

Introduction Geert Versnick - 'Annual Conference AEBR'

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Round Tabel (15.30u)

Future priorities for CBC in Europe

Cross-border health care, energy, public services, territorial planning, legal bodies

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to introduce the speakers of this round table session

- **Jiří Buriánek**, Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions since one year. Former Director at the Secretariat-General of the Council of the EU. He holds a joint Czech-German citizenship.
- **Breda Pecan**, Rapporteur of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe on External Borders/Third Countries, Representative of the Chamber of Local Authorities, Alternate of the Governance Committee

View of the border regions:

- **Xosé Lago**, Deputy Director-General of External Relations and Cross-Border Cooperation, Regional Government of Galicia (ES) (Spanish-Portuguese border, Euroregion/EGTC Galicia-Norte). Beside an Interreg cooperation, this border region has an intensive cooperation on economical, social and cultural themes.

Before I give the floor to the panel I would like to thank the AEBR for the opportunity to preside this round table that will focus on the future

priorities for Cross Border Cooperation in Europe. I am Geert Versnick, Vice-governor of the Flemish Province of East Flanders and representative of the Euregion Scheldemond.

To start my short introduction I would like to give you a quick view on the Euregion Scheldemond. Our Flemish – Dutch Euregion is a cooperation between the provinces of East and West Flanders and Zeeland. What is particular in our Euregion is that a small part of Zeeland is detached from the rest of Holland by the Western Scheldt and is attached to Flanders. This creates an unique situation. which makes cross-border cooperation truly a necessity. Last year we celebrated 25 years of cross-border cooperation in the Euregion, and right from the start we have been active in EU programmes and projects.

Another reason why Cross Border Cooperation is so important in our region is the Canal Ghent – Terneuzen. This cross border channel connects two important ports: the port of Ghent in East Flanders and Zeeland Seaports in Zeeland. The regional and local authorities in this Cross Border Area work together on spatial development, sustainability, environment and economic cooperation. More recently the two ports also decided to work closely together on integrated port management. Not only do they jointly promote themselves internationally, they also want to achieve a common nautical management.

This example shows that Cross Border Cooperation is indispensable. Therefore we welcome the AEBR Opinion on the future of Cohesion policy and cross-border cooperation as well as the opinion of mister Dobrosłavić on strengthening cross-border cooperation and also the initiative of the Luxembourg Presidency to enhance the cross-border regulatory framework with new tools. The Euregion Scheldemond highly supports the AEBR in its striving for the future of cohesion policy and

guaranteeing the future of territorial cohesion, and in particular cross-border cooperation.

The Euregion Scheldemond is in line with the AEBR in highlighting the need to strengthen the role of local and regional authorities in the management and implementation of the ERDF programmes, fully in line with the principle of subsidiarity, and equally in respect of the principle of multi-level governance. It is clear that regional and local authorities play an important role in Cross Border Cooperation, as it is also the case in Euregion Scheldemond. It's up to them to keep on investing in Cross Border Cooperation and to stress the importance of it. And this for the sake of the citizens, the organizations and the companies in the region.

In our Euregion, the cross-border cooperation is embedded in both the local as well as regional policies and strategies, on both sides of the border. However, EU programmes and projects, in particular of the EU cohesion policy, are a crucial instrument to create a leverage effect and implement our policies and action plans. It is my conviction that a strong bottom-up willingness to cooperate together with the support of the European Union is key to the future of regional policy in action.

Let me briefly illustrate this by our approach to Cross Border Labour Market issues. Within the European Union there are still a lot of barriers that make it difficult for people to work on the other side of the border. The Scheldemond Council considers the increase and facilitation of cross-border mobility one of its priorities . Interreg funding helped accelerating the implementation of various actions.

Other Cross Border Challenges that we have established in our Action Plan 2020 are:

- Innovation in different domains such as Bio Based Economy, Health Care and Agro Food. As a province, as well as a Euregion we have developed a 'Smart Specialisation Strategy'. These and other key clusters have been integrated in the strategy we are currently implementing.
- Climate Change and Renewable Energy
- Cross Border Logistics and Mobility
- Biodiversity
- Cross Border Spatial Planning

To conclude, a lot of these themes will probably remain a priority after 2020. In this respect we welcome the first negotiations on future topics. But it is still early. From an operational point of view, the Interreg V programme just started, and the first projects have only been recently approved. So there is still a long way to go. However, the Euregion Scheldemond is happy to contribute to the debate, and give input to the cross-border cooperation of the future.

I am very interested in hearing from the different speakers their views and insights on the future priorities for Cross Border Cooperation.