



Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)  
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)  
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)  
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)  
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)  
Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab (AGEG)  
Werkgemeinschaft van Europese grensgebieden (WVEG)  
Associação das Regiões Fronteiriças Europeias (ARFE)  
Σύνδεσμος Ευρωπαϊκών Συνοριακών Περιφερειών (ΣΕΣΠ)  
Stowarzyszenie Europejskich Regionów Granicznych (SERG)  
Ассоциация Европейских Приграничных Регионов (АЕПР)



## Annex 4.2 (GA)

### DRAFT AEBR ACTION PLAN

The following text was proposed to the Executive Committee as a first draft for debate with AEBR members in Cottbus (Annex 5e) on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016. It was approved with the recommendation of provoking comments and proposals from AEBR members)

**The core business of the AEBR is lobbying on cross-border issues at EU and national levels, and this is going to be more relevant in the coming months and years, while keeping an exchange of information with border and cross-border regions on CB general and thematic issues, and providing services, mainly based on information, assistance and contacts.**

#### TASK 1: COORDINATION WITH THE DEBATES ON CROSS-BORDER ISSUES

Core business at European level: interaction, exchange and coordination with EU initiatives (lobby, think-tank).

Targets:

- DG Regio
- Other Commission's departments
- Parliament: REGI Committee, Informal Working Group on CBC
- Committee of the Regions: Intergroup on Cross-Border Cooperation, EGTC Platform, Subsidiarity Platform, Covenant of Mayors, etc.
- Other relevant players

Core business at the level of AEBR members: lobbying the national authorities when necessary and providing services, mainly based on information, assistance and contacts.

#### TASK 2: THEMATIC WORK

To deal with thematic work we have an Advisory Committee, dealing with general and particular cross-border issues.

We also have several Task Forces on thematic aspects already working for some years: *External Borders, Culture, Health, Labour Market, Water Management* is working quite autonomously, promoting the exchange of good practices in cross-border management of natural resources in Europe and other continents. *Data & Innovation* has been further promoted within the partnership to develop a project on Cross-Border Impact Assessment. They are more or less active in relationship with the participation of AEBR members, external players, and the involvement in projects.

Two new TFs were launched in Cottbus: one dealing with *Interreg*, in order to follow up the implementation of Interreg V A, identify problems and obstacles, search for possible solutions, and make proposals for future structural funding in territorial cooperation and regional funding after 2020. A second TF will deal with *Schengen* issues, following up the effects of the refugees' crisis and national measures against terror, while keeping pressure for Schengen not to vanish.

### **TASK 3: BETTER APPROACH TO BORDER AND CROSS-BORDER REGIONS**

**3.1 Communication and information.** The main gap identified is communication and information flow between the AEBR and its members. We do a lot, but we communicate very little. After more than one year with a lot of pressure under our tiny team regarding AEBR book-keeping (four persons run over our accounts in the last months: Ms Doods, Ms Winkler, Ms Pandary and, finally, Ms Diekel, our brand-new book-keeper) now we have liberated some workforce to make renewed efforts to communicate better what we do (and to receive feedback from our members).

The news in our *website* will contain main information, links and documents related to every topic, and short announcements or statements will be made through our *Facebook* and *Twitter* accounts. Periodical *news digests* will contain main news in the last week(s). We will keep on using *email* and news digest as communication tools with our members and friends (not everyone has a FB or TT account), but we will substantially change the way we do it. Instead of using long mailing lists, which are less efficient to handle, blocking the server, producing errors, etc., we will use a professional tool for the handling of mailing and news. It looks quite promising.

Other innovations are proposed using several data initiatives, synergies with several projects, and the use of best information available, including EU tools and project opportunities. In order to put everything available in a targeted way, a specific App and several web-based tools have been proposed.

Feedback from members will be encouraged.

**3.2 Coordination of border and cross-border regions.** Besides general communication channels from the Secretariat, we have to keep a permanent dialogue or, at least, an open channel in several “operational regions”. These could not be organized by a single Secretariat in a pyramidal way. It should be rationalized in geographical areas, for instance, in the framework of current macrorregional strategies (e.g. Baltic, Danubian, Alpine, ... coordination) and/or groups of similar structures such as the German grouping in the AEBR or the Association of Polish Euroregions. A Russian Association of Border Regions and an Association of Ukrainian Euroregions have also been announced. The case of the German Grouping is ideal, because it is strongly connected with the euroregions, on the one hand, and with the AEBR Secretariat, on the other, solving many communication problems and being a perfect framework to share information and react very fast when it is needed. But we need a committed member in these operational regions to coordinate, and consider other networks to play a role in this coordination picture.

Similar synergies are to be promoted in other parts of Europe with the aim to create a consortium which could implement a great ***European Borders' Project***:

- The *German Grouping in the AEBR*, coordinated by Peter Hansen, Region Sønderjylland - Schleswig (DK/DE)
- CESCİ, *Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives*, AEBR member based in Hungary. They already implement these tasks at the borders of Hungary, keep track of further border areas, and manage an Office for the Balkans where the AEBR has also placed an Info Centre.
- The French inter-ministerial organization MOT (*Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière*) already implement these tasks at the manifold borders of France. We have agreed to discuss a joint approach.
- Partnership with existing *Alpine-Adriatic* and *Carpathian* coordinations. The establishment of links for an additional Balkan coordination through the CESCİ and

the AEBR Offices in Novi Sad. The participation of Vojvodina authorities and the Euroregion DKMT is to be strongly encouraged in this operation.

