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## **CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION**

**- European priority and political objective of the EU -  
Beyond 2013**

Association of European Border Regions  
(AEBR)

## 1. European / political arguments for the future

Also in the future **all** European border regions should have political priority and cross-border cooperation as prior European objective implemented at regional/local level must be supported beyond 2013:

- In the “Treaty of Lisbon” border areas are explicitly listed as areas that are eligible to special assistance.
- Both the “4<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report” and the “Territorial Agenda” emphasise the importance and added value of cross-border cooperation within the scope of territorial cooperation.
- In the European Single Market borders should not be lines dividing people but places where people come together.
- For that reason cross-border cooperation is indispensable as the “cement of the European House”.
- The European unification process is experienced primarily by citizens in border areas. This is true both for **the advantages** (e.g. free movement of persons, services, goods and capital) and for **the disadvantages** (resulting from different structures, competences, tax and social laws that will further on hinder the cooperation and mobility in the upcoming decades).
- Cross-border cooperation solves many problems of this kind; it creates evident added values (European, political, institutional and socio-cultural) and contributes significantly to European integration and territorial cohesion.
- The contribution of cross-border cooperation to achieving the objectives of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategy is evident.
- Cross-border cooperation demonstrates exemplary how „New Governance“ works, as cooperation has taken place in flexible networks and partnerships for decades already (in the future legal foundation possible thanks to EGTC) irrespective of different competences and structures on both sides of the border.
- „To bring Europe closer to the citizens“ (“Communicating Europe“) is a day-to-day business for border regions, as no cross-border meeting takes place, be it in business, culture, of employment centres, chambers, schools, all NGO’s etc. that would not immediately focus on questions related to the European Union.
- Despite its European dimension and the demonstrable achievements cross-border cooperation is hardly (or just in rare cases of small member states) a national priority. This is why border and cross-border regions, in coordination with politicians from all levels and from both sides of the border, have to continuously raise the national governments’ awareness of the necessity to actively support cross-border cooperation as a contribution to achieving the Lisbon and Gothenburg objectives which they themselves have agreed to achieve.

- The withdrawal of European funds would mean for nearly all border regions in Europe automatically the withdrawal of national co-financing with comparable special purpose funding in long-term programmes.
- Cross-border cooperation is a *policy framework task for the European Union* which must be *implemented at regional/local* level in partnership with the national bodies in the field. Cross-border cooperation as a *practical task in the field* and an *objective for European policy* will thus become a touchstone for:
  - European integration and social cohesion;
  - peaceful human coexistence, including respect for diversity and the rights of minorities;
  - respect for the principles of partnership and subsidiarity;
  - the active participation of citizens, politicians, authorities and social groups in cross-border cooperation;
  - reconciliation, tolerance and equality, in spite of any differences between the respective partners;
  - social, cultural and economic interwoven cooperation, extending as far as cross-border integration, without undermining state sovereignty;
  - a Europe for citizens in their communities, regions and countries.

**For that reason: Cross-border cooperation should remain also in the future a European priority and political objective of the EU.**

## **2. The added value of cross-border cooperation**

### **2.1. European added value**

**European added value** arises from the fact that in the light of past experience, people who are living together in neighbouring border regions want to cooperate and thereby make a valuable contribution to the promotion of peace, freedom, security and the observance of human rights.

### **2.2. Political added value**

The **political added value** of cross-border cooperation involves making a substantial contribution towards:

- the development of Europe and European integration;
- getting to know each other, getting on together, understanding each other and building trust between neighbours;
- the implementation of subsidiarity and partnership;
- increased economic and social cohesion and cooperation;
- preparing for the accession and integration of new members;

- using EU funding to secure cross-border cooperation via multiannual programmes, and ensuring that the necessary national and regional co-financing is committed in the long term.

