

The Future of cross-border cooperation in Europe

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Future priorities for CBC in Europe (8 minutes)

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Ladies and gentleman

I would like to give you some information about the current and future work of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities with relation to CBC.

It's my pleasure to do this as the thematic rapporteur of the Congress on CBC and – as from last month – Vice-President of the Congress.

In 2012, the Congress Governance Committee and the Euro-Institute organised a seminar on 'Multi-level governance in trans frontier cooperation' in Innsbruck, Austria. During this seminar we looked at trans frontier cooperation in Austria, Germany and Ukraine and took stock of the work that the Congress has already carried out in this field.

That seminar gave birth to a Congress report and resolution, to give direction to our future work on the subject of "Prospects for effective transfrontier co-operation in Europe".

The report noted an important and positive trend in European trans frontier cooperation in recent years – moving from a focus on informal exchanges to a preference for practical projects, based on light structures, which we could best describe as 'cooperation platforms' rather than administrative units.

We proposed an action Plan to pave the way for more effective international cooperation in this field which will change the way that trans frontier cooperation is perceived at a national level and lead to a significant increase in this form of cooperation.

There is a new spirit of pragmatism, where the actors concerned by trans frontier issues are actively searching for practical solutions to a variety of local problems, which are arising from the increasing mobility of our citizens.

The financial crisis has focused our attention on the potential benefits of transfrontier cooperation, as local and regional authorities can pool their resources and avoid duplication in neighbouring states, especially when it comes to expensive infrastructure projects like drinking water supply, waste management, sewage treatment and in areas such as health, education and emergency services.

That is the good news. But the picture is not all so positive. As these practical projects develop, they reveal a number of significant challenges to effective trans frontier cooperation:

- How to ensure that projects are sustainable,
- How to assess the added value of a project,
- Identifying the most appropriate level of administration and legal structure,
- How to create a productive working environment with partners from very different institutional, legislative and administrative cultures, and
- How to create an effective knowledge base for the trans frontier territory

We believe that a sustained programme of capacity building, training and gathering of data and information is required. We need to consolidate and pool existing expertise and develop indicators that will measure the impact of our cooperation activities.

As a follow up to that report we organised a conference last year of the main actors working on trans frontier cooperation issues, with a view to establishing a pool of expertise, to coordinate research and to develop a capacity-building and training programme.

The conference brought together all the main partners – several are represented here today – and lots of optimism and good intentions – but little has happened since – and there remains always the problem of resources and funding.

We agreed that it was better to have light structures – to communicate using e-media – to share good practice.

There are two other elements to our work on CBC that I'd like to share with you, which is

- Our work on inter-regional cooperation covered in Dickson report and
- Our work on Macro regions, which is included in Van Staa report.

The last 20 years have witnessed a remarkable surge in such cooperation within and beyond Europe. Regional governments are becoming increasingly active in this field, developing more and more projects with their counterparts in other countries, both inside and outside of Europe.

There are many factors behind this boom, which is linked to developments in globalisation, improvements in communications and increased mobility through low-cost travel and easing of visa regimes.

Such cooperation, characterised by the adaptability, flexibility and fluidity of its arrangements and the lightness of its structures, is leading regions to discover new, effective and imaginative ways of working together and is becoming an important engine for European integration and creative territorial cohesion.

Regions are cooperating in an increasingly diverse range of fields, including infrastructure projects, investment in research and technology, exchanges and training programmes, intercultural dialogue and promotion of shared cultural heritage, serving the interests of citizens, local and regional authorities, NGOs, cultural associations and business enterprises.

Also a word about the Committee on Democracy and Governance - our partner in the Council of Europe:

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has just approved a revised version of the appendix to Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline

Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euro regional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs).

We are still waiting for the first Euro regional Co-operation Groupings to come into being – but it looks like Greater Geneva will be the first – in 2016.

The democratic governance and accountability and transparency of new cross-border structures and metropolitan regions is a new and important field – so we pleased that Committee on Democracy and Governance is pursuing this together with its partner the Gorizia institute.

And I myself am very much interested in getting CBC relaunched in my own transfrontier territory, which would encompass nine municipalities in Slovenia, the province of Trieste in Italy and Istria County in Croatia.

I hope and wish that we will in the next two or three years, however managed with the help of the Congress, Committee on Democracy and Governance and the Committee of the Regions, to achieve the integration of three border areas of Slovenia, Italy and Croatia in a single cross-border region and to make this territory an example of joint management for the benefit of all residents.

Thanks for your attention!