

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking you for giving me this opportunity to make a small contribution to your candidacy for European Capital of Culture 2019.

I am here today as a representative of the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion – a border region of Europe located in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium – and also as a representative of the umbrella Association of European Border Regions, the AEBR. I am also a representative of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, which has a friendship with South Tyrol going back a long way.

As recently as the end of October, the Parliament and government of the German-speaking Community visited EURAC as part of a study trip to South Tyrol and Bolzano, and had a meeting with the Parliament here and the Governor.

On behalf of Karl-Heinz Lambertz – the Minister-President of the German-speaking Community and Chairman of the Association of European Border Regions – I would like to convey the greetings of the Association and the AEBR and wish you resounding success with your candidacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe is in crisis.

That is not really anything new.

Even the very first steps on the way to a united Europe – with the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and the European Economic Community (the EEC) in 1957 – took place not only against the backdrop of quasi-indifference on the part of the peoples concerned but were also difficult births from the political perspective.

In the Benelux countries, ratification of the two treaties was supported by a relatively large majority in Parliament, but in France, Germany, and Italy there was significant parliamentary opposition. Indeed, the plan launched in 1952 for a European Defence Community (the EDC) collapsed when it failed to achieve a majority for ratification by the French Parliament in 1954.

In general, one can say that the subsequent ratifications of European treaties have not always been enthusiastically supported by national parliaments or peoples. But it would be too simple to explain that lack of enthusiasm as resulting purely from self-interested and commercial cost-benefit analyses by the Member States.

Political and economic crises – the oil crises of the 70s and 80s, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany (with its political and economic consequences for both Germany and Europe), the American speculation crisis involving hedge funds, coupled with massive new borrowing by many EU Member States in order to support their banks and the resulting reaction on the part of the rating agencies, which really turned off the money tap for a number of Member States... all of these have often confronted the peoples of Europe and

their parliamentary institutions with major challenges, and they continue to do so.

One might consider that Europe is not doing all that badly and that we have in fact managed to work things out – at least to some extent – despite these crises during this period of southern and eastern extension of the European internal market.

But things are not that simple, because it has often been precisely these crises that have caused Europe to grow closer together.

The financial crisis in Greece – which became apparent to everybody no later than early 2010 – is a good if sad example of this.

The Euro countries have realised – at the latest since the Irish financial crisis in 2008 – that in addition to investment incentives and budgetary restraint they also need a shared instrument in the case of crises to ensure the financial stability of the Eurozone, and for years they half-heartedly put together measures that we can summarise as a rescue package for the euro.

It was only the crisis in Greece – which rapidly contaminated other countries of the Eurozone too – that placed the Eurozone countries under pressure to such an extent that they completed that rescue package – at least for the present – on the 27th of September last year.

The real scandal is not that countries like Greece have been living beyond their means: the level of debt per person in the United States is in fact significantly higher than that in Greece – 34,000 as opposed to 32,000 – and the growth in private assets in America has declined sharply in the past five years, whereas it has risen strongly in Greece since 2010.

The real scandal is that we have taken so long to create solidarity between the peoples of Europe regarding this issue, something that has led to the impoverishment of large portions of the population in the countries affected and to considerable collateral damage in other countries. All this could definitely have been avoided by more courageous action.

The great danger for Europe is the slow rate at which it is growing together.

This is also becoming increasingly clear in other areas too. Take the example of the European internal market, which in many areas remains incomplete. Two important chapters are missing, namely those concerning a common European fiscal base and a common European social base.

The lack of the fiscal base can hardly be made more comically apparent than by the case of Gérard Depardieu, whose efforts to evade French taxation have taken him from being a Frenchman to almost being a Belgian and most recently to being a citizen of that great democracy, Russia.

And if German carmakers shift whole production lines to Hungary and their French counterparts lay off thousands in their own country while producing their

new sub-models in Romania, or a Belgian sawmill on the border with Germany closes down only to reopen on the German side, then it is not a contribution to development aid for a European neighbour but a matter of exploiting European, fiscal, and social imperfection.

