

50 YEARS OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC COOPERATION IN THE EUREGIO

Achievements and new challenges

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CHRISTIAN
DEMOCRATIC
COOPERATION IN
THE EUREGIO

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CDA-CDU EUREGIO ASSOCIATION 2009

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Acknowledgements

The EUREGIO celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2008. This occasion prompted the CDA-CDU EUREGIO Association to investigate the role that the CDA and the CDU have played in the EUREGIO, and in particular the added value that party-political cooperation generates for the EUREGIO now and in the future. This chronicle was produced in association with the Centre for European Studies (CES) in Brussels, which also financed the publication. The research was carried out by Shira Godfried, a Master's student in European Studies, under the auspices of the University of Twente's Wetenschapswinkel. The study was peer-reviewed by Professor Ramses Wessel. Egbert van Hattem provided additional journalistic input. Bianca Gabbe is owed an enormous debt of thanks for her coordination and practical support, particularly in the second phase of the project. The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) also provided practical support during the writing of the chronicle.

Employers of the EUREGIO, particularly Christoph Bönig and Melanie Pietzowski, provided valuable assistance in searching for historical material and other documents. Special thanks are owed to the Stichting Twentsche Courant, and in particular its chairperson Hennie ten Hag, whose efforts helped to make the publication and its presentation possible, and to Roland Freudenstein, Head of Research at the CES, for the useful contacts and advice he provided during the research process.

For whom is this chronicle intended? In any case for readers who are interested in the EUREGIO, its often exciting history and the future prospects of the cross-border association. A particularly fascinating element of this study is the analysis it provides of the added value of political cooperation, in particular the cooperation between the CDA and CDU, for the EUREGIO. The conclusion contains a number of interesting recommendations for the immediate future. This study therefore deserves a place on the bookshelves of research institutes and politicians who would like a deeper understanding of cross-border affairs.

Finally, this study, which is being published in three languages, could prove very useful for political parties in European border regions that are looking for ways to intensify their cross-border cooperation, resolve problems and discover new prospects.

This important study was presented to Professor Hans-Gert Pöttering, the President of the European Parliament, and Wim van der Camp, a member of the Dutch parliament and the CDA's leading candidate for the European elections at a special meeting in Bad Bentheim castle on 20 April 2009.

Bart van Winsen

Chairman, CDA-CDU EUREGIO Association

Foreword

Bringing Europe closer to its citizens is a challenge that everyone faces, from European politicians and the EU institutions and national politicians at different levels of government to civil society organisations and, in particular, the media. The fact that citizens are in principle in favour of European integration but nevertheless – despite all the successes of the EU – regard it with scepticism is due to a feeling that the European Union is too remote and that many decisions are too complicated. Consequently, it is difficult to convey those decisions to the general public.

In short, citizens do not really feel as much at home in the EU as they do in their own municipality or region, which is where they derive their cultural and regional identity from. It is precisely this diversity that characterises the enormous wealth of Europe, and we should cherish it. The identity of the European citizen is reflected at different levels: first and foremost at home in the place and region where they live, then as an inhabitant of their country, and finally in the EU. These four levels are inseparable and determine, each in its own way, our lives and our identity. This is why Europe should not be identified with “harmonisation”, but rather with the preservation of our diversity. If we do that, everyone can feel at home in the EU of 27 member states and a population of 500 million that it now is. “Unity in diversity” is our ambition and our challenge.

Nowhere can this diversity be seen more clearly than in the border regions, where the various cultures meet directly. Since I entered the European Parliament – where I have been a member since the first direct elections in 1979 – I have experienced this diversity for myself on the German-Dutch border, where German and Dutch citizens have worked together to forge a European border region while retaining their own regional identity.



Although borders are “the scars of history”, border areas today also offer opportunities, for example by allowing people to meet. For decades now the cross-border cooperation in Euroregions has been making a crucial contribution to European integration and hence to healing the scars of history. This cooperation is a cornerstone of the European house. The German-Dutch EUREGIO, encompassing the region of Westmünsterland, Grafschaft Bentheim, Twente, the Achterhoek and the district of Osnabrück, the area I was born, is the oldest of the Euroregions. Since then, 150 similar cross-border structures have been created in Europe. Today, cross-border cooperation is without question a political priority of the EU.

This report on political cooperation between the Dutch CDA and the German CDU in the EUREGIO correctly focuses on the significance of political cross-border cooperation. The added value for the EUREGIO lies in the fact that transnational political groups make decisions and that those decisions are not appropriated by national delegations. As in the European Union itself, this laid a fundamental basis for the success of the EUREGIO.

On the one hand this publication is an interesting chronicle of the occasionally difficult evolution of the EUREGIO in the last few decades, but one which also identifies new opportunities. On the other hand, the chronicle can also provide some guidance for more recent forms of cooperation in Europe. In that sense, this is not just a review but also a look into the future to describe the expectations and make recommendations on how border regions can continue to play a significant role.

Just as the European Parliament is playing an increasingly important role in the EU, and in the process making a fundamental contribution to democracy in Europe, political parties on both sides of the border, as the principal decision makers in Euroregions, must also join forces to shape the future and the well-being of the citizens on both sides of the border.

Hans-Gert Pöttering
President of the European Parliament

Introduction

The EUREGIO celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2008. This prompted the idea of publishing this chronicle describing the history of cross-border cooperation in the region. It describes the cooperation in various sectors of society and highlights the milestones that have been achieved over the years, but also addresses the factors that have sometimes hampered progress. The experience gained in 50 years of cross-border cooperation can perhaps serve as a guide, or even a model, for other regions that also want to create a system of cross-border cooperation.

The overarching aim of this study, therefore, is to explore the extent to which *cross-border cooperation in Europe generates added value in the political, economic, social and cultural arenas*. The assumption here is that some of the attainments that have been achieved would not have been possible without this cross-border cooperation.

A particularly interesting aspect is the cooperation between political parties, which was established quite early on and put into practice in the Euregio Council, the EUREGIO's political forum. The central question addressed in this study is what added value this party-political cooperation has yielded, with special attention for the cooperation between the Christian Democratic parties, the CDA and the CDU.

“The future” played a major role in the study, which addressed the question of what new forms of cooperation could emerge in the future and what significance cooperation between political parties could have in them. The study also discusses aspects of the current form of cooperation that deserve closer attention in the future and considers the major challenges facing cross-border cooperation.

Finally, it was important to investigate the extent to which Dutch-German political cooperation in the EUREGIO should be restricted to the inter-party discussions in the Euregio Council or whether it should also extend to cooperation between the CDA and CDU parties, and what added value that would have.

The information was gathered from literature studies in combination with an examination of source and archive materials. Interviews were also conducted with Dutch and German politicians who have been (or still are) closely involved with the EUREGIO.

Naturally, special attention is devoted to the future development of the EUREGIO. What new efforts will be needed and will the EUREGIO be given sufficient powers to carry out its tasks properly. The findings from the interviews may show where the major challenges for cross-border cooperation will lie in the future and what role the CDA and CDU can play in meeting them.

The structure of the chronicle is as follows. To begin with, we explain the methodology used. In this chapter we will discuss the aims of the study, the associated research questions and how they will be answered. We will then present a theoretical framework to explain what cross-border cooperation is and why these cooperation structures are formed. On the basis of this knowledge, we will then provide a survey of 50 years of cooperation in the EUREGIO, how the cooperation is promoted by Europe and the role that the CDA-CDU association has played in institutionalising political cooperation in the EUREGIO. The conclusion at the end of this section provides an answer to the first research question. The second part of the chronicle has a narrative structure and comprises of 8 interviews. The stories told by the interviewees will enable us to answer the rest of the research questions. Finally, we will present a general conclusion and make several recommendations.

Method

Aim of the study

The overarching aim of the study is to investigate the extent to which *cross-border cooperation within Europe generates added value in the political, economic, social and cultural arenas*. The assumption is that some of the attainments that have been achieved would not have been possible without this cross-border cooperation (Aim A).

Within this wider context, the following topics have to be studied: since cross-border cooperation is greatly enhanced by cooperation at political level, it is important to investigate what role that cooperation, and more specifically the cooperation between the CDA and CDU, has played (Aim B1), and consequently what the added value of political cooperation is for the EUREGIO (Aim B2).

Another important aspect of the study is “the future”. What new forms of cooperation will there be in the future and what significance will cooperation between political parties have for them; what aspects of the current form of cooperation deserve closer attention in the future (Aim C1); and what are the major challenges facing cross-border cooperation (Aim C2)? This latter aspect seems particularly important.

Finally, it is important to investigate the extent to which Dutch-German political cooperation in the EUREGIO should be confined to the consultation in the group in the Euregio Council or whether it should extend to the CDA and CDU parties themselves (Aim C3).

Research questions

Four research questions can be derived from the aims of the study as set out above:

- What goals have been achieved through cross-border cooperation in the EUREGIO over the years and what were the main problems? (A)
- In what specific aspects of cross-border cooperation have CDA and CDU played a role and what has it yielded in the perception of the political actors? (B1 and B2)
- Do the political actors feel that the Dutch-German cooperation in the EUREGIO should be limited to the consultation in the group in the Euregio Council or should it also extend to the CDA and CDU parties themselves? (C3)
- What do the political actors see as the expectations, challenges and priorities in the field of cross-border cooperation in general, and in the EUREGIO in particular, in the future? (C1 and C2)

Methodology

The topics discussed here were explored by means of a literature study, together with an examination of source and archive materials. The study covers specific themes of relevance to the EUREGIO that have played an important role in the past and will continue to do so in the future. This will enable us to answer the first research question. The research questions can also be implicitly answered by the interviews. The research questions are operationalised by means of interview questions, which will be referred to later under the heading ‘interviews’.

The second, third and fourth research questions can then be answered on the basis of qualitative interviews with leading Christian Democrats from the Netherlands and Germany.

Accordingly, the report is divided into a theoretical framework and the section with interviews. While the theoretical framework adopts a thematic approach, the interviews are broader. The theoretical framework has an exploratory character, while the interviews are intended to examine the material in more depth.

Interviews

The general questions that were used to steer the interviews are presented below. These questions represent the operationalisation of the research questions that had to be answered through the interviews. The interviewees could also be asked more specific questions on the themes referred to above in order to provide more depth to the interviews. These themes and general questions were presented to the interviewees in advance so that they had time to reflect on their responses to them.

The general questions were:

1. What is the added value of political cooperation in the EUREGIO? (A)
2. What benefits could be derived from cooperation at party level? (C3)
3. Have CDA and CDU played a special role in the cross-border developments in the last 50 years, and if so in what specific areas? What form did this cooperation take? (B1 and B2)
4. Was there a common basis for this cooperation, for example in the form of a statement of principles or a joint action programme? (B2)
5. What shape will political cooperation take in the future? Is a joint (election) programme conceivable and are direct elections either desirable or feasible? (C3)
6. On what topics (themes) has progress been made and in what respects has the EUREGIO lagged behind in the last 50 years? (A)
7. In which of these areas have the CDA and CDU made their mark? (B1)
8. Does the EUREGIO have sufficient powers to carry out its tasks properly in the future? (C1 and C2)
9. What are the prospects, challenges and priorities for the future in the field of cross-border cooperation in general? (C1 and C2)
10. What are prospects, challenges and priorities for the future in the field of cross- border cooperation within the EUREGIO? (C1 and C2)

PART I: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The EUREGIO: theoretical framework

Introduction

By investigating which of the EUREGIO's goals have been achieved, we can identify the added value of cross-border cooperation on the basis of specific issues that arose at particular points in time. These milestones represent day-to-day problems that have been overcome. Besides investigating what has been achieved in the last fifty years, it is also important to enquire, from a theoretical perspective, why there is cross-border cooperation in the EUREGIO in the first place. This will help to highlight more clearly the added value of cross-border structures like the EUREGIO. The theoretical framework will also help to explain developments that have occurred in practice.

This theoretical framework is constructed from secondary literature on cross-border cooperation in general, and the EUREGIO in particular. The purpose of this theoretical framework is to help explain the events that have occurred and the milestones that have been achieved in the EUREGIO.

This chapter first discusses precisely what Euroregions are in broad terms. It will shed light on why Euroregions are formed and how they fit in to the larger picture of European integration. Secondly, the EUREGIO will be looked at from the narrower, local perspective: a bottom-up perspective. The chapter will also present a method of analysing the EUREGIO, both in its own right and in relation to other Euroregions. Fourthly, we will explain precisely what is so innovative about this type of regional cross-border cooperation, and fifthly what form that cooperation takes in our specific example. Sixthly, we will discuss the objections to this form of cooperation, but also present some arguments to counter those objections. Finally, we will review the factors that could theoretically contribute to the success and effectiveness of the EUREGIO and to what extent these factors are present in the EUREGIO.

What are the Euroregions?

According to Boekema (2000), Euroregions are "cross-border partnerships" that "were established in part because specific problems occurred, and in some cases still do, in the border regions".¹ These problems can be defined as specific border-related problems that have arisen over the years. Examples of such problems might include:²

- The region's peripheral location in relation to the administrative and economic centres of the relevant country or its economic arrears in relation to the rest of the country;
- A shortage of transnational infrastructure;
- Differences, or even similarities, in language, culture and history;
- Negative external effects that need to be addressed jointly.

These problems have been caused by the failure to recognise the natural cohesion of regions in the course of the random, or strategic, drawing of borders. In the case of the EUREGIO, the underlying idea behind the drawing of the border was religious: in the Peace of Münster the Protestant areas were absorbed by the Netherlands and the Catholic areas were assigned to Germany. The search for solutions to the problems this created was left to the border region itself. The problems could only be effectively addressed through cooperation with the immediate neighbours on the other side of the border. An incidental advantage was that the cross-border cooperation highlighted more clearly the potential of the border region. There are now more than 150 Euroregions in Europe, and the concept has now also been incorporated in European policy in the form of Cross-Border Cooperations (CBCs) and Cross-Border Regions (CBRs).³

1 Boekema, 2000, p. 7

2 Boekema, 2000, p. 7

3 Boekema, 2000, p. 8; Perkmann, 2003, p. 154

CBCs can be defined as more or less institutionalised forms of cooperation between neighbouring sub-national authorities that transcend national borders. To be regarded as a CBC, the relevant partnership must meet four criteria:⁴

- First, the main protagonists must be *public authorities* within the region;
- Secondly, the agreement must involve cooperation between *sub-national authorities* in different countries. The actors are not normally legal subjects under international law and the agreement may therefore not encompass international treaties between national authorities; as a result, the policy of a CBC falls under the heading “low politics”;
- Thirdly, a CBC must in practice confine itself to *solving practical problems* in day-to-day life;
- Finally, the aim of a CBC must be to stabilise cross-border contacts by establishing institutions.

A CBR, on the other hand, can be defined as a limited territorial unit made up of authorities that participate in a CBC initiative. This leads to the conclusion that a CBR is not only a functional tier of government, but a social and territorial unit with a certain degree of strategic capacity based on formal agreements. Furthermore, when analysing a CBR one should consider not so much the common denominator between the two countries in the region, but how the cooperation is constructed and the structure of the organisation.⁵ The analysis in this chronicle will therefore focus mainly on the form of cooperation and what it has achieved. Naturally, we will provide some general history of the creation of the EUREGIO, but this will be largely secondary to the actual analysis of the EUREGIO.

The EUREGIO from a local perspective

Generally speaking, there can be various reasons for creating such a cooperation structure from a local perspective. In the first place, the region's costs can be shared and the local assets can be promoted more effectively. Furthermore, the partners can pool their efforts to lobby for the region and the region can promote itself more effectively in terms of international competition and inter-governmental relations. Secondly, the partners can share expertise in policymaking and best practices.⁶ Finally, establishing a regional cross-border partnership of this kind provides access to subsidies that would otherwise not be available. Accordingly, the number of such partnerships grew explosively following the introduction of INTERREG, the EU's programme of subsidies for regional development.

⁴ Perkmann 2003, p. 156

⁵ Perkmann 2003, p. 156

⁶ Gualini 2003, p. 44

Analysis of a CBR

A number of aspects need to be considered when analysing a CBR:⁷

- The geographic scale of the region;
- The intensity of the cooperation;
- The types of actors.

These aspects are principally of importance when comparing two CBRs, but can also be of practical use in the present analysis because it allows the object of the study to be more clearly defined.

As far as the geographic scale of a CBR is concerned, Perkmann makes a distinction between small, so-called Micro CBRs and large CBRs such as the Scandinavian groups and working communities. In this classification, the EUREGIO is a Micro CBR, which is the category that Euroregions generally fall into. The EUREGIO also falls within the definition of this category because it has a council, a president, functional working groups and a joint secretariat.⁸

The same author has mentioned a number of criteria for measuring the intensity of the cooperation in a CBR based on a memorandum from the European Commission:⁹

- The cooperation is based on a particular legal form and has a joint secretariat and its own funds;
- It has adopted a development strategy;
- The cooperation extends to a broad range of policy fields, which are the same as those of conventional local or regional authorities.

