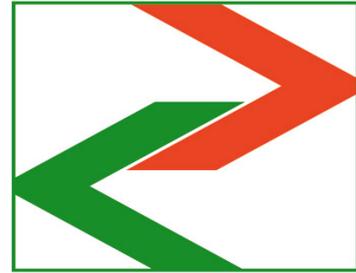


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Gronau, 7 October 2004

ACTION PROGRAMME

FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE

CHARTER FOR BORDER AND

CROSS-BORDER REGIONS

AEBR ACTION PROGRAMME, Gronau, 17 August 2004

CONTENTS:

I. BASIC FACTS AND FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS	3
1. Basic facts	3
2. Border and cross-border regions – an engine of development	4
3. European Charter for Border and Cross-Border Regions	4
II. MEASURES AND INSTRUMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE CHARTER	5
1. Smoothing out the interfaces of European spatial planning policy	5
2. Cross-border infrastructure – physical prerequisites for cooperation	6
2.1 Transport infrastructure	6
• <i>area-wide links and development</i>	7
• <i>Intra-regional connections and development</i>	7
2.2 Telematics and communication	8
3. Making cross-border regions more attractive as business locations and enhancing economic development	9
• <i>Cooperation to facilitate economic development</i>	10
• <i>Promotion of entrepreneurial innovation and competitiveness</i>	11
• <i>Cross-border labour markets and staff training</i>	12
4. Improvement of cross-border protection of the environment and nature	12
5. Improving services through cross-border cooperation	14
6. Development of cross-border tourism	15
• <i>in the context of regional development (20):</i>	16
• <i>in transport:</i>	17
• <i>in marketing:</i>	17
• <i>in the natural environment and agriculture</i>	18
7. Solving the problems faced by regular border crossers	18
8. Promotion of cross-border cultural cooperation	21
9. Improving organisational and legal cross-border cooperation	22
• <i>At the organisational level (24):</i>	23
• <i>At the legal level (25):</i>	23
III. BIBLIOGRAPHY	24

I. BASIC FACTS AND FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS

1. Basic facts

The recent enlargement of the European Union on the 1 May 2004 is a milestone in the history of European Integration. The accession of 10 new Member States from the Central, East and South of Europe extends the economic, cultural and social diversity of the European Union and, at the same time, confirms the necessity of bringing the citizens closer together on a basis of shared values and principles.

Therefore, the European Union must develop so as to become a community of values based on shared cultural, social, economic and political aims. Otherwise, there is a danger that the EU will define itself primarily in terms of economic growth and competition.

This vision is based on the new European Constitution (1) with a deepening and an integration of the European Union, whilst at the same time guaranteeing cooperation beyond the EU's external borders. It does not only focus on economic development, but also aims to bring the Union closer to the people, to involve the citizen in democratic actions, to improve the distribution of tasks between the European, national and regional/local level and to strengthen the European Union's tasks in relation to foreign policy and defence.

As part of this vision, EU cohesion and regional policy, including territorial cooperation, is not only an instrument for economic development, but also an offer to pursue European affairs in a targeted way throughout the whole EU and for the entire population with due regard for the principles of subsidiarity and partnership.

AEBR warmly welcomes the recognition of the exceptional political importance of territorial cooperation, especially cross-border cooperation, which has been declared one of Europe's three main priorities and is considered to be a factor of integration in future European cohesion and regional policy starting in 2007. AEBR is also delighted that the financial resources required to realise this political objective will be made available (2). In addition, the significance of cross-border cooperation has been emphasised through the creation of a new legal instrument governing decentralised cooperation between regional and local authorities (3) and the specific mention of cross-border cooperation in the future European Constitutional Treaty (III-Art. 116).

2. Border and cross-border regions – an engine of development

The added value of cross-border cooperation - in European, political, institutional, economic and socio-cultural terms - is demonstrable, visible, tangible and noticeable, making it a justifiable priority for the EU (4).

Cross-border cooperation means is all about neighbouring areas along a border working together in all spheres of life, at all times, and with the inclusion of all actors in direct proximity to the border.

Cross-border cooperation at regional and local level has proven to be the most successful form of cooperation so far. It encompasses socio-cultural as well as economic and infrastructure cooperation, and forms the most intensive network across the border.

Accordingly, cross-border networks not only contribute towards cooperation on infrastructure and in an economic context, but also eliminate barriers, for instance in the social sector, in education, in language training, in solving daily border problems, in promoting cultural understanding, etc.

