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**REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,
COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT,
ON THE ROLE OF TERRITORIAL COHESION IN REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
(FINAL A6-0251/2005)**

Comments of AEBR

During its meeting on 9 December 2005 in Maastricht, Euregio Maas-Rhein, the Netherlands, the Executive Committee of AEBR discussed in detail the report of Mr Ambroise Guellec (EVP-ED / FR) on the role of territorial cohesion and comments on it as follows.

1. General conclusions:

The AEBR supports **the general conclusions** of the report, in particular:

- That the territorial cohesion shall be based on the principle of equity and therefore EU programmes supporting regional development shall guarantee equality of treatment between Community's territories while preserving their diversity;
- That the territorial cohesion is a major and new element in the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies and therefore the disparities between the centre and the periphery shall be combated (particularly with the local / regional level involved) and that the territorial dimension shall be integrated in the Community's policies;
- That alongside GDP new territorial indicators shall be adopted with respect to the genuine regional diversity in the different geographical situations and to the disadvantages;
- That a Community Cohesion Strategy shall be adopted with clear priorities and concrete guidelines taking into account the European spatial development concept;
- That before 2007 a White Book on the objectives of territorial cohesion shall be drawn up.

The AEBR points out, however, that the **report** comprises a **contradiction**: on the one hand the **partnership between urban centres / suburban areas and rural areas** shall be given a boost and on the other hand **towns shall play central role** in the development and the territorial balance. **A real partnership** isn't build upon super- and subordination. The fact is that **urban centres / towns** can't flourish **without the hinterland / rural areas** and **the hinterland and rural areas without strong urban centres / towns**.

2. As regards the explanatory statement

The AEBR agrees principally **with the explanatory statement** and welcomes in particular concrete proposals of the Parliament with regard to the success of enlargement and the improvement of EU's competitiveness. It underlines that:

- The multicentric development of the European territory requires the development of targeted policies supporting both towns and the development of rural areas; this shall be harmonised;

- Enhanced territorial co-operation, in particular cross-border co-operation, contributes veritably to the implementation of Lisbon Strategy (see the annex);
- The European Spatial Development Concept and cross-border development programmes are directly linked with each other and enhance the multicentric model for Europe;
- A better co-operation between the different sectoral policies at European and national level is needed in order to achieve maximal efficiency;
- Hereby it's desirable to enforce the bottom-up-approach:
In region-specific and cross-border programmes regional diversity in Europe becomes visible. Following the principle of countervailing influence European and national framework programmes affect these region-specific cross-border programmes (top down) and on the other hand results and knowledge gained in programmes at regional level must influence the national and European general framework (bottom up) in order to achieve the best possible results.

3. Conclusions from the perspective of cross-border co-operation

In its 3rd Cohesion Report published in February 2004 the European Commission emphasised in its definition of the term "territorial cohesion" that this cohesion should, politically, be reflected by an encouragement of cooperation between regions: *"The concept of territorial cohesion extends beyond the notion of economic and social cohesion by both adding to this and reinforcing it. In policy terms, the objective is to help achieve a more balanced development by reducing existing disparities, preventing territorial imbalances and by making both sectoral policies which have a spatial impact and regional policy more coherent. The concern is also to improve territorial integration and encourage co-operation between regions."*

Regrettably, the **report** of Mr Guellec mentions **just in a few passages co-operation, in particular cross-border co-operation**. He solely confines himself to the recommendation „(...) a boost to be given to all dimensions of territorial co-operation, whether transnational, interregional or cross-border."

However, cross-border co-operation is necessary for territorial cohesion not only through such activities as exchange of experiences and assessment of best practices. **Cross-border co-operation always adds value** (European, political, institutional, economic, socio-cultural added value – see the annex) and **contributes** veritably to the **European integration** and the **European unification process**. It goes far beyond exchange of experience etc. and results in practical co-operation in: infrastructure, economy, innovations and research, labour market, tourism, culture and much more. Today it's not a part of national external policy but primarily of European internal policy, **because cross-border**

co-operation doesn't constitute a national priority but a European priority and a political objective of the EU. Also for this reason it's an independent European political objective within the framework of the European cohesion and regional policy.

It's true that the Community initiative Interreg has significantly advanced cross-border co-operation and has generated very positive results. As regards Interreg IIIA the results are quite satisfactory. In the years 2000-2006 for Interreg III-programmes app. 5,6 bn were available for co-operation in the entire EU. This alone corresponds with the budget of the objective-1-labour market programme in Spain.

In terms of an independent regional development including also a region-specific cross-border development it shouldn't be ignored that in accordance with the EU-objectives the Interreg-initiative shall support the implementation of individual cross-border regional concepts and give the co-operation a solid base. Otherwise the risk might arise that Interreg and succession programmes would be seen solely as financial instruments of the EU and cross-border co-operation would come to an end if the EU-programmes ran out. This would be a sheer windfall gain of EU-funds.

Either there is a need for cross-border co-operation or not. As the need for cross-border co-operation is evident, it must take place. For the purpose of the European integration and the European unification process it will be given a boost by Interreg and succession programmes that are still necessary. Because differences in national competences, structures, social and tax laws that won't disappear in the next decades give on internal and external borders consistently rise to barriers, obstacles, frictional losses and disparities that can be combated only by co-operation at regional / local level. The regional / local level is not responsible for these problems (that have overwhelmingly national and European reasons), but they negatively affect its development due to the national and sometimes even European peripheral location. Consequently, a semicircle for potential catchment areas arises that must be surmounted. The viability ("critical mass") of reasonable economic measures (supply, waste disposal, hospitals, research and innovations, development of labour market etc.) is often given only through partners across the border, i.e. through cross-border co-operation.

Cross-border co-operation and its results (also with regard to economic growth and employment) always arise in addition to national measures in a border region. It contributes therefore significantly to the implementation of the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies.

Accordingly, **cross-border co-operation** remains a key instrument of the European cohesion and regional policy that aim primarily at improving the territorial cohesion.

The AEBR would highly appreciate it if in the next report of the European Parliament, that is principally supported, **more attention** was given to **cross-border co-operation**.