

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab (AGEG)
Werkgemeinschaft van Europese grensgebieden (WVEG)
Associação das Regiões Fronteiriças Europeias (ARFE)
Σύνδεσμος Ευρωπαϊκών Συνοριακών Περιφερειών (ΣΕΣΠ)
Stowarzyszenie Europejskich Regionów Granicznych (SERG)
Ассоциация Европейских Приграничных Регионов (АЕПР)



AGEG c/o EUREGIO · Enscheder Str. 362 · D-48599 Gronau

STATEMENT
and
PROPOSALS

on the 7th Cohesion Report
from the perspective of Cross-Border Cooperation

Adopted by the AEBR General Assembly
on 22 September 2016 in Görlitz

General remarks:

The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) founded in 1971 is **the only international organisation dealing exclusively with cross-border cooperation** on a Europe-wide basis. Our almost 100 members represent most border areas in Europe. Border regions account for more than one third of EU territory and a similar proportion of EU population live in border areas.

The AEBR has more than **45 years of unique experience** in the field of cross-border cooperation and offers to contribute with this (practical and theoretical) knowledge to the elaboration of the Mid-Term Review and the 7th Cohesion Report. For this, the AEBR presents its **first set of remarks and proposals** for modifications and improvements. This is first explained from a general perspective, and then also in detail from the perspective of cross-border cooperation.

The AEBR underlines the necessity to:

- initiate a permanent dialogue on territorial cohesion and cooperation with all stakeholders, according to the conclusions of the Luxemburg Presidency;
- **alignment of cohesion policy** and the related programmes with the EU 2020 Strategy and a future EU strategy post-2020, while taking into consideration the **particular conditions** in **territorial cooperation** programmes (e. g. more time for coordination, more difficult administration/higher costs);
- investments to strengthen the **competitiveness of the regions**, adapted to the **individual specific conditions**, in order to improve the quality of life of its inhabitants, based on smart strategies;
- **Achieving results**, especially qualitatively, not only quantitatively, (correct administration and correct financial management are only instruments);
- concentration of funds on some **selected priorities**, which are expected to **add the most value**, but should **not be fixed so closely** that they exclude the funding of regional **specificities** (thematic objectives in acc. with art. 9 of the VO1303 2013 as horizontal overall objectives, but a further choice of topics is possible);
- formulate **clear objectives and results** in the programmes, while **starting point** for territorial cooperation should be **regional/local needs**, as they define **what** needs to be done and **who** should be involved;
- not to just regret that „**place-based approach**“ and „**bottom-up**“ are too poorly developed, but define clear and binding **rules/regulations** with regard to the **role and involvement of regional/local authorities** in the elaboration and implementation of Interreg programmes (**who** and **when?**) instead;
- a further significant **simplification and efficiency** of administrative processes, which create particular **difficulties in territorial cooperation** (formulation by the EU of **maximum- not minimum standards**, which do not allow different national interpretations);
- to examine if **national partnership agreements** which concern at least two states, are suitable for the definition of cross-border programmes and activities with its common priorities,
- to create in the field of cross-border cooperation, in view of the **always growing programme areas**, the **possibility** of largely **independent sub-programmes**, which facilitate a „place-based approach“;

