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Press release:

Borders can hinder entrepreneurship. Based on some studies enterprises in the border areas tap into only 50 percent of their target market. This is because many Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) perceive that their market ends at the border and does not extent across it. This is a shame, as the effect of borders should be as low as possible, at least within the so-called "Single Market". All of this without taking into account (yet) the current situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic, hopefully temporary.

Running from 1 August 2019 to 31 July 2022, Interreg Europe project INTER VENTURES brings partners from five European border regions together to promote internationalisation of SMEs in EU border regions. These partners are representing various stages of evolution of SME ecosystems, ranging from occasional cross-border cooperation, through more structured networking, to international clusterization.

Within the first year of Inter Ventures, project partners have been studying each other's good practices to apply the gained knowledge in their own environments within the second year. These good practices will be made public through the webpage of the Interreg programme, an EU instrument to promote territorial cooperation, in particular cross-border, which has become thirty years old in 2020. As an appetizer, here are some examples of these good practices that were shared among the partners.

The Chamber of Commerce of the Italian region of Lombardy region of Italy provides since 2012 support to companies considering investing/expanding in the region over a 12-month period. The assistance is mostly directed towards manufacturing and consulting enterprises, a sign that the attractiveness of the Lombardy region in those sectors is particularly strong.

In Spanish Castilla y León region, the practice 'Creative Accelerators for Sustainable Tourism' (CAST) envisions four types of actions, one of which is 'innovation and proof of concept'. In this action, innovation is based on

a literature review done by an expert partner. The SMEs in the region will be assisted through an innovative series of actions, such as special sessions in which SMEs and other project's partners exchange information on best practices. Noteworthy is that the project, as is indicated in its name, focuses on the tourism sector. Tourism is a growing sector in Castilla y León, with various UNESCO World Heritage sites, and an interesting historical and natural heritage.

In the Polish Podkarpackie (Subcarpathian) region, the weak intensity of SME internationalisation and cross-border cooperation is rooted in the general level of development of private entrepreneurship, financial systems and a weak business environment. Partners in the region are developing ways to combat these hurdles: "clusterization", in cooperation with the already existing Aeropolis Science and Technology Park in Rzeszów; and a more systematic networking between SMEs in the EU (Slovakia) and in non-EU territories (Ukraine) could provide opportunities for all sides of these borders.

The project Inter Ventures is supported by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) which acts as an advisory partner in the project. AEBR was founded in 1971 with the aim of making the voice of the European border and cross-border regions heard, defending their interests, and promoting cross-border cooperation at the internal and external borders of the EU, and beyond. With this project, AEBR tries to get more involved and gain a better knowledge about the role of SMEs in (cross-)border regions, whether these are highly populated and developed, or they have low and sparse populations in mostly rural or mountain areas.

Every region deserves a special attention and border regions still have many potential to exploit due to their location at an international boundary which has become less and less an obstacle, and more and more an opportunity thanks to Schengen, the Single Market, or Interreg. Among the opportunities, those related to the promotion of the regional economy are of utmost importance, including the internationalization of their SMEs, and the promotion of joint ventures, investments, or any other activity with their neighbours.

This is particularly notorious in these times of COVID-19, and we hope that the current pandemic will not leave any additional restriction to cross-border cooperation, and further obstacles for SMEs in these challenging territories will be further removed. Otherwise, the pressure of months of inactivity, the difficulties to achieve a minimum level of business, and additional problems in perspective could be the end of activity for many enterprises. For these reasons we have demanded a stronger EU support to border regions, enterprises and citizens in the forthcoming programming period 2021-2027, and a specific approach in this sense within the Recovery Package.

On 17th and 18th June 1971, ten European border and cross-border regions set up a Standing Conference of European Border Regions at the Anholt Castle (EUREGIO, Westphalia)