On this basis, we can say that the cooperation in the EUREGIO is highly intensive. The EUREGIO can therefore be classified as an integrated Micro CBR.

Finally, as regards the types of actors, it can be stated that the principal advocates of a Micro CBR are local authorities. In fact, CBRs are formed more easily in countries where inter-municipal relations play a prominent role, as in the case of the German Kreise – a self-governing group of municipalities. In most cases, the German Kreise were in fact the driving forces behind the creation of a CBR.¹⁰

⁷ Perkmann 2003, p. 159

⁸ Perkmann 2003, pp. 159-160

⁹ Perkmann 2003, p. 159

¹⁰ Perkmann 2003, p. 160

New form of cooperation

In 1980, cross-border cooperation in the form of a CBC was codified in public law in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention of Madrid. This convention creates a framework within which bilateral and multilateral agreements are valid under public law for both the CBC and for regional authorities. However, it is clear from the Madrid Convention that decisions taken by the authority of the Euroregion in question only apply for the public authorities within the CBC and therefore have no direct effect on citizens.¹¹

By establishing CBRs or Euroregions, regional authorities have found an instrument by which they can represent their interests in an area that was for a long time reserved to central government. By establishing multilateral and bilateral government bodies, in the early years of the EUREGIO's existence policy could be formulated in areas such as spatial planning and infrastructure. Thirty years later, the domain covered by the EUREGIO has expanded, partly as a result of the emergence of regional integration on a larger scale: the European Union. Through bodies such as the European Council and the European Commission, the EUREGIO has both the competence and the financial resources to develop new initiatives in various areas.¹²

What forms of cooperation do these border regions employ?

The legal framework for cross-border cooperation can be defined in one of two ways: informally or formally under private law. In the informal version, the cooperation has no legal status. This method therefore involves non-binding agreements between administrators on both sides of the border on a small number of topics and for a limited geographic area. In this form of cooperation the parties will at most adopt a non-binding charter or a statement of principles. In cooperation based on private-law principles, however, the relevant authorities on both sides of the border create a separate legal entity or enter into a partnership based on private law. In the case of the EUREGIO, a separate legal entity was created. The EUREGIO is an association formed under German private law. In this way, it can also act commercially.¹³

Objections to cross-border cooperation

Although there are generally only advantages to cross-border cooperation, there are a number of objections to establishing such a partnership, whether it is informal or based on private law. In this discussion of the objections we will also try to refute them as far as possible.

The first objection to a partnership between border regions is that although a new administrative tier is created it can still not act as an "authority". The EUREGIO in question lacks the necessary public-law powers to act as a tier of government. This represents a major obstacle to its ability to formulate policy in areas such as spatial planning, the environment and infrastructure, policy subjects that are often among the most important in border regions.¹⁴

This objection can be countered with the argument that, as we have already seen, the local authorities cannot be obliged to cooperate with policy measures that can benefit the EUREGIO; and since the EUREGIO in fact only has the tried and trusted method of persuasion and conviction at its disposal, the relevant authorities will be more inclined to provide their cooperation and there is therefore a greater guarantee of success.

The second objection applies in the case where the partnership between border regions possesses legal personality. If it does, the problem is that a legal entity has to be chosen based on the legal system of one of the countries involved, since there is simply no such thing as a "transnational legal entity". However, the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) could offer a solution for this problem. The EGTC is a legal entity created by EC Regulation No. 1082/2006, which allows local, regional and national authorities to create cooperation groupings with legal personality. The objective of this instrument is to "facilitate and promote territorial cooperation (...) with the exclusive aim of strengthening economic and social cohesion".¹⁵

However, there are also arguments that can be made in favour of cross-border cooperation based on private law or the creation of a legal entity. The principal argument relates to the ability of an authority to secure and manage (financial) resources.

11 Perkmann 2003, p. 155

12 Perkmann 2003, p. 154

13 Boekema 2000, p. 8

14 Boekema 2000, p. 9

15 Article 1 (2) of Regulation no. 1082/2006

The third objection to cooperation groupings between border regions concerns the absence of a democratic component in this tier of government. It is said that the informal or private-law character of the cooperation limits scrutiny by the public and/or municipal councils or even makes it totally impossible. Because the cooperation structure has no powers in public law, it also has no duties, including the duty of accountability and responsibility for its policy. This argument seems to gain in importance the more extensive and/or intensive the cooperation is between the border regions in question – and hence the greater the political and administrative interest in it.

This argument has little or no bearing as regards the EUREGIO. The problem of the lack of democracy was partially resolved with the establishment of the Euregio Council in 1978. Members of the Council are elected indirectly: the citizens elect the members of the municipal council, who in turn elect the members of the Euregio Council. The members of the Euregio Council are then accountable to the municipal councils, which are responsible for scrutiny of the Euregio Council. This is laid down in its charter. Members of municipal councils and other holders of public office in the municipality are in fact themselves often members of the Euregio Council. This guarantees a greater degree of scrutiny by and accountability to the public than in Euroregions where no such body exists.

Success factors in CBRs

Although cross-border cooperation attempts to remove the major obstacles and negative effects caused by the existence of borders between countries, the degree of integration within cross-border regions also depends on three other factors, which we will discuss in this section.

The first factor is the level of socio-economic development on either side of the border. After all, major discrepancies in socio-economic development do little to promote regional economic integration. The wealthier partner may have the idea that by setting up a cooperation structure its poorer neighbour could profit from it and that it would itself secure too little benefit from it. Since there are no major socio-economic differences within the EUREGIO, a large degree of integration in various areas of social and economic policy can be expected.¹⁶

Secondly, the economic characteristics of a region are an important factor. Are the two economies alike, do they in fact complement each other or do they have entirely opposing interests and objectives? Such factors can influence the development or otherwise of a cross-border partnership between regions. Historically, both the Dutch and German parts of the region have had large textile industries. Nowadays, it is no longer true that the economies of the two areas are largely similar, which facilitates cooperation in various areas.¹⁷

A third important factor is how the policy is ultimately implemented by local and regional policy officials. The competencies of these policy officials seem to have a major impact. Their wishes and interests also play a part. Because decisions of the EUREGIO in fact provide no basis for the formulation and implementation of policy, the EUREGIO depends on other tiers of government that do have the competencies to formulate, implement and carry out policy.¹⁸

Finally, the greater the independence enjoyed by the local authorities, and hence the more experience they have in formulating and implementing policy, the greater the degree of integration and the effectiveness of the border region will be. There has for years been a tradition of autonomy and co-administration in the Netherlands, which means in practice that provinces, but also municipalities, are allowed to manage their own affairs and, to a certain extent, formulate their own policy. As already mentioned, that is also the case in Germany. This has at least contributed to the degree of integration achieved within the EUREGIO and helped ensure that it has made a very effective contribution to reducing the negative effects of a border in various domains.¹⁹

16 Boekema 2000, p. 24

17 Boekema 2000, p. 24

18 Boekema 2000, p. 24

19 Perkmann 2003, p. 165

Conclusion

This theoretical framework has shown that the objective of Euroregions in general is to reduce, or even eliminate, negative (side) effects caused by the existence of a border. The latter could be an ultimate objective. The EUREGIO can be described, from a European and national perspective, as a CBR, a Cross-Border Region, in the context of the European Union's policy objective of achieving a greater degree of cross-border cooperation (CBC). Besides meeting European objectives, local authorities can also benefit from a CBR.

The analysis of a Euroregion was based on an assessment of three aspects: geographic scale, the intensity of the cooperation and the types of actors involved within the region. This method allows CBRs to be compared with each other, but also allows a CBR, like the EUREGIO, to be categorised and broadly analysed.

Evidently, the formation of the EUREGIO in 1958 created a new form of cooperation. This type of cooperation structure can be informal or based on private law, but not on public law. This constitutes the EUREGIO's greatest weakness: it is not a body established under public law and its decisions therefore have no legal basis. It has only an advisory capacity, with its advice binding on its members. In the case of the EUREGIO, the cooperation is laid down in German private law, but it is not a transnational legal entity and thus it also exists in Dutch private law, which is a serious disadvantage for its legal position.

As previously mentioned, the greatest objection to the EUREGIO is that its decisions have no legal basis and cannot therefore be regarded as "legislation". However, this is simultaneously the strength of the EUREGIO, since whereas other authorities can impose their rules, decisions initiated by the EUREGIO are purely the result of its ability to persuade and convince other authorities, at local, provincial but also national level. Apart from the fact that all the (theoretical) factors in favour of a greater degree of effectiveness and success for a CBR are present in the EUREGIO, clear evidence has been provided that the EUREGIO can provide added value for citizens in the region of Twente and the Achterhoek and the German federal states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony in political, economic, cultural and social terms.

50 Years of EUREGIO: a review

Introduction

The EUREGIO was established in 1958 through cross-border cooperation between local authorities in the Netherlands and Germany. The EUREGIO had in fact already existed earlier; the official national borders between the Protestant Netherlands on the one hand and the Catholic part of Germany around the river Ems and in the Münsterland on the other were only drawn with the Treaty of Münster in 1648. Some time later, however, cross-border relations were restored because of similarities in language, economy and culture. A good example of this is the common textile industry on both sides of the border which gave the region its name as the "Cotton Route". These contacts were rudely interrupted, however, with the start of the Second World War and the subsequent deep-rooted mistrust – predominantly on the Dutch side. Although the residents of the border area initially avoided each other in the immediate aftermath of 1945, contacts were gradually re-established by families and parishes, whereupon contacts between local officials quickly followed. Finally, in 1954 local authorities on both sides of the border formed alliances, mainly with the intention of improving the regional infrastructure and, above all, promoting cross-border contacts.²⁰



20 Von Ameln, 198x, p. 20

Another reason why the border municipalities decided to cooperate was because they were unable to reap the benefits of positive developments occurring elsewhere in the country. Through cooperation they hoped to strengthen and generally improve the border region's economy. As already explained, the residents of the border municipalities were themselves also interested in restoring the contacts that had been broken after the Second World War.²¹ Since the formation of the EUREGIO in the Rhine-Ems-IJssel area – which will be referred to from now on as the EUREGIO – many other Euroregions have been established along the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian borders. The EUREGIO has served as a model for them.

The EUREGIO can be seen as a European region. The EUREGIO covers a geographically defined area and can be regarded as an organisation established to draw up plans for the border region. There are two underlying elements to the programmes developed by the EUREGIO:²²

1. To mitigate the effects of the border in social, culture and economic terms;
2. The principle of a single region.



A region can be defined in this context as “a functional area of social and economic integration”. Social and economic integration in turn means “a uniformity of aspects of life, home, work, education, transport and leisure that are connected in terms of a particular quality and intensity”.²³ The premise that the EUREGIO is genuinely a region and the ensuing definition of a region provide an explanation for the aims set out for the EUREGIO. These aims are explained in the next section.

Aims of the EUREGIO

Although for the first 20 years of its existence the EUREGIO set out to achieve its goals primarily through voluntary cooperation, with the costs being borne by the local authorities themselves, since the 1980s the EUREGIO has been able to secure funds from Brussels. Now, fifty years later, the EUREGIO has evolved into a political cooperation structure whose principal task is to promote, support and coordinate the cross-border cooperation between its members. A second task is to put forward solutions for border-related problems and to represent the interests of the border region. It is also able to organise activities, programmes and projects and even carry them out. These cross-border activities encompass the fields of social, cultural and economic integration, tourism, sport and education, spatial planning and infrastructure as well as science and technology. The activities that are organised respond as closely as possible to the demands and needs of the citizens, companies, organisations and municipalities within the EUREGIO.²⁴

21 <http://www.de EUREGIO.nl/cms/publish/content/showpage.asp?themeid=41>, 23 Sep. 08, Müller, 2003, p. 3

22 Von Ameln, 198x, p. 24

23 Von Ameln, 198x, p. 9

24 http://www.de EUREGIO.nl/cms/publish/content/downloaddocument.asp?document_id=3, 23 Sep. 08

More specifically, the EUREGIO's aims are:²⁵

1. To develop a functional unit in the area of living, working, education, leisure and communication;
2. To raise awareness of the principle of “*neighbourliness*” among the population of the border region in order to promote social integration between the Netherlands and Germany;
3. To promote the broad and intensive transfer of knowledge, experience and conceptions concerning European integration between Germany and the Netherlands without losing sight of the national identities;
4. To stabilise the regional labour market and improve the supply of public and private services;
5. To provide information on recreational possibilities for the population;
6. To coordinate and publicise social services and facilities on both sides of the border;
7. To strengthen and intensify private, cultural and inter-municipal cross-border contacts;
8. To ultimately realise a bilingual community with unrestricted access for the entire population to all institutions on both sides of the border, ranging from higher education to the most basic services.

Finally, in the last 50 years the EUREGIO has achieved many milestones in the area of political cooperation and on cultural, economic and social issues, but nevertheless has also encountered problems. In this first chapter we will provide an overview of the development of the EUREGIO, its milestones and the problems that have emerged since 1958 up until today. For this overview, we consider specific topics that have arisen over the years and which were relevant or created problems at a specific point in time. Our intention is to provide a chronological survey of milestones, problems and general developments in the areas in which the EUREGIO was active, such as security and disaster prevention, spatial planning and infrastructure, environmental protection, the economy and transport, social and cultural integration and education, sport and recreation.

Infrastructure and Spatial Planning

In the 1960s and 1970s, infrastructural and economic obstacles between the Netherlands and Germany were major priorities for the EUREGIO. After all, to achieve economic, social and cultural development in the border region, the infrastructure on the two sides of the border would have to match. Steps were also taken to improve the road network. For example, on 12 November 1992 the extension of the A-1 motorway into Germany was completed, thus creating a new European connection between Amsterdam and Berlin. The construction of the A-31 also significantly improved the north-south connection, making the Ruhr area parallel to the border more easily accessible.²⁶ Progress was also made in improving rail links. For example, in 2001 the railway line between Enschede, Gronau and Münster was reopened. The possibilities of creating a faster link between Amsterdam and Münster are currently being reviewed, as is the possibility of a line between Hengelo and Rheine.²⁷

Major obstacles in relation to infrastructure and spatial planning can be blamed on the fact that plans for infrastructure are drawn up by different central governments and border regions are only involved to a limited extent in the preparatory phase and are therefore unable to exert much influence on the development process. An additional problem with regard to spatial planning is that the planning process ends at national borders. For the EUREGIO, an additional factor is that the German part of the region falls partly in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia and partly in the state of Lower Saxony. Although provinces in the Netherlands are responsible for the construction of minor roads, there are three provinces that have a say: Overijssel, Drenthe and Gelderland. Consequently, coordination can quickly become a problem. To reconcile the differences in the area of spatial planning in the border region, in 1976 the Dutch-German Spatial Planning Commission was established. This is an advisory commission. By means of closer consultation, problems and inefficiencies in the use of facilities in the area of spatial planning can be avoided, while at the same time new possibilities for growth may emerge.²⁸

The EUREGIO, and in particular the Euregio Council, have exerted political pressure to achieve these goals for the infrastructure. Besides improving the railways and motorways, the EUREGIO has also arranged the construction of various cross-border cycle paths and improvements in bus connections. These projects have been financed with funds from national governments and the EU. The EUREGIO can therefore also be seen as a driving force for improvement of the infrastructure in the region.²⁹

26 Oortgiesen, 1992, p. 11

27 <http://www.tctabantia.nl/regio/hengelo/3588792/A1-tijdelijk-dicht-dan-proef-met-trein-tussen-Hengelo-en-Rheine.ece>, 21 August 2008

28 Oortgiesen, 1992, p. 9, Oude Veldhuis, 1995, p. 33

29 Müller, 2003, p. 31

25 Von Ameln, 198x, p. 24

Social and cultural integration: Youth and the Elderly, Education, Culture, Sport

One of the most important aspects of the EUREGIO's activities relates to social and cultural integration. The EUREGIO attaches a lot of importance to promoting contacts between the citizens of Germany and the Netherlands in the border region.



The responsible working group is the Mozer Commission, which was established in 1971 and has a budget of around € 140,000. This commission is responsible for arranging social and cultural contacts for specific groups such as young people and the elderly and organising family and sports events, musical events, education, social contacts and tourism. Cross-border contacts and cooperation between municipalities, organisations, schools, sports clubs and music societies and organisations for the elderly on both sides of the border are therefore strongly encouraged by organising events such as tournaments, concerts and meetings.³⁰ The commission does this by arranging the necessary contacts and providing advice when cross-border activities are being organised.³¹ The Mozer Commission is the oldest working group in the EUREGIO. It has 16 members – eight Dutch and eight German – most of whom are local politicians from both sides of the border.

