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**Panel discussion in Brussels on the role of the border regions as a driving force for the European idea**

**Initiated by the Saarland, experts from all over Europe discussed on Tuesday (28th May 2019) the potential of border regions as pioneers and driving forces for the European integration.**

Under the auspices of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), the Brussels-based regional representative offices of Saarland, Rhineland Palatinate, Eastern Belgium and the Bureau Europe Grand Est hosted a panel discussion yesterday entitled ‘European Border Regions – Pioneers and Driving Forces for the European Idea?’. Christoph Roth, the head of the Saarland Government EU Office in Brussels, thanked the President of the Committee of the Regions, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, for his support and hospitality and underlined the forces and potential of border regions, representing 40% of the European territory and giving home to 30% of the European population.

“Border regions, where European identity and European reality come together, are somehow the grassroots for the European idea. The 350 European border regions are laboratories and predestined to test solutions for Europe.” said Martín Guillermo Ramírez, Secretary General of the Association of European Border Regions, in his incentive statement.

A high-calibre panel of experts discussed then the opportunities and prospects that cross-border regions can offer to pan-European networking. Thomas Wobben, director at the European Committee of the Regions, discussed key issues with Lukas Redemann, Chair of the General Student Committee (AStA) at Saarland University,

Hynek Böhm, a border studies specialist from Liberec (Czechia), Maria Stoicheva, Vice-President of Sofia University (Bulgaria), Ana Čižauskienė, Head of the ‘European Capital of Culture 2022’ in Kaunas (Lithuania), and Szymon Adamczyk, CEO of a start-up company from Katowice (Poland). The discussion was moderated by Michael Stabenow, Brussels correspondent at the German newspaper FAZ.

“If we want a closer Europe, we have to support border regions! The role of universities cannot be overestimated for the European integration as they convey European values, educate the next generations and bring people together.” stated Thomas Wobben in his closing words.

Auch Europaminister Peter Strobel begrüßte diese Veranstaltung und sieht großes Potenzial für die Zukunft: „Grenzregionen sind Räume der kulturellen Begegnung, des sprachlichen wie wissenschaftlichen Austausches, aber auch der wirtschaftlichen Vernetzung. Hier liegt der ideale Nährboden für große Europäische Projekte“.

Peter Strobel, Europe Minister in the Saarland State Government stressed the role of border regions and the importance of this event as well:„Border regions are the natural home of cross-cultural interaction, language and academic exchange and economic networking. Here – in Saarland – we have the ideal conditions for nurturing major European projects.“

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