



European Committee  
of the Regions



# The future of cross-border cooperation and border regions in Europe



#EUlocal



## Event type

Digital local dialogue

## Dates

21 April 2021

## Initialising member

Pavel Branda  
(CZ/ECR)

## Audience

Citizens, students, local administration  
90 participants

## Organisers

Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa  
Rádlo Municipality

## Partner

EDIC Liberec  
Technical university of  
Liberec

## Themes

Cross-border cooperation in the Euroregion, citizens' access to cross-border public services (CPS), European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs)



## Speakers

- **Pavel Branda**  
CoR member, Deputy Mayor of Rádlo Municipality, Vice-President of Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
- **Martin Půta**  
CoR member, President of the Liberec Region, President of the Euroregion Nisa
- **Bernd Lange**  
CoR member, Speaker of Görlitz District, President of the Euroregion Neisse
- **Iva Linder**  
Director of the District Chamber of Commerce in Jablonec nad Nisa
- **Regina Gellrich**  
Head of the Sächsischen Landesstelle für frühe nachbarsprachige Bildung
- **Hedvika Zimmermann**  
Pastor of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, Councillor of Hrádek nad Nisou
- **Hynek Böhm**  
Senior Assistant, Department of Geography, University of Technology, Liberec
- **Blanka Konvalin**  
Emeritus Director of the Liberec Regional Science Library, President of Eurex Library
- **Martín Guillermo Ramírez**  
Secretary-General of Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
- **Slaven Klobucar**  
European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Monitoring Platform, European Committee of the Regions

**Moderator:** David Hamr, Czech Radio Liberec



## Key messages

**European cross-border cooperation** aims to tackle the common challenges faced in border regions, and to contribute to the socio-economic development and integration of border areas. Nevertheless, there are still many **obstacles that citizens in border regions face**. After decades of prosperity and open borders, the population living in border regions was negatively affected by the Covid-19 crisis.

This online local event discussed **the future of cross-border cooperation and the position of border regions in Europe**. Many experts agree that exchanging good practices and information will reduce barriers. Participants also supported keeping borders open in the case of future crises. Moreover, the future of cross-border cooperation involves the promotion of languages and education **to create a cross-border identity**. Finally, local initiatives and cross-border public services are essential to improve citizens' lives.

To this end, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) commissioned studies and a public consultation with cross-border entities on the future of cross-border cooperation. These inputs helped to draft a **Resolution on the Future of Cross-Border Cooperation** to be adopted in the CoR Plenary in July 2021. This will also feed into the CoR contribution to the **Conference on the Future of Europe**.

## Media coverage

[CoR Event Page](#)

[CoR News](#)

## Websites

[Future of Europe](#)

[Europe Direct Cz](#)

[Conference on the Future of Europe](#)

## Social Media

[LinkedIn](#)



## Press/Social media coverage



The purpose of this event was to discuss the future of cross-border cooperation in Europe, and to exchange good practices and experiences to overcome the current challenges facing cross-border cooperation, especially after the COVID-19 crisis.

## European Committee of the Regions (CoR) activities in cross-border cooperation – linked to the Conference on the Future of Europe

**Slaven Klobucar** (CoR) opened the event with a brief presentation of the CoR latest activities in cross-border cooperation. After the Plenary in July 2020 and in light of the negative effects of the pandemic in border regions, the CoR's president decided to take action and put more efforts into the future of cross-border cooperation. Accordingly, the CoR wants to organise events across Europe and collaborates with three organisations: Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT), the European Cross-Border Citizens' Alliance and the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). In addition to this, the CoR carried out different studies and addressed a public consultation to cross-border entities to analyse the future of cross-border cooperation (CBC). These inputs helped draft a **Resolution on the future of CBC to be adopted in July's 2021 Plenary** and that will be the **CoR's official contribution** to the **Conference on the Future of Europe** on this topic.

In relation to this, **Pavel Branda** (CoR member, Deputy Mayor of Rádlo Municipality) called upon border regions to play an active role in the Conference. He pointed out that local debates should contribute to the Conference because one third of European inhabitants live in border regions of Europe. To overcome obstacles, Mr. Branda underlined the importance of outlining cross-border cooperation in Europe and of clarifying the role of regions at the borders.

## Importance of cross-border co-operations – reality in times of crisis

**Martin Puta** (CoR member, Governor of the Liberec region) remarked that cross-border cooperation is part of their daily life. After a prosperous period of open borders for 30 years, the COVID-19 crisis had a particularly negative affect on them. To make border areas more livable, regions should cooperate for a common resolution of erasing areas of friction. Replying to the question of whether there are issues in relation to COVID-19 that could be improved, Mr. Puta explained that everyone can learn lessons from their neighbours. For example, when Czech measures were not successful, they looked at how Germany was dealing with the situation.

