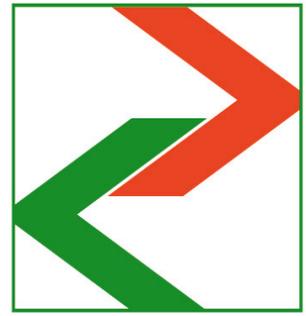




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CHARTER

FOR

EUROPEAN BORDER AND CROSS-BORDER

REGIONS

New version

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I. Preamble

In the last decennia the European Union, the Council of Europe, the European States, regional and local authorities have contributed to make borders on the European continent more and more permeable. Cross-border regions (euroregions and similar structures) represented by their umbrella organisation – the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) - have a particular role in this process. Due to their untiring commitment “on the spot” they have been able to develop and realise manifold contacts, common programmes and projects as well as other forms of cooperation.

In contrast to other continents, Europe is characterised by a dense network of borders, evolved historically, politically and/or economically. In the European Union almost one third of the 500 million inhabitants live in border regions covering approx. 40 % of the territory.

Nowadays, borders are

- of the one part "scars of history" and are becoming
- on the other part more and more places of encounter and cooperation with the neighbour.

Cross-border cooperation helps to mitigate the disadvantages of these borders, overcome the peripheral status of the border regions in their country, and improve the living conditions of the population in border regions. It encompasses all cultural, social, economic and infrastructural spheres of life. Having both knowledge and an understanding of a neighbour's distinctive social, cultural, linguistic and economic characteristics - ultimately the well-spring of mutual trust – as well as the political will are prerequisites for any successful cross-border cooperation.

The wide range of problems and opportunities on both sides of borders in Europe makes cross-border cooperation indispensable. It helps to make European principles and objectives tangible and real for citizens and regions. This cooperation of the regional/local level with the neighbours across the border is not only an essential piece in the mosaic for the economic, social and cultural development of a border region, but promotes as well peace, security and safeguarding of human rights and encourages the protection of ethnic and national minorities. Border and cross-border regions are thus building blocks and bridges in the process of European unification, as “cement of the European house”. The European Policy makes allowance for this fact through considering all border regions (on external and internal borders) as European priority and through funding.

Cross-border cooperation has a particular role due to the new challenges faced by many regions at internal and external borders of the EU, when creating their future. The increase of ethnical tension in some border regions demands new concepts of peaceful coexistence of different national, social and religious groups at both sides of a border. Migratory pressure, especially at the Southern external borders of the EU, requires tested and new forms of cross-border cooperation also across maritime borders. In the East and South East the often young cross-border cooperation structures face new problems while cooperating with their neighbours, in particular with those outside the EU. They in particular need support on a short term.

This Charter has the intention to make the objectives and added value of cross-border cooperation clear, even in a difficult political and economic environment. It is therefore consistent with the values and objectives of the Treaties of the European Union, the new EU Constitution and the Council of Europe.

“...AEBR has a stake in the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the EU.” (Walter Deffaa, Director General DG REGIO, Berlin, 8th November 2012)

II. Objectives of cross-border cooperation

1. The new quality of borders: meeting spaces

Europe is characterised by a manifold regional diversity with different geographical, ethnic and linguistic-cultural, social, political and economic conditions. This diversity and these structural conditions need to be considered, protected and further developed, in order to build a common European house and strengthen cross-border cooperation. Most people in Europe identify themselves with the region they live in. Therefore, regions are important components of the European house and of the European Union.

The 'human face' of European policy can show itself to its best advantage in places where the will to cooperate is vitally necessary and is put into practice, namely in border regions, that are the cement in the interfaces of the European house.

Border regions and cross-border regions contribute in crucial ways to increase tolerance and understanding between peoples - without however losing their rich cultural diversity – and therefore contribute to develop the principle of European integration. Economic problems, labour market issues (in particular training and employment for young people), access to public infrastructure and many other issues can often be solved only by using possibilities at the other side of the border. To this end, cross-border cultural cooperation with a large scale of close contacts between citizens is necessary in order to strengthen mutual understanding of the neighbours' customs and habits, needs of ethnic and national minorities, creating furthermore important impulses for multilingual education. All these elements create an important basis for a successful cross-border economy.

In border and cross-border regions a 'back-to-back' existence must be transformed into a 'face-to-face' coexistence, by dismantling barriers and impediments at borders, in particular in daily cross-border working life and in the fields of social affairs, health and education.

