



Statement and Suggestions

on the

6th EU Environment Action Programme

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1. The general significance of the environment in border and cross-border regions

- EU environmental policy has become an ever more important issue in European regional development policy. As a result, it has also gained significance for the border regions given that environmental standards are taken into account in other Community policies and programmes (including the structural programmes and Community Initiatives), which, in turn, have an impact on border areas.
- Environmental quality is a key prerequisite for ensuring the citizens' quality of life and, being an important locational factor, also for economic development. It is thus essential for neighbouring regions along national borders to establish a close co-operation in order to avoid damage to the environment and/or to improve environmental quality.
- In many cases, the environmental problems of border regions are quite small compared to urban agglomeration areas. Border regions dispose of considerable nature and landscape resources. However, environmental issues are directly linked to the regional economic and spatial development – factors, which are important for cross-border regions in general and those in rural areas in particular. Furthermore, transregional economic activities influence the regional environment.
- At the same time, it can be stated that environmentally harmful facilities, such as nuclear power plants, waste disposal sites or reprocessing plants are in many cases located close to the borders – frequently without having agreed the issue with the neighbouring country or even by disregarding environmental requirements or protected areas and leisure facilities situated just across the border.
- In order to support activities that promote environmental protection in border and cross-border regions it is essential that EU environmental guidelines and general provisions (e. g. norms and limits) are put into effect in a more efficient way. These guidelines and general provisions will also permit preventive measures for the benefit of the environment.

2. An integrated political concept – a necessity for border regions in particular

- In promoting sustainable development, there is a growing understanding that environmental issues must be integrated into regional planning and economic development. This tends to be a “natural” area for cross-border co-operation since environmental issues such as problems of air pollution and polluted waterways and the impact of major infrastructure projects in border regions cannot be contained within national boundaries. The protection and management of the environment affects and must be integrated into various other areas of activity relating to the development of cross-border regions, such as:
 - Spatial development: One of the key objectives of cross-border spatial development is the implementation of a sustainable development policy, which does not only promote an environmental-friendly economic development that ensures the sustainable use of our current resources for the benefit of the generations to come, but also a balanced spatial development and the maintenance of diversity. This policy is to embrace all types of human activity (see ESDP). It requires cross-border spatial development concepts that leave sufficient scope for an integrated and co-ordinated planning for the benefit of the border regions (European areas of

activity for an integrated spatial development). Cross-border co-operation is to be further enhanced by designing cross-border protection areas, biotopes and natural preserves, establishing cross-border landscape planning and elaborating joint remediation programmes to improve the environmental situation.

- Economic development: Economic development policies and actions must focus on the sustainable use of natural resources; and ensure that industrial and production activities influence the natural environment and the ecological balance of an area as little as possible. Environmental quality is an important factor in attracting investment and new business location based on the services sector and using “clean technologies” market development and the marketing of products of the region (especially food, crafts) as well as new service industries in tourism and leisure. A high environmental quality is also important in retaining and attracting people to border regions – to live, to work and to visit.
- Promotion of tourism: A high quality environment (clean, attractive) is always an important factor in the development and maintenance of tourism in border regions.
- Strengthening of the labour market: Achieving and maintaining a high quality environment requires specific skills and know-how in areas such as environmental management, recycling and environmentally friendly tourism management.
- Development of the physical infrastructure: EU requirements for environmental impact assessment as part of the appraisal of major physical infrastructure development proposals demonstrate the importance of ensuring that such developments should not have negative effects on the natural environment. General provisions laid down by transport policy, as well as careful planning should help to reduce traffic congestion and pollution, save energy, increase safety and also ensure that attractive views, landscape and ecology are not damaged by infrastructure development (e. g. inappropriate types of buildings, roads through environmentally-sensitive areas etc.).

3. Actions in border and cross-border regions

- As most environmental problems have a cross-border impact effectively combating environmental and ecological problems requires cross-border co-operation. The main types of action in the field of environment are as follows:
 - Actions which focus on addressing existing problems including cleaning up pollution which can be either small-scale (e. g. cleaning up untidy areas, beaches etc.) or involve major clean-up operations (e. g. heavily polluted waterways and soils, as well as serious problems of atmospheric pollution); removal of dereliction involving new use for old industrial sites and buildings; and dealing with effects of inadequate waste disposal and treatment;
 - Actions which are characterised by new approaches for dealing with cross-border environmental problems, environmental protection, maintenance and enhancement. These involve a wide range of actions undertaken at different levels; including studies to assess current conditions and resources; environmental education, awareness-raising,

information in schools, enterprises, community organisations and amongst the population in general; pilot actions in enterprises and other organisations in conservation, waste management, energy-saving etc.; development of new production techniques and products which are more environmentally-friendly; promoting actions to reduce waste and find new ways of recycling waste; specific ecological actions linked to preservation of animal species and plants under threat; joint planning and co-ordination of services to deal with emergencies (e. g. spillages).

It is crucial to bring in line environmental issues, spatial and economic development, infrastructure requirements, the promotion of tourism etc. With the absence of a sound economic development, environmental policies can hardly be funded on a sustainable basis. This is why it is particularly important for cross-border regions to establish a co-operation that takes into account environmental issues instead of counteracting them (e. g. weigh up short-term economic advantages against long-term damage to the environment). As a result, a comprehensive and sustainable cross-border strategy is to be developed. This strategy must ensure economic growth while taking into account environmental issues so that the border regions will be able to participate in the overall economic development of the EU. Border regions must not be locked up in "glass domes" in order to preserve their landscape and nature.

4. Border and cross-border regions – natural partners of the EU in environmental issues

- It is regrettable that the 6th EU Environment Action Programme hardly deals with the border and cross-border regions' particular geographic and political importance for the European environment or with potential ways of cross-border co-operation in this context, given that:
 - border and cross-border regions can play a key role in overcoming environmental problems in the EU;
 - integrated joint environmental programmes for each cross-border region provide for cross-border economic development models which also ensure the protection of the environment, the joint cultural heritage etc.;
 - cross-border euroregions and similar structures ensure partnership and subsidiarity, i.e. the integration of NGOs and citizens, joint information systems for citizens, training for instructors, joint environment monitoring etc.;
 - given the different laws and regulations on both sides of the border, as well as differences relating to language, culture and advisory structures, cross-border regions are particularly interested in putting the existing European environmental laws into effect;
 - cross-border regions are used to implementing exactly those aspects in their programmes and projects which are particularly stressed in the 6th EU Environment Action Programme:
 - focusing on long-term collective advantages instead of short-term individual benefit;
 - implementing joint projects aiming to protect forests, reduce air pollution, improve soils, strengthen renewable energy (particularly in mountainous and maritime regions), protect running waters and

- seas, create joint nature parks and protected areas, use joint capacities for waste disposal, sewage etc.;
- cross-border regions are therefore natural partners of the EU in European environmental issues:
 - they wish to put the 6th EU Environment Action Programme into practice;
 - they are an active multiplier in implementing the 6th EU Environment Action Programme in an enlarged EU and at the future EU external borders;
 - they try to prevent a further depopulation of rural and border areas as this can also entail threats to the environment;
 - border and cross-border regions are affected in three different ways, i.e.:
 - ❖ environmental problems of a global dimension (climate change);
 - ❖ specific environmental problems of the individual region;
 - ❖ particular environmental problems resulting from the fact that the region is located at a border (e. g. legislation, regulations).

This is why border and cross-border regions require special assistance.