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## **"Cross-Border-Cooperation in the New European Territorial Cooperation ETC"**

**Speech at the conference of AEBR (Association of European Border Regions) "Cross Border Cooperation: Best Practice and Future Opportunities" in Trim, County Meath, Ireland, 13-6-2013**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for having invited me to this conference.

I'm pleased to be here, because we are at a crucial moment in the preparation of the next programming period of our Cohesion and Regional Policy. Therefore we regard the exchange of experiences between us and you also as an excellent opportunity to listen and to collect helpful suggestions .

First time ever there will be a separate regulation for ETC, which shows its importance. But as you already know, the future ETC will be maintained and continued to run on its three 'traditional' rails cross-border cooperation, transnational cooperation and interregional cooperation. About the budgets for each of them I cannot say you anything precise yet because the original proposal to increase the overall budget for our Cohesion policy by 15% and –among it – the ETC budget by 30% has recently been rejected by the Member States. In contrast, they have requested a cut of 5% of the whole Cohesion Policy compared to the current programming period. The only good news so far are for ETC: Here the Member States did not cut the ETC envelop but seem to wish to maintain at least the current budgetary level. Currently the EU-institutions are negotiating about the budgetary issues, but we are confident that a solution will be found soon.

To come to cross border cooperation: We do not envisage substantial changes in the geography of CBC-programms.

During 2007-2013 we have 53 programmes, and for 2014-2020 it will be 56-57 programmes. The small increase in the number of programmes is due:

- to the accession of Croatia and the creation of 3 new programmes
- to the new status of outermost regions (Mayotte)
- to the proposal to transform the current transnational MAC (Madeira – Acores – Canarias) programme into a CBC programme

Out of the future 56 or 57 CBC programmes:

- 32 programmes have proceeded with ex-ante evaluations and are in different stages of the SEA process.

- 21 programmes have agreed their program area, but the majority of the programmes is still discussing the inclusion of additional areas which are not part of the current programming geography.
- And equally 21 programmes have already agreed on joint structures and their location.

To prepare the new ETC there were more than 115 task force/programming group meetings organised, the big majority of which Commission services have attended. Several informal bilateral meetings were organised with the Commission and among the partners during the annual event for the current CBC programmes (last 22 and 23 April). And the CBC-program AT-CZ has even submitted to the Commission a first draft of the operational programme – to give an example of a very timely reply to our requests.

So far a snapshot of the current CBC-landscape.

In the current programming period, we have achieved a great deal with supporting regional development projects. However, in these tough times of a financial and economic crisis, we have to make a further effort to fully exploit the potential of all instruments and programmes the EU Regional Policy offers to us, and particularly of the European Territorial Cooperation.

This concretely demands from us to

- o To design more strategic initiatives
- o To make sure that we address the real big problems, as sustainable energy, environment, growth of jobs, etc.
- o To play a full part in implementing the objectives of our Lisbon-successor-strategy "Europe 2020"
- o To manage cooperation programmes more efficiently and to obtain the best results – "result orientation" is the slogan.
- o To emphasize the cross-border and transnational aspects of regional cooperation (the interconnectors, the joint initiatives)

To illustrate what I meant by "emphasizing cross-border and transnational aspects of regional cooperation let me give you some good examples such as "CODE 24" or the "University of Greater Region":

\*\*\*\*The project "CODE24" facilitates the interconnection of economic development, spatial, transport and ecological planning along the trans-European railway axis (TEN-T) n. 24 from Rotterdam to Genoa (across the Netherlands, Germany, France, Switzerland and Italy).

CODE 24 considers by the way to make use of the EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) as a legal base.

\*\*\*\*The project "University of Greater Region (UGR)" has created a multicultural higher education and research space by bringing together seven different universities from the Greater Region (Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg)

In the next programming period, we can and should be even more **ambitious** in our approach to regional cooperation..

Therefore the 2014-2020 draft regulations which we proposed for our new Regional Policy now integrates cooperation aspects in the strategic framework at a number of different levels. To mention four of them:

- First, we have the classic cooperation activities carried out under the European Territorial Cooperation goal (ETC)
- As a second aspect, the contribution of ETC-programmes to the implementation of Macro-Regional and Sea-basin strategies has to be mentioned;
- Third, there will be joint actions with beneficiaries from different Member States financed through the respective "Investment for Growth and Jobs" programmes (articles 87 and 60 of the Common Provisions Regulation);
- And last but not least, the European Social Fund includes also a transnational cooperation component.

