

**Communication from the European Commission**  
**“Paving the way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument”**  
([http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/we/doc/com03\\_393\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/we/doc/com03_393_en.pdf))

**1st July 2003 [COM(2003) 393 final]**

**Statement of AEBR**

**August 2003**

## 1. Generalities

AEBR as unique European regional organisation dealing exclusively with cross-border issues, welcomes the political orientation of the EU communication „Paving the way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument“. It supports the EU's intention to better coordinate existing funding programmes and its proceeding in two phases (short-term until 2006 and long-term from 2007 onwards).

The EU enlargement in 2004 represents a big challenge both to the currently existing as well as future external land and sea borders, especially to Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia and the Southern Mediterranean Sea: security, stability and sustainable development for the citizens on either side of the border need to be ensured. For that purpose it is necessary to further deepen cross-border socio-cultural contacts, also outside EU programmes (see annexe: added value of cross-border cooperation).

## 2. Content of the EU communication in detail

### Ad II. Targets, 6 (Box):

In the **East** there are also border regions without close cultural relations. On the contrary: Fear and prejudice dominate among the population (e.g. Western border of Belarus and Ukraine), since after the Second World War population was expelled and a foreign population was settled. Psychologically sensible relations also exist between Moldavia, Romania and the Ukraine.

In the **South East** (Balkan) populations were killed in wars, expelled and newly settled. Historical relations contrast with fear and prejudices, sometimes also cultural relations are missing.

*Ad 8.1 Promoting sustainable economic and social development in the border areas*  
Declarations remain too general. As regards cross-border cooperation with INTERREG, one should speak of a strategic, programmatic approach in the development of cooperation. The currently low salaries and transport costs are only in the short-term an economic advantage which creates jobs. In the long-term the border areas of EU neighbouring states must also be led to a modern economic development (e.g. increasing salaries and costs). Otherwise situations such as on the border between the USA and Mexico will be the consequence.

### *Ad 8.3 Ensuring efficient and secure borders*

Concrete declarations are missing such as how cross-border cooperation can meet the challenges. The attached proposal of AEBR presents two possibilities of how cross-border could be deepened on future external borders respecting the Schengen rules.

### *Ad 8.4 Promoting local "people-to-people" type actions*

Please see statements in II.6.

Cross-border cooperation at regional and local level is, as can be proved, most appropriate to lead cross-border cooperation to success.

### **Ad III. State-of-Play of Current Co-Operation, figure 9**

Existing differences between EU funding programmes must be eliminated. They do not only make it difficult to realise jointly projects but especially **joint programmes** : INTERREG is a multi-annual integrated programme which is not the case for funding programmes outside the EU.

#### *About the TACIS-Programme (Box):*

The TACIS-Programme knows projects, but no Operational Programmes. Cross-border cooperation is only a general chapter (sub-programme) under TACIS. Decentralisation is practically non-existent. Therefore a real cooperation with INTERREG also in the framework of „small project facilities“ is rather an exception.

In MEDA there are fundamental perception differences as regards cross-border co-operation and therefore INTERREG A.

#### *Ad 10. Joint legal framework conditions and procedures*

The declarations are confirmed. However, a programmatic approach under INTERREG means something different to the one currently practised under PHARE, CARDS, TACIS or MEDA. In addition, partners should define in future jointly what would be eligible.

### **Ad IV. Towards a Neighbourhood Instrument: A Two Phase Approach**

#### *Ad 11.*

Despite of all progress made there are still significant differences between INTERREG A / PHARE CBC. The progress achieved with INTERREG A / TACIS CBC is not a result of changes in TACIS, but rather the fruit of the flexibility and guidance of the Finnish side.

Different legal and budgetary conditions do not only exist on external border but throughout the whole EU. These can be surmounted by the partners concerned only prior to the joint programmes, not after adoption of the programmes. The EU cannot force partners to develop joint compromises in the programme-development phase.

#### *Ad 12.*

The two phases approach seems to be realistic. After 2007 external EU programmes (especially, when INTERREG will receive an own decree in the future) should reserve in their budget a certain percentage to cross-border cooperation (similarly to PHARE CBC). **External programmes must adjust to INTERREG and not vice versa.** Different legal instructions in external funding programmes can in the future be changed through a political fundamental decision by the Commission on how co-operation beyond borders will be delivered in future.

#### *Ad 1st Phase 2004-2006: Introducing Neighbourhood Programmes*

In this phase one should already try to deliver training on EU INTERREG rules in external funding programmes for the phase from 2007 onwards (e.g.. programmatic and multi-annual approach, decentralisation). In particular time-related processes need to be coordinated when it comes to a decision about projects. The role of existing cross-border structures must be clarified (e.g. euroregions or similar structures).

*Ad 20.*

The suggestion to fix a total volume for external programmes is welcomed. The EU should even make one path further: joint financial means for individual borders improve individual programmes.

*Ad Phase 2 after 2006: A New Neighbourhood Instrument*

*Ad 22.*

As under INTERREG also the external programmes must distinguish between cross-border cooperation as well as interregional and trans-national cooperation (also under annexe 1). Cross-border projects are significantly different from B and C. A "mix" would efface the necessary clear differences in projects and criteria and conceal risks for their evaluation. It is referred to the current discussion between Member States and the EU as far as practical results of A are concerned in comparison to B and C.

The big geo-political targets can be covered better by INTERREG B and C. C should not only facilitate bigger networks, regional framework operations, etc., but also cooperation between neighbouring regions having to overcome bigger distances (e.g. certain maritime regions). These cannot meet the severe content of INTERREG A, but still collaborate in a sensitive way in certain sectors.

*Ad 25.*

A proper INTERREG-decree could facilitate from 2007 on also the use of INTERREG-funds outside the EU (in a limited geographic area).

Even if also in the future two different instruments continue to be applicable, one basic rule needs to prevail:

**External funding programmes adapt to INTERREG rules and not vice versa.**

This needs to be fixed as political aim of the EU in view of the planned substantial alterations to all external decrees, and needs to be changed for external funding programmes.

In this context, the following issues are important on future external borders :

- The introduction of multi-annual operational programmes for cross-border cooperation with a fixed financial framework and a guaranteed co-financing at national and regional level on either side of the border.
- A decentralisation of external funding programmes dictated by the EU (which is gradually possible after an appropriate training in the years 2004-2007).
- A clear definition by the EU Commission in the next INTERREG communication for all future programmes, also valid for external funding programmes.
  - o What is a cross-border programme?
  - o What is a cross-border structure?
  - o What is a cross-border project?
  - o What is a joint bank account?
- Joint applicable actions need to be defined in advance in the programmes to be presented.

The attribution of EU-funds for cross-border cooperation in future neighbourhood programmes at external borders must be bound to essential criteria which guarantee the success of the cooperation. Different legal systems, structures and budgetary

conditions at national level or different instructions for EU funding programmes must not be an obstacle to achieve actual cross-border programmes, projects and structures in a new neighbourhood programme after 2007.

The EU has now the opportunity to define a corresponding future orientation with the principle:

**INTERREG rules are valid also on new external borders.**

All other programmes need to adjust to them.

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**Annexe:** Added value of cross-border cooperation

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