### **2.3. Institutional added value**

The **institutional added value** of cross-border cooperation entails:

- active involvement by the citizens, authorities, political and social groups on both sides of the border;
- secure knowledge about one's neighbour (regional authorities, social partners, etc.);
- long-term cross-border cooperation in regional and/or local structures that are capable of working efficiently:
  - as a vertically and horizontally functioning partnership, despite having different structures and areas of responsibility;
  - as a legally accepted target of aid and a working partner, receiving and administering funds;
- joint drafting, implementation and financing of cross-border programmes and projects.

Experience gained throughout Europe shows that jointly developed cross-border programmes and projects can be most effectively implemented and realised if the regional and local partners play a considerable role.

### **2.4. Socio-economic added value**

The **socio-economic added value** of cross-border cooperation becomes apparent in the respective regions, albeit in different ways, through:

- the mobilisation of endogenous potential by strengthening the regional and local levels as partners for and initiators of cross-border cooperation;
- the participation of actors from the economic and social sectors (for example, chambers of commerce, associations, companies, trade unions, cultural and social institutions, environmental organisations and tourism agencies);
- the opening up of the labour market and harmonisation of professional qualifications;
- additional development, e.g. in the fields of infrastructure, transport, tourism, the environment, education, research and cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises, and also the creation of more jobs in these areas;
- lasting improvements in the planning of spatial development and regional policy (including the environment);

- the improvement of cross-border transport infrastructure (including state-of-the-art border crossings with joint clearance facilities).

### **2.5. Socio-cultural added value**

**Socio-cultural added** value is reflected in:

- lasting, repeated dissemination of knowledge about the geographical, structural, economic, socio-cultural and historical situation of a cross-border region (including with the media's help);
- the overview of a cross-border region afforded in maps, publications, teaching material, and so on, with the aim of perceiving the cross-border region as a common living environment,
- the development of a circle of committed experts (multipliers), such as churches, schools, youth and adult educational establishments, the conservation authorities, cultural associations, libraries, museums, and so forth;
- equal opportunities and extensive knowledge of the language of the neighbouring country or of dialects as a component of cross-border regional development and a prerequisite for communication.
- demonstrable revitalisation of cross-border cultural and social relationships, which have been interrupted for political reasons for quite a while; this will lay solid foundations for establishing cross-border networks for economic and political cooperation.

**In this way, cultural cross-border cooperation becomes a constituent element of regional development. Only if socio-cultural cooperation takes place is a workable cross-border environment for business, trade and services established.**

### **3. Economic arguments**

With respect to still recognisable disparities within Europe as a whole, cross-border cooperation helps to level out economic imbalances, eliminate barriers and counter location-related disadvantages in neighbouring border regions within a manageable regional framework, working in partnership with the relevant European and national bodies.

While estimating the importance and impact of cross-border cooperation not solely the current or future data as GDP, labour market data, population development etc. has relevance. Important is rather **the general question**, how the positive development initiated by Interreg A can be ensured in a sustainable way in order to exploit further on consequently the growth opportunities and integration effects as consequence of cross-border cooperation for the benefit of the population and the European Union as a whole.

- The growing exchange of goods over a large area and the free movement of people, labour, services and capital, both between EU Member States and worldwide, are particularly affecting European border and cross-border regions.
- Throughout Europe, the peripheral location of border regions within their respective country, and sometimes also in Europe, frequently leads to imbalances and poor starting conditions in comparison with the degree of economic concentration in central regions.
- Sometimes such imbalances (markedly different economic structures and income) are flagrant, as is the case in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe, or on the EU's external borders. In other cases, they only become clear on closer inspection, as for example in Western Europe's border regions that are grappling with the consequences of previous one-sided structural and industrial development or the continuing lack of economic trade extending beyond a border.
- The situation of border and cross-border regions in Europe is characterised by a wide range of economic barriers and imbalances on the internal and external borders of the European Union and in Eastern Europe itself.
- **The specific added value of cross-border cooperation to implementing the Lisbon Strategy** derives from the fact that cross-border cooperation always adds value to national measures. This added value results from
  - additionality of cross-border programmes and projects,
  - cross-border labour market with additional new employment opportunities,
  - synergies and spin-off effects through cross-border cooperation (universities, hospitals, etc.),
  - joint research and innovation (critical mass),
  - additional growth and economic development (e.g. with new jobs, risk capital funding for SME),
  - cross-border value chains with capital commitment and return for the benefit of the regional economy,
  - new cross-border relations between producers and suppliers,
  - new cooperation and sales opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises,
  - joint expansion of telematics and communications networks, which enable the following, among other things:
    - cross-border transfer networks at and between universities and other educational establishments;
    - the cross-border exchange of data between universities, institutes, and so forth, providing access to innovation, know-how and research results and

information on market developments, customers' accessibility, and so forth.