Nowhere is the need to overcome obstacles and barriers created by borders, which can then reoccur due to national laws despite the existence of the EU, more apparent than in the border regions of neighbouring countries. Something that is 'European theory' for someone living in the interior of a country often represents daily practical experience for citizens living in a border area who suffer the consequences of the border's existence and therefore want to see the causes of those difficulties removed. The willingness of citizens, communities and regions to seek cross-border solutions together does not entail any intention to shift borders or do away with nation States' sovereignty. The sole aims are to heal the 'scars of history', enable the population in the vicinity of borders to cooperate more effectively in all areas of life, improve living conditions for border residents and realise 'a citizens' Europe'.

2. Cross-border partnership and sustainable cooperation

Achieving partnership and subsidiarity through improved coordination and intensive cooperation amongst local, regional, national and European decision-makers is indispensable for a 'bottom-up' development of Europe.

This principle applies in particular to European border and cross-border regions, as large-scaled partnership between all relevant key actors is crucial for solving specific problems and exploiting existing opportunities in an optimal manner.

In this context, the establishment of sustainable functional structures for the regional and local cross-border cooperation and of other cross-border networks is crucial. This does not mean

the creation of a new administrative level, but intensive and successful political, economic-infrastructural and in particular socio-cultural cooperation across borders. Consequently, cross-border structures can be bridges and help to solve problems along European borders, thanks to their regional knowledge and proximity, offering better development perspectives for border and cross-border regions. Therefore, they should be supported and promoted by all national and European institutions and political forces.

3. *Territorial integration of a cross-border region and political will*

Economic and socio-cultural development of a cross-border region is directly linked to European integration and reinforced large-scale economic and social integration. Cooperation of border regions for common development complements planning and measures of local and regional authorities, according to directives of national planning and European development visions.

The overall objective of these development efforts is a stronger geographical integration of cross-border regions. The goal of common cooperation structures and development of practical procedures and instruments is to facilitate the removal of obstacles and foster the elimination of divisive factors. The ultimate objective is to transcend borders and reduce their importance to mere administrative boundaries, allowing people at these interfaces of the European house to realise their right to equal living conditions, free movement and improved mobility in this 'new' Europe.

Deciding for the success of cross-border co-operation and stronger territorial integration is - apart from treaties, EU regulations, loan programs and co-operation structures - the political will of national governments and also of the regional / local authorities.

III. *The added value of cross-border cooperation*

The **economic added value** becomes apparent in the respective border regions, albeit in different ways, through:

- the mobilisation of its specific endogenous potential through inclusion of its neighbours,
- opening up of the labour market,
- harmonisation of professional qualifications,
- additional development, e.g. through cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises as well as in the fields of health care, universities, research&innovation, tourism, the environment, education,
- the improvement of cross-border transport infrastructure,
- the improvement of cross-border transport, including public transport,
- by strengthening the regional and local levels as partners for and initiators of cross-border cooperation,
- the participation of actors from the economic and social sectors (for example, chambers of commerce, associations, companies, trade unions, cultural and social institutions, environmental organisations and tourism agencies),
- sustainable improvements in the planning of spatial development and regional policy (including the environment).

Socio-cultural added value is reflected in:

- being a constituent element of regional development, as only if socio-cultural cooperation takes place, a workable cross-border environment for economy, trade and services established,
- lasting, repeated dissemination of knowledge about the geographical, structural, economic, socio-cultural and historical situation of a cross-border region (including with the media's help),
- the overview of a cross-border region afforded in common maps, publications, teaching material, and so on,
- the development of a circle of committed experts (multipliers), such as churches, schools, youth and adult educational establishments, the conservation authorities, cultural associations, libraries, museums, artists, writers, journalists, and so forth,
- extensive knowledge of the language of the neighbouring country or of dialects as a basic condition of communication based on equal opportunities.

Institutional added value entails:

- active involvement by the citizens, authorities, political and social groups on both sides of the border,
- secure knowledge about one's neighbour (regional authorities, social partners, etc.),
- joint drafting, implementation and financing of cross-border programmes and projects,
- long-term cross-border cooperation in structures that are capable of working efficiently, as a legally accepted target of aid and a working partner, receiving and administering funds.

Political added value involves making a substantial contribution towards:

- the development of Europe and European integration,
- getting to know each other, getting on together, understanding each other and building trust,
- the implementation of subsidiarity and partnership,
- increased economic and social cohesion,
- preparing for the accession of new members;
- using EU funding to secure cross-border cooperation via multiannual programmes, and ensuring that the necessary national and regional co-financing is committed in the long term.

European added value arises from

- the fact that in the light of past experience, people who are living together in neighbouring border regions want to cooperate
- and thereby make a valuable contribution to the promotion of peace, freedom, security and the observance of human rights
- the fact that people in border regions in the new EU member States and in third countries can learn from areas with longer experience in the field of CBC.