³⁰ <http://www.de EUREGIO.nl/cms/publish/content/showpage.asp?pageid=82>, 23 Sep. 08

³¹ The EUREGIO Mozer Commission, 1996, p. 2

Another important activity of the Mozer Commission is providing support for inter-municipal cooperation and city partnerships. Specifically, this involves organising activities between partner municipalities, including exchanges of municipal officials and cooperation in the provision of municipal services. The commission also supports various events and exhibitions.³²

Exchanges often take place under the title of people-to-people projects. Almost 100,000 people attend these events every year to share their experiences or simply to take part in a cross-border activity.³³ These projects were also supported by projects and programmes organised by the EUREGIO which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

In the field of education, the EUREGIO has encouraged secondary students to explore professional opportunities on the other side of the border and promoted dual language education in both Dutch and German schools and the organisation of meetings where students can meet their contemporaries from the other country. One of the Mozer Commission's major successes was the publication of teaching materials for students and teachers in primary, secondary and higher education clearly explaining the history and geography of the region.³⁴

When it comes to social issues, the focus is on learning from each other. For example, a cross-border exchange organised between Münster and Enschede yielded new ideas for addressing problems surrounding integration. The projects addressed the question of how migrants can be helped to integrate in society as quickly as possible in terms of language, work and participation. The solution lay in setting up a functional network of professional agencies and voluntary organisations and a good living environment. In view of the ultimate success of the new approach, it will probably be rolled out further.³⁵ Establishing knowledge networks of this type can help to improve the prospects of migrants on the labour market, facilitate cultural exchanges and promote mutual understanding. This will ultimately also have a positive effect on economic activity in the EUREGIO as the labour market becomes increasingly interwoven.³⁶

Besides finding solutions for social issues of this type, participants also share their experiences in fields such as care of addicts and the handicapped. Exhibitions are organised on the history of the textile industry in the border area. But even terrible memories are not avoided: young people from the Netherlands and Germany are reminded of the experience of the Second World War in the municipality of Aalten, "lest we forget".³⁷

³² Mozer Programme 2002, p. 7

³³ Müller, 2003, p. 22

³⁴ Interview with Jens Gabbe, Monday 16 March 2009

³⁵ EUREGIO brochure, *Van mens tot mens zonder grenzen – Elkaar ontmoeten en ervaringen delen*, 2005

³⁶ EUREGIO brochure, *Onderwijs zonder grenzen- Samen leren en lesgeven*, 2005

³⁷ EUREGIO brochure, *Van mens tot mens zonder grenzen – Elkaar ontmoeten en ervaringen delen*, 2005

Political cooperation in the border area: the Euregio Council

The Euregio Council, the body for political cooperation in the EUREGIO, was established in 1978 and celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2003. The Council could determine its own powers, although its decisions are largely advisory. The Council can be regarded as a “miniature European Parliament” whose aim is to make the activities of the EUREGIO more transparent and democratic. Above all, the Euregio Council is a body concerned with “fundamental issues relating to regional cross-border cooperation”.³⁸

The first Euregio Council in 1978 had 25 Dutch and 25 German political representatives from villages, towns and Kreise in Germany who were indirectly elected. The Council has now expanded to 82 members, 41 each from Germany and the Netherlands. As already mentioned, members are indirectly elected. The results of municipal elections determine the number of seats for each political party in the Council since all the members of the Council are elected by the municipal councils.³⁹

The representatives of the various political parties from the Netherlands and Germany form cross-border groups in the Council in the same way as in the European Parliament. The phenomenon of cross-border groups cooperating in a political body is in fact unique to border regions.⁴⁰ Other Euroregions, such as the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, have now also incorporated a similar political body in their organisational structure. However, it was not formed bottom up as in the case of the EUREGIO but thanks to financial support from the EU.⁴¹

However, the fact that decisions taken by the Euregio Council do not in fact have any legal basis causes problems. Guidelines and decisions have no standing in the Dutch provinces or in the German states. Essentially, this means that if the EUREGIO wants to achieve a particular goal it has to use its powers of persuasion to convince both the national and local authorities to formulate policy that coincides with the aims of the EUREGIO.⁴²

Some academics have argued that this specific lack of power to force local authorities to cooperate has in fact led to the ultimate success of the EUREGIO. Their argument is that with the method of persuasion and conviction local and national authorities are far more inclined to cooperate and that gives a greater guarantee of success.⁴³ The result is a political body that, although it has few powers, does enjoy broad political support on both sides of the border.

Developments in the EUREGIO since the 1980s

Cross-border commuters

One of the major challenges facing the EUREGIO, and in particular the Euregio Council, has been to promote cross-border commuting and address the problems of cross-border commuters. Before the Schengen Agreement (1985), numerous residents in the border area complained to officials of the EUREGIO about the long waiting times at the border. The border crossings were not only difficult to find, but were often only open for limited periods. Consequently, the Euregio Council pressed strongly for more border crossings with longer opening hours to promote social and economic integration between the Dutch and Germans.⁴⁴

Besides the fundamental problems of the cross-border commuters themselves, for a long time there was also uncertainty about the social position of cross-border commuters in terms of medical costs, unemployment benefit, pensions and health insurance. There were also tax problems when someone bought or built a house on the other side of the border. The EUREGIO, including the Euregio Council, also sought to find solutions for these issues.⁴⁵

Security and Disaster Prevention

There were already ideas for a joint effort to tackle disasters and provide help for victims at the end of the 1980s. The idea of dealing jointly with these issues was dictated mainly by practical considerations: the emergency services on the other side of the border could sometimes reach the scene of a disaster or attend to a victim quicker than the services in the county where an incident had occurred. Problems standing in the way of a joint response to disasters were due to differences in the applicable law in the Netherlands and Germany, so that cooperation only came about at a late stage. For example, the question of insurance for personnel and equipment that were deployed across the border caused insurmountable problems. There were also communication problems because the German fire brigade used old communication systems and practical problems arose from the fact that Dutch and German hoses could not be connected. These problems were remedied, respectively, by introducing a new communication system and a universal coupling.⁴⁶

38 Müller, 2003, p. 11

39 Müller, 2003, p. 13

40 Müller, 2003, p. 14

41 Müller, 2003, p. 15

42 Von Ameln, 198x, p. 16

43 Von Ameln, 198x, p. 16

44 Müller, 2003, p. 18

45 Müller, 2003, p. 18

46 Müller, 2003, p. 32

A treaty was finally concluded between the Netherlands and Germany in 1988, and with the help of European subsidies it became possible for the police, fire brigade, ambulance service and other emergency services in border areas to cooperate and so make the region safer.⁴⁷

There are three aspects to cross-border disaster prevention:⁴⁸

1. keeping records of the available manpower and equipment;
2. the drafting of an action plan for the response to a disaster;
3. cooperation between the police, fire brigade and ambulance services.

A fairly recent example of the current cooperation in cross-border security and disaster prevention is provided by the fireworks disaster in Enschede on 13 May 2000, when the German fire brigade and other emergency services quickly arrived to help their Dutch colleagues.

Another example of cross-border cooperation in this policy area can be seen in a project involving Bocholt-Süderwick in Germany and the municipality of Dinxperlo in the Netherlands, where Dutch and German police officers work together in maintaining law and order. They patrol together, can conduct joint investigations and both forces are available by telephone 24 hours a day. Apart from these two specific examples, European subsidies have opened the way for the development of programmes designed to increase safety on the motorways, to prevent violence and public disturbances and to provide help for victims.⁴⁹

Problems were caused in the past by differences in Dutch and German criminal law. They included differences in the perception of the drug problem, obstacles to the exchange of information due to differences in the rules on data protection, the structure of the information and bureaucratic complexity and, finally, unclear rules concerning the right of hot pursuit in the neighbouring country. With the help of European subsidies, however, these problems have also been (largely) resolved.⁵⁰

Economic cooperation and cooperation in technology and innovation in the border area

In the economic field, the EUREGIO strives, in the context of EU subsidy programmes, for the improvement of technology and for innovation in the cooperation between companies and organisations and methods of improving efficiency and the competitive position of companies. This is reflected in various domains that are discussed below.⁵¹

Labour market

One aspect that needed to be addressed to improve the competitive position was the integration of the labour market. The foundations had already been laid with the establishment of the internal market, but other factors influence efforts to further improve the labour market. For example, cooperation between employment agencies on both sides of the border contributed greatly to the development of a common labour market. By closely following supply and demand in the labour market and organising meetings of employers and unions, it has become easier for employees to find a job in the neighbouring country, while at the same time it is easier for employers to find new employees.⁵²

In addition to the cooperation between the employment agencies, in the 1990s the EURES network was established. The EURES network was formed because more than 15 years of experience in advising the public on issues relating to social insurance, housing and work in the neighbouring country, everyday border-related problems and the cross-border labour market as a whole and providing information about jobs in the EUREGIO had made it clear that such a pan-European network was needed. EURES is an important source of information for anyone looking for a job across the border or planning to move to the neighbouring country.⁵³

47 Müller, 2003, pp. 18-19; EUREGIO brochure, *Veiligheid zonder grenzen*, 2005

48 Müller, 2003, p. 32

49 EUREGIO brochure, *Veiligheid zonder grenzen*, 2005

50 Oortgiese, 1992, p. 26

51 Müller, 2003, p. 31

52 Müller, 2003, p. 22

53 Müller, 2003, p. 29

The first initiative in the field of retraining for the labour market was taken in 1987 by the Dutch Stichting Grensoverschrijdende Beroepsopleiding. The idea behind it was to facilitate vocational training for Dutch and German job-seekers by making it easier to secure a dual diploma that is recognised on both sides of the border. However, because of the language barrier and a lack of genuine willingness to look for a job in the neighbouring country, few people ultimately dared to make the leap. Thanks to European instruments, a new effort can be made. The EUREGIO hopes that with targeted retraining in machine building, midwifery, IT, natural sciences and technology and the integration of handicapped workers in the labour market it will be able to help small and medium-sized businesses in particular.⁵⁴

Problems in the labour market are caused by:⁵⁵

- a lack of information about the EUREGIO's labour market;
- the continued absence of a genuine *Euroregional labour market*;
- a mismatch between the training provided and the demands on the other side of the border;
- a lack of access to the education systems in the neighbouring country;
- and most important, the language barrier.

Tourism

Tourism is a powerful engine of the economy in the border area. Although there is no mass tourism, day trips and week-long visits to the region are growing in popularity. An organisation has been established to promote this sector, which publishes a bilingual magazine with the most important information about the neighbouring country for tourists entitled "Toeristische EUREGIO-magazine voor vakantie en vrije tijd". The publication quickly proved its worth, since restaurants and hotels profited greatly when the magazine appeared.⁵⁶

A Tourism Offensive, in which regional tourism organisations have joined forces to promote the existing tourist attractions in the EUREGIO, was also launched. There are cycle, walking and skating paths with bilingual signposts as well as travel guides and helpful Internet sites. Even more specific examples of activities to promote tourism are the Hamaland route, a cross-border tourist route stretching more than 220 km, digital topographical maps of the EUREGIO and cross-border cycling routes.⁵⁷

Cross-border consumer advice

One of the most important and most common activities of the EUREGIO is providing advice to consumers. The EUREGIO has been addressing consumer issues since the early 1990s. Its purpose is to inform consumers about the possibilities of a common consumer market so that they can take full advantage of what is on offer. However, when problems occur the EUREGIO also acts as a sort of ombudsman to protect the rights of the consumer. Cross-border consumption is believed to have increased since the introduction of the euro and the improvement of the infrastructure, but with it the demand for advice as well.⁵⁸

In the past, problems have regularly occurred due to differences in consumer law, differences in price and quality and, again, the language barrier. The arrival of the euro, tax harmonisation in the EU, the EU's ombudsman and EU legislation in general should help to resolve these problems.⁵⁹

Technology and innovation

In addressing issues relating to technology and innovation, the EUREGIO concentrates on the creation of networks and centres of expertise to strengthen the technological infrastructure in the region. For example, the cross-border cooperation between companies in life sciences is stimulated and companies can share and hire expensive equipment at low rates through the EUREGIO Biotech Centre. Organisations also often receive support from experts from throughout the EUREGIO rather than only within the national borders. A cross-border high-speed Internet hub has now been created that allows large volumes of data to be transmitted quickly and cheaply. Furthermore, the university in Münster and the Medisch Spectrum Twente have formed a partnership that allows scientific medical knowledge to be shared more quickly over the border. Cross-border training programmes are also being established in technology and commercial sciences to help find solutions to problems in these disciplines that exist on both sides of the border.⁶⁰

54 Müller, 2003, p. 33; EUREGIO brochure, *Beroepsopleiding zonder grenzen – Samen opleiden en bijscho len*, 2005

55 Oortgiesen, 1992, p. 14

56 Müller, 2003, p. 33

57 EUREGIO brochure, *Toerisme zonder grenzen – Samen zorgen voor aanbod en promotie*, 2005

58 EUREGIO *grensoverschrijdend consumentenadvisering*, 1997, p. 7

59 Oortgiesen, 1992, p. 24

60 EUREGIO brochure, *Technologie zonder grenzen – Samen werken aan innovatie*, 2005

Cross-border health care

In the field of cross-border health care, in 1992 a system was introduced for cooperation in the transport of patients, cooperation between the blood banks in Germany and the Netherlands and preparing an inventory of health care institutions. However, no major progress was made in subsequent years. Significant differences in legislation, a lack of money and discrepancies between German and Dutch health insurers, the fee structure and the financing of health care itself all contributed to delays in the process of cooperation and possible integration.⁶¹ In recent years, however, more progress has been made in this area.

After all, it is essential that cross-border health care is possible. Patients should have the option of seeking treatment across the border. By virtue of European programmes, a cross-border network dedicated to improving the quality of care has been set up. Examples of what has been done include the initiative taken by the universities and other large actors in the health care sector in Twente and Münster in the Euregionale Servicecentrum voor Gezondheid (ESG) project; cooperation aimed at the prevention and earlier diagnosis of diabetes; improvement and development of technology for the electrical stimulation of brains; cross-border health care courses; and the establishment of cross-border residential centres. And urgency is called for: research has shown that more than half of the Dutch and a somewhat smaller proportion of the Germans in the border area are considering crossing the border for future treatment. Efforts to combat bacteria in hospitals and the MRSA project have also received a lot of attention in recent European subsidy programmes.⁶²

Nature, environment and agriculture

Agricultural policy has been regulated by the EU since the 1950s. The Treaty of Rome in 1957 set out five objectives designed to lead to the implementation a comprehensive structural policy for agriculture that acknowledged regional factors. One of the objectives is the creation of a cross-border agricultural market, also in the EUREGIO, without discriminatory barriers. The EUREGIO has made its own contribution to achieving this through the INTERREG programme, which we will return to in the next chapter.

Problems arose, however, due to price differences, the production of waste products, excessive manure spreading and differences in the methods used to measure excessive manure spreading in the Netherlands and Germany. These differences in the measurement methods led to abuses of the existing legislation that drove up the prices for farmland.⁶³ In addition, conditions in the agricultural sector as a whole deteriorated due to tougher legislation and the increasing environmental burden. However, counter-measures were also taken as part of a cross-border environmental programme and a programme designed to address the problems surrounding landfill sites and waste processing.⁶⁴

An effort is also being made in INTERREG to safeguard the future of agriculture, nature and the environment by creating new employment and new sources of income. New initiatives have been launched to protect and preserve nature areas by assigning EU protected status to them and through environmental protection measures in the Groene Grens project.⁶⁵

61 Müller, 2003, p. 32; Oortgiesen, 1992, p. 17

62 Müller, 2003, p. 32; EUREGIO brochure *Gezondheid zonder grenzen – Samen onderzoeken en zorgen*, 2005; Paalman, R. (2008), *Met je hart de grens over*, in: Buren – Samen leven in het grensgebied, supplement to *Tabantia*, 23 September 2008, pp. 5-7

63 Oortgiesen, 1992, pp. 19-20

64 Müller, 2003, p. 34

65 EU-INTERREG-Programme for the EUREGIO, 199x, front; Grensregio's bouwen aan Europa: *INTERREG in het Nederlands-Duitse grensgebied*, 2007, p. 39

Conclusion

What goals have been achieved through cross-border cooperation within the EUREGIO over the years and what were the major problems? (A)

In this chapter we have given an overview of the most important events and milestones that have been achieved, and the major problems that were encountered, in the 50-year history of the EUREGIO. The most striking thing about this EUREGIO – apart from the fact that it was the first of its kind – is that the body was created entirely from the bottom up. The current level of cooperation has come about because local authorities, but above all citizens, set out to restore the contacts with the neighbours on the other side of the border. In the early years of the EUREGIO the focus was on the practical matters required to establish those contacts: the infrastructure. Once people were able to communicate with each other, institutionalised social and cultural contacts were introduced on a large scale, and political cooperation was embodied in the Euregio Council. From that point on, the EUREGIO started to try to solve the everyday border-related problems that were experienced by cross-border commuters, the working population, security services, patients, students and scientists: in short, everyone in the region who cast a glance across the border. The developments outlined above lead us to the conclusion that the EUREGIO has strived to do that for its citizens. The major problems encountered in the 50 years of the EUREGIO have been mainly due to differences in legislation between the Netherlands and Germany, and in the early years a lack of structural financing. INTERREG has cured part of that latter problem. Differences in legislation, on the other hand, are to an increasing extent being resolved by European integration. However, if problems arise due to the progressive integration they will be felt in the border regions and can then be referred back to the EU.