Where internal borders are concerned, the European single market makes it possible for border regions and cross-border regions to tackle tasks and projects that in the past were blocked by the barriers of national borders, had to be left undone, and could not be implemented. On the previous and new external borders, the task is to gradually bring the border regions out to their peripheral status in the EU, to build viable bridges to Central and Eastern Europe, and often new ones as well, and to mitigate the economic, currency and wage differential along these borders.

For this reason, cross-border cooperation is a key task for the new millennium, and one that must be tackled with energy and caution. The border regions cannot cope single-handedly with the tasks they face, since the conflicts and causes are national and European in nature.

3. European Charter for Border and Cross-Border Regions

The European Charter for Border and Cross-Border Regions is a strategic policy paper on cross-border cooperation within and outside the EU. It takes up these issues and sets out the aims and challenges of cross-border cooperation, highlighting its added value (5). This makes it

clear why such cooperation is a European objective and a political priority for the EU. The Charter emphasises that cross-border cooperation shows how mindful we are of Europe's historical and political origins and indicates an awareness of our responsibility for the future of a Europe that is growing ever closer together, where border and cross-border regions are a "touchstone for diversity in European integration". Thus the Charter is aimed at all the participants in this ongoing process, and in particular at border and cross-border regions themselves, as driving forces behind such a development.

The European Charter for Border and Cross-Border Regions is in line with the main political topics and developments in Europe, with the European Constitutional Treaty and the EU's forward-looking cohesion and regional policy. It provides a solid, political and strategic basis for specific further efforts made in this connection.

II. MEASURES AND INSTRUMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE CHARTER

1. Smoothing out the interfaces of European spatial planning policy

Hardly any genuine cross-border spatial planning has taken place in the past, despite aims and measures to do so (6):

- The preconditions for equivalent - as opposed to identical - standards of living, must be created in all border and cross-border regions;
- the structure of the space in question must respect natural conditions, environmental, infrastructure, economic, social and cultural requirements in border regions needs to be developed in such a way that it best serves the free development of the character of the community concerned;
- the structure aimed for in border regions should be adapted to the spatial planning framework conditions in Member States and in the EU (7), which must in turn take greater account of cross-border relations (interaction).

The following measures and instruments can go a long way towards intensifying cross-border spatial development and regional policy:

- continual monitoring of cross-border areas by performing socio-economic analyses;
- cross-border coordination and the reciprocal involvement of citizens, local authorities and border regions in all plans, measures and decisions concerning regional policy or

- the area in question;
- drafting and updating of a list of problems facing neighbouring border areas;
 - preparation of a sustainable joint approach to development as the basis for the establishment of principles and plans governing regional cross-border spatial development and their consideration in national and European spatial development and other plans as well as within European programmes;
 - the drafting of directly binding joint cross-border regional plans as the most extensive form of cross-border spatial planning;
 - coherent planning (joint urban development concepts) for cross-border agglomerations and neighbouring urban and residential areas;
 - gradual coordination of regional policy support instruments in border areas;
 - integration of these spatial planning and regional policy measures and instruments with a view to improving implementation in "Operational Programmes" (e.g. as with INTERREG).

2. Cross-border infrastructure – physical prerequisites for cooperation

2.1 Transport infrastructure

Area-wide transport links and energy supplies are becoming increasingly important internationally. As a result, they are among the most important measures and instruments available to spatial development and regional policy in cross-border regions.

For border and cross-border regions that are still having to suffer as a result of their peripheral location in their country, and often in Europe as well, the construction and expansion of roads, railway links, airports, shipping routes and ports is vitally important. International connections through border and cross-border regions must link these areas to national centres and thus avoid congestion in the European transport network (8). Only the development of region-specific links and the utilisation of an area-wide infrastructure will eliminate bottlenecks, transform border regions into bridges between countries and at the same time also help to open up cross-border areas.

For international connections must not turn border and cross-border regions into mere transit zones. When transport infrastructure is built or expanded, consideration must be given to the interests of the affected individuals living in these cross-border regions and to requirements regarding the protection of the environment, nature and landscapes. For this reason, such large-scale transport infrastructure projects may only be carried out with the

equal participation of the border and cross-border regions affected.

The following measures and instruments can help to boost regional and intra-regional links and open up the border and cross-border regions concerned:

- *area-wide links and development*
 - the orientation of future transport policy objectives towards joint spatial and regional policy and European strategies, going beyond current volumes of traffic and traffic flows;
 - the construction and development of area-wide infrastructure in connection with pan-European corridors (9) (roads, railways, airports) for example via:
 - completing Alpine tunnels;
 - improving transit through the Pyrenees (pan-European corridor III, modern rail network);
 - promoting the interoperability of the Spanish high-speed rail network;
 - developing the Eastern European high-speed rail network and combined transport network;
 - constructing a bridge and/or tunnel across the Fehmarnbelt;
 - implementing projects designed to boost the navigability of the Danube and building new bridges or improving old ones in the Central and Eastern European countries through which the river flows;
 - implementing satellite radio navigation projects (GALILEO);
 - improving connections to main ports for onward travel by rail, road or waterway;
 - developing high-speed shipping connections (e.g. 'motorways of the sea') and the appropriate port and safety facilities.