IV. Cross-border cooperation - a European task and one of the EU's political objectives

Borders are “scars of history”. We must not forget these scars, but we should not cultivate them when taking the decisions that will decide the future of Europe.

Social, cultural and political life in the European States and regions are very varied. Apart from a long-lasting ethnic and linguistic-cultural variety, over the centuries different political systems and administrative structures, political competences (as spatial planning, economic promotion, media landscape, etc.) as well as tax systems and social systems have been developed. This variety is the richness of Europe and the basis of regional identity that needs to be maintained and strengthened.

Citizens have grown up in these different socio-cultural, national and regional environments. They will not always wish to sacrifice aspects of their everyday lives for the cause of European harmonisation, particularly where this would result in the loss of Europe's diversity.

Despite the reduction of barriers, especially along the EU's internal borders, and growing mobility, these different social and cultural environments (including the various administrative structures and systems) will continue to exist for many decades to come, and will encounter each other at borders. This will continue to generate manifold consequences for border regions: economic disadvantage, often caused by marginal national and often also European location, but also and in particular by social and legal-administrative obstacles faced by citizens living in border regions, hindering them in day-to-day exchange across borders.

No State in Europe – inside or outside the EU – will alter its tried and trusted political structures, competencies and legal systems on account of the problems that arise in border regions. Furthermore, no State is able to draft its laws in such a way that they harmonise with all the neighbouring States on its borders.

Cross-border cooperation at regional/local level will therefore remain a necessity over the long term. The sovereignty of the State ends at its borders. Citizens and regions however need sustainable solutions for their specific problems related to the border, not just in order to prevent cross-border conflicts and overcome psychological barriers, but, above all, in order to facilitate an instrument that will balance and reconcile these differences, through Euroregions and similar structures. Partnerships of this kind need to be cultivated within regions, with all the often very different social partners on either side of each border, and externally with national governments.

Taking into consideration the special needs of border regions as well as the promotion of cross-border cooperation should therefore remain a national and Europe-wide political objective and an important task in particular for the European Union. The Treaty of Lisbon and the European Cohesion Policy make allowance for this fact through regarding the cross-border co-operation as one of the three European priorities, supporting the concrete realisation on the spot in partnership with national, regional and local authorities.

V. Outlook

Issues influencing the future of the European Union, as demographic change, climate, innovation and research, employment, health care and environment do not stop at the border. This fact requires common action, in particular in border regions with their special geographical, political and administrative conditions.

In all parts of Europe, cross-border cooperation is an urgent task for the future that must be tackled with an equal measure of caution and energy. Sustained solidarity with the particularly disadvantaged border and cross-border regions of Europe is absolutely indispensable in this context. The latter can take profit of the longstanding experience of other border regions.

The Charter on European Border and Cross-Border Regions reflects awareness of the historical background and of the responsibility for the future of a Europe that is growing closer together and in which border and cross-border regions play a decisive role. They are becoming touchstones for:

- peaceful human coexistence, including respect for diversity and the rights of minorities;
- respect for the principles of partnership and subsidiarity;
- active participation of citizens, politicians, authorities and social groups in cross-border cooperation;
- reconciliation, tolerance and equality, in spite of any differences between the respective partners;
- a new neighbourhood on the EU's external borders;
- social, cultural and economic interwoven cooperation, extending as far as cross-border integration, without undermining State sovereignty;
- a citizens' Europe where people feel at home in their regional diversity.

To travel down this road towards a 'Europe without borders' in the 21st century, strong and active cross-border regions in Europe are not sufficient. Joint action by the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, national governments, regions, the local level and all politicians is every bit as essential as mutual solidarity between border and cross-border regions. This Charter addresses politics, economy and social groupings in their relevant fields of action, in order to strengthen border regions and take profit of their particular diversity and experiences, also as an active partner in the field of further development and strengthening of European integration politics.

Authors: Jens Gabbe, Dr. Viktor v. Malchus (1981), later on AEBR Advisory Committee

Adopted by the General Assembly of the AEBR

- on 20th November 1981 in EUREGIO, Germany / The Netherlands (author: Jens Gabbe, Dr. Viktor von Malchus)
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- amended on 11th September 2014 in Rzeszów, Carpathian Euroregion, Poland

Background information
(Annex to Charter)

I. Historical and political background

1. Historical background

Europe today is characterised by its shared culture and history. Until the 17th century in particular, a patchwork of historical landscapes was formed. The 18th century, with its dynamic development in industry and politics, formulated concepts like the rule of law, human rights, basic rights and free enterprise. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the nation State developed as the predominant entity in the context of tensions between regions. Many of the new borders of these nation States, often the result of wars, became 'scars of history' that cut through Europe's historical landscapes with their regions and ethnic groups, whereas the latter never ceased to exist.