Promotion of the EUREGIO by the EU: INTERREG

In this chapter we discuss the development of the EUREGIO and the promotion and support provided for it by European Union. For a clearer picture of what that entails, we will first outline the EU's perspective on the EUREGIO. This will help to explain why Brussels encourages and supports the development of border regions. We will then explain INTERREG, the programme established for border regions in Europe, and discuss its history and importance.

The EUREGIO from a European perspective

Borders have always imposed a number of constraints, and hence had a negative effect on social and economic integration, spatial planning, transport, infrastructure, etc. The EUREGIO's task has been to mitigate the negative effects of "the border's" existence. With the creation of the internal market in the Treaty of Maastricht, various border-related problems – which CBCs were already confronted with – now had to be addressed at European level. It can therefore be argued that the goals the EUREGIO has set itself fully correspond with the EU's objective, namely the creation of a united Europe. In the EUREGIO, this process takes place on a smaller scale and in a more transparent manner.⁶⁶

Preliminary stages of INTERREG: cross-border action programmes

On 5 June 1987, E. Schleberger and J. Schwer, the chairmen of the regional councils (Regierungspräsident) of Münster and Weser-Ems respectively, and M. de Bruyne and J.L.M. Niers, the Queen's Commissioners for the provinces of Gelderland and Overijssel respectively, signed the "Grensoverschrijdend actieprogramma voor de EUREGIO" [Cross-border action programme for the EUREGIO]. The action programme was then presented to ministries of economic affairs in The Hague, Bonn, Düsseldorf, Hanover and to the European Commission. The main objective of this cross-border action programme was to promote economic development and stimulate integration within the region. The programme was instituted because the Netherlands and Germany faced the common problems of the overspreading of manure on farm land, overburdened landfill sites and the poor quality of water and of trees in the border area.⁶⁷ The programme also proposed organising meetings and exchanges and suggested possibilities for stimulating the labour market, services, tourism, infrastructure, nature and the environment.⁶⁸



*Signed Cross-Border Action Program.
Background: Mr. Gabbe and Mr. van Geffen, Secretariat EUREGIO*

67 Müller, 2003, p. 20

68 EUREGIO inform, September 2008, p. 6; Grensoverschrijdend actieprogramma voor de EUREGIO, 1987, p. 9

With this Cross-border action programme the EUREGIO was in fact drawing the contours of the future INTERREG, the programme of subsidies for border regions launched by the EU. Although the EUREGIO, in association with the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), cannot be called the "engine" of INTERREG, it could be described as one of the incubators of the successful EU subsidy programme for border regions. This is reflected, for example, in the same method of analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Euroregions in question. Once again, it shows that the Euroregions were the first to anticipate the benefits of cross-border cooperation. In the case of INTERREG IIIA, the subsidy of 48 million euro generated a boost to investment of 125 million euro.⁶⁹ There have now been three successful INTERREG programmes and INTERREG IVA started last year. We will briefly describe the last three INTERREG programmes.

INTERREG I, II and IIIA

INTERREG is a programme launched by the European Union to provide subsidies to stimulate and support European border regions. INTERREG has two objectives:

1. To improve the regional economy and raise the standard of living of the residents of the region concerned;
2. To support cross-border integration in the region.

Secondary literature on INTERREG implies the same: INTERREG is generally intended "to subsidise local cross-border projects that are jointly initiated by local authorities and other organisations in a border area", with the aim of creating cross-border social and economic centres through joint development strategies by means of eligible projects that make a distinctive contribution to the economy of the border region.

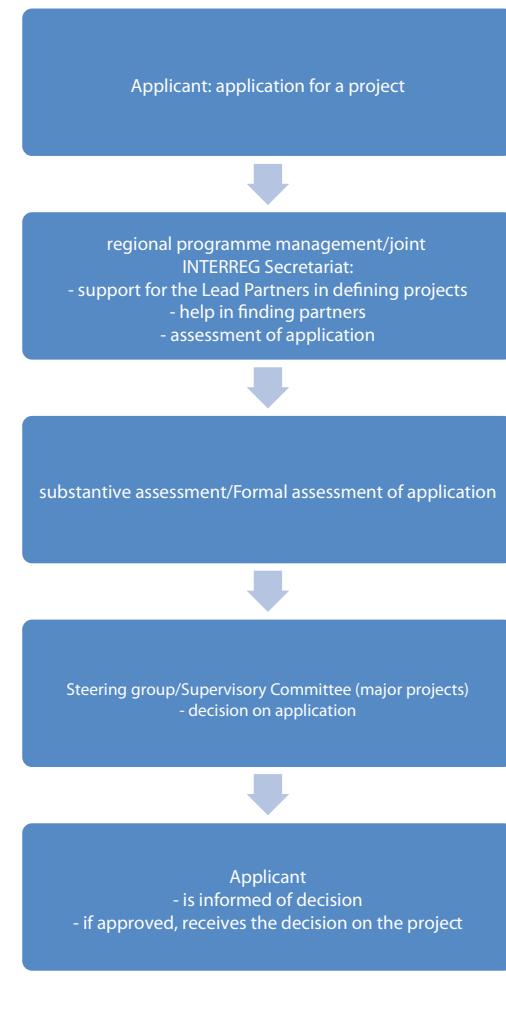
The INTERREG programme is designed to address specific priorities in the region during the period of the programme. Proposals for cross-border projects that are submitted bottom up must also fall within the realm of the priorities. Since INTERREG has now become the most important source of subsidies for border regions, the projects must also comply with the EU rules. In that sense, the function of a border region has in that sense evolved into an instrument for implementing European regional policy.⁷⁰

69 EUREGIO inform, September 2008, pp. 6-7
70 Perkmann, 2003, p. 155

The cross-border projects are planned and implemented by partners on both sides of the border. The INTERREG partners are also jointly responsible for carrying out the programmes.⁷¹ The figure to the right illustrates the application and approval process for projects:⁷²

INTERREG I started in 1990 and ended in 1994. This period was used mainly to allow the partners to get to know each other and to remedy the most serious bottlenecks in the infrastructure, such as the lack of bus connections. The priorities, and therefore also the projects in INTERREG I, in the period from 1990 to 1994 were concerned mainly with:⁷³

1. Networking, exchanging information and communication;
2. Transport and infrastructure;
3. Tourism and leisure;
4. Labour market and training;
5. Environmental protection and agriculture;
6. Innovation and technology transfer.



The aim of these programmes was to realise the priority objectives of INTERREG I. INTERREG IIA was launched in 1994 on the basis of the aims and programmes. This programme ran until 1999 and its main objective was to "strengthen the cooperation between project partners".⁷⁴ As with the earlier INTERREG I, there were six priorities in INTERREG IIA:⁷⁵

1. Spatial planning;
2. Economy, technology and innovation (including tourism);
3. Milieu, nature and rural development (including agriculture);
4. Labour market and training;
5. Social and cultural integration;
6. Technical support.

Finally, INTERREG IIIA, which ran from 2000 until 2006, was intended to a) create networks for each project; b) strengthen the cooperation between knowledge institutes and the business community; c) introduce major projects. These goals were to be achieved by carrying out two programmes in the German-Dutch border area on the one hand, and through pan-Euroregion projects on the other. Projects launched under INTERREG IIIA had to fall into one of the following priority areas:⁷⁶

1. Spatial structure;
2. Economy, technology and innovation;
3. Nature, environment and agriculture;
4. Labour market and qualifications;
5. Social and cultural integration.

⁷¹ EU INTERREG Programme for the EUREGIO, 199, front

⁷² Grensregio's bouwen aan Europa: *INTERREG in het Nederlands-Duitse grensgebied*, 2007, p. 18

⁷³ EU INTERREG Programme for the EUREGIO, 199x, front; Grensregio's bouwen aan Europa: *INTERREG in het Nederlands-Duitse grensgebied*, 2007, p. 8

⁷⁴ Grensregio's bouwen aan Europa: *INTERREG in het Nederlands-Duitse grensgebied*, 2007, p. 8

⁷⁵ EU-INTERREG-Programme for the EUREGIO, 199x, front

⁷⁶ Grensregio's bouwen aan Europa: *INTERREG in het Nederlands-Duitse grensgebied*, 2007, p. 49



*The EUREGIO board meeting on
INTERREG projects*

A total of 218 projects were carried out in these five priorities areas in the period 2000-2006 with the help of INTERREG IIIA. However, the majority of the projects were economic and socio-political projects falling under the second priority.

INTERREG IIIA in the EUREGIO

In the period from 2000 to 2006, approximately 150 projects were carried out in the EUREGIO, including about 60 People-to-People projects. The objectives of INTERREG IIIA are to strengthen the cross-border economic structure and the labour market in the EUREGIO; to bridge cultural differences; and to build cross-border networks by setting up specific projects. The results have been impressive. As already mentioned, the subsidy of € 48 million ultimately generated investment of more than twice that amount. Cross-border cooperation in the EUREGIO has proved successful in economic terms thank to the implementation of INTERREG.⁷⁷

But INTERREG, and particularly INTERREG IIIA, also seems to have been successful in other respects. By starting specific projects designed to improve the factors that determine the choice of business location in the region, including nature, tourism and culture, the quality of life of the inhabitants has improved as well as the business climate. Attention has also been devoted to the labour market and the economic structure of the region. INTERREG IIIA provides financial support for measures to make the region more attractive for companies and individuals. The policy also helps in efforts to develop cross-border networks in every sector of society.⁷⁸

77 De EUREGIO brengt Europa in de Praktijk, *INTERREG-III A: grenzen worden kansen*, 2004, p. 1

78 De EUREGIO brengt Europa in de Praktijk, *INTERREG-III A: grenzen worden kansen*, 2004, pp. 3-4, 5-6

INTERREG IVA

INTERREG IVA was launched in 2007. The European Union's aim under the Lisbon strategy adopted in March, 2000, is to become "the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy with the capacity to achieve sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and closer social cohesion" by 2010. This subsidy programme will run until 2013 and has three priorities:⁷⁹

1. Economy, technology and innovation;
2. Sustainable regional development;
3. Integration and society.

For the EUREGIO, INTERREG IV corresponds with the objectives set out by the European Union. Consequently, the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy are taken into account in setting priorities and developing specific projects. Measures to promote the information society, to improve the conditions for research and development and to support the establishment of innovative companies, in particular SMEs, are therefore major priorities.⁸⁰

The objective of the programmes is to intensify permanent cross-border cooperation between the German and Dutch partners. In this way the programme area should evolve into an integrated European region in which the national borders constitute a typical feature but are not a hindrance.⁸¹ The European Commission has earmarked more than € 138 million from the European Regional Development Fund for measures to achieve the goals in these priority areas. These funds are intended for all four Dutch-German Euroregions and should generate investment of almost € 300 million.⁸²

INTERREG IVA also embraces environmental objectives. The so-called Gothenburg Objectives can be translated into four main goals: tackling climate change, guaranteeing the sustainability of the transport sector, managing public health risks and prudent stewardship of natural resources. INTERREG IVA has incorporated these objectives in the programme under the priority Sustainable regional development. Besides these two major objectives, through INTERREG IVA the EU also hopes to achieve greater equality between men and women, produce integrated guidelines for growth and employment and improve the implementation of its cohesion policy in the member states.⁸³

Furthermore, INTERREG IVA introduced the concept of "major projects" [majeure projecten]. These are projects of strategic importance. The activities and the results of these projects should not be confined to a single region but have an influence along the entire Dutch-German border, in other words throughout the programme area. They should also generate synergies while at the same time enhancing the quality of the projects throughout the programme area. Apart from their regional impact along the German-Dutch border, major projects should also generate added value on a national scale. In addition to the EUREGIO and the other German-Dutch Euroregions, the Dutch provinces bordering on Germany are also involved in INTERREG IVA and in the implementation of the subsidy programme.⁸⁴

Conclusion

With the INTERREG subsidy programme, the EU has killed three birds with one stone. Firstly, because its objectives are more firmly integrated in the policy of the member states. Secondly, by providing an economic impulse to the border regions. And finally by promoting social, economic and cultural integration, so that Europe is more "united" than ever. The EUREGIO has been able to contribute to this by being the first to produce such a cross-border programme. As already mentioned, the policy pursued earlier in the EUREGIO served as a sort of incubator for what would later become INTERREG. All in all, we can say that INTERREG has generated considerable added value for the EUREGIO in financial terms, since there are now more possibilities in the area of social and cultural integration. Furthermore, because of INTERREG attention within the EUREGIO has shifted from social and cultural initiatives – the Mozer Commission – to social and economic projects financed from INTERREG funds. In view of its major financial contribution, we can also say that the EU does see the value of cross-border alliances between border areas because of their benefit to the European Union as a whole. Even from the EU's perspective, cross-border regional cooperation clearly has significant added value.

79 Grensregio's bouwen aan Europa: *INTERREG in het Nederlands-Duitse grensgebied*, 2007, p. 15

80 Operationeel Programma INTERREG IVA, *Duitsland-Nederland 2007-2013*, p. 55

81 <http://Interreg IV A Deutschland-Nederland-doelstellingen.mht>, 20 Oct. 08

82 Grensregio's bouwen aan Europa: *INTERREG in het Nederlands-Duitse grensgebied*, 2007, p. 16

83 Operational Programme INTERREG IVA, *Duitsland-Nederland 2007-2013*, pp. 51-52

84 Grensregio's bouwen aan Europa: *INTERREG in het Nederlands-Duitse grensgebied*, 2007, p. 16; Interreg IV A Deutschland-Nederland-majeure projecten.mht, 20 Oct. 08; Interreg IV A Deutschland-Nederland-programmapartners.mht, 20 Oct. 08

Political cooperation in the EUREGIO: The CDA–CDU group and its evolution to the CDA–CDU EUREGIO Association

Introduction

As we saw in the historical overview, since 1978 the EUREGIO has had a political forum in the shape of the Euregio Council. The Council is often compared with the European Parliament, but in miniature. And not without reason. As in the European Parliament, the political parties representing the same political family from both sides of the border form groups in the Euregio Council. By contrast with the European Parliament, however, the members of the Euregio Council are indirectly elected. The local councils of the relevant municipalities and Kreise choose the members of the Euregio Council. The elections to the Euregio Council are therefore ‘indirect’.

In this chapter we will examine the largest cross-border group in the Euregio Council, the CDA–CDU group, more closely. The unique aspect of this political alliance compared with other groups in the Euregio Council is that the parties quickly institutionalised their cooperation in protocols. We will consider the origins of the cooperation, the group’s general objectives and the actions it has taken in recent years. We will then outline how the cooperation within the group has evolved over the years to encompass full cooperation between the two political parties and the creation of the CDA–CDU EUREGIO Association. The survey is based on a literature study, but a lot of information was also gathered from the personal recollections, anecdotes and future visions of the individuals we interviewed.

Origins of the political cooperation

When the Euregio Council celebrated its first lustrum in 1982, the CDA and CDU decided to intensify their cooperation in the Council by drawing up a sort of political manifesto setting out the basic principles and priorities of their work in the Euregio Council. The cross-border cooperation between the Christian Democratic parties in the EUREGIO thus became more deeply embedded and was no longer confined only to group meetings.⁸⁵

The underlying idea behind the alliance between the two political parties was based on the conviction that the CDA and the CDU could better protect the welfare of the EUREGIO and its inhabitants by working together. The alliance was based on the charters and political programmes of the CDA and the CDU.⁸⁶

The document establishing the cooperation between the political parties, CDA/CDU-FRAKTIION IM EUREGIO-RAT, *Grundlagen und Arbeitsschwerpunkte* (1982), shows that the cross-border group initially focused on promoting social and cultural contacts. With the arrival of INTERREG, attention shifted mainly to socio-economic topics, although cultural aspects remained a priority for the group.⁸⁷

Building on the cooperation in the group, in 1988 steps were taken to expand the cooperation between the CDA and CDU parties in the EUREGIO, which led to the formation of the CDA EUREGIO Association. The Association was an initiative of the CDA branches in Overijssel, Gelderland, Drenthe and (at the time) Twente. The basic principles were laid down in the Protocol en Reglement CDA EUREGIO Association (1988), which besides setting out the basic principles of the association also formulated objectives, rules on practical procedures and an organisational structure. Although there were still no formal talks on an alliance between the CDA and the CDU, the documents did anticipate such a move in a number of respects, as was also happening in practice. In 2003, the protocol was updated and rewritten to reflect changing circumstances.⁸⁸

The last, probably decisive step on the way to full cooperation between the political parties was taken on 26 April 2006 when, at a meeting of the executive of the CDA EUREGIO Association, to which partners from the German CDU were invited, a manifesto for more intensive cooperation between CDA and CDU was unanimously adopted.

The actual cooperation structure was finally established in 2007. The manifesto for the party-political alliance was presented during the inaugural meeting on 23 November. The following section discusses the objectives of the manifesto.