The president of the German Euroregion party, **Bernd Lange** called for **three main changes: less bureaucracy, more EU funds and better exchange of information**. In the next years, he would like to see better cooperation and he believes that additional funds can help that. He also stated that the areas which need to continue working have less to do with the national state but more with local initiatives, where common support and exchange of positive and negative experiences will be extremely helpful.

Mr. Branda underlined that municipalities are still collaborating although the general response across Europe was to close the borders during the pandemic. To prevent the closure of borders, he invites the European Union and the CoR to issue a **statement about the minimum conditions and public services** that have to be preserved in case of similar future crises.

**Iva Linder**, (Director of the District Chamber of Commerce in Jablonec nad Nisa) shared that they have overcome many barriers. According to her, the big challenge right now is to overcome fear. She has noticed that people are afraid of crossing the border and that bureaucracy does not help; there is a big administrative burden for many citizens, also in relation to projects in cross-border cooperation. For this reason, in the future she would like to see more support to citizens and entrepreneurs.



The Secretary General of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), **Martin Guillermo**, said that the pandemic affected all borders, but the impact was different across Europe. "The higher the interdependence the higher the risk", he added. Mr. Guillermo pointed out that the borders between Germany, Poland and Czech Republic are working to advance the needs of the reconstruction. In this sense, **Euroregions** that received trust from their Member States **can be the transmitters** to and from citizens. Regarding the minimum level of cross-border cooperation, he added that Member States are capable of covering "minimum needs" without this being overly burdensome for them. According to him the decision should be made on consensus, which can be achieved within the EU but the **commitment of Member States is crucial**. Moreover, a European framework is necessary so as not to leave anyone behind.

## Education, culture, languages – opportunities across the border

The second part of the debate started with the intervention of **Regina Gellrich**, Director of Saxony's National Office for Early Neighbourhood Language Education. She said that when talking about the future of Europe, it is important to talk about cooperation between regions. In addition, she saw a positive aspect of the pandemic was that people helped and supported each other. When asked about the issue of language and education in border regions, Ms. Regina Gellrich said that overcoming language barriers is one of the main challenges. According to her, knowing each other's languages is not a question anymore, but the willingness to be open to the culture of the other border is the current challenge. She remarked the positive aspects of this for other areas, such as economy or tourism.

In relation to languages and education, Slaven Klobucar said that the CoR will put more emphasis in children's education to learn the neighbouring language. He added that the Euroregion of Neisse-Nisa-Nysa is very active and a potential future step would be its transformation into an EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation). About life in border regions in the future, borders should not have an impact in citizens' lives. The responses in the public consultation showed that **regions want to see more shared public services**. Mr. Klobucar would like to have a better definition of what cross-border functional areas are. In terms of education, cross-border universities and the merging of curricula and education would build trust and common understanding. Finally, we should share that there are opportunities across the border.

**Blanka Konvalinková** gave a useful example of how the INTERREG funds can help exchange information with other regions, where Germany and Poland cooperated with a library that owns German literature and offers multiple translations. As for cross-border cooperation in the long-term perspective, she asked for access to literature to be given to all territories as well as the exchange of exhibitions.

**Hynek Böhm**, an academic who has been working on the topic of cross-border cooperation for a long time, said that impacts of COVID-19 were different depending on the region. By closing the borders, the states received a response from society and this can serve as a new incentive for cross-border cooperation. In this sense, Mr. Branda remarked that the pandemic showed that citizens in the rest of the country do not have the same needs as those citizens living in border areas. Therefore, he repeated the need to focus on the citizenship and special conditions of border regions. Mr. Hynek Böhm concluded his intervention highlighting the importance of getting used to the fact that we share a region and a common area. He said: **"cross-border identity is related to the level of cross-border integration"**.

**Hedvika Zimmermann** has been a municipal councillor in the city of Hrádku nad Nisou for many years. Her experience with COVID-19 was to organise face-to-face negotiations with their counterparts across the border from the 1st of May 2020, once the borders had reopened again.

Jiri Zahradnik and Ondrej Havlicek regretted that administrative burdens and bureaucracy discourage citizens and small companies from working on regional projects.

As closing remarks Mr. Lange said that **"regions can only develop on an economic level if borders are open"** and added that this is important for businesses and workers. To this end, contacts in professional and private life will remove the borders, Mr. Půta concluded.