- *Intra-regional connections and development*
 - the development of infrastructure in border regions (10) in accordance with joint cross-border structural spatial concepts, regional policy requirements and relevant national and European considerations (TEN), in addition to technical criteria such as volumes of traffic and traffic flows;
 - coordinated transport infrastructure planning on both sides of borders for railways, roads and waterways, based on joint cross-border environmental compatibility checks;

- the stopping of gaps in cross-border transport infrastructure, i.e. filling in missing links between regional, national and trans-European axes and networks;
- the construction or expansion of joint border crossing points on the EU's new external borders (reduced waiting times, direct solutions to problems);
- the development of multimodal cross-border transport infrastructure, including the construction of transport centres;
- the development of product-related and marketing activities in the transport sector across borders, including training the necessary personnel;
- the establishment of regional links between transport modes and feeder traffic;
- the development of cross-border public transport networks;
- the elimination of border-related barriers both restricting the use of certain modes of transport and affecting tariff systems;
- the development and creation of cross-border communication networks at the regional and local levels (11).

2.2 Telematics and communication

For the future development of border and cross-border regions, especially in Northern Europe, on the EU's external borders and in Central and Eastern Europe in particular, the development of telematics and communications is presenting the border regions in question with some ground-breaking opportunities to escape their national (and sometimes also European) peripheral status and wipe out the traditional disadvantages due to their marginal location.

The European Union and respective national governments are therefore urgently requested to plan the necessary investments in telematics and communications in border and cross-border regions, and to do so at the very least concurrently with investment in national conurbations. Past mistakes regarding investment in infrastructure, e.g. for transport, mustn't be repeated when we strive to develop modern communications networks. This is the only approach that will ensure that the advantages of modern telematics and communications can also be used to benefit regions that have often been disadvantaged in the past.

The following measures for telematics and communication significantly boost development in border and cross-border regions and help to overcome the disadvantages of their peripheral location:

- upgrading telematics and communications networks in border regions to enable them to accommodate ISDN;
- the extension of future information superhighways across borders to cover several

regions;

- the elimination of administrative, economic and technical barriers linked to borders that restrict access to telematics and communication;
- the creation of special tariff systems in border regions for telephone services, mailboxes and teletext systems;
- the promotion of call-centres used on a cross-border basis serving as centres for telematics and telecommunications in sparsely populated border regions;
- the establishment of cross-border 'transfer centres' in universities, higher education institutions and other training establishments;
- cross-border cooperation between universities, research institutes and other establishments to disseminate innovations, expertise and research results, and data on international market developments and customer accessibility, etc..

3. Making cross-border regions more attractive as business locations and enhancing economic development

Border regions both within and outside the EU are often 'cut off' from part of their natural surroundings by a border. This prevents them from developing possible areas of business the way they could do if the areas in question were in the same country. This can often substantially undermine their locational quality and considerably limit economic development in border and cross-border regions.

The previous national peripheral status of many border regions can only be transformed into a favourable situation with a greater locational value, improved economic development and a cross-border labour market within Europe when all economic, social and legal barriers have been dismantled and Europe has been integrated into a single, diverse entity. Cross-border networks create conditions that make border areas more attractive, enhance economic cooperation and development and develop cross-border labour markets (*especially external borders*: The conditions required for cross-border labour markets and training are particularly difficult on the EU's external borders. Immigration puts far greater pressure on labour markets in the EU's eastern and southern border regions. Consequently, there is often a much higher incidence of illegal activity and job mediation in these areas (12)).

With increasing area-wide trade in goods and the free movement of persons, labour, services and capital between the EU Member States, the special circumstances in border and cross-border regions also need to be taken into consideration (European Constitutional Treaty, Part III Article 116).

Whereas cross-border infrastructure frequently does no more than create the preconditions for economic cooperation, a coordinated economic and labour market policy must directly improve regional and economic development on a cross-border basis (13). Despite clear economic differences between areas in southern, western, central and eastern Europe, border regions share a great many problems that deter new industries and service providers from setting up shop there, prevent established industries from carrying out necessary restructuring measures, and obstruct the elimination of imbalances in poorly structured border areas. The EU supports cross-border cooperation aimed at improving locational quality and the economic situation of border regions through its policy on economic, social and territorial cohesion (14).

