national regional policy as well as the added value of cross-border cooperation and its contribution to the European integration. The Nordic Council of Ministers and several border regions presented their different experiences with cross-border cooperation:

- Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion (ES/FR),
- International Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area (ES/LE/LI/FI/SE),
- Eems-Dollard Regio (NL/DE),
- Carpathian Euroregion (PL/HU/UKR/SL/RO),
- Öresundskomiteen (DK/SE).

All Euroregions argued for improved legal structures, for a strategic cooperation and for long-term financing.

Dialogue with Commission President Barroso in Brussels

Mr. M. Eurlings, member of AEBR's Executive Committee and Vicepresident of the Province of Limburg (NL), presented AEBR's opinion on the occasion of the Brussels dialogue meeting of the European Commission and the European regional organisations on 17 November 2005.

For more information: www.aebr.net

Dialogue with Commissioner Borg in Brussels on 2nd December 2005



Following the request of Commission President Barroso from February, this was the second in a series of sectoral thematic dialogues to take place between associations and the European Commissioners concerned. Mr. Joe Borg, European Commissioner responsible for Fisheries & Maritime Affairs, discussed "The Future of EU Maritime Policy". AEBR was one of the associations invited to contribute to the debate. Mr. Uwe Döring, Minister for Justice, Labour and Europe of the Land Schleswig-Holstein

(Germany), presented AEBR's opinion. For more information: www.aebr.net

European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument



The European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development is responsibly dealing with the neighbourhood and partnership instrument and the instrument for accession candidates. AEBR President Lambert van Nistelrooij is co-rapporteur in the Regional Development Committee, in which a first statement was presented and discussed already in July 2005.

Having read the text of main rapporteur Konrad Szymanski, AEBR's Secretariat General elaborated a statement, which was presented to the Regional Development Committee by AEBR's President on 5 December 2005.

For more information: www.aebr.net

Perspectives and challenges for cross-border cooperation at the EU's Eastern External Borders (NEEBOR)

During a Seminar in Brussels on 8 December 2005, NEEBOR, a network of border regions at the eastern external borders of the EU in which AEBR is involved as partner, discussed the issues of EU's external borders. Danuta Hübner, Commissioner responsible for Regional Policy, presented the Commission's point of view. AEBR President Lambert van Nistelrooij, MEP, and Secretary General Jens Gabbe spoke for AEBR.

More: www.aebr.net

The EU presents new „Community strategic guidelines for cohesion, growth and jobs“ with three main priorities

On 5 July 2005, the European Commission presented a communication on „Community strategic guidelines for economic, social and territorial cohesion“. The strategic guidelines elucidate community priorities with regard to the cohesion programmes. Three main priorities, which have to be taken into account in future programmes, have been fixed:

1. Europe should be made an attractive place to work and invest;
2. Knowledge and innovation for growth;
3. More and better jobs.

More: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/index_de.htm

The members of AEBR submitted their observations on the guidelines.

Legal instrument of the EU for territorial cooperation not yet adopted

The European Parliament adopted the report of Jan Olbrycht on a "Draft Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing European grouping of cross-border cooperation (EGCC)" was adopted by the European Parliament in July 2005. In the meantime, there have been compromise proposals by both the Luxemburg and UK Council Presidency, which are being discussed by the European Commission and the member states, but without mutual consent. Due to the fact that this is a Co-Decision of the European Council/European Parliament, the EP's Committee on Regional Development will deal once again with this subject.

Cross-border cooperation in the health system urgently requires a European exchange of experience



On 27 September 2005, "RegioTriRhena", "REGIO BASILIENSIS" and AEBR organised an AEBR-forum on the topic "Cross-border health cooperation – added value for people, economy and regions", which took place in Basle. A survey concerning European developments in cross-border health cooperation was carried out.

Besides, exemplary projects from different European border regions were presented. In cooperation with HOPE and the project of the land NRW "EUREGIO – Cross-border health system", AEBR will prioritise this topic further on.

More: www.aebr.net

Further information: www.regbas.ch

AEBR's General Assembly and Annual Conference on 20 and 21 October 2005 in Drama (GR) were a complete success



AEBR President Lambert van Nistelrooij thanked the Euroregion Nestos-Mesta, the Region East Macedonia/Thrace and the Prefecture of Drama for the invitation. He reminded that this was already the third Executive Committee meeting and the second General Assembly in five years to take place in Northern Greece.