If these social and fiscal chapters are not immediately added to the European treaties, there is a risk that it will lead to the bankruptcy of the western-European model of social security, which is already crumbling.

That would inevitably lead in turn to the collapse of Europe because the ever-increasing number of opponents of Europe – with their populist slogans such as “Own people first!” – could then definitely not be stopped. Let’s not forget David Cameron’s threats: offering the British the prospect of an exit from the EU in order to win the next election.

Compared to the rapidly developing new economic superpowers like India, Brazil and China, some of the EU’s Member States – including big ones like Germany, the UK, France, and Italy – look set to become economic midgets. We can all only survive if we grow closer together – faster and more strongly – than ever, as a united Europe at all levels.

What can culture and the cultures of Europe contribute to this process?

Let’s start with what culture can’t really do:

Culture can’t defeat economic crises.

European culture and the range of cultures within Europe can also not prevent Brazil, China, or India from overtaking Europe as number one in the global economic market.

Culture cannot be a panacea for the great mass of people when their income from work or social security is insufficient for them to purchase food, a roof over their head, clothes, heating, and health. It can at best alleviate the misery.

More and more frequently, I hear it said that we must have the courage to let go of the welfare state and – through the interplay between promoting individual creativity and opening up the possibilities of culture for all, the hybridization between culture and the market – arrive at new, self-created markets and jobs, and that we have to build new models, outside of the governmental and supranational regulatory systems for the redistribution of wealth, for example by means of bartering rings.

That is definitely the right approach to a certain extent, and we should definitely not ignore its potential. Even if this approach involves primarily a relatively small, creatively minded, intellectual elite, who generally have a certain level of financial security with which to tackle these challenges. But I doubt whether this approach can become a real alternative for the great majority of the population. We shouldn’t throw the baby out with the bathwater and we shouldn’t fail to recognise the potential of the state-organised system of social security as a fundamental economic factor.

However, this complex cultural, scientific, and research landscape in Europe can certainly provide fertile soil for dealing with creative industries and innovation, sustainable design and manufacturing, renewable energy and energy efficiency, etc., and developing these into solid competence and location factors within Europe in order to stand up to international competition.

Germany is currently showing us the way by abandoning atomic energy. This is a courageous and probably expensive step, but one that in the next few years will certainly give Germany a tremendous lead in innovation and a boost in investment and the economy.

Given that the issue of how the economy and culture can interact successfully has already been investigated in numerous studies and colloquiums – including at the conference held here with the EURAC in 2008: “Culture meets Economy” – I would like instead to consider the question today of how culture in the broader sense of the word can contribute to Europe’s growing together and to its closer integration.

I shall proceed from the following hypothesis:

In order for Europe to grow closer together, its citizens must act as cultural ambassadors to one another.

The border regions and their peoples, but also the European Capitals of Culture – especially those whose candidacy transcends borders and cultures – can make a significant contribution to this.

Border regions such as the Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion or the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion represent Europe in miniature.

The 2007 EURAC study on the added value of minorities in border regions – taking Germany and Denmark as the example – provides impressive evidence of the benefits of such regions. In particular the minorities – although in a border region one is quickly a minority even if one is able to speak the official national language – are developing a very special potential of multiculturalism, multilingualism, and European awareness. They are pioneers who are capable of becoming Europe’s bridge-builders. We must win them over as promoters of the unification process and support them in their efforts to involve the mass of the population in that process.

Let me explain this using the example of the collaboration between the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, the city of Maastricht as a candidate for European Capital of Culture 2018, and the Association of European Border Regions.

The Meuse-Rhine Euroregion is one of some 185 cross-border cooperation associations within Europe. It is a complex border region, consisting of five partner regions, with five often very different mentalities, political institutions, and decision-making levels from three countries and cultures. Besides dialects and local languages, three official languages are spoken – German, Dutch, and French – and in an area of just 11,000 square kilometres there is a population of some 5 million.