The following measures for improving locational quality and economic development in border and cross-border areas must be deemed priorities for collective action to be taken at regional, national, and EU level:

- *Cooperation to facilitate economic development*
 - the improvement of cross-border cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises;
 - the development of new cross-border relations between producers and suppliers (many previous cross-border industrial structures have collapsed and no new structures have emerged yet);
 - the creation of new jobs to replace border-related activities and employment lost through EU enlargement and the completion of the single market (e.g. customs and freight forwarding);
 - the solution of structural problems linked to cross-border labour markets;
 - cross-border cooperation in combating illegal activity and job mediation;
 - the elimination of border-related competitive disadvantages (as seen in public and private tendering procedures, administrative barriers, social dumping and delayed postal services, etc.);
 - the planning and establishment of legal and fiscal preconditions for the smooth operation of cross-border industrial estates;
 - the utilisation of comparative cost advantages in border areas in order to offset and supplement differences rather than as a means of engaging in cut-throat competition;
 - the development of cross-border concepts designed to boost tourism as a local economic factor;

- coordination the provision of regional and economic support on both sides of a border;
 - compiling and updating joint statistics;
 - devising joint region-specific Operational Programmes that place the economic development of border and cross-border regions in an overall, integrated cross-border context.
- *Promotion of entrepreneurial innovation and competitiveness*
 - Promotion of rivalry between regional locations, including across borders, to prompt the best possible competition;
 - attainment of cross-border added value by learning from neighbours with regard to production methods, staff training and motivation, cooperation between businesses and the authorities, etc.;
 - organising cross-border innovation fairs;
 - providing specific cross-border training and continuing training in certain sectors of the economy (including language training) through joint training courses given in shared institutions, or through corporate partnerships, and so forth, entailing the extension of catchment areas, boosting the capacity of such establishments, and the mutual recognition of diplomas;
 - cooperation between universities, technical colleges and SMEs with a view to generally shoring up economic cross-border cooperation and enhancing the appeal of the location with a view to attracting more SMEs to settle there and raise employment;
 - use of special national and European aid programmes that will facilitate access to funding for start-ups and the expansion of existing businesses (especially innovative SMEs), doing so on both a national and a cross-border basis (e.g. shared mutual guarantee associations, seed capital funds, venture capital, and so on);
 - the creation of a favourable cross-border atmosphere, encouraging people to seek and then also build on business opportunities and forms of cooperation beyond a border and establish personal and business contacts;
 - the creation of an environment that is conducive to entrepreneurship which fosters innovation, technology and the transfer of knowledge through cross-border cooperation;
 - the provision of good (bilingual or even trilingual) information and consultancy services that facilitate cross-border access to markets in the neighbouring country;
 - improvement of the environment for business start-ups or the establishment of newcomer businesses by setting up a single point of contact in public administrations to provide advice and facilitate access to the authorities in the neighbouring country,

explain rules and administrative procedures, take care of administrative formalities associated with business start-ups, provide bilingual forms, offer assistance on legal questions, and so on;

- learning from both good and bad examples of conditions of employment and working conditions in the neighbouring country.

- *Cross-border labour markets and staff training*

- Flexible handling of various clashing rules, structures, and labour market and employment subsidies at borders with a view to establishing a truly cross-border labour market as well as cross-border training and mobility;
- the improvement of cross-border coordination of labour market issues and training;
- the establishment of cross-border networks including employers, trade unions, labour administrations, Euroregions, etc.;
- the creation of cross-border education and training establishments;
- the creation of transparent cross-border labour markets through the elimination of barriers and the solution of problems to do with social aspects, training, tax, etc. for border crossers;
- the specific development of cross-border catchment areas, e.g. for cross-border business parks and industrial estates, nature reserves, tourism projects, and so forth, with a view to creating additional jobs via cross-border activities;
- the establishment of conditions essential for acquiring the language of the neighbouring country in all types of school (institutions, teachers, syllabuses);
- the promotion of cross-border vocational training with mutual recognition of equivalent national qualifications.

4. Improvement of cross-border protection of the environment and nature

Air, water and natural development do not stop at borders. As a result, effective environmental protection and nature conservation extending beyond borders is needed, and should be incorporated into a cross-border spatial planning model. Active landscape design in border and cross-border regions requires a joint approach just as much as the elimination of cross-border problems associated with air and water pollution, waste reduction, noise abatement and so on. In so doing, attention must be paid to the substantial differences in environmental protection and nature conservation and the resultant priorities in individual border and cross-border regions. (15).

