

Framework AEBR position on the Draft New Regulations for Cohesion 2014-2020

The AEBR **welcomes the Commission's proposal for MFF provisions** because Cross-border cooperation keeps at least a similar funding than in the previous period, despite the general increase of funds for territorial cooperation (CBC's share drops); and also because there are other possibilities for border and cross-border regions to have access to European support in several fields. There is a need for Europe to overcome the current crisis of trust, and we feel therefore committed with the general EU effort to face most immediate challenges, while keeping a reasonable cruising speed in European cohesion policies.

But there is still an important obstacle regarding the attitude of some Member States towards the financial proposal. Some of them ask for **austerity and reduction in the EU budget**, but this is a clear mistake, as some more "national" investments in the EU can lead to savings at European level because of the economies of scale and synergies developed through the Union, as President Barroso has recently declared.

We also welcome the draft regulations on cohesion policy, and particularly a new and separate regulation for the objective **European Territorial Cooperation** is a great progress, especially in those fields that cross-border cooperation is complicated or real cross-border results are hampered to date. Until the final adoption, improvements (particularly bottom-up approach, INTERREG agreement) are possible, and we have elaborated concrete proposals for this (submitted in the set of AEBR positions on the different draft regulations).

In general, regional policy **keeps its scope to benefit all European regions**, and has clarified a bit the typology with the creation of the "**intermediate regions**", instead of the complex issue of phasing-in and phasing-out regions. We do not see major problems with the introduction of this "transition" region category and the **partnership contracts** .

We can see the aim towards more coherence of EU action in the harmonisation of rules related to different funds, including rural development and maritime and fisheries.

In our opinion, an increased focus on interregional and transnational cooperation could risk subsidiarity, but we also understand that would strengthen the concentration on certain priority areas, reinforcing the EU2020 Strategy with better European coordination and making easy to monitor the real impact of European funding. We fully agree the general purpose of getting an impact on growth (focus on results and effectiveness), bringing benefits to most of the Member states with a clear EU added value, while keeping a reasonable support to all territories. And we hope that national approaches will not prevail over European and territorial-based ones. Conditionality and cross-compliance arrangements should be better defined, orientated towards the future possibilities of many territories currently deep affected by the crisis. In fact, Structural Funds could be part of the solution for countries with budgetary problems, and the recent reduction of co-financing rates for most affected countries is a good example. There other question marks, as the performance reserve or the "delegated acts" procedure, but in general this is a good set of proposals.

We also hope that Cross-Border Cooperation would not suffer from the relevance paid to macro-regional strategies. This would happen unless cross-border structures and border regions are better involved in the planning of national and macro-regional strategies. On the

other hand, it seems difficult for many Commission's departments to understand **the meaning and impact of CBC**. This has very much to do with the difficulties to communicate clearly what is happening in border areas. We are aware that a main concern for DG Regio is the impact of Territorial Policy. More visibility is needed both top-down and bottom-up. On the other hand, it seems very evident the need to differentiate between borders, and the need to stress capacity building in many areas.

The controversial new **Connecting Europe Facility** designed to boost investment in transport, energy and ICTs, could be a perfect instrument to fill cross-border gaps, adding enormous European value to current national networks which still suffer from connection dysfunctions with their neighbours' ones.

We should thank the EU Commission for this effort, the Parliament for supporting a similar focus while asking for more flexibility, and the Polish Presidency for a good understanding of Cohesion Policy and its links with the EU2020 Strategy. We could be quite satisfied with the attention paid to discuss the different proposals with many stakeholders, including the associations of regions and municipalities, and here we should also acknowledge the extraordinary role that the Committee of the Regions plays, eg the organisation of these Structured Dialogues jointly with the European Commission.