

To the AEBR members

Gronau, 30 September 2003

F:\DATA\WP\WINALG\AGEG\2003\Briefe09\RS Maritime Kooperation\Maritime Kooperation 3009 GB.doc

Maritime cross-border cooperation

Dear Sir or Madam,

During our last Executive Committee meeting, we discussed the seminar on cross-border cooperation to be held in Sicily on 15 October 2003 as part of the Italian presidency of the Council. There were related discussions among members of the Executive Committee on maritime cooperation, which will also play a major role in this seminar. As such, we would like to set out AEBR's position again below.

- 1) We welcome and support all forms of maritime cooperation (cross-border, interregional or transnational). As an association, our main focus is understandably cross-border cooperation, i.e. daily cooperation in all areas of life between neighbouring regions along a (water) border, in line with the definition of INTERREG A.
- 2) As shown by the evaluation of maritime cooperation and the INTERREG IIA programme, there are different levels of cooperation along sea borders (see also enclosed extracts from the Practical Guide to Cross-Border Cooperation, published by the European Commission, Regional Policy DG and an AEBR document, annexes 1 + 2). These statements are generally confirmed by recent evaluations by the European Commission.
- 3) For the seminar on cross-border cooperation as part of the Italian presidency of the Council, we sent out the enclosed letter (see Annex 3) at the request of the organisers. It met with widespread approval during the preparatory discussions. In the letter, we call for confrontation between regions on land and sea borders to be avoided and for INTERREG A to be retained as a unit. This is because a special maritime programme would almost certainly result in demands for a programme to benefit mountain regions, river regions and so forth.
- 4) Maritime border regions should all cooperate with a neighbour on the other side of the border, with this cooperation taking a variety of forms depending on the respective needs and the opportunities available.
- 5) There are examples of successful maritime cooperation under A (e.g. Åland/Kvarken/Øresund, Kent/Nord-Pas-de-Calais, etc.) as well as instances where such successful cooperation has not been possible due to the considerable

distance involved or the political situation, as has especially been the case at a few external maritime borders (e.g. Italy/Greece and Andalusia/Morocco).

Where the intensive cross-border maritime cooperation demonstrated by the positive examples is possible (daily/all areas), further neighbouring maritime regions should be fostered under INTERREG A in the future, e.g. between Sicily and Malta.

- 6) However, there are also coastal regions which are unable to maintain this intensive cooperation due to the considerable over-water distance separating them but which could launch very meaningful and profitable joint projects and strategies in selected sectors. This bilateral cooperation between neighbouring maritime regions should be promoted by INTERREG B or C. The preferred option would be INTERREG C, which should be adjusted accordingly to favour immediate bilateral cooperation between regions over greater distances (including neighbouring maritime regions): this is indeed the way in which the word *interregional* should be interpreted. As such, sufficient financial resources should be made available under INTERREG C (e.g. from INTERREG B).
- 7) The survival of INTERREG A would be in question if, for example, all of Italy's maritime regions were to be accepted (one reason for this is the fact that A receives the largest proportion of EU INTERREG resources). This is because a demand would almost certainly follow for all the coastal regions of Spain, Sweden, Germany or the United Kingdom and Ireland, which have not previously been covered by INTERREG A, to be included as well.
- 8) On the future allocation of resources under INTERREG: it is likely that there will be a separate EU regulation for INTERREG (within or outside the Structural Fund). This would raise the following points for discussion:
 - joint allocation of resources by border or by programme and not by Member State. This could have a positive effect on the quality of programmes;
 - development of cross-border criteria, e.g. the joint economic situation (such as cross-border gross domestic product, purchasing power, etc.);
 - can the 'accumulation' of EU money on one side of the border through national Objective 1 areas – which has clearly hindered cooperation – be avoided? Can this national situation better be taken into consideration by means of joint criteria, especially if there were actual joint accounts for INTERREG?

We hope that this outline of our position will launch a forward-looking discussion.