- to adapt the **multi fund approach** which is already followed (integrated territorial investments, common action plans) to the reality in border regions resp. to develop new instruments in this regard, to **complement the ETZ programmes usefully** and to generate **territorial synergy effects**;
- to attach **more significance** to the **key element** of each kind of cross-border cooperation – “**trust**” – based on the results of the Luxembourg **meeting “25 Years Interreg”** (see the chart of the cake in the speech of Commissioner Crețu);
- **Therefore**, and particularly in view of the results of the EU evaluations of Interreg as well as of the efforts of the EU review to identify **Border Obstacles, people-to-people projects** people oriented on a regional and local level should also be possible in future, as they **create trust** (basis of each successful cooperation according to the EU dissertation in Luxembourg) and contribute to a gradual **removal of these barriers (linguistic and mentality in particular!)**,
- The **Mid-Term Review and 7th Cohesion Report** should include key statements referring to the chapters “Investment for jobs and growth“, „Smart, inclusive and sustainable growth“, „Public investment, growth and the crisis“, „Good governance“ and „Development and Cohesion Policy.”
- The **7th Cohesion Report should be based on the results of the Mid-Term Review and the EU review of border obstacles**,
- **Territorial cooperation** and its **main objective „cross-border cooperation“** should receive a much higher **attention and importance** (not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively) than in the 6th Cohesion Report (not only in quantity but also in quality),
- The **financial means** for territorial cooperation and the main objective „cross-border cooperation“ **should be increased substantially** in order to meet the **ambitious objectives of EU policies** (see Interreg evaluations, Barca Report, etc.), which would imply at the same time an obligation of the EU member states to provide the necessary co-financing funds (no shifting on the local and regional level);
- stronger consideration of the cross-border cooperation in the national EFRE and ESF programmes.

The **general provisions** for the ERDF, ESF and the Cohesion Policy for the years 2014-2020 define **two main objectives**:

- Investment for jobs and growth,
- European territorial cooperation.

It is understandable to pay high attention to the first objective (also due to its much higher financial volume). According to the Treaty of Lisbon and the Article 175 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) territorial **cooperation is and should remain the second main objective of the cohesion policy**.

As illustrated in the **Lisbon Treaty** and in the reports on Cohesion Policy, besides **border regions** also others like mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated regions 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:

- mountains
- coastal areas
- islands

- periphery (national, sometimes even European)
- sparsely populated areas
- rural areas

The decisions taken toward the end of the Luxembourg Presidency some months ago, as well as the report of the Chairperson of the Committee of Regional Development of the European Parliament, Ms. Mihaylova, 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!**).

Therefore, the **Mid-Term Review** and the **7th Cohesion Report** should take the chance to present this both in **quantitative and qualitative** terms. The achieved **results** could be presented at first in the overall part of the reports together with the **potentials** and the still existing **problems**, in particular referring to cross-border cooperation.

In the **individual chapters**, the reports should refer to **quantitative and qualitative** aspects of **cross-border cooperation**, for example as regards: infrastructure, labour market and mobility, environment, water use and disposal, waste management, health care, research and development, tourism, public services and governance. All of these areas include remarkable cross-border elements and potentials.

The **AEBR** presents below its **remarks and proposals** referring to subjects and chapters, understandably **concentrating on cross-border aspects**.

Regarding the section „Investment for jobs and growth“

The necessary conclusions should be drawn from the past crisis, the programmes 2007-2013 and the Mid-Term Review of the current programming period. Remarks on macroeconomic political strategies, a favourable business environment, efficient institutions, investment fields having their foundation in smart strategies and good projects based on these strategies can be very helpful.

While focusing on the Europe 2020 Strategy and a future EU strategy, it is necessary to **concentrate on** corresponding **priorities**. It would be most welcome if, in the implementation and review of programmes/projects, **more attention** would be paid **in future to the realization and achievement of objectives as well as to the achieved effects and results** (a correct use of funds etc. is an important condition, but not an objective or a result).

The Cohesion Policy will be measured by its **success** and its practical results. This is also true for **Territorial Cooperation Programmes: they could be further improved** (cross-border added value, shared management, etc.). It would be, thus, **desirable** to devote **one particular subchapter** to **Territorial Cooperation Programmes**. In this context, it would be necessary to go into the need to establish more efficient **institutional capacities and to improve the effectiveness and simplification of cross-border** administration and management (in all steps of elaboration and implementation of programmes and projects).