- cross-border networking,
  - joint location marketing
  - exchange of best practice and experience,
  - efficient cross-border resource management.
- The **evidence** for the specific **added value** of cross-border cooperation to implementing the Lisbon Strategy can be provided (see justification above).
  - In accordance with ESDP, based on national spatial development plans and the Territorial Agenda 2007, in the future attention should be accorded to the following cross-border issues to achieve sustainable spatial development in border regions:
    - development of transport and telecommunications infrastructure and services;
    - provision of public and private services across borders;
    - economic cooperation and cooperation in the field of education;
    - organisation of cross-border labour markets;
    - preservation and sustainable use of natural resources (especially in mountain, coastal and wetland regions etc.);
    - prevention of cross-border effects of pollution.
  - In accordance with ESDP and the Territorial Agenda 2007, EU Member States should be expected to:
    - create and regularly adjust cross-border spatial planning models and concepts (spatial development concepts) and take these into consideration in national spatial development and sectoral plans (e.g. settlement structure, infrastructure, economy, education);
    - regularly coordinate all spatial planning and measures;
    - set up joint cross-border regional - and where useful - land use plans as the most advanced form of cross-border spatial development policy.
  - The need to support **all** border regions beyond 2013 with due regard to **regional diversity and regional characteristics** becomes clear while considering the different initial conditions and needs of border regions in convergence areas, in sparsely populated areas, at different internal borders, the previous external borders, the borders between new member states, the external borders of the EU (ENPI and IPA) as well as in border regions with specific geographic features (e.g. mountainous areas, maritime areas) → see annex.

#### **4. Socio-cultural reasons**

Even today, cross-border cooperation is breaking open existing semicircles at national borders and creating larger areas of influence and zones of interaction for businesses, trade and citizens across the border.

Just like transport infrastructure, the socio-cultural infrastructure is a prerequisite for enabling cross-border cooperation between different localities, and ensuring that it is and remains successful.

Cross-border cooperation does not only mean harmonious co-existence, but also cooperation in spite of rivalry, competition and differences. If cooperation is to become self-evident in spite of rivalries, the respective socio-cultural preconditions have to be met, namely:

- Recognition rather than ignorance;
  - Understanding rather than rejection;
  - Trust rather than resentment.
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- Socio-cultural cooperation mobilises all partners on both sides of the border and thereby lays vital foundations for the establishment of cross-border organisations such as Euroregions and similar structures.
  - Socio-cultural cooperation increases interest in and appreciation of cross-border regions beyond existing structures, motivating citizens to approach each other and, in particular, to learn or, at least, understand, the language of their neighbours.
  - The knowledge gained, results achieved and projects arising from cross-border socio-cultural cooperation constitute growing - and important - factors in determining the standing of the site in question in the eyes of future investors.
  - The image and attractiveness of a cross-border region is enhanced through socio-cultural cooperation, which breathes new life into urban and rural areas alike.
  - There is a direct connection between cultural life (public cultural and socio-cultural institutions such as theatres, museums, centres of the arts, historic buildings, landscapes) and the cultural economy (music, art, literature, film and television, architecture, monument conservation and tourism).
  - Cross-border socio-cultural cooperation creates transparency and helps to develop a functioning cross-border labour market, which in turn makes the structural problems of a joint labour market easier to solve.
  - Socio-cultural cooperation is an important source of jobs, both as regards activities designed to maintain an area's cultural and historical heritage and also with regard to cultural products that directly or indirectly impact on the employment situation (services/SMEs).