The Meuse-Rhine Euroregion was founded in 1976 and has since passed through three major phases of development:

In the first few years, the focus was on overcoming the physical barriers of the borders between the countries involved. Once that had been done and the borders had been opened up, the main challenge was to deal with the success of having opened them.

The Meuse-Rhine Euroregion (the MRE) carried out pioneering work in this regard, for example in the field of healthcare: today, any inhabitant of the MRE can be treated without any problem in one of the neighbouring countries, either in hospital or as an outpatient, joint prevention campaigns take place, and common quality standards have been introduced for hospitals.

Where policing is concerned, there is now a shared joint command centre for the MRE's police forces, a coordination office for the various prosecution services, and manhunts take place across borders. But in the safety sector too, the operations centres are networked and disaster assistance is provided jointly in the case of major fires, industrial disasters, flooding and other emergencies. With the motto "when minutes count, borders ceased to count long ago", ambulances and fire engines are dispatched according to how fast they can get to the accident of fire, regardless of which country they are based in.

Similar successful cooperation is to be found as regards the labour market and the provision of training or advice for cross-border workers and in the field of regional public transport.

None of this pioneering work would have been conceivable without those bridge-builders – those highly motivated citizens of the Euroregion.

After virtually completing that second phase of development, we are now advancing more and more towards a joint cross-border development and integration area. The aim is for the border areas that make up the MRE – which, as marginal areas of their respective nation states, have always been positioned rather weakly from a socio-economic perspective – to develop economically and socio-culturally as the interwoven cross-border MRE.

Europe must grow together at its borders: they must no longer be the scars of history but the tightly welded joints of Europe.

Just how interesting the idea of a cross-border integration area actually is can be seen when one compares the MRE with Luxembourg, Denmark, or the Berlin metropolitan region.

Let's take the example of Berlin. One can in fact superimpose a map of the MRE on Berlin and find that it fits almost exactly: each is about the same size and has about the same population.

Compared to Berlin



With its 200,000 businesses, 300 research centres, 5 universities and 19 other higher education institutions, the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion has theoretically just as much potential as Berlin, if it were not for its three different languages and legal systems and the borders.

So how can one nevertheless utilise the potential of the Euroregion? In addition to political will, the necessary resources of the partners, and the funding that we can deploy via various EU programmes and a development plan that we are elaborating, we also need the will of the population concerned.

Here too, we again need those highly motivated citizens of the Euroregion, who can act to promote this development. And for the next step – in addition to those highly motivated citizens who are already extremely active in fields such as healthcare, policing, and safety – we need other promoters in such fields as civic involvement, culture, and cultural tourism.

That's because the majority of the population do not yet see the MRE as a unified region that is available to them for their own personal and professional development. The problems regarding healthcare, security, mobility, and the labour market caused by the borders have been removed, and many people would seem to be satisfied by what has already been achieved.

Even if they sometimes do a bit of shopping or go the disco in one of the neighbouring countries, people are still unaware of the cultural offerings available there – even in the case of major events taking place just a few kilometres across the border – and therefore do not make use of them. The desirable cultural exchange does not take place, and the wide range of culture available is not utilised.

But there is little point in creating a cross-border integration area without inhabitants, without citizens, and without cultural interaction. One can hardly expect it to achieve any great degree of success.

With the motto **“Your World Is Getting Bigger”**, the MRE has therefore been making increased efforts for almost 10 years now to open up the cultural riches of their neighbours to the citizens of the Euroregion.

Closer integration of the border area must create a sense of belonging. That can only happen through its citizens becoming involved, being provided with information, and meeting one another.

Here are specific examples of these three requirements:

Where citizen involvement is concerned, we made use of the “World Cafés” approach in 2010 and 2011 – prior to the development plan for the MRE – and ran a number of Euroregional “Citizen Cafés”.

This method makes it possible to involve a large number of participants – up to 2000 people – in a brainstorming session in a number of different languages. An initial question is discussed for about half an hour at a large number of small tables by groups of between four and six people.

Each table has a facilitator whose task is to chair the discussion and to note down the ideas that are generated. All the participants except for the facilitator then switch to a different table and discuss the second question, which is again the same for every table, with different people. The process continues until the participants have dealt with all the questions.