As an example for macroregional cooperation I mention the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) which encourages vital environmental cooperation projects, necessary to restore the ecological balance of this sensitive and vulnerable sea.

- Concretely, a project called "Baltic deal" aims to raise awareness on agri-environmental practises. With the support of the EU-transnational cooperation programme "Baltic Sea Region", farmers from the entire region are encouraged to improve their know-how by showcasing their own environmental actions to each other or by learning from demonstration-farms abroad. Methods to reduce fertiliser and manure run-off have been developed, and their use promoted.
- And, since we are here in Ireland, which has engaged in the launch of the EU Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area (the so-called "Atlantic Strategy"), I mention an other example. The objective of the project "Climatlantic" is to cooperate, among other issues, in the reduction of the carbon footprint in the Atlantic Ocean Area. This involves setting up four thematic think-tanks to address key topics in which substantial reductions of the carbon footprint are promoted. These topics are Energy, Mobility, Spatial Planning and Social Behaviour. This project examines how urban development plans, transport systems and public attitudes should be re-oriented in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

But let me come back a moment to our intention to make the new Regional Policy more result oriented and –to say it clearly- we do not regard "output" or "activity" alone as a result, but only an output or activity which has an impact too. To achieve more results with significant impact, better **co-ordination** at all levels concerned between the instruments at our disposal is a precondition: Therefore the Common Strategic Framework and the Partnership Agreements between each Member State and the Commission will be used to ensure that the different funds produce synergies and reinforce each other in their effect.

Furtheron, please remember that the Partnership Agreement will set out the main priority areas for cooperation between regions, and you should make sure your voice is heard in that regard. These priority areas should for example include:

- infrastructure needs of border areas
- risk prevention challenges to be addressed in a transnational context is the objective of the project "Climatlantic"
- specific development potentials that could be realised through cooperation cluster initiatives. (For example, research networks, joint tourism development)

You certainly have already heard that another new aspect of the next Regional Policy is more "thematic concentration" – also this principle we wish you to follow in order to achieve better impacts of our joint efforts and funding. It has shown, that if we spread many small projects over a big number of thematic objectives, we only get projects which eachone lacks the critical mass to have a real "impact". Therefore we also want the ETC-stakeholders, - you- , to plan projects only in view of thematic concentration and the clear definition of investment priorities. While the "normal" Regional Policy will request that in the advanced regions 80% of our funding should be concentrated on the three objectives SME, energy and research & innovation, ETC projects will enjoy more flexibility.

It is envisaged that 80% of ETC-funding has to be concentrated on 4 thematic objectives freely chosen from the list of 11 enumerated objectives in the regulation.

The priorities which are attached to each thematic objective should also align with the key priorities identified at Member State level, which are central to the country-specific programmes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude and resume my statement with some key messages for all who take part in ETC initiatives in the next programming period. Special efforts should be made in the following domains:

- We need a broader scope of cooperation. This could be achieved by creating new innovation and R&D structures, and information platforms.
- The development of businesses and employment initiatives generated by local projects in ETC programmes has to be accelerated, especially by fostering the inclusion of populations into the labour market who face the risk to be marginalised or who are already deprived.
- ETC programmes should also keep in mind that better cooperation initiatives do not only imply improving the process of cooperation (by fostering the communication between governance structures) but also delivering better outputs and results.
- We need the improvement of the capacities to address cross-cutting issues, for example by establishing legal frameworks which citizens living on both sides of the border can benefit from.
- It is – according to the slogan "publish or perish" – indispensable to increase the visibility of cooperation initiatives. In this regard, the ETC day in September 2013 should play a key role.

- Particularly in times of scarce budgets it is unavoidable that European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes are to be opened to new forms of partnership with the private sector. In order to facilitate this process, it is clear that the so called financial instruments need to be applied more frequently than hitherto.
- I close this summary with the key words for territorial cooperation: focus, relevance, impact.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

the possibilities for European Territorial Cooperation are ready to be further exploited. We count on all the stakeholders to make use of them.

For the Commission, AEER has always been considered as a reliable partner. We count on your support for building trust between regions throughout Europe, as this is a precondition for making cooperation a valuable instrument for a successful European Integration process.