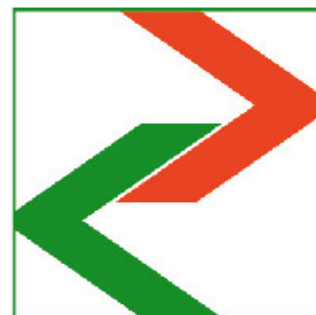


Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab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



Speech of Mr. Jens Gabbe „Importance of Cross-border Cooperation“

*on the occasion of the INTERACT Seminar on
Cross-border Cooperation
14 June 2006, Riga*



Dear President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you very much for the invitation to this important event.

Let me first of all shortly present the AEBR. AEBR, the oldest European association representing regional and local authorities, was established in 1971 and is the only one that deals with cross-border issues. Today, AEBR has 90 members representing more than 200 border regions.

There have been three cohesion reports of the European Commission, at first with 8 and then with 3 priorities. Cross-border cooperation or territorial cooperation have always been maintained as independent priority.

In the latest cohesion report with three priorities, the objectives „convergence“ and „Growth and Employment“ have been given the largest part of the budget: approx. € 240 billion.

In contrast, territorial cooperation seems to be a financial dwarf that was given 4 % at first, but will now receive only 2,45 %. Admittedly, 77 % of that sum are foreseen for cross-border cooperation.

Why has cross-border/territorial cooperation always been maintained as independent political priority? Due to the fact that it considerably contributes to the European integration and because tangible results are evident. If Europe doesn't grow together at its borders, then I really doubt that there will actually be a European integration in future.

Furthermore, cross-border cooperation has never been a national priority. But it is a European objective and a political priority of the European Union. For the EU must have an elementary interest in a successful cross-border cooperation.

Pursuant to a statement by President Barroso the European Commission is still committed to upholding the balance between the three pillars of the Lisbon Strategy:

- growth and employment,
- social cohesion,
- sustainable environment.

Mr. Barroso added, however, that the relating instruments are currently redesigned in such a way that they boost dynamic economic growth. In terms of financing, these restructuring measures take priority over all other issues, as economic growth prepares the ground for strengthening the other two pillars, i.e. "social cohesion" and "sustainable environment".



These priorities are understandable from an economic point of view. However, it must not happen that we regress to a European Economic Community. We rather have to orientate towards a **Political European Union**, even though the European Constitutional Treaty has failed.

Moreover, it has to be considered that the regional diversity in Europe very often calls for different region specific solutions, e.g. in Central Europe and in the so-called “old” Europe. In Central Europe, the extension of the infrastructure in border regions is a precondition for physical cross-border cooperation. The Upper Rhine area with more than 10.000 cross-border commuters and a special microclimate could also favour an investment in social cohesion and sustainable environment. These two elements are essential location factors for enterprises in this area, which is well developed with regard to infrastructure, and thus also for growth and employment.

In the debate about the future financing of the EU budget and priorities, one **key question** needs to be asked:

- Which contribution does cross-border co-operation make to implement the Lisbon Strategy?

Answer:

- Cross-border co-operation adds value.
- Evidence for this added value can be provided.

European added value arises from the fact that in the light of past experience, people who are living together in neighbouring border regions want to cooperate and thereby make a valuable contribution to the promotion of peace, freedom, security and the observance of human rights.

Political added value involves making a substantial contribution towards:

- the development of Europe and European integration;
- getting to know each other, getting on together, understanding each other and building trust;
- the implementation of subsidiarity and partnership;
- increased economic and social cohesion and cooperation;
- preparing for the accession of new members;



- using EU funding to secure cross-border cooperation via multiannual programmes, and ensuring that the necessary national and regional co-financing is committed in the long term.

Institutional added value entails:

- active involvement by the citizens, authorities, political and social groups on both sides of the border;
- secure knowledge about one's neighbour (regional authorities, social partners, etc.) to overcome the problems arising from differences;
- long-term cross-border cooperation in structures that are capable of working efficiently:
 - as a vertically and horizontally functioning partnership, despite having different structures and areas of responsibility;
 - as a legally accepted target of aid and a working partner, receiving and administering funds;
- joint drafting, implementation and financing of cross-border programmes and projects.

Experience gained throughout Europe shows that jointly developed programmes and projects can be most effectively implemented and realised if the regional and local partners play a considerable role.

The **socio-economic added value** becomes apparent in the respective regions, albeit in different ways, through:

- the mobilisation of endogenous potential by strengthening the regional and local levels as partners for and initiators of cross-border cooperation;
- the participation of actors from the economic and social sectors (for example, chambers of commerce, associations, companies, trade unions, cultural and social institutions, environmental organisations and tourism agencies);
- the opening up of the labour market and harmonisation of professional qualifications;
- additional development, e.g. in the fields of infrastructure, transport, tourism, the environment, education, research and cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises, and also the creation of more jobs in these areas;
- lasting improvements in the planning of spatial development and regional policy (including the environment);
- the improvement of cross-border transport infrastructure.