The topics considered were:

- the labour market and education;
- culture and tourism;
- health and social matters;
- safety (both civil safety and policing).

The questions for the various themed “Citizen Cafés” were the same for all of them:

- What is going well in the context of the cross-border co-operation in this field?
- Why are these things going well?
- What is not going well and needs to be improved?
- What can I – or my organisation – do to help improve things?

What is particularly important for the success of this method is that the questions – and the order of the questions – are decided on carefully in advance.

If the first question asked is “what is going badly?”, then the whole session will definitely just become an opportunity for people to vent their frustrations. Asking why things are going well is a positive way of responding to the question of why things are not going well in other areas, and what can be done about it.

The Citizen Cafés are evaluated the same day – generally during the lunch break – so that the facilitators can summarise the results and present them on display boards. Each participant is then given a fixed number of little stickers for each question and can assign one or more points to each statement. This allows us to arrive at a final weighting for the various statements.

The Citizen Cafés method probably doesn't produce a great deal more output from the point of view of quantity or quality than if all the participants had answered the same questions and assigned a weighting to them on a questionnaire. But the basic difference is the group dynamic that operates, and that ensures that the participants go home with a sense of belonging – “We are the Euroregion!” – and promote that idea within their families, businesses, and associations.

We were amazed that so many highly engaged citizens – so many citizens of the Euroregion – attended the Citizen Cafés. We need to involve them much more closely in our work in future. For this dynamism to continue, these sessions will also need to be more than simply one-off events.

We made use of the results of the Citizen Cafés at a number of multi-day seminars, where they were incorporated into long-term plans. The latter were in turn incorporated – together with other elements – into the basis for the Euroregional development plan. In the meantime – and before the adoption of the Euroregional development plan, which will need to be adopted definitively next month by the board of the MRE – a whole range of measures have been implemented that were called for in the context of the Citizen Cafés.

This enables us to invite people to another series of Citizen Cafés this year so as to provide feedback on what has been achieved and also to discuss future developments with them.

The future Citizen Cafés will be more open, less theme-specific, and even broader than hitherto, so as to restrict the creative contribution of citizens as little as possible.

*

Where providing information for citizens is concerned, we have been working for years now to set up a **Euroregional data pool** involving the multidimensional, mobile provision of information.

Information from databases in a very wide range of fields – tourism, events and culture, and in the second phase also business, industry, and trade – will be combined within a shared search system.

The intention is for citizens and visitors of the Euroregion to also be able to search through the data on a mobile, cross-border basis, with geo-references being given. The databases maintained by all providers of culture, events, and tourism facilities that are networked in this way will enable every partner – creators or transmitters of culture – to derive additional data from the shared pool that is relevant to its target audience and with which it can improve its Internet presence. A shared events portal will also be created, presenting everything available within the MRE. For example: what to do in the weekend or during a short break, QR codes for museum tours, printed publicity material, etc.

With a view to implementing the project, there have so far first been discussions with major information providers – institutional suppliers and users of data – and with the main parties – partners and partner regions – within the Euroregion. An initial prototype of a search engine has also been constructed. Smaller-scale providers – cafés, theatres, bicycle hire companies, etc. – must also be involved, however, in order to consolidate the data. To achieve this, a multilingual shared input template has already been developed that enables all providers to publish their information on their own website – without duplicate entries – and at the same time to input it to the Euroregional data pool. Geo-references have also already been provided for more than 11,000 venues and providers within the MRE.

Until two years ago – and despite enormous efforts and not inconsiderable funding by the MRE itself and other organisations – the project had not really got off the ground. We were often only able to act behind the scenes and at first only in the face of opposition from certain tourism organisations and cultural institutions, which still saw themselves too much as competitors. More recently, however, the ice would appear to have been breaking and more and more responsible parties in political, cultural, and commercial circles have come to appreciate the value of such an approach.

Where newspapers and radio and television stations are concerned, we have also attempted on a number of occasions in the past to get Interreg projects going so as to bring about collaboration between them within the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion. Unfortunately, little remained of these initiatives at the end of each funding period.