- Socio-cultural cooperation creates large numbers of high-quality jobs and helps to solve social problems in cross-border regions (commuter difficulties, use of hospitals on the other side of the border, and so on).
- Cross-border vocational training and recognition of the qualifications gained are facilitated.
- Cross-border vocational training can help to counter the effects of the concentration of work, services and capital in the industrial centres of Europe by coordinating cross-border cooperation in conjunction with European and national spatial development and regional policies.
- Trusting cross-border cooperation leads to joint plans, programmes and projects which overcome the national tendency to focus on a semicircle on the respective country's side of the border. Engaging in joint ventures enables the following, among other things:
  - the planning and construction of shared infrastructure (roads, railways, airports, freight centres);
  - the organisation of joint public institutions (motorway police, fire brigade and other emergency services, schools and social services);
  - cross-border trade and industry areas;
  - the establishment and running of joint utilities (water, electricity) and waste disposal systems (sewage processing, waste recycling);
  - the organisation of cross-border environmental compatibility tests.

## **5. Key elements of successful cross-border cooperation in the future**

There must be greater awareness at local, regional, national and European levels that the nature of borders changes as a result of cross-border cooperation. They are no longer a division but rather a meeting place. Cross-border cooperation has long since developed from opportunities to share experiences and encounters into tangible practical cooperation in all areas of daily life. It is therefore no longer a question of **whether** we cooperate but rather **how**.

There are some general principles for successful cross-border cooperation:

- Proximity to the citizens (given that citizens in border areas are concerned by the differences on either side of the border and desire a solution of their difficulties: increasing interaction in all areas of life also results in higher expectations of the citizens);
- Involvement of politicians (local, regional, national and European) from both sides of the border (if policy is made, politicians are needed!);
- Partnership and subsidiarity: The regional/local level has turned out to be the best and most successful one for cross-border cooperation. External partnership with

national governments of the EU is as necessary as internal partnership (involving all actors on both sides of the border) in order to mobilise the knowledge of all actors that can contribute to cross-border cooperation;

- Cross-border cooperation structures authorised to find solutions and featuring joint bodies, a joint office and joint budget; they are instruments for enhanced cooperation, not self-serving.
- The regional/local level is the most appropriate and, as a result, the most successful form of cross-border cooperation.

### ***EU Programmes - recommendations for the future***

There is a greater need than ever before to take advantage of **the general experience gained from successful cross-border cooperation and the key elements required to create a successful management system of EU programmes**. Only then will available resources and structures be put to even better use for cross-border cooperation and developed with a view to the future.

For this purpose, it would be helpful and beneficial if the EU and the national governments appreciated and used the comprehensive experience and practical knowledge of the cross-border cooperation structures at regional/local level and of their association at European level, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), to an even greater extent than up to now.

For the EU funding period 2007 – 2013 the EU has launched far reaching, politically important and financially significant instruments to advance cross-border cooperation. These instruments should be further developed and enhanced, wherever necessary, after 2013 for the advantage of cross-border cooperation at the internal borders of the EU. This will, in the future, also include the promotion of cross-border cooperation at the EU external borders by the DG REGIO (and no longer by the DG RELEX), which is essential from the point of view of AEBR.

- An overall AEBR concept for cross-border cooperation therefore remains necessary to ensure that cross-border cooperation stays high on the European agenda. This issue will be highlighted again in 2007/2008 when *AEBR lists key political issues for the period after 2013*:
  - sufficient financial resources for cross-border cooperation;
  - unlimited support for **all** border regions;
  - decentralisation of the programmes for the benefit of the regional/local level, which also includes the urgent need to reverse the trend towards recentralisation observed under Interreg IV A in certain cases,

