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EU Cohesion and Regional Policy and Cross-Border Cooperation

Problem:

- The incomplete implementation of the European Single Market and the use of territorial potentials is **influenced by** the fact that the European Union is separated **by many borders**. Different competencies, structures, social or fiscal laws clash at borders.
- **Border and cross-border regions** are particularly affected by **geographical diversity** quite often, when borders follow rivers, mountain ranges, etc.
- As illustrated in the **Lisbon Treaty** and in various **Cohesion Reports**, besides **border regions** also others like mountain, islands and sparsely populated ones are listed as areas with **specific problems**. Many of them are **at the same time border regions**. This means that many **border regions** are not only affected by one, but **by several negative characteristics** for disadvantaged areas:
 - o mountains
 - o coastal areas
 - o islands
 - o peripheral (national, sometimes even European)
 - o sparsely populated areas
 - o rural areas

I. Answers:

- **The need of growing together** at borders through cross-border cooperation is a **pre-condition** for a gradual European integration.
- Cross-border cooperation is **mostly effected by territorial cohesion**. If there is no cohesion along the European borders then it would be rather difficult to realise European integration and territorial cohesion for the entire EU.

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- **Cohesion and regional policy** helps **border regions to fully develop their potential** by overcoming the semicircles on either side of the border. Thus, by cooperation a “critical mass” for investments is generated which only makes sense in a cross-border way (hospitals, services, waste management facilities, water management, economic cooperation etc.).
- These policies contribute to create a **new quality of borders**: they become meeting places and laboratories for integration.
- Only with the help of cohesion and regional policy at the **old and new internal borders** and later at the **EU's external borders** the **conditions** were **created** (infrastructure, genuine cross-border structures, a legal instrument for decentralised cooperation) to **exploit in a cross-border way** the potential for **economic growth**, but also opportunities in such areas as environment, innovation, tourism, cooperation between social institutions.
- The sentence “Geographical diversities are no handicaps but underused potentials” applies in particular to border regions, which need support from the European and/or the national level.
- The **regional/local level** turned out to be the most appropriate one to **implement** numerous EU programmes and projects with good results particularly in the European Cohesion and Regional Policy as well as the Community Initiatives.
- Accordingly, cross-border co-operation remains a **key instrument of the European Cohesion and Regional Policy** with the primary aim (besides growth and employment) also to improve territorial cohesion.
- Today, cross-border cooperation is rather a **European internal policy** than a national external policy and thus no national but a **European priority and a political objective of the EU**.
- Also for this reason, it must remain a European political **objective on its own** within the framework of the European Cohesion and Regional policy.
- The multiannual strategic programmatic approach is to be kept in order to develop cross-border cooperation.

- **EU-programs** with the **concrete objective** “cross-border cooperation” have the great **advantage**, that only **for this single purpose EU-funds** are provided **for several years**, which again **tie regional and national means for co-financing** on a long term.
- Cross-border cooperation is not a **national priority**. Without these EU-programmes such a **targeted cross-border work** with assured co-financing extending over several years **on national level is not possible**. It would suffer a serious **setback**.

II. Added value of the cross-border cooperation

- **Cross-border co-operation and its results** in a border region (also with regard to economic growth and employment) **always arise in addition** to national measures. It contributes therefore significantly to the implementation of current and future European strategies.
- It goes far beyond exchange of experience and coordination and leads to **practical co-operation with proven results** of success in: infrastructure, economy, innovation and research, labour market, tourism, culture and much more.
- **Cross-border co-operation always creates added value** (European, political, institutional, economic, socio-cultural added value) and **contributes** veritably **to the European integration** and the European unification process.
- The decisions taken by the Luxembourg Presidency at the end of 2015, the report of the Chairperson of the Committee of Regional Development of the European Parliament, Ms. Mihaylova, the **Cohesion Alliance** promoted by the European Committee of the Regions, several Parliament's reports and recommendations, Commission's working papers, evaluations, and communications, CoR own opinions, etc., confirm that European **territorial, and in particular cross-border cooperation, contribute essentially to European integration and create added-value** (and as AEBR we add: cross-border cooperation is **the cement of the European house!**).