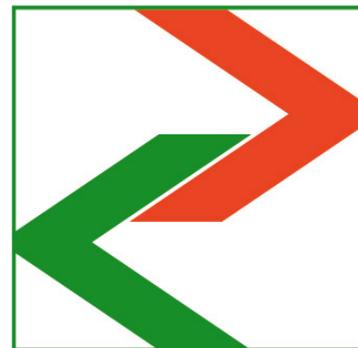


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Comments

on the

BARCA-REPORT

18 September 2009

1. General remarks

The report corresponds fully with the expectations of border and cross-border regions as well as with the AEBR regarding the necessary future developments.

In line with the „place-based approach“ (closely linked to partnership and multi-level governance) a stronger focus on **territorial dimension**, the necessary **inclusion of all stakeholders** as well as **the necessity of a sustainable strategy** are of substantial importance for successful development, in particular for successful cross-border cooperation.

The Cohesion Policy offers the appropriate framework for the implementation of the „place-based approach“, but the temporary conditions and strategy seem not to be adequate.

Cohesion policy is necessary for **all regions** depending on the existing needs in each area.

A focus on three or four priorities is acceptable; however, some degree of **flexibility** is necessary in order to meet **specific challenges of some territories** (e.g. border areas, mountainous areas, maritime areas).

Generally, **GDP and NUTS II** should be maintained as criteria despite the overall known weaknesses related to evaluation and analysis. However, in particular **in cross-border cooperation** (see evaluation results of previous INTERREG A Programmes) **NUTS III** should be maintained, yet allowing **more flexibility** (no restriction to solely NUTS III areas at the direct border line, as reasonable cooperation communities should be maintained).

Particular attention paid to **regions in transition** and **direct agreements with the EU member states** are welcomed.

It should be examined, if due to **vast budgetary burdens at local, regional and national level** as result of the current crisis, **the principle of additionality** should be further **extended**. The provision of **the necessary co-financing for EU Programmes** will be **more difficult** in the future.

2. Remarks related specifically to cross-border cooperation

First preliminary **conclusions** on cross-border cooperation are welcomed. Apparently, however, precise **information on quantitative results** is missing. The AEBR will distribute a special document on **the added value of cross-border cooperation** and **the evidence of its contribution** to implementing the **Lisbon Strategy** within the next days.

It's true that **territorial cooperation, above all cross-border, motivates partners**; and that **some barriers have been removed, innovative projects** have been implemented and **regions have become active in fields** that

previously were reserved to the **national level**, **additional funds were gained** as well as economic, social and cultural **exchange** took place.

These **qualitative results** are **the foundation** for **quantitative results** in concrete projects dealing with economy, labour market, innovation, research etc.

Also **territorial cooperation** should concentrate on three or four **core priorities** in the future. However, **some degree of flexibility** is necessary with the aim to create the necessary **socio-cultural conditions for a successful cooperation** dealing with economy, labour market, research, innovation etc. (see results of the INTERREG evaluation).

Cross-border cooperation has always been an important **puzzle** contributing to the **overall** economic and social **development** of regions **on both sides of the border**. As regards **infrastructure** and similar projects, the results are directly and **quantitatively** measurable. In **other cases** this is **hardly possible**, as two regions in different states are involved. For example, tourism development in a national border area benefits from cross-border attractions and projects, but it's not possible to determine the quantity of tourists that were mobilised through cross-border actions.

We agree that cross-border **INTERREG Programmes** should be more **precise**, in particular as regards the specifications on **organisation** and **management** (how they are implemented and how territorial complex projects are jointly managed).

As regards territorial programmes **noticeable simplifications** in **management** and **audit** are urgently necessary (EU competence).

It is true that best results are achieved in regions where **integration** and **cooperation** are already **well** developed and / or programmes are implemented within a functional **political and strategic framework**.

In the future it is very important that **Technical Assistance** for programmes include also a **direct exchange** of experiences between more and less advanced border regions.

The EU Commission should have **the competence** to provide **targeted training** to **less developed border regions** through selected experts (calls for tenders as regards events, technology etc.). The experts with Europe-wide practical and scientific experience should be selected by DG REGIO.