Best regards,

Jens Gabbe
Secretary General

Annex 1

The type of actions is linked to the level of connection / degree of separateness in the border regions, and can be classified into three categories:

- **sea bound activities** have generated the most genuine examples of cross-border cooperation on borders with close connections. This cooperation normally includes transport, environment, and resource management. In some cases, such actions have provided a focus for strategic cross-border development as in the development of cross-border networks. However, sea-bound actions are by themselves sufficient to achieve a fully integrated cross-border approach, and this is manifested especially in more separated border regions where actions have tended to be parallel rather than cross-border and generally most of the infrastructure takes the form of stand-alone projects;
- actions of a genuine **cross-border nature**, often build on an extension of sea bound cooperation and include actions in the areas of tourism and economic development. For example, cross-border tourism projects are often built on the improvement in transport infrastructure which facilitates access to/from the region and the joint exploitation of tourism potential. Similarly, economic development is promoted through improved cross-border transport connections and environmental improvements. Cooperation on labour market matters, including training and other human resources projects, represents the most advanced indication of a high degree of connection between the two sides of the border. Maritime border regions which are closely connected have the potential to treat the two border regions as a single economic unit and have the potential to generate genuine cross-border cooperation in tourism, economic development and labour market/human resources
- actions of an **inter-regional** nature are most prevalent in border regions which are most separated and focus on the development of linkages and exchanges of experience between local governments, NGOs, chambers of commerce etc. However, even in closely connected borders many of the preparatory and early-stage projects tend to be of a less intensive nature akin to inter-regional cooperation. The absence of a tradition in cross-border cooperation, a cross-border strategy, and an effective cross-border structure will militate against genuine cross-border actions, and is likely to result in isolated cooperation actions along inter-regional lines.

\\server\daten\DATA\WPWINALG\AGEG\2003\Briefe09\Leygues 2509.doc

Annex 2

Maritime borders

Maritime border regions are found on both the internal and external borders of the EU. They include various stages of development, from Objective 1 regions to regions without Objective status under the European Structural Funds. Only certain maritime border regions are eligible for INTERREG assistance (four maritime programmes under INTERREG I and 17 maritime programmes along the EU's internal and external borders under INTERREG IIA). The Nordic countries have a particularly long tradition of cooperation on maritime borders.

Key elements favouring close cross-border cooperation on maritime borders are:

- a short distance between the shores of border regions, plus good transport links (ports, ferries), which enable "gateway" functions for the free movement of goods and persons and for international transport;
- in some cases where the border regions are very close to each other, access was improved further by creating fixed links between the coasts concerned (e.g. via the tunnel under the English Channel linking the UK and France, and the bridge over the Øresund between Denmark and Sweden); and
- strong historical ties and cultural similarities (e.g. between Denmark/Sweden/Finland, between Estonia/Finland or between Ireland/Wales).

The priorities for the maritime border regions include the following main aspects:

- general upgrading of transport links, particularly in Objective 1 regions (e.g. GR/I), to overcome access difficulties. This applies to the type of transport (ferries, trains, etc.), the time needed to travel from one border region to another, costs, distance (proximity of regions on the two sides of the border), and specific issues:
 - the "gateway" function as stimulus and transit link to international markets (e.g. Finland/Sweden);
 - gaps in the transport infra-structure and in the transport and communication network linking both border regions (access points),
 - environmental monitoring, protection and management, joint development and management of natural resources;
 - strengthening the cross-border region as an economic unit. This involves in particular maritime border regions situated very close to each other with strong historical and cultural ties (joint actions in economic development, tourism, cooperation between companies, research and training), (e. g. Åland-Islands);
 - the challenge for regions located farther apart from each other is to develop contacts and networks between very different authorities and organisations in the framework of interregional cooperation.

In the case of **internal maritime border programmes** there are important differences which can basically be grouped together geographically (see Table 1).

All five programmes in the Northern group (Fyn-Kern, Storstrom-Ostholstein, Øresund, Aland and Kvarken-MittSkandia - S/F) have permanent, regional/local cross-border structures which have been responsible for practically all technical aspects of developing and managing INTERREG IIA programmes. With the exception of Øresund, all these programmes have a common bank account for EU contributions.

This contrasts with the three Southern European programmes (Greece-Italy, Corsica-Sardinia, Corsica-Tuscany), which are underdeveloped in terms of cross-border institutional arrangements, but there are initial signs of an important bottom-up initiative to create permanent structures at the regional and local levels.

The three Western European programmes (Ireland-Wales, Rives-Manche and Kent-Nord-Pas-de-Calais) are an intermediate form where specific cross-border programme management arrangements have been created for the purposes of INTERREG. These arrangements do not involve common structures, but instead the coordinated work of competent central and regional/local government authorities and social partners from both sides of the border, through joint committees and working groups. In this way, programme development and the technical aspects of programme management are conducted with a high degree of cross-border cooperation.

