

Brief AEBR Annual Report 2022

The global attention to COVID-19 shifted dramatically in February 2022 to Ukraine, the war, the refugees and the effects on all Ukrainian border regions. Some were directly affected by the fights, and others closer to the EU were responsible for the distribution of aid and the flow of persons. The EU regions bordering Ukraine faced additional challenges, especially those with Russia and Belarus. Unfortunately, we still had to face the war and its devastating effects on the population, our continent and the world. The pandemic was still around, particularly in some parts of the world, without appropriate vaccination schemes. The increase in China was worrying, and new variants were unpredictable. “Old” challenges such as global warming were still there, too. In many countries, 2022 was the warmest year in more than one century¹.

There was other worrying news about border incidents in the Balkans, an unfortunate possible case of corruption involving some Members of the European Parliament, the dangerous polarization of the political debate in various EU Member States, or that bizarre plot by old German aristocrats and military. We also had to face systematic border checks at various internal Schengen borders: a Czech extension of border controls at the Slovak border until 25 January 2023, including the deployment of troops due to the increasing flow of migrants. Austria had objected to Romania and Bulgaria joining Schengen, fearing the acceleration of illegal migration, and so forth. In this “polycrisis” or “permacrisis” age, one of the Commission’s high-level expert groups advocated placing the EU in constant crisis management.

But there was also good news. The EU Parliament showed a renewed effort to revitalize the cross-border mechanism (or a similar instrument), *b-solutions* run to identify further obstacles with a lower dynamic than expected, and the implementation of solutions was not easy. Still, the AEBR team and stakeholders did not lose heart. The IVY community was growing in terms of young people and the number of Interreg programmes. We took advantage of the European Year of Youth with plenty of activities, including a strong presence during the EWRC 2022 in Brussels. The Commission’s Border Focal Point was also determined to further facilitate cross-border labour markets and public services, among other promising initiatives.

In January, the Commission adopted the list of Interreg programmes, the eligible areas and financial support. Looking at the CBC programmes approved by the end of 2022, the number of Small Projects Funds had grown, showing that it is an excellent approach for CBC involving the citizens. The European Committee of the Regions kept showing its consciousness of cross-border territories. Some nation-states systematically showed interest in considering their borderlands and other challenging territories, such as small and “empty” ones. The closing of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the [European Summit of Cities and Regions](#) in Marseille on 3-4 March, and the [8th Cohesion Forum](#) were significant events of the year. The Cohesion Alliance continued working. We signed the [Strasbourg Declaration](#) with the MOT and CESC in Strassburg in October after a series of online working sessions and an on-site one in Eupen in April, hosted by the AEBR President. Together with the CoR’s EGTCs Platform, we established the CB Citizens’ Alliance, which might soon become the European Cross-Border Platform.

We took part in various project proposals, and some were accepted, many with groups of researchers from different universities. New partners like the UEFA are helping to widen our scope when facing border challenges. A new wave of actions in Latin America, thanks to the EU’s ADELANTE Triangular Cooperation Initiative, also kept our speed in that continent.

In April, AEBR ExCom met in Karlsruhe with a previous workshop and a study visit. And, in June, the ExCom met over the Botnian Sea between Vaasa (FI) and Umea (SE), where the Cross-Border Public Services 2.0 was closed, and the debate on new AEBR Statutes started. We successfully organized our [Annual Events](#) in Szeged (HU) and Novi Sad (RS) with the support of Euregio DKMT and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the re-election of Karl-Heinz Lambertz as AEBR President, the election of a new Executive Committee and the bestowal of a new edition of the [Cross-Border Award Sail of Papenburg](#).

In 2022, we also welcomed the Regional Council of Lviv Region (UA) as a full member and the EGTC Amphictiony (a network of municipalities in CY, GR, FR and IT) as an advisory member.

¹ 2023 seems to be even warmer.