Socio-cultural added value is reflected in:

- lasting, repeated dissemination of knowledge about the geographical, structural, economic, socio-cultural and historical situation of a cross-border region (including endogenous potential with the media's help);
- the overview of a cross-border region afforded in maps, publications, teaching material, and so on;
- the development of a circle of committed experts (multipliers), such as churches, schools, youth and adult educational establishments, the conservation authorities, cultural associations, libraries, museums, and so forth;
- equal opportunities and extensive knowledge of the language of the neighbouring country or of dialects as a component of cross-border regional development and a prerequisite for communication and cooperation.

In this way, cultural cross-border cooperation becomes a constituent element of regional development. Only if socio-cultural cooperation takes place is a workable cross-border environment for business, trade and services established.

So the European, political, institutional, economic and socio-cultural added value is evident.

The specific added value of cross-border co-operation to implementing the Lisbon Strategy derives from the fact that cross-border co-operation **always adds value** to national measures.

This added value results from

- additionality of cross-border programmes and projects,
- synergies through cross-border co-operation,
- joint research and innovation,
- cross-border networking,
- exchange of best practice and know-how,
- spin-off effects by overcoming borders,
- efficient cross-border resource management.

But all these are only slogans that are used by researchers and politicians everywhere in Europe. They can be written down (as paper is patient), but we have to **proof that all this really happens**.



It is a matter of fact that cross-border cooperation helps to reach the critical mass in order to make sure that something can happen in a reasonable and economically justifiable way. The border regions alone in their semi-circle along the border often do not have the capacity for certain facilities, which can often only be created through cross-border cooperation.

Evidence of the specific added value of cross-border co-operation to implementing the Lisbon Strategy:

- cross-border spatial and development concepts (i.e. border areas in Germany along the border to the Czech Republic, as well as in Austria along the borders to the Czech Republic/Slovakia/Hungary/Slovenia; Italian/French border; Polish/German border; sea protection areas between Corsica and Sardinia);
- creation of cross-border infrastructure (also maritime) as precondition for cross-border cooperation with regard to creating growth and employment (Ems-Dollart Region / EUREGIO: The highway “Emslandlinie” runs only on German ground, paralleling the Dutch border. It is financed by German and Dutch Ministries, two Euroregions as well as regional/local authorities and Chambers of Industry and Commerce from both sides of the border. Thus, a parallel highway on the Dutch side was avoided. The highway has veritably enforced growth and new jobs have been created);
- further promotion of growth and economic development in addition to the developments at national levels (i.e. cross-border area Ireland/Northern Ireland; Germany/Belgium/Netherlands with new jobs; Spanish/Portuguese border with its risk capital fund or Bulgaria and Romania with a cross-border business card);
- new cross-border business relationships between producers and suppliers (i.e. network of the Chamber of Commerce in Northern Greece/Bulgaria and in the Czech Republic/Saxony; at German/Danish border; French/German border along the Upper Rhine; Hungarian/Austrian border);
- new co-operation and sales opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises; these companies typically operate within a radius of some 200 km from their location, which usually covers the geographic area of the neighbouring border region (i.e. Northern Greece with an entrepreneurship centre for Balkan and the Black Sea states; Finish/Norwegian/Swedish border with the Arctic Investors Network; Spanish/Portuguese border with the forum of entrepreneurs);
- establishment of a cross-border labour market which offers additional new employment opportunities (i.e. France and Switzerland with adjustment



payments for commuters that work in Switzerland; German/French border area along the Upper Rhine; Öresund with its specific labour market strategy = increase of commuters from 3.000 up to 10.000)