Under INTERREG IIA there are no cross-border structures and procedures used for programme development and management for the **external maritime programmes**... The only exception is the Swedish/Norwegian component of the Kvarken/MittSkandia programme (SF/ S/N), where the Kvarken Council has responsibility for programme management. However, this is a mixed type programme encompassing both internal and external EU borders and both land and sea borders.

\\server\daten\DATA\WPWINALG\AGEG\2003\Briefe09\Leygues 2509.doc

Francesco Attaguile
Regione Siciliana
Brussels Office
Bastion Tower, level 21
5, Place du Champ de Mars
B-1050 Brussels

Gronau, 8 September 2003

F:\DATA\WP\WING\AGEG\2003\Briefe\09\RS Maritime Kooperation\Annex 3 GB.doc

Seminar to be held on 13–14 October in Sicily

Dear Mr Attaguile,

Please accept my sincere congratulations on the plans for the conferences organised as part of the Italian presidency of the Council.

Please find enclosed a draft of our paper on the future shape of cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation and the role of the EU and regional/local authorities.

As previously discussed in Brussels, I suggest that the working title of the conference be adjusted slightly to read '*Les frontières de la nouvelle Europe – problèmes et perspectives*' ('Borders of the new Europe – problems and perspectives') (the following could possibly also be added: 'Focus on new external borders and Mediterranean maritime regions').

Since this is a seminar focusing on future developments, I would recommend omitting the phrase '*Régions à objectif '1*' ('Objective 1 areas'); in the future, the term 'Objective 1' will mainly be linked psychologically and financially to the Associated States. Sooner or later, southern Europe will cease to be an Objective 1 area. Furthermore, there is a new INTERREG regulation which will more than likely be separate from the Structural Fund. It is therefore not at all certain that 'Objective 1' will continue to be used as the standard for Community initiatives. It has even proved to be a problem in INTERREG A cross-border cooperation when one side of the border has amassed 'huge heaps of money' through Objective 1 areas whilst the other side has not. This poses more of a hindrance to cooperation. Efforts are being made to develop joint criteria for a cross-border area as a whole, which will definitely include level of development, income and so forth.

We should also avoid a confrontation between land and maritime borders at the event. Creating a special maritime programme under INTERREG may open the way for calls for a mountain areas programme, or a flooding or drought programme for river areas and so on. This would put the entire INTERREG initiative in political danger. The allure and political recognition of INTERREG A are due largely to the

fact that the programme applies to the whole of Europe, with the level of course depending on the respective economic needs. If all maritime borders now push to join INTERREG A because that is where the most money is available, this will most likely signal the end of A in the current EU. If all Italian maritime borders are included, then there is nothing to stop all maritime borders in Spain, England, Sweden and Germany also pushing their way in.

However, due to the considerable distance between the border areas, many maritime border areas are unable to meet the very strict standard for INTERREG A (cooperation of immediate neighbouring areas along a border in all areas of life and all sectors). For example, the Italy/Greece and Andalusia/Morocco cross-border programmes have been strongly criticised because a great deal of money is spent there and, according to A criteria, very little is happening or can happen. This is not a criticism of maritime border areas but rather a statement of fact. Nevertheless, there has also been successful maritime cooperation under INTERREG A, where neighbouring border areas are, however, located in close geographical proximity (e.g. Åland, Øresund, Kent-Nord-Pas de Calais and, in the future, Sicily/Malta, etc.).

In maritime border regions, efforts should focus on what can successfully be achieved when considerable distances are involved: cooperation in selected sectors. Accordingly, transnational and interregional cooperation would need to be structured less around studies and more around actual cooperation projects - especially in maritime areas - with corresponding financial support. Between now and 2007, a new, improved, creative approach needs to be found. Our proposal is therefore aimed at promoting action geared towards specific requirements in order to ensure success. Consideration also needs to be given to the future evaluation of INTERREG programmes and the methods for verifying results in the light of the strict checks required by the European Parliament.

These thoughts on maritime areas are initial ideas to be discussed.

I am, of course, always available to answer any questions you, your colleagues or the Italian government may have.

Unfortunately, I cannot attend the meeting in Rome on 2 October but am able to come to Brussels in the meantime to discuss this further with you and reach an agreement.

Best regards,

Jens Gabbe
Secretary General