Moreover, the environment, spatial development, the development of the economy and infrastructure, the expansion of tourism, and so forth, are all interlinked. In cross-border regions this means it is necessary to work with - rather than against - the environment (e.g. to weigh up short-term economic gains against long-term environmental damage). Consequently, we need a sustainable overall cross-border strategy that opens up possibilities for economic growth while bearing environmental policy factors in mind, so that border areas keep pace with the general economic growth of the European Union. For unless the economies of border and cross-border regions develop healthily, it will prove very difficult to finance a joint environmental policy in the long run. On the other hand, border regions should not be isolated from their surroundings in a bid to conserve nature and landscapes.

The following measures are suitable for a coordinated joint approach in border and cross-border regions (16):

- Favouring common long-term benefits over short-term individual gain;
- cross-border application of the 'polluter pays principle';
- the drafting of cross-border environmental conservation and nature preservation programmes at regional level;
- the expansion and creation of cross-border recreation areas, nature areas, protected landscapes or nature reserves, plus the establishment of cross-border biotope networks;
- the investigation of potential pollution on either side of the border in a joint environmental impact assessment (e.g. in the event of planned industrial development, the exploitation of groundwater reserves, or the construction of plants that cause pollution);
- the planning and operation of cross-border waterworks, waste disposal and recycling plants;
- elimination of existing pollution on a smaller scale (e.g. cleaning up designated areas, beaches, and so on) or more comprehensive decontamination (e.g. where the water, soil or air have been badly polluted, causing serious problems, and so on) on both sides of the border;
- reduce the impact of industrial decay by enabling industrial sites and buildings to be re-used;
- take action in the event of insufficient waste disposal and treatment;
- the development of new, more environmentally friendly manufacturing processes and products;
- measures adopting new development strategies that deal with cross-border ecological problems, conservation measures and environmental improvements (e.g. education

about the environment, raising awareness of the issues and running information campaigns in schools, businesses, local authority establishments and targeting the general public; implementing pilot schemes in companies and other organisations on environmental protection, dealing with waste, saving energy, etc. (17).;

- advertising encouraging people to avoid waste and find new ways of disposing of waste material;
- taking special ecological steps to conserve animal and plant species that are under threat;
- cooperative projects designed to protect forests, reduce air pollution, improve soil quality, boost the use of renewable energy (especially in mountain and maritime regions), and protect our waterways and seas;
- the establishment of cross-border environmental databases and ecological early warning systems;
- joint planning and coordination of emergency services (e.g. in the event of accidents involving substances that pose a threat to the environment);
- pursuing the aim of attaining higher standards on both sides of the border;
- running a comprehensive public information campaign and arranging as impartial a hearing procedure as possible for the affected people on both sides of the border;
- using cross-border information and education systems as instruments helping us to care for the environment.

5. Improving services through cross-border cooperation

Cross-border regions, which are often sparsely populated and suffer from relatively poorly developed health and social services, find it difficult to guarantee the inhabitants of their region reliable basic health care and social services.

Practical difficulties related to cooperation arise in the shape of legal hurdles resulting from nationally oriented laws, provisions and plans (e.g. planning and insurance systems that apply only to national contributors or citizens, differing circumstances).

A region's ability to offer a wider range of services of higher quality more cost-efficiently can be significantly boosted by cross-border cooperation, and especially by using shared resources (such as hospitals, old people's homes, ambulance and emergency services).

Service providers in border regions could often be more sensibly planned, more cheaply financed and more fully used if the respective cross-border requirements were ascertained and authorities stopped thinking in mere 'semicircular' terms, i.e. focussing exclusively on their side of the border. The main services affected are health care (hospitals, rehabilitation centres, old people's homes), educational establishments (kindergartens, bilingual schools, universities, technical colleges, vocational training centres), waterworks and waste processing plants, and other services (emergency services, regional sports facilities, the police, housing estates). As is so often the case, daily experience shows that cross-border cooperation in health care and social services is essential for the lives of the inhabitants of border regions.

The following measures can help to improve the cross-border provision of such services:

- Ascertaining the extent of cross-border demand and using that as a basis for drawing up joint plans and developing cross-border service provision and waste disposal facilities;
- mutual use of resources through joint investment in service provision or the distribution of tasks on a cross-border basis between existing and new establishments on both sides of the border in question (e.g. hospitals, rehabilitation centres, kindergartens, old people's homes, ambulances, emergency services, and so forth);
- overcoming legal and financial barriers (e.g. in insurance systems);
- creating cross-border special purpose associations;
- allocating costs for service provision on the base of national provisions (e.g. setting up equalisation funds for health insurance companies, and so on);
- establishing legally secured cross-border civil protection plans for emergencies, rescue systems, police and customs offices, etc.;
- operating cross-border waste disposal and recycling plants, and so forth.