86 DE EUREGIO/ CDA-CDU FRAKTION IM EUREGIO-RAT, *Grundlagen und Arbeitsschwerpunkte*, 1982, p. 2

87 DE EUREGIO/ CDA-CDU FRAKTION IM EUREGIO-RAT, *Grundlagen und Arbeitsschwerpunkte*, 1982

88 Protocol CDA EUREGIO Association, 1988, pp. 1-2; Protocol CDA EUREGIO Association, 2003

85 DE EUREGIO/ CDA-CDU FRAKTION IM EUREGIO-RAT, *Grundlagen und Arbeitsschwerpunkte*, 1982, p. 2

Objectives of the CDA-CDU political alliance

In any discussion of the objectives of the political cooperation between the CDA and CDU, the 2006 manifesto deserves special attention. It paved the way for the decisive step of forming the CDA-CDU EUREGIO Association. However, it is also worthwhile enquiring whether the original goals were consistent with those of the ultimate CDA-CDU EUREGIO Association.

The objectives of the CDA EUREGIO Association in 1988 could be broken down into general and specific objectives. The general objectives related to the goals of Christian Democracy, as pursued at national (CDA) and European (EPP) level. More interesting are the specific objectives for the EUREGIO. The CDA EUREGIO Association set out six specific objectives – relations with the CDU is specifically mentioned as one of them! – by which it hoped to promote the interests of the EUREGIO by attracting support and attention from provincial, national and European government bodies. However, by already referring to relations with its German counterpart, the CDA seems to have been laying the groundwork for future political alliances.⁸⁹

In 2003, the updated protocol created an even more robust political basis for the CDA in the EUREGIO by stating its aim of raising the European dimension and increasing awareness of Europe among the citizens in the border area; maintaining direct relations with politicians at provincial and national level – something that had not previously been mentioned; maintaining permanent contacts with CDA members in the region; and finally maintaining closer contacts with Christian Democrats at European level.^{90,91}

Objectives of political cooperation between the CDA and CDU parties

After creating a broad political basis, the next step was to formally establish the cooperation between the CDA and the CDU parties in the EUREGIO. Although, as was shown above, the CDA and the CDU were already cooperating quite intensively in practice, the alliance was formally established in 2007. The fact that the alliance was not formed earlier can be attributed to differences in the parties' structure and organisation (for example, the CDU had no similar structure to the CDA EUOREGIO Association). Furthermore, the personal contacts between members of the parties were not institutionalised. Finally, it was initially felt that no new institutionalised contacts between the parties were needed since the cooperation through other channels was generally largely satisfactory.⁹²

Summing up the consistency of the objectives during the history of the CDA-CDU cooperation, it seems that the main focus was on changing the structure and frequency of former contacts. The joint objectives and aims of the two parties had already been laid down and remained largely unchanged. The manifesto (April 2006) can therefore be seen as a working plan or action plan to enable the parties to put broad political cooperation into practice. After all, the action plan involved organising joint meetings in border regions, planning more regular meetings of members and promoting cooperation between members of parliament of the two parties from the EUREGIO. Finally, the Eduardo Frei Foundation (CDA-affiliated) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (CDU-affiliated) would encourage and support the cooperation through their contacts with sister parties in East European border regions.⁹³

Chronology:

May 1982: CDA/CDU Fraktion im EUREGIO-Rat, Grundlagen und Arbeitsschwerpunkte

March 1988: CDA-EUREGIO Association, Protocol and Regulation

March 2003: Updating of CDA-EUREGIO Association's Protocol and Regulation

April 2006: Manifesto on CDA-CDU cooperation

November 2007: Foundation of CDA-CDU EUOREGIO Association

89 Protocol CDA EUREGIO Association, pp. 1-2

90 Protocol CDA EUREGIO Association, 2003, pp. 1-2

91 An interesting aspect of the protocol of 2003: in it relations with the CDU are referred to less often and less explicitly than in 1988. A possible reason for this is that relations and contacts had become so institutionalised that there was no longer a reason to mention them.

92 Zusammenarbeit zwischen der Christlich Demokratischen Union (CDU) im Münsterland und dem Christen Democratisch Appèl (CDA) in Overijssel und Gelderland, 2007, p. 1

93 Zusammenarbeit zwischen der Christlich Demokratischen Union (CDU) im Münsterland und dem Christen Democratisch Appèl (CDA) in Overijssel und Gelderland, 2007, p. 2

Conclusion to part I

In this first part of the chronicle we have provided an overview of the EUREGIO based on documents published about that body. Using a theoretical framework, we were able to discover that the aim of cross-border cooperation is to mitigate, and ultimately eliminate, the negative effects of the existence of “a border”. That seems to be precisely what has happened during the 50 years of the EUREGIO. The EUREGIO has constantly strived to promote cooperation between the Twente/Achterhoek region and North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony in various domains. Although there have been setbacks in the last 50 years, the positive effects have clearly outweighed them. One observation that can therefore be made is that the EUREGIO has been a success during the 50 years of its existence. As the most important lobbyist for the inhabitants of the border region, the EUREGIO has been able to remove many of the obstacles to open contacts between people on either side of the border. At the same time, the EUREGIO has correctly always placed the emphasis on the social and cultural importance of the cooperation. After all, it is the cross-border contacts between people and their organisations that form the basis for the successful cooperation. It is therefore very important for the future of the EUREGIO that activities continue to be based on this “person-to-person” approach. The INTERREG programmes provided an enormous boost for cooperation within the region, and to a certain extent represented the recognition by the European Union that cross-border cooperation is a driving force of European integration. The EUREGIO was partly responsible for this and in that respect has also served as a model for other border regions. It can continue to serve as a role model in the future, as long as the European funds to promote cross-border cooperation are continued in some form or other. This effort will expand further in the future. We will look at these and other subjects in the interviews in the next section, as well as the pioneering role played by the political cooperation between CDA and CDU.

PART II: INTERVIEWS

Interview: Franz-Josef Achterkamp

Franz-Josef Achterkamp joined the Euregio Council representing the county district of Steinfurt in 1983/84. He became chairman of the CDA/CDU faction in 1994/95 and vice-chairman of the CDA-CDU Euregio Association in 2007.

Today, the Euregio Council has 82 members, equally divided between the German and the Dutch parts of the EUREGIO. I am one of eight representatives of Steinfurt, the largest county district in the EUREGIO, which has a population of 450,000 and includes larger cities like Rheine and Ibbenbüren. The members of the Euregio Council include representatives of county councils and other local authorities. The number of representatives for each authority is geared to the number of inhabitants. Although it is impossible for every municipality or city to have its own delegate in the Euregio Council (since it would then become almost incapable of action) and the members pay close attention to cross-border cooperation, they are naturally inclined to pursue their own interests; each of them wants to put their interests on the agenda of the EUREGIO committees. To be involved or participate in the dialogue on cross-border cooperation is practical and the political intention of every member. This underlines the importance and the interest in this work. *“Sometimes we have to guard against only protecting our own local interests in the meetings of the Euregio Council.”*

The EUREGIO is the oldest cross-border organisation in Europe. It already had its own secretariat and substantial funds of its own in 1972. The EUREGIO was therefore able to operate successfully in the social, cultural, economic and infrastructural fields long before EU funds were available. The first cross-border action programme was launched in 1972. It presented new approaches for shaping a more prosperous future for what was at the time still a poor border area (with textiles as the only industry, a high level of agricultural activity and a serious lack of large-scale infrastructure). At that time, however, there was competition for national co-financing of activities, especially in the field of the economy and infrastructure.

Funds were already available for social and cultural cooperation, which were allocated through the Mozer Commission. Although the funds had to be applied for annually, they provided a relatively secure financial basis for several small-scale projects, such as organising events where young people, senior citizens, schools, teachers and handicapped persons could meet and local authorities and the numerous twinned towns in the EUREGIO could share experiences. One example is the successful twinning of Rheine and Borne, in which the EUREGIO played a significant role. As well as meetings organised for young people and senior citizens, there were also field trips, meetings between sports clubs and round-table discussions on issues such as drug-related problems. These events fostered communication between the partners and helped to establish a deep mutual trust on both sides of the border.

“As chairman of the CDU working group, I visited Borne several times between 1984 and 1995. The meetings and common events not only highlighted Christian principles and intentions but also demonstrated the importance of cross-border encounters between residents in day-to-day life, including recreation and in the labour market.”

The EUREGIO achieved very good results as regards infrastructure and the economy. The east-west motorway between Deventer-Almelo-Rheine-Osnabrück, with the extension to Berlin, would never have been built without the EUREGIO (in cooperation with the Chambers of Commerce and the district president), nor would the *Emslandlinie* between Emden and the Ruhr region or the A35 in the Netherlands with the connection to Germany's B54 to Münster.

“The cross-border road linking the A35 and B54 being planned at that time can serve as an excellent example of the Dutch open-mindedness and ability to manage many things more quickly and without bureaucracy. In this joint activity, the Germans pressed the Dutch to build their section of the road quickly, with the result that the Dutch had completed their section while the final section of the road on the German side was still being built.”

Today, several new “*Bundesstraßen*” (A roads) in the EUREGIO are linked seamlessly to national and international motorway networks. The preservation of the railroad network in the Westmünsterland is another success, as is the reopening of the railway line between Gronau (Germany) and Enschede (Netherlands) at the end of the 1990s.

Advice on daily border issues, the pension rights of commuters, cooperation between customs officials, border patrol, police, rescue services, the health sector and enterprises in the field of tourism are additional milestones in a long and successful history. The secret of the EUREGIO's success was – besides having its own funding, a common secretariat and good working structures – the fact that it plotted a long-term strategy for the economy and infrastructure, while at the same time establishing a solid basis in the short term for the idea of the EUREGIO and creating grassroots support in the area of social and cultural affairs by securing the involvement of the public and numerous associations and NGOs.

CDA and CDU presented their first common party programme in 1988. *“It was intended as a political starting point, but mostly we had to deal with problems requiring immediate action.”* In 1990 a crucial turning point was reached in Europe, which can be traced back to the lobbying activities and experiences of the EUREGIO and the support of the AEBR. With INTERREG, the EU introduced a support programme for cross-border cooperation for the first time. It is a multi-year programme providing funds exclusively for cross-border cooperation. Receipt of these funds depends on the allocation of national and regional co-financing for the same period. This was a decisive step because it not only meant that large-scale funds were available, which accelerated the processes considerably, but national funds did not have to be sought for every single project. INTERREG became a great success. The current programme is

INTERREG IV, which will run from 2007 to 2013, from which the EUREGIO will benefit significantly.

“This programme demands the full attention and political commitment of CDA/CDU. At the same time, we have to guard against being blinded by INTERREG, for the history up to 1990 reveals that cross-border cooperation is more than INTERREG. Nevertheless, the programme is an essential instrument for implementing the objectives of the EUREGIO considerably faster and with secure financial resources. There is a danger that we neglect these objectives in the cooperation between CDA and CDU. I think we have to take care that political parties also set strategic goals for future development and have an impact on political debate, whether it is in the field of cultural cooperation, the economy or the infrastructure.”

Research and innovation are giving rise to new challenges in the health sector and the field of energy supply.

The EUREGIO is well established in the European market. The region has 3.1 million inhabitants, with two million of them on the German side of the border since the accession of Münster, Osnabrück as well as the county districts of Warendorf and Osnabrück to the EUREGIO. There was already a metropolitan area on the Dutch side of the border with the urban agglomeration of Enschede-Almelo-Hengelo, while the German part was shaped by medium-sized cities. The accession of the two large cities of Münster and Osnabrück was a turning point and reinforced the position of the EUREGIO, while creating an imbalance in terms of geographic scale and population. It was not only the urban centres of Enschede, Münster and Osnabrück that generated the economic and cultural development of the EUREGIO, but also the numerous medium-sized cities.

The EUREGIO may have learned from two action programmes (1972 and 1987) – as well as four INTERREG programmes – that rural areas cannot exist without functioning metropolitan areas and vice versa, but it now has to investigate whether a balance can be created on the Dutch side in terms of infrastructure and the number of inhabitants, for instance through the accession of the area around Zwolle. This would even out the geographic scale. However, the EUREGIO should not become too large. Proximity and reference to the border have to remain decisive criteria. Membership in the EUREGIO simply to secure INTERREG funds should not be an argument. The strength of the EUREGIO was that the inherent added value of cross-border cooperation was always recognised.

„Despite the advantages that INTERREG offers it seems useful to keep these principles in mind. Participation by all interested parties and use of the existing knowledge of citizens, NGOs, associations, trade unions and enterprises for the benefit of cross-border cooperation was and is the strength of the EUREGIO. In today’s Europe this is called networking and partnership. We have to maintain these networks and partnerships because the EUREGIO will continue to exist in any case. The evident continuation of funding from EU support programmes after 2013 will help us to translate our strategies, objectives and plans into

concrete projects. Cross-border cooperation has a specific political significance in the EUREGIO and creates its own political added value through empathy, comprehension and trust and through mutual learning and respect for the distinct character and individuality of one’s neighbours despite the many similarities existing between German and Dutch in this border area.

Naturally, cooperation in the EUREGIO does not always go smoothly and that is OK. We are not making national foreign policy or engaged in diplomacy, but establishing European internal and regional development policy. Furthermore, the cooperation between us is good regardless of the competition between cities and municipalities in the two countries. It is unrealistic to believe that everything will always proceed harmoniously. There are differences, competition and disharmony. The working methods of the EUREGIO and the representation and interests in it are subject to permanent change and we want to continue to be open to new ideas. Despite the achievements, we have to analyse critically what we can improve.”

The EUREGIO serves as an example throughout Europe and has in the past been an important role model. Other Euroregions based their own working methods on the EUREGIO’s model. *“We were often consulted and asked to advise on the establishment of other forms of cross-border cooperation. But we cannot rest on our laurels if we want to continue setting an example of successful cooperation in the future. Looking back, I can say that there were certain things we could have done better. That applies to me as well. For decades I took part in the meetings and events of the EUREGIO. It would have been better if I had made a greater effort to speak Dutch or tried to speak it more often. Like many Germans, I often relied on the ability of the Dutch to speak German.”*

Interview: Günter Alsmeier

Günter Alsmeier was mayor of the city of Bentheim from 1995 until 2005 and has been a member of the Euregio Council since 1996. He is one of two representatives of the county council of the administrative district of the County of Bentheim.

Between 1996 and 2007 several Dutch companies established themselves on the German side of the border and assumed a German legal form. Consequently, more and more Dutch people are living in Germany. During this period, in Bentheim alone the number of inhabitants with Dutch nationality increased from 300 to over 1800. The extensive EUREGIO study on “Living across the border”, prompted by the cross-border purchase of real estate by Dutch people in German border municipalities, was a personal highlight at this time. *“Serious issues emerged, such as the reasons for changing residence and the choice of an appropriate school. Dutch children living in Germany could continue to attend school in the Netherlands, which had hitherto hampered integration. In response to this, the schools in Bentheim have introduced special teaching units to facilitate the integration of these children.”*

The entwining of all aspects of life is most evident in the increase of advertising products in neighbouring countries (e.g. clothing, furniture and DIY stores).

The 1950s

The foundation of the EUREGIO has to be regarded as an essential step in the establishment of social contacts on the other side of the border. Before the Second World War these contacts were very intensive. Household helpers often worked on the other side of the border and there were many cross-border marriages. After the war, this was almost unimaginable right up until the mid-1950s.

In the early years of the EUREGIO twin cities were an important instrument for establishing initial contacts. Bentheim was twinned with the Dutch town of Assen. Furthermore, senior citizens from Delden and Bentheim made regular “official” visits to each other. From the 1970s, these social and cultural contacts were promoted by the Mozer Commission.

A new era began with the introduction of the EU initiative INTERREG. Funds were allocated for cross-border cooperation that extended beyond interpersonal contacts and became increasingly important.

CDA/CDU

Based on my personal experience, I can say that the cooperation between the CDA and CDU in the Euregio Council faction has been purely practical in nature and therefore very effective. The agendas of meetings are discussed and priorities are set in advance. Even when decisions of the Euregio Council were adopted by all the factions, the CDA/CDU faction took the lead on the most important issues and was the driving force in realising many projects, such as institution of the EUREGIO Award, initiatives in the health sector (patient mobility), the adaptation of education to the needs of children from the neighbouring country, demographic developments in general as well as specific infrastructure projects like the reconstruction of the cross-border railway link between Enschede and Gronau. Furthermore, the CDA-CDU faction promoted the accession of the city of Osnabrück to the EUREGIO in 1998.