In their opening addresses and statements, the Presidents of the Northern Greek regions pointed out the high significance of cross-border cooperation for the cooperation with Bulgaria and Turkey. AEBR had supported these efforts in many ways and was a valuable organisation for the region.

AEBR's Annual Report 2004 was also presented in the General Assembly.

More: www.aebr.net



Some 200 delegates from 28 European countries as well as representatives of the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and national governments attended the event. The Final Declaration entitled "Contribution of cross-border cooperation to implementing the Lisbon Strategy" was adopted unanimously.

More: www.aebr.net

The next **General Assembly and Annual Conference** of AEBR takes place in **Pamplona, Navarra/Spain from 19-21 October 2006.**

The Irish/Northern Irish Border Regions (CAWT) won the AEBR Award "Sail of Papenburg" 2005



The Irish/Northern Irish border regions received the AEBR Award 2005 for their project "A strategic approach for cross-border health and social services". The Laudation was held by Dr. Reinhold Kolck, Vice-President of AEBR and chairman of the jury. He handed the certificates over together with the President of AEBR. A short description of the projects can be found on www.aebr.net

High decoration for members of AEBR's Executive Committee handed over by the Prefect of Drama (Greece)



On the occasion of AEBR's General Assembly on 20 October 2005, Konstantinos Evmiridis, Prefect of Drama (to the right) handed over some special prizes for successful and innovative cooperation and support of cross-border cooperation, in the form of engraved silver tags, to four members of AEBR's Executive Committee:

- Jens Gabbe, Secretary General (left hand of the picture),
- Dr. Viktor Frhr. von Malchus, Chairman of the Committee,
- Wim Schelberg, Honorary Member,
- Eugenio Ambrosi, Regione Friuli-Venezia-Giulia and
- Konstantinos Hatzidakis, Member of the European Parliament.

Future of European Cohesion and Regional Policy

Financial Perspective of the EU 2007 – 2013 and territorial cooperation

The European Council of Heads of State or Government adopted in December 2005 the As we all know, the European Council of Heads of State and Government adopted the Financial Perspective for the period 2007-2013, with a volume of € 862,363 Mio. = 1,045 % of the European Gross Domestic Product. In the framework of the European Cohesion and Regional

policy, the original proposals of the Luxemburg presidency for Territorial Cooperation remain unchanged: 2,4 % = € 7,5 billion are available.

Compared with the original Commission proposal of 4 %, the reduction seems to be negative at first sight. But at the same time it has to be considered that the EU Commission proposal intended only 47,5 % of the funds for cross-border cooperation.

According to the decision of the Heads of State and Government of last week, 77 % of the € 7,5 billion are intended for cross-border cooperation = € 5,775 billion. The amount of € 5,775 billion nearly corresponds to the total amount available for the entire INTERREG III-Programme 2000-2006, from which approx. € 3,6 billion were intended for cross-border cooperation. This means that € 2 billion more than up to now will be available for cross-border cooperation in the period 2007-2013.

Territorial cooperation comprises cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. Cross-border cooperation will receive 77 %, transnational cooperation 19 % and interregional cooperation 4 %.

The following regions will be eligible: all NUTS III regions at internal land borders, certain NUTS III regions at external borders and all NUTS III regions at maritime borders (up to a distance of 150 km). The amounts for cross-border cooperation will be calculated on basis of the population in the NUTS III regions.

Thus, cross-border cooperation is not only secured until 2013, but will also receive additional funds (which are urgently necessary in the light of the EU enlargement). The NUTS III rule and the support for all border regions will be continued, too.

In addition, the draft EU regulation contains many of AEBR's modification proposals on Cohesion and Regional Policy, which have mostly been considered in the opinions of the European Parliament, too.

More: www.aebr.net

Meeting with DG REGIO Director General Graham Meadows

On 21 December 2005, a meeting took place at short notice with Director General Meadows as well as Mr. Bougas and other assistants of DGREGIO. President Lambert van Nistelrooij

and Secretary General Jens Gabbe participated on the part of AEBR. The meeting that was originally planned to last for one hour resulted in an intensive 2½-hour dialogue on the future cohesion and regional policy, the territorial cooperation, the neighbourhood and partnership instrument as well as the EU's legal instrument for territorial cooperation. On the basis of the results of the meeting of heads of state or government in December 2005, the uniform implementation provisions for the whole of Europe with regard to cohesion and regional policy were discussed, e.g. in questions of public/private co-financing, the timely application of EU funds (N+2 rule) and that EU border regions must not be put into a worse position in the neighbourhood and partnership policy than up to now in INTERREG A.