But here too we can conclude that our many years of persistence are now starting to bear fruit. For a while now, it has no longer just been representatives of the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion who have visited editors to convince them of the value of cross-border co-operation: it is now the editors themselves who are asking us to allow them to help with the development of Euroregional television or a Euroregional press.

*

For the TV stations, this specifically means that six regional TV channels in the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion launched the first Euroregional television magazine **“Via Euregio”** on 14 September 2012. In Belgium, these were TV Limburg in Hasselt, BRF in Eupen, Télévesdre in Verviers, and RTC in Liège; in Germany Centre TV in Cologne; and in the Netherlands TV Limburg in Roermond.

The contributions are produced by the various partners in their own language and then subtitled and broadcast to the entire area covered. The themes involved are economics, security, tourism, sport, culture, events, innovations, and much more, and they always have a Euroregional relevance.

The advert produced by Via Euregio is interesting. It could in fact have come from the document with arguments for a Euroregional TV platform that we already published years ago. “Some 5 million people live and work in the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion. They often live no more than an hour away from one another but they hardly know one another at all. And being unknown often amounts to not being liked, which is something that the regional broadcasters aim to change by setting up this broadcasting platform.”

The times and mentalities are changing, including where newspaper publishers are concerned. Eight Euroregional newspapers in the MRE have now joined together as **EUnonce**: *Dagblad de Limburger, Limburgs Dagblad, Grenzecho, Het Belang van Limburg, La Meuse, La Nouvelle Gazette, Aachener Zeitung, and Aachener Nachrichten*. Their aim is to promote cross-border reporting. Their advertising slogans could also come from the MRE: Living Europe! It is high time to tread new paths– regional paths that take no account of national borders. It is specifically in the border regions that we find Europe, and the same applies to the daily newspapers as applies to Europe: link together regions and bring people together.

The initiatives by both the TV stations and the newspaper publishers are in the foundation phase and are receiving advice and support from the MRE but also funding from the MRE's own resources.

Where contact between citizens is concerned, we are this year joining with the TV stations, the newspapers, and the tourist organisations to organise contact weekends. This might involve citizens of a region or city inviting counterparts from elsewhere in the MRE to their homes in order to get to know them.

The newspapers and TV stations will also request citizens to act as hosts for people from other regions and to spend a day or weekend showing them their region or city. People in other regions will be offered the opportunity to spend the weekend in the guest region. The arrangements between hosts and guests will be organised via the newspapers, television stations, and tourist board offices. The tourist board offices will advise the hosts, and will provide information material and admission tickets available free of charge. The media will of course deal with the public relations side of things.

The aim is to set up personal contacts between the citizens of the partner regions. We are assuming that a family in Aachen that has been hosted by a family in Liège, for example, will invite the latter for a return visit, including outside the context of the next contact session. This will create a powerful multiplier effect for relatively little expenditure.

Via2018: Maastricht's candidacy for European Capital of Culture 2018: Focus on the citizen: It is people who make up the Cultural Capital, not cities and regions.

Maastricht's candidacy as Capital of Culture for 2018 – together with the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion – gives all these initiatives a special extra dimension.

The media for example – but especially the newspapers together with the tourist board offices and the Cultural Capital consortium Via2018 – will jointly implement the project for the large-scale culture and events portal for the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion. As the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, we are naturally grateful that we have finally been able to assemble the necessary critical mass in the form of partners, know-how, information, PR, and financial capital to take on such a major project, and can incorporate all the preparatory work that we have done, including the technical developments.

But the European dimension will also now find better expression:

The Cultural Task Force of the AEBR

At the request of Maastricht 2018 and the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, a decision was taken at the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Association of European Border Regions (the AEBR) in Istanbul in May 2012 to organise a workshop on cross-border and regional collaboration on tourism and culture.

A group of some twenty directors of Cultural Capital initiatives and of the border regions operating in the cultural sector then met in Berlin on the 8th of November 2012. The workshop provided the opportunity to share experience and views regarding the cultural challenges and the possibility of future long-term collaboration to develop a European chain of "cultural welding points".

