



## Language Action Team

### *Languages in Border Regions*



A survey showed that in most (72%) of the border regions the language is an obstacle to cross border cooperation. A workshop, held during the AEBR Conference in Plauen (17 October 2008), showed that a lot of initiatives already exist to overcome this problem. The host region, Euregion Egrensis, explained how their *Sprachen offensive* (Language Offensive) has led to the introduction of Czech language learning in a number of secondary schools in the German part of Egrensis.

During the workshop it became clear that it would be very useful to create a network of "excellent education Euregions" where good practice would be gathered and spread (for example Interreg projects). A network would also allow to develop together innovative ways of language learning such as web based learning. A pilot group of border regions will prepare such a network in cooperation with the Language and Borders project coordination. This newsletter is one of the first steps. If you want to know more or join in, please send an e-mail to [ruud.halink@labsite.org](mailto:ruud.halink@labsite.org)



More pictures made during the workshop can be found at [www.labsite.org](http://www.labsite.org)

### **"Share the nice things with your neighbour"**

~ Ms Grazyna Staniszewska (MEP) pleads budget for neighbour languages, an interview ~



#### **What is your own personal experience with border regions?**

I come from a city in southern Poland called Bielsko-Biala which is located in a border region. Nowadays this city is developing relations with their neighbours, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This is a very good thing for the region, as well as for the people living there who are opening up to their neighbours. This happens on a very practical level, e.g. people go shopping across the border to buy some local products, to drink a beer that is different from the Polish ones. In fact, they especially love the "Rezané" (people in Slovakia have a name for this, namely "cut beer") which is brewed in a special way so that you get two separate layers of beer (brown and amber).



#### **Do you think that the language difference in this border region is an obstacle?**

Well, recently there has been a big change. Ten years ago it was not possible to get in touch with the close neighbours. Politically this was not wanted; the communist authorities even enhanced conflicts in the boarder regions! Nothing happened in terms of cooperation in our border region since World War II.

However, in the period between the wars, when Poland had gained the independence after 123 years of the foreign domination, this region had been blooming. Nowadays economic and social activities develop fast. And we see that the interest for learning the Czech and Slovak languages is growing. Some years ago this was not imaginable.

#### **LAB-coordination:**

Talenacademie Nederland  
 Boschstraat 45 6211 AT Maastricht  
 Phone +31 -43 -350-7400. Fax: +31 43 3507409  
 E-mail: [info@labsite.org](mailto:info@labsite.org)



or

Association of European Border Regions(AEBR)  
 Enscheder Str. 362 D-48599 Gronau  
 Phone: +49 - 2562 - 70219 Telefax: +49 - 2562 - 70259  
 E-mail: [info@aebr.eu](mailto:info@aebr.eu)



With the support of:  
 The Province of Limburg  
 Europees Platform

Comissão de Coordenação e Desenvolvimento Regional do Alentejo





### ***Do you think that at on the European level more should be done in the field of learning the neighbour's language?***

A number of things are happening already, like the Languages and Borders Comenius Network which is an interesting initiative. But there should be a structural platform to promote the learning of neighbouring languages, which should cover all of Europe, including the outside borders of the European Union. This platform should have a mutual approach: both languages should be promoted in a bilateral cooperation. Needless to say that in border regions like the Polish-Czech-Slovak Euregion, the languages are similar, and so it is not that difficult for a Pole to learn Czech.

### ***What should be the role of the European Union in this?***

There should be more money available for this type of language learning in order to co-finance costs of new activities. The condition should be, as I already mentioned, the mutuality. Therefore, I proposed a budgetary amendment (to the EU budget 2009) on Learning Neighbouring Languages. I proposed to establish a pilot platform to promote learning of those languages. In the long run the ministers of education of the Member States should cooperate in this field. I also believe that knowing neighbouring countries' languages would be a huge step towards strengthening our European community.

### ***What do think of the recent initiative to come to a network of border regions which would cooperate in the field of education?***

I think this is a very good initiative because it has been taken by the Association of Border Regions, the Languages and Border Network and a number of interested (border) regions. These are the key players in this field. The exchange and dissemination of good practice should take place all over Europe; therefore, such a network should grow quickly.

### ***What do think the Commissioner for multilingualism could do in this field?***

The task of Mr. Orban is a rather difficult one, but he could support initiatives concerning the neighbouring languages. This would help to achieve one of the EU's goals, namely to promote the learning of many foreign languages. Investments in this field are mutually beneficial, both for the EU as a whole and for each of its citizens in particular, since they contribute to solving conflicts, create understanding between countries, regions and people, in consequence help to maintain peace and stability.

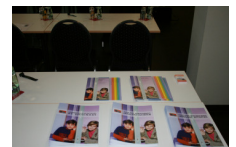
**HOT NEWS!** A short while after we published this interview we got some great news from Mrs Staniszewska. The EP has adopted the amendment (although not as a separate pilot project) therefore the amount for the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLL) will be increased by 2 million euros for projects aiming at learning neighbouring languages. It was the first reading in the EP, that means, now the Council will have to approve it and then the EP will finally adopt it likely by the end of December.



## Hints for neighbouring language activities organizing programs and policy at a Euregional level



In the Languages and Borders Comenius Network hundreds of teachers in border regions exchanged lesson ideas and working materials. A smaller number of civil servants and experts also exchanged their experience on how to organize projects and how to promote language learning for very different target groups (from young children up to adults). The brochure "*Hints for neighbouring language activities*" (also available in French and German) brings together a number of practical solutions for problems incurred. Some of the participating border regions are developing broader programs or even language policies; short "language portraits" of 4 border regions are presented in this brochure. The brochure is available via [info@labsite.org](mailto:info@labsite.org).



### **LAB-coordination:**

Talenacademie Nederland  
Boschstraat 45 6211 AT Maastricht  
Phone +31 -43 -350-7400. Fax: +31 43 3507409  
E-mail: [info@labsite.org](mailto:info@labsite.org)



or

Association of European Border Regions(AEBR)  
Enscheder Str. 362 D-48599 Gronau  
Phone: +49 - 2562 - 70219 Telefax: +49 - 2562 - 70259  
E-mail: [info@aebr.eu](mailto:info@aebr.eu)



With the support of:  
The Province of Limburg  
Europees Platform

Comissão de Coordenação e Desenvolvimento Regional do Alentejo