6. Development of cross-border tourism

Tourism is a key factor in measures designed to develop a region's economy; it also provides large numbers of jobs (19).

Furthermore, tourism helps to exploit many of the development opportunities that are typical for border areas and to overcome developmental weaknesses. It facilitates economic diversification, creates additional new employment possibilities and new qualifications, helps to maintain local natural and cultural heritage, and improves the quality and quantity of establishments, services and infrastructure.

Tourism, the environment and agriculture are distinct areas, though there are also close links between them. They are directly associated with regional economic development and spatial development and are therefore generally important areas in border and cross-border regions, rural ones in particular.

The environmental quality and type of landscape of a region (air, water, the nature of the landscape itself, buildings and infrastructure) are factors that play just as vital a role in determining an area's tourism potential as the type of tourism envisaged (either mass tourism with summer visitors on coasts and winter sports enthusiasts in the mountains, or alternative forms of tourism based on the region's cultural heritage, special activities or the notion of a holiday in the countryside). However, they are also important for determining the quality of what tourists are offered and for the type of visitor target groups. This applies equally to the development of tourism in rural areas, which may be based on mass or alternative tourism, and to urban tourism, which is based on culture, historical heritage and leisure facilities.

The following measures are recommended for the development of cross-border tourism in border regions:

- *in the context of regional development (20):*
 - Taking account of tourism in regional and cross-border development plans with a view to promoting economic diversification, creating new and additional employment possibilities and new qualifications;
 - planning and securing the sustainable development of tourism, e.g. by developing cross-border tourism concepts and/or free space concepts;
 - overcoming fierce rivalry on either side of a border by developing cross-border tourism concepts with a wide range of shared facilities and services on offer so as to guarantee guests a comprehensive service of high quality:
 - firstly for the respective border region;
 - then for the cross-border region;
 - and if possible to make them stay longer and establish ties with the area;
 - developing cross-border tourism and tourism in neighbouring border areas by making optimal use of endogenous potential to complement existing economic activities;
 - avoiding overly close dependency on specific forms of tourism (mass tourism), which can create new burdens and imbalances in the structure of the regional

economy;

- paying closer attention to the indirect potential impact of tourism (e.g. creating new markets for local products and services);
- avoiding disadvantages associated with the development of tourism (especially in remote rural areas) e.g. situations in which the financial gains and employment-related benefits are lost, owing to dependency on external organisers, transport and travel companies, whose activities do not benefit regional and/or local companies in the respective border regions.

- *in transport:*

- The national and cross-border expansion of infrastructures and services (the road network, railways, airports, telecoms, information centres for guests, providers of accommodation, leisure facilities, health care providers, shopping facilities), which pave the way for and guarantee the sustainable development of tourism in competition with other regions;
- eliminating bottlenecks in the transport and economic infrastructure required if tourism is to be developed, the aim being to enhance accessibility;
- boosting the quality of what tourists are offered in a bid to extend the tourist season and prolong tourists' visits.

- *in marketing:*

- Unmistakable shaping of the tourism profile and image of cross-border regions;
- exploitation the possible strengths of a cross-border region, so as to sensibly plan and finance investments in infrastructure and services for tourists;
- paying special attention to the quality requirements of core and target groups of visitors;
- building up knowledge of the market and skills, so as to be constantly informed about the development of tourism products and successfully offer cross-border tourism to target markets;
- optimising strengths and resources with a view to investing in the development of new, high-quality tourism products and markets, especially on a cross-border basis;
- checking the quality of tourism services and the development of new, high-quality tourism products so as to be capable of weighing external needs against the internal allocation of resources;
- building up and extending cross-border information, contacts and networks and also

joint marketing by the respective tourism associations and other organisations, including private companies;

- optimising qualifications and know-how so as to be in a position to offer high-quality services to tourists on both sides of the border and on a cross-border basis.

- *in the natural environment and agriculture*

- Avoiding activities that are damaging to the environment, deplete natural resources or undermine the conditions required for specific regional agricultural production;
- concentrating on promoting activities that enable the harmonious coexistence of tourism and favourable environmental conditions and pave the way for an environmentally compatible form of region-specific agriculture;
- creating services that bolster soft eco-tourism, especially in conjunction with the long-term guaranteeing of sustainable forms of cross-border, environmentally compatible rural development;
- promoting greater use of synergies between tourism, agriculture and forestry, environmental policy and SMEs;
- providing joint, bilingual information and devising measures designed to entice people seeking a refreshing change back to nature and the countryside, whilst also offering appropriate education or training in a bid to prevent the environment, landscape and agriculture from being spoilt or damaged.