The participants defined the concept of "culture" broadly, and did not restrict themselves to cultural events or commercial products. Rather, they saw culture as a mainstream matter that influences people's lives and that can bring them closer together.

As regards the European identity, it was agreed that this is based on cultural diversity and that that diversity constitutes a great potential for Europe and its citizens, but a potential that still needs to be utilised. Methods are therefore needed to explore that potential and to exploit it.

Border regions offer a unique opportunity to develop cultural practice to utilise the potential of cultural diversity. They should therefore act as a kind of "laboratory" for testing out tools for implementing culture within daily life.

The barriers to cross-border cultural collaboration are complex, and can be categorised as: asymmetric administrative structures; explicit financing restrictions on international collaboration; continuing resentment against neighbours; visa requirements on the external borders (South Karelia, Finland, and Russia); and areas of Europe where conflicts still continue (Ireland). There was also discussion of the risk that culture will no longer continue to be one of the aims of the EU's Structural Funds.

The workshop participants decided to set up a European cultural network by founding the AEBR's Cultural Task Force. The AEBR will help those operating in the field of culture to develop cultural practice within and between the various Euroregions. The AEBR offers the opportunity, on the one hand, to bring together partners from the whole of Europe and is also able, on the other hand, to strengthen the necessary European lobbying work as regards promoting culture.

The size of this potential is shown by the map of the European border regions that are members of the AEBR: of the 185 border regions, more than 100 are members.

Another advantage of working within such a network is that there are regularly European project calls – for example for transnational cooperation regarding European cultural routes. However, such calls generally allow only a short time

for formulating the project and finding the necessary number of partners from the most widely differing regions of Europe. Systematic collaboration within the framework of the AEBR's Cultural Task Force can prepare such projects well in advance, allowing them to be presented quickly in response to a call, with assistance also being provided for submitting the project proposal.

Take the example of two of the most important European cultural routes, the Via Regia and the Via Imperii.





The Via Regia and the Via Imperii run right through Europe from east to west and from south to north. They are symbolic of Europe's shared heritage, culture and history, and have major potential as regards cultural tourism. It would not be at all difficult to propose joint projects along these cultural routes.

For example, the following cultural tourism products could be developed jointly via such calls:

- A route connecting the Cultural Capitals along the Via Regia and the Via Imperii: from San Sebastián in Spain to Wrocław in Poland (both of which will be European Capitals of Culture for 2016) or from Pilsen in the Czech Republic to Mons in Belgium (the two Capitals of Culture in 2015). But Maastricht, Linz (Austria, 2009), Venice (2019), Marseilles (2013), and many other cities are located on these two cultural axes and could be linked in this way.
- There could also be an "experience bike route" between former and future Capitals of Culture located on the Via Regia and the Via Imperii, for example from Maastricht to Cracow or from Venice to San Sebastián...
- One might also make it possible to book travel deals in the border regions and Cultural Capitals...

The imagination knows no limits in this regard.

What is particularly important is that by participating in such a network, any city that wishes to put itself forward as a candidate for European Capital of Culture can showcase the European dimension of its candidacy.

The network already comprises Euroregions, Cultural Capitals and candidate Capitals, for example the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia and South Karelia (Finland); Maastricht Via2018 (The Netherlands); Sonderborg 2017 (Denmark);

the Lower Rhine Cultural Area (Germany); the Luxembourg, Belgium, France, and Germany Cultural Area of the Greater Region; Tallinn 2011 (Estonia); the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion; the Elbe/Labe Euroregion; Görlitz 2010 (Germany); San Sebastián 2016 (Spain); and many more.

The next step towards building up this European cultural network will involve a two-day exchange workshop for cross-border cultural co-operation that the AEER and Maastricht 2018 will be running jointly in the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, probably in April 2013.

We would greatly appreciate your participation in the network and would like to cordially invite you to attend so that we can join you in giving shape to the cultural future of Europe.

Thank you.