The initiative of drawing up a common programme for the EUREGIO was important for the elaboration of concepts, but also in terms of proposing solutions to the national governments and thereby gaining influence over border-related issues. *“Such a common concept creates a stronger basis for action by the CDA faction in the province of Overijssel and the CDU in a German county district. A large cross-border association will be regarded differently, will be listened to more closely.”*

Political representation

The decisions made by the EUREGIO are political in nature, which is a great advantage. *“A democratic structure is a prerequisite. Decisions will have wider support than if they are taken only after consultation between some heads of county districts or mayors.”*

Political legitimacy creates transparency in the work of the Euregio Council. As a result of this transparency, citizens can learn about the background to political decisions. *“The press is always involved. Interesting and topical issues are high on the agenda of the Euregio Council. This is the first step in the dissemination of the results of our work.”*

Expanding the competences of the Euregio Council is not essential. It is important to act beyond the sphere of influence of provinces, federal states and cities/municipalities. *“We must work with them as far as possible, not take over their role.”*

Another advantage is that sensitive topics like the drugs problem and nuclear energy can first be discussed in a small group. *“A discussion in a small group is more effective than discussing the whole issue in the general meeting.”*

Direct elections to the Euregio Council are unnecessary and would also not be legitimate. *"The members of the Euregio Council are delegated by the municipalities/cities and county councils and therefore enjoy political legitimacy. Elections with a voter turnout of less than 30% would not be good for the status of the Euregio Council. On top of that, there is a risk of confusing those elections with the elections to the European Parliament."*

Results and bottlenecks

The EUREGIO has achieved many important results.

- Creating a broadband fibre optic cable network
- Reconstruction of the Münster-Osnabrück railway line
- Cooperation between police and customs under one roof
- Cooperation between enterprises in INTERREG projects (VNDU 2005).

However, there are still several difficult issues to be faced. The missing link between the Mittelland canal and the Twente canal is still on the agenda. Without the EUREGIO, that idea would have been scrapped. The administrative districts of Bentheim and Emsland still see the benefits of this project and are prepared to implement it.

Major differences continue to exist in national legislation in many areas: hospitals, insurance, legal systems, tax laws, etc. *"We have to learn to live with them."*

Particularly in the area of water resources management, there are notable differences between Germany and the Netherlands, but that also applies to the handling of real estate.

Geographic scope of the EUREGIO

With the foundation of the EUREGIO, two national semicircles were joined to form a complete, self-contained cross-border entity. Physically, but also in terms of raising awareness through increased contacts and common initiatives. *"The cooperation between the universities of Münster and Twente is a good example of how cross-border cooperation within the region is sometimes better than at national level between North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony."*

Because the territory of the EUREGIO on the German side is nearly twice as large and the number of inhabitants is larger, enlargement of the geographic area on the Dutch side is required to achieve a better balance.

There are some ideas regarding the future involvement of Zwolle and Zutphen. Zutphen is already "preliminary member" of the EUREGIO. *"The IJssel is an important river for the EUREGIO. Enlarging the EUREGIO would create a better balance between Germany and the Netherlands and that would give the EUREGIO greater importance in Europe."*

In the next INTERREG programme period, structural funds should also be allocated for the internal borders. These funds would enable the EUREGIO to have a substantial impact in important areas, on a scale that would not be possible with funding from Berlin and The Hague. *"Such a large amount (43 million euro for the programme period 2008-2013) would never otherwise have been provided."*

Interview: Hans Kieliszek

Hans Kieliszek was a member of the Euregio Council for 16 years. For most of that time he was chairman and spokesman of the CDA-CDU faction in the EUREGIO Council.

Because of its extensive experience, a solid basis of cooperation, a good working structure and successful cross-border cooperation in many areas, the EUREGIO can be regarded as “*an example for other European border regions.*” By means of the EUREGIO, one is able to experience in practice what Europe means in daily life. “*The added value of political cooperation within the EUREGIO comes from creating personal contacts and meeting politicians from across the border.*” Consequently, cross-border objectives can be formulated in a dialogue, conferences can be held and the results of these joint activities can be passed on to the secretariat of the EUREGIO for further elaboration.

The most important milestones since the formation of the EUREGIO are the creation of the EUREGIO Council, the cross-border action programme for the EUREGIO and the establishment of a common cross-border EUREGIO Secretariat. Apart from these positive experiences, the EUREGIO has also encountered some obstacles in its development. “*A major impediment to the practical activities of the EUREGIO were and still are the differences in national legislation.*”

Dissemination of information and publicity also need to improve with a view to creating more knowledge about and generating public support for the EUREGIO.

In the future the EUREGIO will retain its significance, even if funds from Brussels are no longer available. However, areas in which the EUREGIO should pay more attention can be better explained after a thorough inventory of the current activities and the effectiveness of these activities. As regards the goals of the EUREGIO, attention should be paid to the extent to which those goals can actually be accomplished. “*This should be used to decide which competences municipalities, county districts, provinces and the national states could delegate to the EUREGIO.*”

The current relations are dominated by the German side; the EUREGIO should attract more Dutch municipalities and provinces to redress the balance in terms of participants and size. As regards the expectations for the future of the EUREGIO, a number of factors seem to determine the course the EUREGIO will take. Besides the current successful activities, which have been mentioned before, the size of the area is important for the EUREGIO. “*If more municipalities and county districts join the EUREGIO, the current cross-border cooperative activities may lose their transnational context in the future.*”

As for the future of the EUREGIO Council, more needs to be known about the decision-making process. However, the Euregio Council already has great influence on the decisions in the EUREGIO. Further strengthening of the Council therefore depends on the prevailing public-law circumstances in the EUREGIO: “*Experience has taught us that problems arise when it comes to delegation of competences from other authorities.*”

The desire to acquire new tasks will subsequently give a positive impulse to the democratic legitimacy of the EUREGIO.

Democratic legitimacy remains problematic given the fact that the members of the Euregio Council are not directly elected. The current process of appointing members of the Euregio Council is far from ideal. One solution would be to organise direct elections. “*Stronger public participation by changing the process of election would of course be useful; however I am not sure whether it would be possible in law.*”

It is doubtful whether direct elections would increase the public commitment to the EUREGIO. Based on the experience up to now, it will be important that the members of the Euregio Council do not regard themselves as lobbyists or representatives of the public institutions they represent but commit themselves to the interests of the EUREGIO.

During the establishment of the EUREGIO, and especially within the EUREGIO Council, the CDA and the CDU have always been forerunners and protagonists of party-political cooperation. Party-political cooperation in a cross-border party did not exist before the establishment of the Euregio Council in 1978; there were hardly any contacts between the CDA and the CDU in the region. That changed, however, after this event. The personal contacts and the collective cooperation within the EUREGIO faction led to more discussions, conferences and congresses at which cross-border themes were discussed and objectives were formulated. These results were then passed on to the EUREGIO secretariat and to the national partners. “*At meetings on topics such as the “Basics of the key activities of the CDA/CDU fraction in the Euregio Council” and the “EUREGIO conference of the German and Dutch Christian Democrats – economic, labour market and infrastructural problems in the EUREGIO”, many possibilities were created to formulate a view on the different working methods, ideas, opinions and structures of the two parties.*”

CDA and the CDU also cooperate within the framework of the CDA-CDU Euregio Association: “*The CDA-CDU Euregio Association is definitely favourable for close cooperation between the CDA and the CDU within the Euregio Council.*”

This was a starting point. “*I would imagine that a working group of the CDA/CDU is formulating guidelines for the CDA/CDU Euregio Association.*” There should be a meeting at least once a year between the people in charge of both the CDA and the CDU to determine which political points should be given priority in the Euregio Council.

My personal highlight is very clear: “*The most impressive event in the 50 years of EUREGIO is the establishment of the Euregio Council in 1978. I was spokesman for the CDA/CDU faction in the Council from the time of the establishment of the Council until 1994.*”

I was already involved in the EUREGIO before 1978 and was also active in municipal and party politics for 14 years. “*I regard the cooperation with the Netherlands in the Euregio Council as innovative. There had been no similar endeavours before then; there was no comparable cross-border ‘municipal parliament’ in Europe.*”

It was a huge challenge for the EUREGIO to lay down the fundamental ideas for cross-border cooperation at a political level. Every member of the Euregio Council was willing to speak for the people in the EUREGIO with great spirit. One problem was that practically no legal basis existed for the work we were doing. The Council had to try to formulate persuasive arguments to assert its influence in favour of the EUREGIO.

“*The cooperation in the Euregio Council and the CDA-CDU faction were events of profound importance in my political career, and I had the honour of experiencing the friendly and cooperative nature of the Dutch and the Germans in the human and political arena.*”

Interview: Maria Martens

Maria Martens has been a member of the European Parliament for the CDA since 1999. She is the contact person for Overijssel.

I was acquainted with cross-border cooperation at a very early age. At home we had a family business. There were close contacts over the border. Doetinchem is near to the border and going to Emmerich and Kleve for sports, shopping or medical care was very normal. We also had family just across the border. Since I became politically active I have seen the power and meaning of cross-border cooperation more clearly. When I was chairman of the CDA branch in Nijmegen I had contact with the Rhine-Waal Euroregion. Naturally, I also became involved in the EUREGIO when I became the contact person for the province of Overijssel in the European Parliament. In the parliament I am responsible for the Development Cooperation, Safety and Defence portfolios, I am spokeswoman on the new Treaty and I am concerned with ethical dilemmas in political issues. The role of religion and the debate on the values of the European Union have also been important topics.

The CDA has always had an eye for cross-border cooperation. It is inherent to the Christian tradition to ‘look across borders’. Neighbours, including those in other countries, are natural partners. Stimulating contacts across borders can help the unity in Europe to grow. It is interesting to see that problems or issues that actually have an impact at European level are often first raised at a local or regional level. In that sense, you could say that Euroregions are a type of laboratory for European rules. Many practical problems come to the surface in the cross-border contacts. That remains true today, whether they relate to cooperation in the field of culture, environment, education, water or sports. Time and again differences can be found in rules, authority and culture, but sometimes even in very practical problems, such as the fact that the hoses of the German and Dutch fire brigades could not be connected.

Fifty years of cooperation, cultural exchange and contacts between border regions have not only contributed to realising greater European unity but also to the growth of the faith in the power of cooperation. The EUREGIO is a good example of that. Trust has grown in the joint approach to handling problems. There have been some interesting initiatives such as the construction of the rail connection between Enschede and Münster and the cooperation between Dutch and German universities, hospitals and schools.

Cross-border cooperation often encounters obstacles due to differences in national legislation on either side of the border. Sometimes there are also administrative and financial impediments to the cooperation, for instance in the area of education and health care. Who should pay if Dutch children living in Germany want to attend a Dutch school? Which insurance system is responsible for the costs of a Dutch person being treated in a German hospital? How can one arrange that the fire hoses fit or that a connecting piece is made? The interesting thing is that experiments in the border regions often lay the groundwork for European rules, which can then in turn be used in other regions.

The European Union knows Euroregions very well and supports cross-border cooperation through the INTERREG programmes. The EU also encourages contacts with neighbouring countries of the EU itself. A special programme, the *European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)* – which is targeted at countries in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean area for example – was developed to promote this, not only from the perspective of solidarity but also because stability, democracy and prosperity in the neighbouring countries are important for the European Union.

The CDA and the CDU work well together in Europe. They are both at this moment – and will hopefully remain so in the future – the largest political parties in the Netherlands and Germany respectively. Our political vision and starting points have common roots, namely in the Christian tradition. That makes us natural partners and ensures that mutual ground is found more quickly on various issues. It also ensures that the CDA and CDU can play a large role in the Euregio Council. Through this cooperation the parties have given an important impulse to the development in the region. CDA and CDU are both in government at the moment. This results in short lines of communication to the provinces, Bundesländer, The Hague, Berlin and Brussels. CDA and CDU are both part of the EVP-ED faction in the European Parliament, by far the largest faction. “*This provides us with a large network and great voting power, which enables us to accomplish more, raise problems quicker and push new ideas through faster.*”

The Euroregions receive money from the European Structural Funds. There are some who think that the Structural Funds should only be allocated to the poorest regions in Europe. However, the CDA argues that these funds should remain available for other European regions as well, such as the EUREGIO “*I agree with this point of view. However, we do need to explore how best to spend the money. The Structural Funds are meant to strengthen economies. Especially at this time, every region has to contribute to maintaining a strong Europe. Entrepreneurship, technological developments and innovation have to be stimulated continually. That corresponds with the Lisbon Strategy, the Economic Agenda of the European Union. That is why the Structural Funds, in my opinion, remain of great interest for Euroregions, which is something we in the CDA work hard on. On the whole, the cooperation between CDA and CDU is obviously a great opportunity..*

When it comes to the local and regional authorities of the Euroregions, Maria Martens wonders whether the gaps are so great. “*The EUREGIO has a large degree of autonomy with regard to the allocation of funds for certain projects. The Euregio Council is a ‘binding’ advisory authority when it comes to decisions on INTERREG projects. The Euregio Council is an indirectly elected regional authority. However, direct elections do not automatically mean that citizens are more involved with that administrative tier. One needs to comply with the wishes of the citizens and they need to see that action is being taken. The EUREGIO plays a very important role in this; it initiates and stimulates a lot.*”

“*Where do I see challenges and priorities in Europe in the near future, and thus for the border regions as well? I think that the economic and energy crises are going to be the greatest challenges. How can we maintain our economically strong positions? There are also a huge number of challenges in the area of environment and climate, also in Europe. Innovation and technological developments are important, but sustainability and the quality of life in the countryside need our attention as well. In our role as CDA and CDU, we should not lose sight of moral values. The crisis is partly a moral crisis, for example in terms of trust and responsibility.*”

“*How can citizens become more involved with the EUREGIO? Perhaps by intensifying the extent of social and cultural contacts and exchanges. Maybe the EUREGIO could serve as an information point that people can turn to with their problems and questions regarding cross-border activities. Perhaps organising more cultural events, occasions when people can express their opinions and engage in cultural exchanges, could promote greater involvement. I think that the EUREGIO is on the right track.*”

The highlight when it comes to the EUREGIO is “*the fact that I know about it! When I was not yet so politically active or working on a project in which the EUREGIO was involved, I didn’t fully realise what it did and how much had already been accomplished. Since I was elected as a member of the European Parliament, I have become aware of the organisation and come to understand the meaning of the EUREGIO. Maybe the EUREGIO’s best asset is that people meet each other and get to know each other across borders. In the EUREGIO everyone speaks their own language and by now everyone understands each other. Although cooperation is being sought, differences are respected.*”

Interview: Rob Meijer

Rob Meijer's name stands out most prominently on the list of interviewees. By contrast with the others he is not a politician, but is still closely involved in the EUREGIO as chief of general affairs at the secretariat. Nevertheless, Rob Meijer (62) is an icon in the EUREGIO when it comes to cross-border international cooperation in the domain of art, culture and social themes. Of his 50-year experience with the EUREGIO, he says: "*It was a time when a border region could contribute to European integration on a regional scale because of the cross-border concept of 'Noaberschap' (good neighbourhood). The incentives came from the region itself, which was exceptional. Administrators and the community started their own initiatives for constructing co-operative ventures and contact structures and in that way clearly conveyed their vision to the outside world. This vision should embrace an active role for local politics, with the EUREGIO assuming the function of coordinating institution. Since there was not a lot of support for cooperation at a higher level, the cooperation within the EUREGIO started from the bottom up and was very intense, which again is exceptional.*"

In recent years, and especially since the 1970s, the EUREGIO has served as a European model for other border regions. "*After the opening of the borders in 1992, and later at the start of the European support for border regions, the cooperation became more structured and the cooperation in the EUREGIO was no longer unique but a common objective with the other border regions in Europe. Of course, we cannot keep the structure to ourselves and the title of Euroregion has become a generic name for cross-border cooperation,*" says Rob Meijer, "*The EUREGIO has experienced the transition from idealistic cooperation to a more or less institutionalised and businesslike cooperation, which meant that decisions had to be made regarding structures and forms of cooperation. Unfortunately, the Anholt Treaty has not been optimally applied.*"

By virtue of the Anholt Treaty, the EUREGIO could become a public organisation by law. That would guarantee the organisation's future existence and provide a legitimate basis for the financial and governmental connections with local authorities on both sides of the border. However, the EUREGIO is not an intermediate administrative tier but an extension of local government, and its range of tasks can be broader than those of municipalities. "*It somehow seems contradictory for an organisation, which is an association according to private law, to have a political institution in the shape of a parliament*", says Rob Meijer.

What might be the solution? "*The best solution would be for cross-border cooperation to become an integral component of the tasks of every municipality in the border region, while at the same time the overarching tasks of coordinating activities are delegated to the EUREGIO as an extension of local government*", Rob Meijer explains.

