

Dear Mr. Plokhikh (Gouverneur de Koursk),

Dear Mr. Lambertz,

Dear Mr. Guillermo,

Dear Mr. Gabbe, dear Dr. Kolck (vice-president of the executive committee)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to have the occasion today to officially congratulate the Association of European Border Regions for its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The EUREGIO belongs to the 10 founding members of the AEBR and has always been actively involved in it. We are proud the secretariat of the AEBR is settled in our building, in the oldest institutionalized cross border region of Europe. Thus we are supporting our umbrella organisation on a financial perspective; we put an office at the secretariat's disposal, free of charge and our staff members are taking over minor administrative tasks.

There are a lot of good things to say about the AEBR and I could name many successes. But according to the time at my disposal, I will try to summarize in one point. The AEBR is a forerunner. It has always been and is still one.

To begin with, the organisation paves the way to Brussels to its members. Without the AEBR, border regions' interests would never have been heard as well and taken into consideration.

The organisation is also active in other fields: it provides us with information from Europe.

It paves the way to others border regions: it offers us an important network and allows us easy and personal exchanges with other regions.

In these last years, it has paved the way, even more intensively, to European cooperation projects: as initiator and helpdesk for projects, it has motivated and encouraged transnational and interregional activities.

Its paves the way to new perspectives: for example, concerning the cooperation with Eastern EU countries and the contact about EU external borders. Today's conference in Kursk is a good example of that. As a forerunner, the AEBR has always known how to set its goals and from where the wind is blowing. Expertise, long-term vision, courage and commitment are required in this perspective. For this, I would like to thank all the interested people, especially the General Secretary, Martin Guillermo and his predecessor Jens Gabbe but without forgetting the secretariat's staff in Gronau.

I wish the AEBR to continue to be successful and I hope it stays a forerunner in the future. Both tools – compass and torch – should help us to find the right way and to keep track.

Happy anniversary to the AEBR for its 40 years of existence!