

***Remarks on the topic of the conference “The Future of Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe”, taking place on 13 November 2015 in Brussels***

Cross-border cooperation (CBC) has been developed for more than 50 years already (in the EUREGIO at the German-Dutch border, in Scandinavia and in the Upper Rhine area). There was one common aspect in all these areas: the cooperation was not limited to certain selected topics, but included all areas of life, as for example it was the case already in 1972 in the first EU funded cross-border action programme for the EUREGIO.

In close cooperation with the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) the Council of Europe organised for more than twenty years European-wide conferences on cross-border topics and launched the Madrid Outline Convention as a first approach for a cross-border legal instrument.

Since 1990 the evolution of CBC was even more accelerated thanks to the EU programme INTERREG developed in cooperation with AEBR, ensuring longer term subvention for cooperation and, in 2006, by the legal instrument for territorial cooperation EGTC, applicable in the whole EU. The AEBR has elaborated the baseline study for this instrument.

The EU INTERREG programmes are more and more aligned with the priorities of cohesion and regional policy, and do not finance the whole range of topics. In the same time, in many member States and in border areas it seems as if there is a certain tendency to equate CBC more and more with INTERREG funding.

As best practice and INTERREG evaluations realised by the European Commission show, CBC goes beyond INTERREG. CBC includes all areas of life, is based on mid-term and long-term strategies, where common projects have to fit in, and is most successful when implemented on a regional / local level, in partnership with national governments, EU, civil society and NGOs.

Therefore, successful CBC is closely linked to well functioning regional / local democracy, spatial planning and the development of region-specific objectives with regard to cross-border development (mid-term / long-term strategy). It is a task of CBC to examine what the regional / local level can do by itself in order to achieve its objectives, which national means from both sides of the border can be used and which priorities can be realised with the support of INTERREG. As many cross-border problems and tasks have above all national, but often also European and global causes, the States, the EU and the Council of Europe are responsible for giving their support, and for this they need border regions and cross-border structures as partners. A cross-border organisation with a recognised cross-border legal form is a more suitable partner than a private-law organisation.

In the framework of the common conference it is the intention to discuss the future of CBC in general, not only with regard to EU programmes, taking into account the above mentioned aspects. The added value of CBC for border regions and for the European level, its contribution to cross-border territorial integration, growth and jobs, better cooperation with neighbouring States and between third countries, better use of futures chances (energy, health care, public services, education, modern means of communication etc.) need to be elaborated as well as the elimination of existing obstacles.