Many obstacles had to be overcome in the 50 years of the EUREGIO's existence, but many milestones were also reached. In those 50 years the EUREGIO has blossomed from informal, hobby-like cooperation to cooperation with an important intermediate function, on a political as well as an economic scale, by means of European support programmes. According to Rob Meijer, one of the obstacles in the first years of the EUREGIO was "*the speed with which the former administrators wanted to place the new Europe on the map in their own region and the relatively slow pace of developments at national and European level.*"

Focusing on the milestones, Rob Meijer views the opening of the internal borders in 1992 and the start of the INTERREG subsidy programme as the greatest landmarks for the EUREGIO. With funds now available from Brussels, Europe finally acknowledged that regional cross-border cooperation is useful for European integration. "*Borders should not separate societies*", he says. "*Borders were arbitrarily drawn because of wars and the residents of border regions notice that their neighbours aren't very different to them. There is more that connects us than separates us, for example the dialect. Regardless of the will to cooperate and respect for each other, dialect plays a very important role in cooperation.*"

The Euregio Council played a particularly important role in the process of putting the EUREGIO on the European and national political agenda: "*By means of political cooperation, the region highlighted - and attracted attention to - the regional cross-border cooperation at national and European level. With the establishment of a cross-border parliament in the border region in 1978, topics discussed in the Euregio Council could be passed on easily and directly referred to higher governmental levels. Besides this, the border problems raised in the EUREGIO found their way onto the political agendas.*"

The CDA and its German sister party the CDU occupied a special position in this political institution. Rob Meijer says that, "*as the largest parties in the border area the CDA and CDU kept focusing on eliminating obstacles to sound cross-border cooperation by formulating points to focus on with regard to topics as infrastructure, employment, recreation and the environment. Furthermore, they made good use of existing political and organisational networks on both sides of the border. Cooperation at party level was and is important to maintain a grip on the complicated process of decision-making. Moreover, it is crucial to adapt to policy-making processes at both national and European level on both sides of the border. In this way, the priorities of Euroregional policy and specific regional themes can be incorporated in the organisational programmes on both sides of the border.*"

As a staff member of the Mozer Committee, Rob Meijer gained a lot of experience in translating concrete practical problems to national and supranational legislation. Even in the case of very small problems in daily life: “*It became clear that even in regional sports events the rules were different in the Netherlands and Germany*”, he laughs. “*Problems like that emerge in different areas and through structural cooperation in social and cultural areas; such issues can be easily resolved. By organising EUREGIO clinics, problems relating to social security and taxes could be identified and solved.*”

Rob Meijer also has a clear vision for the future of the EUREGIO: the EUREGIO should specialise in a few aspects of different areas, such as the environment, agriculture and tourism. Furthermore, it is necessary to gain expertise in several areas to enable the EUREGIO to function as a coordinating institution for municipalities on the one hand and an advisory institution for provincial, national and European governments on the other, when it comes to adapting legislation in European border regions. This calls for more expertise. “*This process now takes places informally: ‘über den kleinen Dienstweg’*” (over small roads), he explains, “*It should be formalised in the so-called ‘border area assessment’, a test that should be applied before new legislation is implemented.*”

The EUREGIO needs wider competences to be able to do this. According to Rob Meijer, the EUREGIO should become an organisation that can take on cross-border inter-municipal tasks in order to create a forum in which municipalities in the border region can work on a joint basis. “*The EUREGIO has limited competences. It is an extension of local government and operates by means of the associated municipalities and Kreise*”, he elaborates. “*Because of the allocation of financial resources from Brussels it provides an important basis for the cooperation. When the funding is withdrawn, the basis will diminish greatly. Moreover, it is necessary for municipalities and Kreise to reach an understanding on the future functioning of the EUREGIO, the formulation of a clear set of tasks and the creation a workable structure.*”

“*When it comes to enlarging competences, on the basis of the possible tasks and assignments the EUREGIO should be able to include more tasks. This would also be possible by carrying out initiatives of an experimental nature, which the EUREGIO could adapt to future structures*”, Meijer states. “*A possible future function of the EUREGIO is to act as a fly wheel for European affairs and provide a bridge between the Netherlands and Germany in terms of the execution of European policy. Furthermore, there is an important window of opportunity in the expansion of direct services to citizens. The expansion of the EUREGIO’s public service and intensive support of the participating municipalities is a logical consequence of the establishment of the EUREGIO and the EUREGIO’s idealistic principles.*”

The Euregio Council is very important for creating a basis for the EUREGIO in the future. “*The strength of the Euregio Council is the close links the members have with the grassroots supporters in the municipalities, regions and Kreise in the EUREGIO. Political*

discussions and adjustments create a basis for cross-border measures and project”, Rob Meijer explains. “*In the early years of the Euregio Council it was said that the EUREGIO should become a fourth tier of government and that the members of the Euregio Council should therefore be elected directly by the citizens. However, understandably this is constitutionally problematic and is only desirable if it is assigned competences at the same time.*” Indirect elections therefore seem the most suitable option for the current legal form. “*Direct elections of the members of the Euregio Council by citizens will remain an ideal*”, he predicts. “*Look at the low turnout for the elections of the members of the European Parliament, the Provincial Executives and the district water boards.*”

One way to create higher participation levels is to increase the democratic legitimacy of the EUREGIO, and more specifically the Euregio Council. Rob Meijer thinks that “*the democratic legitimacy can be increased by giving a range of tasks that is closer to the work climate of the individual participating municipalities; in this way cross-border affairs would appear more often on the local governments’ agendas.*”

Although Rob Meijer is actually an outsider in the political arena of the EUREGIO, he still has an opinion on the future cooperation between the CDA and the CDU within the Council. “*It is not that easy to match Dutch and German partners in a cross-border faction: there are differences in programmes, basic principles and visions.*” These differences are also present in the CDA and CDU faction. “*The CDA-CDU factional cooperation in the Euregio Council is an important element in the functioning of the Euregio Council. If this party-political cooperation tightens the bonds with the provincial, Länder, national and European politicians from the EUREGIO and is consequently able to get important cross-border matters on the political agenda for the region, the operation should prove very important for the EUREGIO as a whole*”, he states.

Finally, Mr Meijer’s personal highlight of the cooperation in the EUREGIO: “*Personally, I perceived the merging of the two separate EUREGIO secretariats in Enschede and Gronau into a joint office at the border as one of the greatest achievements. The daily operations with a joint Dutch and German staff, the common adjustments in several policy areas and the short lines of communication gave the cooperation more ‘Schwung’.*”

Interview: Arie Oostlander

Arie Oostlander (72), who lives in Doetinchem in the Achterhoek, is a former director of the research institute of the CDA and a former member of the European Parliament. As a member of the European Parliament from the EUREGIO, Oostlander has always been very involved in promoting the border region that represents the European philosophy. The border region has always lagged behind the west of the country in economic terms, which is what makes it remarkable that the border region is progressive in the field of cross-border cooperation.

Although the EUREGIO's objectives were somewhat naive in the early years, with the main goal being to re-build social and cultural contacts, in the 1970s and 1980s the EUREGIO increasingly started to concentrate on concrete issues in the border region, such as coordinating the rules in the labour market and health care sector. According to Oostlander, this represents the "*process of maturity of the EUREGIO*." Besides solving problems in these sectors, safety policy and police cooperation were also discussed at that time: "*The regulations differed too much and they needed to be harmonised.*" "*The best thing about the EUREGIO is that its working methods are developed in a bottom-up process: working in practice leads to changes at higher levels.*" This helps to explain what is so special about the EUREGIO nowadays. Any developments in the border region are in the interests of both countries and that's why there is so much goodwill from both local and national authorities towards the implementation of solutions for the problems of the inhabitants of the border region.

The efforts of the German and Dutch factions in the EUREGIO, but more specifically the intensive political cooperation between the CDA and the CDU, have created the possibility to meet colleagues from the region who cooperate at the national and European level, according to Oostlander. In Oostlander's opinion, the EUREGIO should focus on European policymakers: "*policy from The Hague stops at the border, but the view in Brussels was to pay attention to the border regions. Therefore EUREGIO has become a sort of pet project of Brussels.*" The question of how to raise the profile of entrepreneurship within the border region is a good example of this, according to Oostlander. Compared with the Dutch, the Germans seemed less capable of cross-border entrepreneurship. Funds were then made available from Brussels to simplify entrepreneurship across the border, which promotes the European Union more effectively and has a positive influence on the European market. "*For example, it was very interesting to have seminars with German colleagues about entrepreneurship across the border.*"

According to Oostlander, political colour and ideological differences caused no trouble within the Euregio Council: "*People agree with each other*", Oostlander says. On the relations between the CDA and the CDU, Oostlander had the idea that his German colleagues pursued a more principled way of life than the Dutch. This is why Oostlander and his colleagues in the CDA could get on very well with their German colleagues in the CDU, because of the '*shared ideological philosophy*'. He adds that the political cooperation in the EUREGIO has had a stimulating effect on European cooperation. The initiators of this effect were the Germans. Despite the fact that the German culture and views on society can be quite different from those of the Dutch in some ways – for example the views on drug issues – good relations between the Netherlands and Germany have always been very important. The EUREGIO can improve those relations.

As regards the future, Arie Oostlander sees a very clear task for the EUREGIO: "*The EUREGIO has to solve problems for the good of ordinary citizens*", he says, "*which came into existence by implementation of the four freedoms. In the border regions these problems are very clearly felt and the EUREGIO has to try to ease them. The EUREGIO should be the main contact point for citizens to report practical cross-border problems and should serve as a guide for citizens living near the border. Although Europe is becoming increasingly integrated, there will always be areas of friction given the continuing differences between the member states. In light of that the EUREGIO should adopt a practical approach to solving problems.*" The starting point in that regard should be to examine EU regulations in light of specific human experiences. Eventually, EU rules will become more clearly applicable to society as their formulation becomes a bottom-up process. More importantly, according to Oostlander, the bottom-up principle should be applied more often since "*practical experiences generate ideas concerning the regulations, and in that way interests can be looked after.*"

With respect to new and additional competences for the EUREGIO in the future, it is not really a question of which competences *should* be assigned to the EUREGIO, but rather whether it *could* be assigned new competences. He believes it is doubtful whether municipalities or provinces would be willing to listen to such a request since it would mean a loss of autonomy. Then there is also the question of whether The Hague is willing to assign competences to interregional cross-border cooperation structures. "*Meaning that the Netherlands has a culture of centralism*", says Oostlander, and that's why the EUREGIO will probably not be given any further competences. "*You should only ask for extra competences when they are really necessary. Only then will administrators recognise the benefits.*"

As a former member of the European Parliament, Oostlander has often seen the EU being blamed for curiosities in the rules laid down by The Hague itself. “*A good example concerns the packaging of milk for the school milk scheme. Dutch civil servants kept saying that only the 0.25 litre carton packages were allowed and they were harmful to the environment. The European Commissioner informed us within ten days that any packages were allowed, including returnable bottles. The packages could also contain yoghurt, buttermilk or any other dairy product, but The Hague kept saying Brussels did not allow it!*”

“*The EUREGIO should verify absurdities in the policies for which Brussels is unjustly blamed by The Hague. The EUREGIO should study Brussels’ policy more closely and look out for this type of cheating. Briefly, the Ombudsman’s office should have a new division to verify these deceptions.*”

Oostlander predicts that cross-border interregional cooperation in Europe will become even more important in the future. “*Just think of all the universities that work together*”, he says. “*Enschede and Münster, Maastricht and Aachen, they all work together. Because of this cooperation, students are easily capable of expanding their horizons across the border, without travelling a large distance, and at the same time getting to know another culture in an accessible way. Cross-border interregional cooperation could also be very useful for Eastern Europe, where there has long been a lot of mutual suspicion due to the ‘divide and rule politics’ of the former Soviet Union. The introduction of Euroregions would help to reduce the suspicion and improve relations.*” Oostlander mentions the Euroregion on the German-Austrian-Czech border as a successful example of this; relations between citizens in this Euroregion have improved significantly through the cross-border interregional cooperation.

Political cooperation will remain important in the future: “*by means of political cooperation a vision can be developed for a region*”, says Oostlander, “*That is a vision of how various economic sectors should be promoted and how infrastructure could be further improved. In those cases, party ideology will suddenly play an important role. For example, the Dutch political parties GroenLinks and VVD will have different views on environmental issues. By broadening the palette of cases concerning services of the EUREGIO, the political parties will become aware of their points of view regarding those cases.*”

The elections to the Euregio Council are currently indirect. In the future, the democratic legitimacy of the Council could be enhanced by granting the Council a direct public mandate, according to Oostlander. “*Ideally, direct elections could take place in combination with municipal elections.*” However, independently organised elections are not a good idea, according to Oostlander, because the electorate would not see the public interest. The major political leaders are not particularly evident during this type of election and grassroots support is not as great as it once was. “*Ideological engagement is less evident in the Netherlands, so the turn out for elections in border regions would be very low*”, he says.

“*Aside from the political cooperation in the EUREGIO, the political cooperation between the CDA and the CDU will be important in future for the development of the border region*” predicts Oostlander. According to him, such a faction will pay more attention to the interests and care for one’s neighbours and a broad vision can be developed, as he experienced in the European Parliament. Despite the consistent pleading for Dutch national interests, political cooperation will result in a great appreciation of European problems. “*Those who put their own interests first will gain very little trust within the European Union, and consequently hardly any support.*”

“*The EUREGIO should in any case focus more on Brussels than on The Hague*”, the former member of the European Parliament says, “*since the EUREGIO does receive support from Brussels through the INTERREG funds. The same can’t be said of The Hague, which is not willing to invest in border regions. Their policy doesn’t extend further than the border.*”

Although many economic benefits can be gained by investing in infrastructure in all border regions, “*now that they are trying to find alternatives for Schiphol airport why are they not considering airports in the EUREGIO area in Twente and Münster?*” Oostlander believes that Twente-Münster could be a good alternative to Schiphol airport. “*Cooperation could boost the region’s profile. The EUREGIO should be aware of its potential and fight for growth of the collective economy.*”

In conclusion, Oostlander is very clear about his personal highlight of the 50 years of the EUREGIO: “*A delegation from the German-Polish-Czech Euroregion, precisely the region where my Czech friends live, visited our EUREGIO to see how things were done here. How we used to dream of a free Czech Republic in a democratic Europe. And even then they were talking about a Euroregion! Something like that never occurred to me even in my wildest dreams. It is for that reason I am so proud of this region.*”

Interview: Dr. Markus Pieper

Dr. Markus Pieper has been a member of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats in the European Parliament since 2004. He is also a member of the Committee on Regional Development, a deputy coordinator on the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and co-opted CDU Steinfurt District Executive, CDU Münster Executive and CDU Münsterland Regional Executive.

How do you look back on 50 years of the EUREGIO?

The EUREGIO is an institution that is deeply entrenched in the region and it is the oldest cross-border regional organisation in Europe. Through cooperation between the German and Dutch border regions, it has evolved into an area with good infrastructure and an effective administrative structure. In that context, I think about the completion of the east-west motorway, the connection of the border region to the A31 and the reconstruction of the railway line between Enschede in the Netherlands and Gronau in Germany. These cross-border structures provide the basis for economic and scientific cooperation, which is steadily growing and removing the borders between the two states. Joint research projects and the transfer of know-how enable local enterprises to perform better on the international market. Joint cultural projects by the tourism organisations and the different Dutch-German meetings have achieved a lot. The cross-border disaster prevention plan and the EURES helpdesk for questions about tax and social security systems should also be mentioned in this context. The joint efforts have eliminated more and more historic and economic barriers on both sides of the border. Today, the EUREGIO is a prosperous economic area where valuable cooperation is taken for granted. Support for innovation and eliminating more of the regional disparities will certainly be future priorities.

The EUREGIO has served as a model for numerous cross-border organisations. Especially since the launch of the INTERREG programme, several cooperation structures have been modelled on the EUREGIO, and many have even adopted the name. There now 26 Euroregions in Germany alone. The EUREGIO has set a good example particularly in areas such as the recognition of vocational profiles and educational achievements and pension rights.

The general added value of political cooperation for the development of the EUREGIO

In the past the peripheral position of the German and Dutch border regions was a disadvantage. Political cooperation mitigated the negative effects of the border and made a decisive contribution to promoting structural change in the region. By improving economic efficiency and differentiation, the advantages of the region's location could be exploited and built on. Examples are the well-developed transport connections and economic relations between the Netherlands and Germany, cross-border industrial parks and cultural exchanges. The cross-border cooperation enhanced the relationship between the Germans and the Dutch, which had been affected by the Second World War. Mutual trust was gradually re-established so that today there is practical and profitable cooperation in the fields of infrastructure, the economy, science, tourism and social affairs.

The added value of the political cooperation between the CDA and CDU is surely based on positive feedback from the cross-border activities of the EUREGIO to the respective national parties, municipalities, cities and county districts. On the one hand the CDA and CDU can provide a new impetus for ideas for cross-border projects, and on the other political support can contribute to wider acceptance of concrete projects and secure closer involvement by citizens. Political cooperation also facilitates political representation of regional interests in the German "Länder" and the Dutch provinces, the national governments and the European Parliament in order to express concrete political concerns.

Future challenges for the EUREGIO

As already mentioned, the EUREGIO has a long history and deep roots in the cross-border region. Long before European support programmes like INTERREG were established, it was having a successful impact on the economic development of the German-Dutch border area. My impression is that the EUREGIO fosters cultural, social and economic networks which will continue to exist autonomously even if the EU funds are reduced in future. The substantial independent funding of projects in the EUREGIO within the framework of INTERREG suggests that this is the case. This relative independence is very beneficial for the prosperity of our common region.