- improved cross-border nature of programmes and projects;
  - Interreg A projects that are primarily geared to cross-border requirements and the needs of the cross-border region/structure concerned and not - as can unfortunately again be observed to an increasing extent - to the requirements of national structures (e. g. lighthouse projects),
  - improvements to the legal instrument “European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation” and promotion of its application,
  - improvements to the neighbourhood and partnership programmes and pre-accession instruments.
  - joint allocation of Interreg A funds (i.e. without prior national quotas) and direct allocation to the programmes concerned, provided that they demonstrably have adequate management structures, management capacities etc. in place. This procedure prevents the national allocation of funds and the application of inappropriate criteria by national governments when allocating funds.
- If Interreg A is to function more effectively after 2013 than it has done up to now, the EU Communication on territorial cooperation would have to dispense with phrases that are often unnecessary and rather restrictive in detail. Instead, **important prerequisites**, first introduced for the period 2007-2013, should not merely be named, but also **defined** to a certain extent.
  - While further improving Interreg A the following is essential:
    - real joint cross-border programmes with actual joint cost projections and financing plans;
    - a responsible role for genuinely joint cross-border structures;
    - veritable joint accounts for EU funds and national co-financing;
    - a definition of the term ‘cross-border project’;
    - specification of what is jointly eligible for funding;
    - joint cross-border criteria and indicators at the levels of programmes, measures and projects

*The annex includes a brief definition of these important terms.*

- From AEBR’s point of view are desirable:
  - Good management capacity, also for the purpose of being able to assume more responsibility for EU programmes;

- Strong secretariat with international profile capable of supporting the MA effectively;
- Assistance and support to projects at all stages;
- Project development in the hands of (or, at least, with the active involvement of) the competent authorities, social partners, NGOs etc. from both sides of the border.
- Evaluation of applications based on a predefined strategy; organisation of expert assessments in exceptional cases only.
- To learn from the extremely successful projects within the scope of “small project funds” as regards cross-border contents, functioning, simplification of the management system etc.
- The regional/local level should assume more responsibility than up to now, in particular if EU programmes are to be increasingly implemented at regional/local level. A European priority is certainly to define the strategic guidelines and ensure the coherence between the programmes’ strategies and the cohesion policy. All other important issues should be realised by the regional/local level in partnership with the national and European level as well as the social partners.
- While defining the objectives, managing EU programmes and assessing the results the regional/local authorities should be directly involved with own responsibilities. This is necessary due to the still visible weaknesses in the implementation of the partnership and subsidiarity principles.
- A significantly simpler management system and organisational efficiency improvements are indispensable.
- Particular attention should be paid to regions with specific problems (e.g. maritime regions, mountainous areas, border areas).
- The Neighbourhood Programme should be governed by the same rules as territorial cooperation in the EU (primarily cross-border and interregional): joint programme, management, funding, etc.

## **6. Final remarks**

- EU Programmes that have just one aim „cross-border cooperation“ and provide funds for 6-7 years (e. g. Interreg A), tie up necessarily national funds for the same period that otherwise would not be available for this purpose and certainly not for a longer period.
- The existing regional differences must be taken into account in European competition. These differences not only come to the fore when comparing urban areas, rural areas and sparsely populated areas. They are also reflected, in particular, in the different strengths and weaknesses of the individual regions, which must be taken advantage of and/or eliminated, as well as in the differences in the regions’ economic power:

- In many parts of Central and Eastern Europe, the regions' attractiveness as business location is increased by prioritising infrastructure improvements, residential construction and the restructuring of old industries. Those regions, which succeed in implementing these measures, first will have advantages over their peers in regional competition.
- In most parts of the current EU, however, competition between regions is rather decided by the so-called "soft location factors", given that the necessary infrastructure is already in place and/or that the necessary transformation has already been started.
- AEBR will continue to work out target oriented recommendations and proposals in order to meet future challenges in cross-border cooperation. AEBR will make available its practical and theoretical expertise, as well as the know how of its members and friends, believing that this is an important contribution to the future development of policies both in the EU and in its member states.
- The European Union lives from solidarity and mutual assistance between the local, regional and national levels. If the poorest regions are meant to receive financial assistance, not only the "less developed", but also the "further developed", i.e. the allegedly "rich" regions, must be given the opportunity to develop and grow further.

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