

## EUROREGION NISAVA DELEGATION IN GRONAU 05.10.2011



Yesterday the AEBR welcomed a delegation of mayors and elected representatives from the Euroregion Nisava. The Euroregion, founded in 2005, gathers municipalities of the around Pirot District (SER) and the Sofia-city District (BG). It has been recently reactivated and has incidentally known an increase in its activities this past year. The representatives present at the General Secretariat yesterday have high expectations concerning the future of the cooperation in the region with the strengthening and deepening of the relationship between their two countries.



*Group picture at the end of the meeting*

The Euroregion, which is named after a river flowing from Bulgaria, where it has its source, to Serbia (in Cyrillic *Нишава*), has set four priority sectors:

- Emergency
- Development of tourism
- Environment and energy efficiency
- Local roads

As it is a mountain region with the Balkan Mountain range, synergy in the field of emergency services is of high importance to prevent and intervene in case of accident and natural disaster. Tourism is also a priority for the Euroregion Nisava. As it is less developed than in other parts of both countries, it is necessary to stimulate a cross border promotion of the area and thus to boost the local economy. Environment and energy efficiency are also integral part of the joint strategy of Serbian and Bulgarian municipalities, as well as the repairing of local roads.

The meeting has opened new perspectives of networking with other AEBR members. The Euroregion Nisava was especially interested in sharing experiences, good practices and taking advantage of other

Euroregions' expertise. Very promising exchanges within the AEBR network could take place in the field of water management for instance. Such partnerships could help activating the Euroregion Nisava and give impulse to the entire region, including other cross border cooperation structures of the Balkan region.

The Euroregion Nisava may be a young one but is endowed with numerous advantages. Besides being supported by a strong political will from its local politicians, civil society is also active within the Euroregion Council. To this extent, Nisava gathers two essential ingredients for successful cross border cooperation. Moreover, a local dialect establishes a perfect bridge between Serbian and Bulgarian. It is a major asset for mutual understanding and communication.



*Goran Stamenovic and Martin G. Ramirez*

The Euroregion Nisava still has to soften mental borders through the implementation of projects involving civil society. In this perspective, the representatives were particularly interested in the presentation of the EUREGIO (NL/DE) and its successful projects (e.g. citizens counseling regarding tax, health insurance, etc.).

Martin G. Ramirez advocates, in the name of the AEBR, the creation of a EU special fund for the Balkan region (in addition to the Instrument of Pre Accession, IPA), promoting especially people-to-people initiatives. Such European financial support would have to be managed by local actors (mayors, local representatives), as first concerned and better experienced in the region.

The Secretary General concludes his presentation reminding the AEBR's conception of cross border cooperation which *should avoid competition and promote synergies*.