The Secretary General presented further field-tested proposals that would help to improve the genuine cross-border character of programmes and projects, e.g. through:

- Allocation of funds per border (as it was already the case in INTERREG-I) and not per member state.
- Avoiding bigger and bigger programmes for cross-border cooperation. EU evaluations clearly demonstrate that the smaller and region-specific have the best cross-border results and added-value.
- Alternatively elaboration of cross-border programmes with sub-programmes per border, whereas the region-specific sub-programmes should have the essential importance in the elaboration and implementation of the programmes and in the execution of projects.
- Necessity of not only creating a joint bank account for EU funding per programme, but to of transferring the national/regional co-financing from both sides to this account.
- Definition of a cross-border project: partners from both sides of the border are involved with regard to management, staff, financing and content. The financial involvement is absolutely necessary, as the partners will then get involved in the other sections.
- Early specification of cross-border criteria for the joint eligibility.

The Secretary General emphasised that the specification of joint eligibility criteria, a joint bank account for EU and national/regional co-financing and the financial involvement of partners from both sides are the most essential elements and pre-condition for genuinely cross-border programmes and projects.

AEBR will continue its contacts with Director General Meadows and DG REGIO with regard to these topics.

Large attendance for the „OPEN DAYS“ in Brussels, 10 – 13 October 2005

From 10 to 13 October 2005, the "European Week of Cities and Regions (OEPN DAYS)" took place in Brussels. It was already organised for the third time by the European Commission's DG REGIO and the Committee of the Regions (CoR). 66 seminars, workshops and exhibitions dealing with urban development and cooperation with regard to the future EU structural funds programmes were carried out.

More: <http://www.cor.eu.int/de/index.htm>

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/opendays/index.cfm

Important activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers (NMR) for cross-border cooperation in the North from 2000 to 2005 and in future

On the occasion of the autumn meeting of AEBR's Executive Committee, Dr. von Malchus and Mr. Radvilavicius, representative of the Nordic Council of Ministers, reported about the NMR's activities. Dr. von Malchus spoke about the pragmatic and exemplary policy of the Scandinavian states between 2000 and 2005, particularly the so-called Schlüter process. more: www.aebr.net. Mr. Radvilavicius supplemented this formation by giving a report about a new project of the NMR, the „Baltic Euroregional Network“ (BEN), which was launched on 27 September 2005. This network contains 35 partner from 9 countries, including the EU's new neighbouring countries Russia (RU) and Belarus (BY). More: www.norden.org/topofeurope/ dated 3 October 2005. AEBR was asked to take part in the BEN project.

New programme of the Nordic Council of Ministers for the cooperation with Northwest Russia

The Finnish Minister for Nordic Cooperation, Jan-Eric Enestam, presented on the occasion of the NMR's November meeting in Reykjavik (IS) the new cooperation programme with Northwest Russia. Key elements of the programme are:

- Democratic development,
- Cross-border cooperation,
- Research and innovation - IT co-operation,
- Social and health issues as well as environmental matters.

More: www.norden.org/topofeurope newsletter of November 2005

AEBR's comments regarding the proposals of the EU and the CoR on support for rural development in Europe

AEBR made comments on both the "Proposal for a Council Regulation on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)" and the CoR modification proposals. Most important content of this concrete statement is AEBR's demand to better coordinate all the national and regional programmes (chapter 14 § 2) on support for rural areas in border regions with the future INTERREG programmes. This demand is also valid with regard to the local development strategies (Art. 58 and 64).

More: www.aebr.net

AEBR requested its members and friends to become active at national level in this sense. AEBR is planning to organise a forum or an annual conference on the subject "Rural areas" in 2006.

Meeting with Commissioner Danuta Hübner in Brussels



On 27 January 2006, AEBR President Lambert van Nistelrooij, Secretary General Jens Gabbe and the Deputy Secretary General Martín Guillermo Ramírez met with Commissioner Danuta Hübner and further representatives of DG REGIO.

The following topics were discussed:

- Results of the meeting of the Heads of State or Government concerning territorial cohesion,
- Legal instrument,
- Maritime cooperation,
- Ombudsman for border issues,
- European Neighbourhood and Partnership as well as Pre-Accession Programme.

It was agreed that the most important proposals of AEBR be sent in writing to Commissioner Hübner again.

***AEBR wishes you the best of luck for your work as well as
personal happiness and well-being for the year 2006.***

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