

STATEMENT

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND BORDER REGIONS

Forum of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
EuRegio Salzburg - Berchtesgadener Land - Traunstein
Cloister of Seeon, 12 March 2007

The new strategy of the European Commission regarding rural areas, taking into account the Göteborg and the Lisbon approaches relies mainly on competitiveness, environmental protection, quality of life and diversification of the rural economy. It is also focused in the horizontal priority of improving governance and mobilising their endogenous development potential.

In this framework, it is a task of Member States to ensure complementarity and coherence of measures financed by the different European Funds in certain geographical areas and fields of action. In fact, it is very important to adjust measures to every particular situation, for example, the different starting position of new Member States regarding the Common Agricultural Policy, or the case of border areas both at internal and external borders. In fact, border areas are particularly affected by all kind of territorial trends and challenges.

Rural areas could be strengthened as polycentric structures with new opportunities for employment, taking into account their respective development level. We are not talking only about agricultural policies, but also about other European and national policies, specially the structural ones, which must be better coordinated.

European Rural Border Regions require completely different measures from urban or suburban areas, and this is specially so in sparsely populated border areas with major structural problems. To actively support them it is necessary to strengthen new forms of concentration, to promote economic development and education, to offer adequate and accessible services, to maintain and develop good transport links and public transportation services, etc.

So, the European Border Regions, having met in Cloister Seeon, declare their need to tackle several specific measures and address the Council of Ministers of the EU in Leipzig on 24 and 25 May 2007:

1. Agricultural actions in border areas should be coordinated with spatial development, transport and regional policies in a cross-border manner.
2. The European Territorial policy allows cross-border programmes and actions. However, agricultural programmes within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are nationalised or regionalised. If solely the Leader provisions include a cross-border focus, border regions should be involved in the elaboration process of joint cross-border agricultural programmes and projects.
3. The critical mass for reasonable investments and projects in border regions can only be achieved through cross-border co-operation. Member States should enhance the opportunities for rural border areas promoting their participation and strengthening the cooperation of local and regional authorities across the borders by any means.
4. National Agricultural Fund programmes should include existing cross-border models and approaches, as they have shown their positive impact in previous programming periods.
5. Key actors involved in cross-border co-operation must ensure that national agricultural programmes and regional cross-border development programmes are coherent, and projects and resources can be jointly used in a cross-border manner.
6. There should be an active support of cross-border models and strategies to contribute to rural development in terms of complementarity, creation of critical mass, creation of cross-border catchment ar-

measures for employment opportunities, services of general interest, etc., specially taking into account the shortages of financial resources in all Member States.