An effective Coaching is to be made possible, in particular as regards the programmes in the new Member States and at the external borders, through CBC programmes within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

Chapter 1: Smart growth

In addition to the impact on metropolitan regions and rural areas described in the 6th Cohesion Report, the **particular conditions in cross-border regions** should be referred to. **Cross-border aspects** are relevant in particular as regards the topics: “Commuters and functional geographies”, “Innovation and research”, “Filling the gaps in digital and transport networks.” In particular reference should be made to TEN-T (Trans-European Networks of Transport) and CEF (Connecting Europe Facility) regulations, where border regions and cross-border links play a key role.

Chapter 2: Inclusive growth

Cities and urban agglomeration areas are facing big challenges in several respects and deserve particular attention. This is both the case of **big cities/metropolitan and middle and small cities in border / cross-border regions with their difficult conditions due to still limited catchment areas** (cross-border employment and obstacles for commuters, health care delivery and other public services, socio-cultural and linguistic challenges).

Problems faced by **rural areas** need also to be taken into special consideration: remoteness, poor accessibility, low population density and difficulty to provide public services are permanent structural handicaps for the economic and social development of these regions.

Chapter 3 Sustainable growth

Cross-border aspects could be considered in texts focusing on the territorial dimension of **the climate change**, the intensity of **disastrous natural hazards**, the **ecosystems** (all this does not stop at the border), the shifting to sustainable **transport** schemes as well as issues related to **accessibility** (examples: cross-border transport networks, missing cross-border connections / links / multimodality in the transport network). Moreover, it shall be revealed (especially after the Brexit decision) that cross-border cooperation creates sustainable added value as well as confidence and understanding towards and for the neighbour (reduction of Euro scepticism and doubts).

Chapter 4 Public investments, growth and the crisis

In line with the Lisbon Treaty the chapter could focus on **regions with particular problems** that include also **border regions** (often facing several handicaps: peripheral location, low population density and demographic change, mountain regions, and/or maritime regions). It would be helpful to get more information for these regions on public investment, growth and overcoming of structural challenges and the effects of the crisis.

Chapter 5 “Good governance”

Cross-border cooperation is considered in more advanced border regions as **an example for „good governance“** despite the difficult conditions resulting from different structures and competences. Governance deficits can be most easily identified in cross-border cooperation. An additional box presenting good examples of cross-border governance could be very helpful (and relevant, in terms of real multi-level governance in practice).

Chapter 6 Developing cohesion policy

„**Territorial cohesion**“ is reflected in the territorial dimension of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) as well as in **the Territorial Cooperation** as an own objective. Following the 6th Cohesion Report, it makes a contribution to **European integration**. This should clearly be pointed out in the mid-term review and the 7th Cohesion Report.

In addition, a reference should be made to the **Treaty of Lisbon (2007)** that identifies areas requiring particular **attention**. Border regions belong to such areas.

In line with the results of the Luxemburg Presidency, Interreg deserves a special recognition in special **sub-chapter/boxes**.

Chapter 7 Impact of cohesion policy

In the parts focusing on transport, environment, labour market and the strengthening of institutional capacities a reference to **cross-border aspects** and to the **evaluation of Interreg programmes should be made**.

Chapter 8 Cohesion policy 2014-2020

Here, **as one of the two main objectives of the Cohesion Policy, the European territorial cooperation** should be particularly highlighted, as well as **border regions**. A **map of Interreg areas** should be presented in this chapter.

„A strategic approach to public administration reforms“ should also provide the opportunity to offer special **coaching and training for less developed border areas**. Such training was carried out quite successfully by the EU Commission in the years 1996-2002 for “old EU” cross-border regions, and also for accession candidates (LACE programme).

Conclusions:

The “European territorial cooperation” as one of the two main objectives of cohesion policy should be much more acknowledged through adequate **quantitative and qualitative consideration in the coming reports**.

European border and cross-border regions can deliver better performance and positive results in the ongoing programming period 2014-2020 and also afterwards, **thus contributing considerably to smart, inclusive and sustainable cross-border growth**.