- Encourage a Greek or, at least, a *Northern Greek Coordination* with the Balkans, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. The CESC-IEBR Balkan office could also play a role here, as well as some partner organizations such as the Congress.
- The *Polish Association of Euroregions* is playing this role in the borders of Poland.
- The announced *Ukrainian Association of Euroregions* is a promising initiative, but faces manifold challenges.
- The *Russian Association of Border Regions* is another promising initiative.
- The organization of our General Assembly and Annual Conference at the Spanish-Portuguese border in 2017 will make possible to call for an *Iberian Coordination* meeting before the end of 2016. This will also be a chance to present the AEBR to the new responsible people of those Iberian regions which left AEBR 4-5 years ago (five left and we still wait for Algarve to join) and advocate for their “homecoming”.
- Other proposed groupings of interest are the Great Region, the Upper Rhine, the Irish Cooperation (particularly shocked after the voting on the *Brexit*), and the revitalization of the Black Sea Cooperation. In the latter, the Balkan, the Russian and the Ukrainian cases, a specific cooperation with the Council of Europe’s Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is to be strengthened.

#### **TASK 4: FINANCES**

The AEBR basic budget for a year could be established in 300.000 €, but revenues due to membership fees are currently below 240.000 €. And we can hardly balance this lost with revenues from projects.

There has always been a flow of non-paying members, but this was balanced with new membership fees and, of course, by those which regularly contribute.

The big crash occurred since 4-5 years, when suddenly four Spanish regions, two Italian, two Greek, one French, one Portuguese and one Swiss regions, eleven very active members of the AEBR, decided to leave almost simultaneously. We lost their inputs, and their fees (55.000 € per year, 15% of our budget). We are now weaker in terms of membership, and 220.000 € poorer. They were previously very active, meaning a substantial decrease in our capacity to organize activities (including Executive Committees, General Assemblies and Forums) and also a “black hole” in our finances, to be added to the permanent drain of smaller cross-border structures.

Despite of the efforts made with projects, we have already spoiled our reserve, but we are still alive. We have liquidity guaranteed because we have one Latin American project ending in January 2017 (those damn Latin American projects! Though thanks to them we could complete our balances in the last five years).

Therefore, if there are no new projects, and even so, we have to guarantee an increase in our income. There are some asking for a further reduction of our expenditure, but this seems impossible at this stage. Which is our floor? And which our roof? To visit our members we need funds for travel costs, and we would also need some more working force, despite of many volunteer work develop by a number of members. Someone assisting the Secretary General, a communication officer and someone dealing with contents would be ideal.

**Possible sources to increase our income:**

- **Gaining new members:** *Carinthia* joined and paid in January 2017; the *Great Region* is expected to join soon; some more input on *potential Swiss members* should be made with the support of AEBR members; an approach to *Iberian regions* should produce the return of, at least, three of them plus *Alentejo*, to the AEBR; some Scandinavian organizations and regions are under new exploration; some two new Russian and one Ukrainian members may join until the end of the year; Northern Greek regions have been approached and there are possibilities; *Lombardy* and *Piedmont* could be approached through the CoR; we still wait for *Valle d'Aosta*, and *Friuli-Venezia-Giulia* should be approached by our politicians; the *County of Kent* would be an ideal partner for the AEBR; the same with *Scotland*; and also small European states such as *Andorra* or *Liechtenstein*. With the new difficulties in border areas, it should be easier to gain new members.

- An **increase of the fee for regional governments** with budget possibilities up to 7.500 € (Gelderland's proposal)
- An **increase of the fees for euroregions of 10%** (5% in 2017 and 5% in 2018) (Mr Junk's proposal)

- **Direct EU financing / EU projects:** it is very hard, too much competition; even EU projects are hard, because we compete with highly skilled (and rich) consultants. But we keep on searching for projects which match two main objectives: deliver a service to our members and get some resources for our structure. Promotion of a big **European Borders' Project** (coaching or escorting border regions).
- **Sponsorship:** Mr Moasio has proposed a system to gain sponsors announcing their events or products in our website and other communication tools. Promising.
- **Crowdfunding:** this is only possible for concrete initiatives. We have planned a campaign in this regard to promote our concept of "TV CB Series", but this is quite complicated in most of Europe, due to high restrictions for receivers and contributors. In search for financing an "information helpdesk for refugees", in which we have been involved for almost two years, we are supporting its operation through a crowdfunding platform in the US. We are handling this as a test for possible future initiatives, but the promotion of European initiatives in the US does not seem to be very promising.
- **Other projects:** we are still approached by institutions which want to use the knowledge gained by the AEBR after decades of promotion of CBC in Europe. Some of these projects are very much time- and effort-demanding, and they should be avoided. But other projects are only good sources to make us more visible, by using the information we already have. Soft participation in these projects could render very interesting benefits for our Association. The same happens with those projects where our only role is the dissemination of information and the exploitation of the results. Other projects demand technical expertise, which is provided through the Secretary General and a network of experts working in other projects, which devote time mostly in a voluntary basis.
- **Paying for services, conferences, seminars?** It is widely assumed that everything we do is free of charge, but some of our members find their ways to pay for some of our services (these are minor contributions, but they cover, at least, travel and accommodation costs).

The role of a European Cross-Border Academy, in the form of a foundation according to German Law is still under analysis.