I will of course lobby intensively for the continuation of funding of the EUREGIO from EU programmes because there are new challenges that have to be met jointly. Regional cooperation has to address globalisation, demographic changes and altered environmental conditions. Cross-border cooperation also has to be intensified to deal with the problems of commuters, infrastructure, cross-border waste and water management as well as the adaptation of social systems. Security issues are also going to play a significant role in the future. Aspects of this include joint measures to tackle crime and increase public safety, as well as cross-border animal disease control. The activities should also focus on innovation and training, including further harmonisation of study requirements and curricula.

Future role and legitimacy of the Euregio Council

In Brussels the EUREGIO and its decision-making structures serve as an example for other Euroregions. The current structure has proved itself to European, national and regional authorities. If there is a vacuum along European borders, as in some border areas in Eastern Europe, new cross-border structures could be useful.

The future political role of the CDA/CDU cooperation and recommendations for enhancing the party-political cooperation in the CDA-CDU Euregio Association

In my view, the cooperation between CDA and CDU will play a significant role in the future. The activities of the German-Dutch group have proven to be constructive and effective and I hope it will continue be so in the future. Cultural empathy is, despite the presence of the border, essential for cooperation.

Person highlights

The continuation of funding for areas along the internal borders within the framework of INTERREG IV was a great political success. CDA/CDU prevailed on this point against the Red-Green coalition in Germany, which only endorsed funding for the new German Euroregions along the former external borders. Through the dedicated efforts of the European Parliament and appropriate agreements by the new German coalition government, EU funding for the existing Euroregions along the internal borders could be continued.

Interview: Frans Willeme

Frans Willeme (1952) was raised at a time when the European borders were still a very real presence. In Eijgelshoven, where he was brought up, a street was abruptly interrupted by a wall of barbed wire: the Dutch-German border. However, cross-border cooperation is a phenomenon he has been familiar with since a young age, with the establishment of the cooperation between Kerkrade and Aachen. Willeme has been involved in the EUREGIO since 1988, first as a representative in the Euregio Council for the municipality of Denekamp. In 1999-2000 he became joint chairman of the executive committee of the EUREGIO with a German colleague and since 2004 he has been chairman of the Euregio Council and thus president of the EUREGIO. The EUREGIO can be seen as the largest, oldest and best model of cross-border international cooperation. What makes the EUREGIO so special is that the relationships were established at a time when cross-border cooperation was not yet taken for granted and there were not yet any financial resources made available for it. In the early 1990s, with the arrival of the European subsidy programme INTERREG, Euroregions were formed throughout Europe. Because the primary focus of INTERREG was on strengthening the economic position of border regions, the EUREGIO increasingly had to be careful not to lose sight of its original goal: *"Bringing people together through cross-border cooperation."* This is why the Mozer Commission is so important: by initiating small projects again, the EUREGIO can return to its roots. *"We have to see each other's faces again rather than standing back to back"*, says Frans Willeme.

According to Willeme, the greatest milestone in the 50 years of cooperation within the EUREGIO is the abolition of the *Zweigleisigkeit*. It used to be that a German and a Dutch representative would be installed for both for official and administrative posts in the EUREGIO but that is no longer the case. *"This shows that the EUREGIO is becoming one."* Furthermore, the acknowledgement by the Royal Family, the government, and the federal chancellor of the Bundesländer has been very important for the EUREGIO, according to Willeme. The personal commitment of the Queen is apparent from the statue of Alfred Mozer that she created and which adorns the entrance to the EUREGIO secretariat. The foundation of the AEBR is also important. *"The EUREGIO can be regarded as a co-founder. The AEBR has now become the coordinating institution for all Euroregions and has proven to be a good vehicle for transferring knowledge from one region to another."*



Frans Willeme and the Dutch Queen during her visit at EUREGIO

According to Frans Willeme, the EUREGIO's principal tasks can be divided into four categories: INTERREG, and with it the strengthening of the competitive position of and economic cooperation in the EUREGIO; the execution of activities within the remit of the Mozer Commission; the EUREGIO should be an oracle for its citizens; and finally, the EUREGIO should promote and strengthen the regional labour market. As already mentioned, the EUREGIO's focus seems to have shifted to objectives which are set by INTERREG rather than its original tasks. The EUREGIO has to be wary that this does not lead to an actual shift.

The EUREGIO's role as an oracle for citizens is a task which needs to be secured in the future. This could, for example, include answering questions about pensions and taxes. The EUREGIO's oracle function is actually financed by its citizens: *"Every citizen pays around €0.30 to the EUREGIO to enable it to operate with its own financial resources. The EUREGIO also has a nest egg in case funds from Brussels dry up."*

On the cooperation between the CDA and the CDU within the Euregio Council, Willeme thinks that its effectiveness has been really noticeable since Bart van Winsen created the CDA-CDU Association: *"Before every meeting of the council, the CDA and the CDU members meet to formulate their joint positions. However, party politics play scarcely any role in the Euregio Council. There is a large degree of unanimity in the Euregio Council since everybody is aware of the benefits of cross-border cooperation. Consequently, voting by ballot is very rare"*, he says.

"Although the CDA/CDU faction has a clear majority in the Council, it does not abuse that majority, for example by blocking a proposal on purpose. The emphasis may be different on specific issues, but eventually everybody agrees in the Council. I would like to preserve that mode", Willeme says, *"because all parties are equal in the Council."*

Problems within the EUREGIO arise from the decision-making process, Willeme thinks. *"As in the rest of Europe, decision-making is an extremely slow process."* The decision-making occurs at many levels. In terms of the attendance of members at meetings of the Council, the Germans seem to be more loyal than the Dutch. According to Willeme, this is due to the fact that the Dutch have to take an afternoon off work to attend the meetings of the Council, while the Germans are paid and generally have better facilities with respect to their involvement in the EUREGIO.

Participation by municipalities in the EUREGIO continues to be a problem, especially among municipalities that are relatively distant from the border. These municipalities have fewer border-related problems to address and are consequently less involved. Municipalities that are situated relatively close to the border are more closely involved in the EUREGIO's activities, Willeme thinks.

The future of cross-border cooperation looks bright, according to Willeme. *"Cross-border activities never end. Borders are the scars of history. Despite the integration of Europe we have to maintain our own culture and that's why we have to turn the borders into 'beautiful scars'."* We have to make the benefits of the borders clear to The Hague, Berlin, Dusseldorf and Hanover. There are still too many differences in legislation. Practical solutions have to be found for the differences in national legislation. The EUREGIO can offer a solution for this by highlighting these differences. Television could also be a good medium for bringing people closer: *"In former times I learned the German language by watching German television"*, Willeme explains, *"There were far more German channels and programmes than Dutch at the time. Nowadays, children watch mainly English television and very little German television. That is a pity, because watching television is a way of positively influencing impression of the German language and culture."*

The role of the border regions – and of the AEBR – in European integration will increase in future. In this context, the EUREGIO has the opportunity to transfer its knowledge and experience to new Euroregions along both the internal and external borders of Europe. Willeme thinks that the external border regions will receive a lot more attention from Europe in the future, as is already evident in the INTERREG IV programme. That is why it is going to be difficult for the Euroregions along the internal borders of the European Union to safeguard their financial resources: “*It will be difficult, but we see it as a challenge for the future.*”

In the meantime, the EUREGIO has acquired a lot of experience and its role as exporter of knowledge and experience will therefore increase further. This is very important, because otherwise “*the wheel has to be re-invented over and over again.*”

“*For example, we could show other Euroregions how rescue services can put cross-border cooperation into practice, since they will encounter the same difficulties,*” Willeme says. However, financing will be a problem with regard to this task. The expense is considerable because somebody has to be sent abroad. Willeme regrets the fact that funding could prove to be the bottleneck for such an important task.

The Euregio Council will remain the highest institution within the EUREGIO in the future. Willeme sees this as a good thing. On the question of democratic legitimacy, Willeme wonders what democratic legitimacy actually is in the first place. He does not think democratic legitimacy can be increased by introducing direct elections: “*Has the democratic legitimacy of the district water boards been increased because of the direct elections when the turnout is 24 percent? No, I think indirect elections will guarantee democratic legitimacy.*” Before any steps can be taken, the EUREGIO has to promote itself to the public and explain its activities. Only then can direct elections be organised. Furthermore, if direct elections are held in the future, party politics will become important.

Apart from party politics, the EUREGIO should promote itself more effectively in future. That is in the EUREGIO’s own interests. The EUREGIO needs a better public relations policy. It should improve its communication to the public. “*We are working on tailoring press reports for every local newspaper. In that way people will see what we are actually doing.*”

The personal highlight for Willeme was his nomination as chairman of the EUREGIO when the dual functions for the Dutch and the Germans were abolished.

“*I was very honoured when the Germans supported my election. It showed that nationality was not the most important factor and that unity comes first. It was great that I was supported by at least as many Germans, as Dutch.*”

Conclusions of part II, general conclusions and recommendations

The information generated by the interviews provides answers to the following research questions:

In what specific aspects of cross-border cooperation have CDA and CDU played a role and what has it yielded in the perception of the political actors? (B1 and B2)

Do the political actors feel that the Dutch-German cooperation in the EUREGIO should be limited to the consultation in the group in the Euregio Council or should it also extend to the CDA and CDU parties themselves? (C3)

What do the political actors see as the expectations, challenges and priorities in the field of cross-border cooperation in general, and in the EUREGIO in particular, in the future? (C1 and C2)

The interviews supplemented the documentary analysis very well. In addition to the research question answered earlier, we can now state that the political actors also perceive the EUREGIO to have been a success in the 50 years of its existence. During those 50 years the role of the EUREGIO has evolved from being dedicated to fostering social and cultural contacts to solving specific problems – with the help of financial support from INTERREG. In the course of that process it has achieved a lot of practical successes. It has incorporated in its structure a political body that reflects the integration of the EUREGIO. It has created awareness of the importance of good infrastructure in the border area. It has contributed to European integration and raised awareness of EU issues, since border areas are often the first to be confronted with problems arising from European legislation. The spectacular development of the EUREGIO is remarkable, to say the least, because uniquely the initiative came from the bottom up.

Euregio Council

The Euregio Council plays a special role in the development of the EUREGIO. The Euregio Council can be regarded as exceptional because this political body has given the EUREGIO a democratic dimension. Through the political cooperation in the Euregio Council, municipalities, Kreise, etc. are more strongly committed to cross-border work. In other words, without this “Euregio parliament” the EUREGIO would have remained more remote in the public mind. The Euregio Council derives its significance mainly from the fact that it can exert influence on other authorities to promote the interests of the border area. The Euregio Council can communicate more easily with other tiers of government and in that sense it can achieve more. Consequently, cross-border problems can be placed on the political agenda sooner. It does, however, have to use its influence without possessing public-law powers. As a political advisory body its decisions have no legal basis. That is why the Council’s network is so important. However, the question is whether this does not make the Euregio Council’s methods too informal and whether its current instruments of “persuasion and conviction” will remain sufficient. After all, the Euregio Council will remain an essential political body for dealing with cross-border issues. And those issues will certainly continue to arise, possibly even in specific areas where municipalities, provinces, Kreise or other authorities choose to delegate authority to the EUREGIO. In the perception of the actors, the Euregio Council has also made a practical contribution to increasing the transparency of the decision-making process, helped to create wider support for decisions of the EUREGIO and provided a platform for representing the interests of citizens.

So if it is to be able to operate more effectively, the Euregio Council will have to be given more powers, which will in turn give it the greater legitimacy it needs to remove the “democratic deficit”. Its current democratic legitimacy is based on indirect elections, but in the future it might, for example, be worth considering a direct mandate, in combination with municipal elections. It is therefore strongly recommended that research be conducted into the possibility of strengthening the powers of the Euregio Council. Meanwhile, the Council can make better use of the instruments that it already possesses. That would involve taking more initiatives and putting forward proposals, motions and resolutions in the Euregio Council. These initiatives should reflect the wishes of the citizens, which would immediately involve citizens more closely in the decision making. But the Euregio Council must also raise its profile to demonstrate to the outside world how the interests of the public are being represented.

CDA and CDU in the EUREGIO

As far as the role of the CDA and CDU in the Euregio Council is concerned, we can conclude that they have been pioneers in the development of the EUREGIO. After all, operating as a joint group the CDA and CDU have played an important role in the Euregio Council from the outset and made good use of existing networks. This was partly due to their number (the Christian Democrats have always been by far the largest group), but also to the appointment of a group executive through which they could jointly prepare for meetings of the Euregio Council. In the perception of the actors, this enabled them to represent their interests better and gave them a greater degree of expertise in relation of the Euregio Council’s advisory function with regard to the formulation of policy by other authorities, generally made it a stronger group and stimulated the output of new ideas for projects.

Although CDA and CDU have over the years increasingly adopted the same basic principles and the group has presented a single political position (Christian Democratic) at meetings, there are scarcely any specific areas in which the CDA-CDU group takes a different line to other parties. The “consensus model” is fairly widely accepted in the Euregio Council’s meetings, if only because almost all the parties in the Council share the same views on most topics. That is likely to change. New developments will force political parties to clear positions. Cooperation between political parties in the EUREGIO will therefore also become increasingly important in the future. The CDA-CDU Association will become more important because the Council will have to deal with a wider range of issues. Themes such as demographic trends (where migration and integration will also become a factor in the border area), energy and energy supply and dilemmas in choosing between business parks and nature all call for political choices, especially if funds become scarcer. Accordingly, the political role of the Euregio Council will become even more significant. And that partly explains the wish expressed by some for the Euregio Council to be directly elected so that with a direct mandate from the voters it can perform its decision-making role better in the future.

Probably anticipating these developments, the Christian Democrats of the CDA and CDU did not wish to restrict their cooperation to the meetings of the Euregio Council. The establishment of the CDA-CDU EUREGIO Association has generated added value and the current cooperation provides a significant stimulus for further progress. With the cooperation at party-political level, and especially the composition of the Association, it will be possible to exploit the party-political channels and the networks even more effectively for future cross-border themes. This type of party-political cooperation will involve operating on the basis of a common (Dutch-German) cross-border agenda and programme. Apart from a good national network, it is important for the CDA and CDU in the EUREGIO to establish ties with the EPP in the European Parliament. This will enable them to create a wider network, increase their voting power and in general achieve more. It is therefore important to critically explore the further possibilities in this regard in the future.

The future

Looking to the future of cross-border cooperation, we will first discuss the future role of the EUREGIO and cross-border cooperation in general on the basis of the information gathered from the interviews. The first thing that stands out is that there is currently an imbalance in the geographic representation of the Netherlands and Germany. It will therefore be necessary to look for ways of restoring the balance in the future by involving more towns on the Dutch side in the EUREGIO, for example the IJssel cities. The EUREGIO must point the way for the citizen when it comes to cross-border themes. Themes that are growing in importance in Europe will also have to be addressed in the EUREGIO. Topics such as ageing, climate change, innovation and science, infrastructure, education, care and above all security will be important priorities in the coming years. Addressing these themes will help to remove regional differences in the EUREGIO. To properly address problems relating to these themes, local, regional and national authorities will have to develop joint programmes after thoroughly analysing the problems and setting the right priorities. These themes and challenges will confront all Euroregions, not just the EUREGIO, since the other Euroregions face the everyday problems that need to be addressed in the EUREGIO.

The political actors also feel that the EUREGIO will continue to set an example in the future: it will export its know-how and experience to other Euroregions. The example it sets in the context of cross-border cooperation in general will be the EUREGIO's most important function in the future. In this way, the proverbial wheel will not have to keep being reinvented. However, the EUREGIO will have to promote itself better in the future. That is a major challenge. One way it can do this is by specialising in specific areas, for example its role in advising the public on cross-border themes and initiating a dialogue on differences in national legal systems. The idea of a grenslandtoets, an assessment of the effects of proposed legislation for residents in

border areas, has repeatedly been suggested. The EUREGIO must also not lose sight of its original goal of establishing social and cultural contacts and promoting economic growth in the region. The question here is whether the structural funds remain in place after 2013, since they are essential for the further development of the EUREGIO. However, these funds are expected to remain available to the EUREGIO in the future; particularly through the efforts of the highly institutionalised political alliances – especially the CDA-CDU EUREGIO Association – there is a good chance that the EUREGIO will still be able to rely on these funds.

General conclusion

This chronicle has shown that cross-border cooperation in Europe provides added value in a number of respects. Political cooperation in the EUREGIO helps to create a wider network among colleagues in other tiers of government and public administration. Because border regions are often situated on the peripheries of countries, far from the economic heart, cross-border cooperation can strengthen the region's economic position. Finally, cross-border cooperation also promotes social and cultural contacts between people, which were formerly more difficult, or even impossible, to establish because of the border. In all of these respects the EUREGIO has contributed to the development of the region encompassing Twente/Achterhoek and North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony. However, the EUREGIO still faces numerous challenges in the future. Another clear task facing the EUREGIO is to export its know-how and positive experiences and the advances it has made to other Euroregions and in this way continue making a contribution to European integration.

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