



Speech given by Cllr Alan Mc Dowell, Vice Chairman of East Border Region on the occasion of the 'Cross Border Co-Operation: Best Practice and Future Opportunities from across the European Union' Conference on Thursday 13th June 2013 in the Knightsbrook Hotel. Trim County Meath.

Mr Butler TD, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure, as Vice Chairman of the East Border Region, to address you this morning. I think that you all will agree that this is indeed a beautiful part of Ireland and I thank TD Butler for his warm welcome to his constituency of Meath West.

It also gives me great pleasure to introduce another event which has been organised by East Border Region (EBR) in conjunction with the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). We in EBR have a longstanding relationship with AEBR and have established many linkages and indeed friendships with our colleagues who are working on cross border cooperation in other border regions throughout Europe. Some of them are speaking today. I extend a particularly warm welcome to our AEBR colleagues from

across the European Union who have made the journey to be with us today.

It is worth noting that there are various INTERREG Programmes across the European Union and most of them are remarkably similar to the Ireland / N Ireland Programme. This is because people who live in Border Regions face similar problems such as

- Higher levels of Unemployment
- Skills Shortages
- Weak Infrastructure
- Lower levels of Inward Investment etc.

The one problem we do not face in Ireland is the problem of different languages which is an advantage. However, unlike our colleagues in the rest of Europe, we do have two different currencies to contend with. The INTERREG Programme was developed by the European Commission to address the problems faced by border regions and we along the Ireland/ N Ireland Border Area have so much to be grateful to the Commission for. Funding from the Commission in the shape of both the INTERREG and Peace

programmes has assisted us to begin the transformation of our cross border region.

The INTERREG Programme has enabled us as an organisation to make a huge contribution to the development of the East Border Region. Our organisation was formed in 1976 at a time when cross border cooperation in Ireland was not fashionable. The political climate was not conducive to this cooperation and governments in both Dublin and Belfast were not supportive. The introduction of the INTERREG Programme in the late 1980's thus represented a huge opportunity for cross border groups such as East Border Region to deliver for the people of our region. Let's take a look at what we have done.

[Video Introduction](#)

In 2013 East Border Region is a key player in respect of the cross border economic development of this region. Why have we been so successful? I believe that there are two key reasons. Firstly, elected members from all of the political parties North and South are members of East Border Region. This gives us a very strong political mandate, particularly in respect of lobbying. Secondly, senior officials from all ten

member councils are advisors to the Board of EBR. These two elements are essential and work well together. We also believe strongly in the principle of 'bottom up' development. Local people must be actively involved in the development and implementation of the projects.

There is no doubt that as a genuine cross border organisation we have been successful in drawing down INTERREG monies.

East Border Region was an Implementing Body for the INTERREG IIIA Programme and successfully administered 36 cross border projects to the value of €25million Euro.

Currently we are responsible for managing 13 INTERREG IVA Projects to the value of €32.47million Euro which has been awarded to a wide range of projects across a number of key themes including: Enterprise, Tourism, Environment and Infrastructure.

This substantive allocation is by no means accidental but is reflective of the excellent track record and reputation which East Border Region has displayed since the outset of the INTERREG Programme. Given the current economic climate this funding will make a real impact across the region and will

help to revive the economy in many of our Border towns and villages who so badly require this money. We are particularly proud to have achieved one of our longstanding ambitions during this Programme which is the funding of the Narrow Water Bridge Project. Our Chief Executive, Pamela, will outline this project in more detail later but it is testimony of just how much can be achieved through collaboration and working together. This is a major infrastructure project which will leave a lasting legacy for the INTERREG Programme in our region.

It would be remiss of me not to mention our colleagues in the other cross border groups, some of whom are here today. As five cross border groups we work extremely well together and I believe that it is incumbent on us to continue to do so particularly in respect of securing our role in the INTERREG V Programme.

I look forward to hearing all of the speakers today. I wish the conference well.

Thank You