- bilingual cross-border professional training (i.e. Dutch/German, Polish/German and French/German border areas);
- establishment and improvement of cross-border public transport links (buses, railways) for the benefit of citizens, commuters and tourists (i.e. German/Czech and Austrian/German border close to Salzburg and in the triangle Bavaria/Saxony/Czech Republic with a cross-border public transport system including throughout tariffs; Swedish/Danish border with a common public transport across the Öresund Bridge);
- cross-border tourism concepts and projects (i.e. Lake of Constance; Bavaria/Austria, Poland/Lithuania with a joint Touristic Service Centre; Galicia/Norte with a touristic map for Spanish/Portuguese area; Tatra [Poland/Slovakia] in the Carpathian Mountains); joint touristic marketing and promotion activities in Ireland/Northern Ireland and the Pyrenees (France/Spain); joint touristic strategies for Kent (GB) and North-Pas-de-Calais (F));
- greater catchment area for business activities and services on both sides of the border; in many cases, businesses and services, such as research facilities and universities, waste disposal, recycling and infrastructure facilities, would not yield a profit (critical mass) or not even be available at all in border regions (especially in rural border regions) if there was no cross-border co-operation (e.g. EUREGIO on the Dutch/German border: joint Research Institute for New Rehabilitation Techniques/Centre for Microscope and Spectroscopy Analyses/border/Neuro-Fuzzy-Centre, which has maintained/created several hundred jobs / Laser institute with scientific research on the Dutch side and applied sciences on the German side), co-operation network of universities in Öresund, in the Danish/German border area and in the cross-border region South Tyrol (I)/Tyrol (A));
- a more efficient use (critical mass) of public funds (joint sewage plants on the Polish/German border; joint libraries in the Upper Rhine region, Saar/Lor/Lux area and on the Danish/German border; co-operation in the health sector between Greece and FYROM, Spain and Portugal, Ireland and Northern Ireland, BeNeLux/Germany);
- joint research and innovation (critical mass) generating additional synergies (i.e. co-operation in the field of technology in Extremadura/Alentejo; Technology and Business Park on the Austrian/Slovenian border);



- additional synergies and spin-off effects (critical mass) thanks to the co-operation of universities, colleges of further education and other educational institutions (i.e. co-operation of universities Strasbourg, Basel, Freiburg in the Upper Rhine region or in Lorraine/Saarland as well as of the universities in the region Friuli-Venezia Giulia with their neighbours in Slovenia and Austria);
- Sustainable cross-border management with regard to environment and environmental protection (Extremadura/Castilla y León/Portugal, Pyrenees, Bavaria/Austria, Poland/Ukraine/Belarus, Baltic States/Russia/Belarus, Belgium/Netherlands/Germany);
- Cross-border co-operation as model for “new governance” (everywhere in Europe).

Very often, it is spoken about good examples. I believe it can be said without exaggeration that cross-border cooperation is a very good example for how subsidiarity and partnership as well as networks function in practise. First of all, the **vertical partnership** on both sides of the border has to be built up (local, regional, national, and perhaps also European). Then, this has to be linked **horizontally** despite the different competencies and structures on both sides of the border. Furthermore, a Euregio has the task to cultivate the **external partnership** with the involved states and also with the EU. A Euregio also has to cultivate an **internal partnership** with all social partners, associations, institutions, cultural institutions etc. in order to make cross-border use of their knowledge. It is not the aim to create a cross-border tourism association or a cross-border Chamber of Industry and Commerce. The aim is to mobilise the knowledge that is available on both sides of the border for the good of the citizens and to create a solid basis for a Euroregion.

A Euregio is rather a motor, a **platform for regular cooperation and in no case a new administrative level**. It is not a matter of **legal competencies**, but of a **competency of acting**. Remark: competency disputes are always the end of all cross-border cooperation. **Cross-border tasks have to be executed and not competencies.**

All what was said today with regard to the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy and a new administrative action is already being implemented in the cross-border cooperation for decades, simply because there was no other way to work due to missing legal structures and competences.

It would therefore be recommendable not only to talk about making use of good examples, but to use them in reality, e.g. also the EU, for there are sufficient EU evaluations, which refer to these good examples, e.g.:



- The rather small and cross-border region-specific INTERREG-A programmes are the best ones with regard to the joint management and genuine cross-border projects (e.g. if partner from both sides of the border are involved with regard to staff, management, content and finances). Instead of that, the EU calls for bigger programmes.
- In its new regulation on the ERDF, the European Commission has nearly verbatim used AEBR's **definition of a cross-border project**: „**Partners from both sides of the border have to take part with regard to management, content, staff and finances** “. However, it was added that two of these elements would suffice. This will not suffice in any case: **all four elements have to be realised** for a genuinely cross-border project. Only those who take part **with own money from both sides of a border in a project** are automatically interested in ensuring a cross-border cooperation with regard to management, content and staff.

Outlook: The regional diversity and the various basic conditions in Europe demand for region-specific concepts and solutions, and this particularly in the cross-border cooperation. It is highly important that growth and employment, social cohesion and ecological sustainability are considered in all three pillars of the Lisbon Strategy.

The value of cross-border cooperation can even be shown in figures. The objective-1 labour marked programme for Spain only amounts to approx. € 5,4 billion. This is exactly the amount that is available **for the entire cooperation in Europe during the period 2000-2006**. I believe we do not have to be shy of comparing this. We have done a very good job with this money.

It would be good if all the other forms of cooperation could similar to the cross-border cooperation prove their contribution to the Lisbon Strategy.