7. Solving the problems faced by regular border crossers

The number of workers throughout Europe living on one side of a border and working on the other side is pretty substantial, fluctuating in line with the changing economic situations in individual countries. The number of people crossing borders to go shopping or indulge in tourism or travel for other private reasons is also rising steadily. As a result, border crossers need to be considered an everyday phenomenon. Obviously there are major differences between the problems faced by people crossing the old internal borders of the European Union, its old external borders and the EU's new external borders. And a further distinction needs to be drawn between legal and illegal border crossers.

The following measures are suitable for solving the problems faced by people crossing borders (21):

- Application of the European Social Charter in all nations and border regions;
- transposition of the European Commission's White Paper on European Social Policy into national legislation;
- the establishment of regional cross-border catalogues of rights and obligations for border crossers;
- measures to compensate for border-related fluctuations in income and exchange rates;
- improved protection of border commuters to secure their jobs;
- the elimination of discrepancies in the area of social security, taxation, and so on;
- the improvement of cross-border consumer protection.

External borders in particular

- Improving cooperation between the police, customs officers and border guards in the fight against cross-border crime, supported by the authorities in the respective Euroregions;
- simplified border checks for commuters who have to cross the border several times a day;
- in principle the organisation of joint border checks in a single shared building. This not only saves money (being a cheaper option than two separate national border control posts), but more importantly enables intensive cooperation between the respective border guards, police forces and customs officials. Any problems arising can be solved immediately and in unison by both sides. This is virtually impossible if national border control posts are several hundred metres apart from one another.
- Capitalising on the advantages of joint customs clearance facilities by:
 - o coordinating duty rosters more efficiently;
 - o enabling less problematic cross-border exports and imports (e.g. joint veterinary checks, and so forth);
 - o adopting practical solutions to passport and visa problems;
 - o facilitating minor border traffic;
 - o organising joint patrols;
 - o improving security while deploying fewer staff and streamlining any administration;
 - o improving linguistic abilities on both sides of the border;
 - o promoting greater understanding of the different administrative systems and work procedures and speeding up processing and clearance times;
 - o training border guards, police officers and customs officials in neighbouring countries outside the European Union to meet the European standard.

- Speeding up processing and clearance at border crossings by setting up or opening a separate lane for people living close to the border (made recognisable by special stickers on their car, for example);
- Providing fast-track procedures close to the border by enabling visas to be issued to local residents and businesses in border regions along the new external border without any decline in security or limiting any necessary checks by (22):
 - o Issuing visas valid for a year or for several months for people who can prove that they have to cross the border regularly, either on business or for personal reasons;
 - o issuing multiple visas (e.g. for 10 or 15 border crossings) in line with professional or private requirements (if need be with the visa's validity limited to a particular time period (such as 6 or 12 months);
 - o issuing daily visas as required;
 - o setting up visa-issuing offices in the immediate vicinity of the border or even issuing them at official border crossings;
 - o applying moderate, customer-friendly, visa fees for businesses and individuals in border regions (rather than making them primarily a source of income for the country in question).
- Simplifying border crossings for groups, schoolchildren, sports clubs, music ensembles, and such like, from neighbouring border areas by:
 - o Issuing group visas based on submitted, pre-checked lists, especially when entry and departure take place within a certain, controllable period (in connection with a school visit, sporting event, concert or similar event in the neighbouring country);
 - o charging a lump-sum price for this list-based visa;
 - o issuing such a visa somewhere close to the border or directly at the customs clearance post itself.
- Issuing tourist visas for the holiday period or day tourist visas directly in the vicinity of the border, as required;
- opening additional border crossing points for people living on both sides of the border, enabling residents and tourists to use these border crossings from, say, sunrise to sunset, provided they are in possession of a valid passport (if need be containing the correct visa) and are not carrying any smuggled goods.

8. Promotion of cross-border cultural cooperation

Overcoming mistrust and developing mutual confidence and grass-roots connections are key elements in any cross-border cooperation. Cross-border cultural cooperation is vitally important as an essential prerequisite for any further confidence-building measures. A knowledge of the entire cross-border region and its geographical, structural, economic, socio-cultural and historical conditions is a precondition for the active involvement of citizens and all other partners. It is also closely related to social and cultural encounters across borders.

