

NEW WAYS TOWARDS A NEW EUROPE



**A POLITICAL APPROACH FOR THE BENEFIT OF
CITIZENS AND REGIONS ALL ACROSS EUROPE**

***Future Regional Policy, Cohesion
and Community Initiatives***

***Association of European border regions
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I. Preconditions for new policies in an enlarged European Union

The **challenge** for the period as from **2007** lies in developing **new and flexible policies** regarding the Structural Funds, cohesion and the Community Initiatives in an enlarged European Union. Despite the given content-related and financial priorities these policies need to serve the manifold interests of the European Union as a whole. Instead of truncating the debate to EU support programmes it must rather entail a fundamental political as well as a socio-cultural and economic dimension.

New political, economic and social objectives for an enlarged EU require a **revision** and an **adaptation** of the existing instruments and not vice versa. A statistical shifting of EU subsidies from "West to East", justified by the existing instruments, as well as an EU retreat from spatial planning, regional policy and the Community Initiatives as they were pursued by the EU up to now would have fatal political, economic and social consequences.

Cohesion policy not merely means providing financial assistance to the most disadvantaged regions - it should first and foremost serve **the interests of the Community as a whole** (Article 158 of the EU Treaty)

II. Political approaches for a future-orientated regional and cohesion policy

An enlarged European Union requires a **territorial cohesion** and a consequent realisation of the "bottom-up"-principle considering subsidiarity and partnership.

A **coherent and sustainable political approach** as of 2007 needs to include and integrate all relevant aspects of EU policy, such as spatial planning, regional, agricultural and social policy, research and innovation etc.

With regard to the impacts of the European Unification and the Globalisation, this policy must increasingly encourage a **polycentric development of the Community Initiatives**, particularly by means of the EU Community Initiatives.

Such a policy requires not only common objectives, but also the knowledge that the socio-cultural basis in Europe and the Europe-wide cooperation (above all cross-border cooperation) is the basis for a sustainable economical development.

Given that the total volume of EU funding is limited and that there is a necessary priority for Central and Eastern Europe, the **GDP** seems to be **unsuitable** as the only or essential scale for a European structural and cohesion policy as long as the other side – the **cost side** – is **not taken into consideration**.

A future-orientated overall political strategy should provide for **different maximum levels of support within the enlarged EU as a whole**:

- High and targeted levels of support in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. 50 – 80%), taking into account the different regional situations in and between these countries;
- a reduced level of support within the current EU (e.g. for a short period up to 75 %, then 30-50%), possibly staggered over specified periods of time.

This approach not only takes into account the **differences with regard to co-financing capacities** and the changed realities in an enlarged EU, but also allows the harmonisa-

tion of the currently heterogeneous criteria for the individual EU policies (ESDP, Structural Funds, research and innovation). The key criteria GDP and employment need to be complemented by other relevant factors such as economic structure, innovation, accessibility and workforce skills.

III. A new policy with regard to the Community Initiatives

Integrating the Community Initiatives into the national mainstream programmes entails major risks:

- Every Member State would be free to decide whether or not to incorporate cross-border, transnational or interregional issues. As soon as one country opts to do so while the neighbouring country does not or sets different priorities, cross-border co-operation would become nearly impossible.
- The countries would lose interest in genuine cross-border programmes and projects.
- The Community Initiatives would basically be abolished for today's EU internal borders.

There **still exist** perceivable **differences** with regard to legal and **administrative systems or structures**, legislation relating to taxation, social issues and economic promotion, rescue systems, industrial law and workforce skills. These differences, which frequently trigger **new border problems**, not only affect the present and future external borders, but also continue to weigh on the EU internal borders. So far, the nation states have hardly, if at all, been in a position to come up with solutions. The border regions themselves will also not be able to overcome these problems without being granted assistance from the EU. Only with the implementation of **INTERREG** were **funds specifically spent on border areas** and thereby **bound by national co-financing**. With a termination of INTERREG such funding will inevitably vanish.

IV. Community Initiatives for the EU as a whole

In the wake of the EU enlargement the EU border and cross-border regions will gain importance as border areas account for 66% of the new Member States' total surface area and for 58% of their population.

The concept of "**Community Initiatives**" implies that the EU **assumes responsibility for all issues which are of major importance for the Community as a whole and for its future development**. This is why INTERREG must continue to cover all parts of Europe and address all types of border problems (and not only those of economic nature), which continue to exist or newly arise.

In case that the **Community Initiatives** will, despite the well-known problems, continue to be incorporated in the European Structural Funds they should at least be considered as an **independent political objective** (and not as Objective regions).

The current implementation of the Community Initiatives in the framework of the European Structural Funds entails considerable restrictions, obstacles and impediments:

IT WOULD THEREFORE BE ADVISABLE TO SEPARATE THE COMMUNITY INITIATIVES FROM THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS AS FROM 2007.

In the long run, the **Community Initiatives** will remain **the only funding instrument** which enables the **EU to reach citizens and regions all across Europe** and to implement subsidiarity and partnership while being close to its citizens.

With a separation from the Structural Funds, an increase of funds for the Community Initiatives, which might turn out to be necessary, would be easier to implement. The additional funds required to reach all of Europe under a system of staggered assistance would be minimal.

Each of these Community Initiatives should then be linked to a corresponding network, which operates all across Europe and is managed by the principal actors.

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