The border and cross-border regions are willing and able to make an important contribution to the broadest and most intensive possible familiarisation and interconnection for the purpose of European integration, whilst preserving their rich cultural diversity. Cross-border cultural cooperation also promotes understanding for ethnic and national minorities and the necessity of finding solutions to their problems. It thus makes an important contribution to tolerance and international understanding. Political and administrative authorities and the press, radio and television must create the conditions required for good relations between neighbours and help to break down prejudices.

Cultural cross-border cooperation becomes an element of joint regional development via the following measures (23):

- The expansion of regional and cross-border cultural foci and a more extensive range of regional highlights;
- fostering greater acceptance of cultural activities offered on both sides of the border;
- improving information systems about cultural events on offer and/or projects and/or artists;
- repeatedly disseminating knowledge over a long-term basis on the geographical, structural, economic, socio-cultural and historical conditions of cross-border regions;
- providing an overview of cross-border regions in maps, publications and teaching material;
- building a circle of committed experts (multipliers);
- promoting partnerships, youth encounters, family meetings, sporting events, exchanges of officials, seminars, seminars, ecumenical meetings, meetings of experts, etc. on cross-border regional topics;
- involving churches, schools, educational establishments for young and old, monument

conservation authorities, cultural associations, libraries, museums, and so forth as active partners with a view to the peaceful development of human interaction in border areas;

- showing consideration for and promoting minorities, e.g. by issuing mutual, legally binding statements and providing government guarantees that they may maintain their own culture and corresponding institutions (schools, libraries, and so on) and also by ratifying Council of Europe conventions on the protection of minorities and on the protection of regional or minority languages;
- including the language of the neighbouring country in the curricula of all school types;
- giving the language of the neighbouring country equal status and acquiring extensive knowledge of it or the local dialects as an element of cross-border regional development and as a prerequisite for communication;
- promoting language training and linguistic encounters as a way of prompting people to adapt to the requirements of a European service- and leisure-oriented society;
- media cooperation through joint, constantly repeated publications and information in the press and cross-border regional radio and TV programmes;
- creating a 'culture and media' network linking parts of countries and neighbouring border regions with what their media and culture have to offer and issuing recommendations on how to get there (bus, rail, car) as well as regarding cross-border tariffs (cultural passes, library cards, etc.);
- enhancing and jointly promoting existing institutions as central cross-border establishments presenting - and for use by - the entire region (play groups, orchestras, keeping culture alive).

9. Improving organisational and legal cross-border cooperation

The economy started organising itself and developing on a cross-border basis a long time ago, frequently supported by European and national subsidies.

Consequently, there's a need to create cross-border public-sector structures at regional and local level which can guide and control these cross-border economic developments along democratic lines. The growing number of border regions in the enlarged European Union and the importance of cross-border cooperation for European integration means that the Union and its Member States have a special obligation to take action.

The following measures are required to improve decentralised cooperation between regional and/or local authorities:

- *At the organisational level (24):*
 - The creation of a cross-border organisation with its own structures and own financial resources as a precondition for taking independent action and promotion from outside;
 - the drafting of 'cross-border developmental concepts' and Operational Programmes by Euroregions and similar structures, embracing all areas of human coexistence. These will serve as a basis for the development of measures and projects up until their cross-border realisation;
 - respecting the subsidiarity principle, including for cross-border cooperation at regional and local level, which is to be assigned its own development period, i.e. comprehensive, cross-border cooperation, rather than just the lowest common denominator;
 - decentralised participation in hearings, advice for cross-border commuters and the development of joint maps, texts, statistics, etc..
 - Realisation of genuine cross-border projects, i.e. the partners on both sides of the borders have to contribute as regards content, organisation, staff and finances,
 - Elaboration of practical rules for a successful development of cross-border projects, e.g.:
 - bottom-up-principle,
 - a strong interest of the involved partners,
 - cooperation in individual projects in line with the (geographical) interests and possibilities of partner mediation,
 - cooperation and competition do not exclude each other,
 - necessity of a good management which should be equipped with sufficient financial resources,
 - useful legal structure (structure follows function),
 - Elaboration of common criteria for priorities/measurements as well as for eligible project costs.

- *At the legal level (25):*
 - The creation of a legally accepted service recipient and contracting party capable of taking action as a prerequisite for developing, managing and administering EU programmes (issues of legally binding nature, liability, and so on);
 - inclusion of the regional and/or local level via European regional associations in the

new political dialogue between the European Commission and the respective regional organisations;

- the European regional associations' right to be heard in the European Parliament, Committee of the Regions and Economic and Social Committee;
- the creation of an EU instrument for decentralised, cross-border cooperation between local authorities and its implementation by border and cross-border regions.

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