2. Political background

From a legal standpoint, borders represent a line where the sovereignty of States ends. The traditional concept of national border often developed out of a protective function. To this day, the idea of the nation State continues to define culture, economics, society and politics.

Border strips of varying width arose in the era of nation States and their military conflicts, and also out of fear of military incursions. These typically had a peripheral status in many of their nation's spheres: the economy, transport, culture and population density often declined as one moved from the centres of a State to the border. With a few exceptions, this turned the border regions into structurally weak areas with non-existent or inadequate development in terms of roads and railways.

Fostered by the growing communication possibilities and transport modes, there is an almost inevitable gravitation towards national centres and ideas. This trend has become particularly evident in Europe's border regions, and has led to losses of identity particularly where populations have shared cultural, linguistic, demographic and historical ties for centuries, despite new national borders.

As a result, from Southern through Central and Eastern Europe to Scandinavia and Ireland we find an abundance of typical border regions which in principle are often afflicted with the same problems. Generally they lie next to a border region in the neighbouring country which is similarly burdened with problems.

After the Second World War, Europe's municipalities, regions and countries set about unscrambling these problems, which had evolved in the course of history but were often unjustified in cultural terms. The Council of Europe and the European Union grew into platforms for seeking understanding. Until the end of the 1980s the countries and regions situated in the eastern part of Europe remained shut off from this political development by the Iron Curtain. Until then, many borders with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe served to warn us of borders' almost impermeable barrier function (hence the term Iron Curtain) which can be politically motivated.

Since late 1989-1990, various processes have been under way in Europe. At first sight they appear to differ, but they are in fact closely related in terms of their content, politics and economics, and include:

- the dismantling of EU-internal borders with the realisation of the European Single Market;
- the shifting of EU-internal borders right up to the European Union's external borders, and thus to the external borders it shares with third countries;

- efforts to establish intellectual, political and economic contacts beyond the EU's new external borders with non-EU countries, such as Switzerland or Norway, the applicant countries to the EU, or non-Member States in the East, the Balkans and the Mediterranean;
- the fact that following the accession of 10 new Member States to the EU on 1 May 2004, most of the current external borders became new internal borders and new external borders appeared, primarily in Eastern Europe but also in the Mediterranean.

All border regions in Europe are directly affected by all of these developments, where they are having to come to terms with a wide range of new tasks.

Today's, borders in the EU have largely lost their previous function of blocking off nation States from each other, even though there remain massive, clear economic, social and legal differences on the borders within the European Union and on the external borders of the enlarged Union to Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean which render cooperation much more difficult.

In many border and cross-border regions the empty spaces created around borders continue to exist. They are often still areas that serve as brakes to Europe's integration. It must also be borne in mind that many border regions in Europe are not only separated by a national border, but often also face special problems due to additional geographical features like rivers, seas, oceans and mountain ranges.

The previous national peripheral status of many border regions can only be transformed into a favourable situation within Europe when all economic, social, cultural, business, infrastructural and legal barriers are dismantled and Europe has been integrated into a single, diverse entity. Border areas on the periphery of Europe can also be freed from their isolation by establishing better connections.

3. *Economic background*

The situation of border and cross-border regions in Europe is characterised by a wide range of economic barriers and imbalances on the internal and external borders of the European Union and in Eastern Europe itself.

Throughout Europe, the peripheral location of border regions within their respective country, and sometimes also in Europe, frequently leads to imbalances in comparison with the degree of economic concentration in central regions. Sometimes such imbalances (markedly different economic structures and income) are flagrant, as is the case in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe, or on the EU's external borders. In other cases, they only become clear on closer inspection, as for example in Western Europe's border regions that are grappling, say, with the consequences of previous one-sided structural and industrial development or the continuing lack of economic trade extending beyond a border.

Economic centres in border areas are often cut off from part of their natural hinterland across the border, which effectively distorts the possible structure of trade and services. For decades, the transport infrastructure in border areas has suffered from inadequate area-wide connections. Where major infrastructure is being created today in border areas, in most cases this is happening decades later than in comparable areas in the same country's interior. Where such infrastructure is still lacking, there is also a lack of physical prerequisites for cooperation and for future-oriented cross-border development.

As a result, border and cross-border regions still frequently have to struggle with a shortage of alternative and high-quality jobs and of national and cross-border educational facilities, and

face disadvantages when taking up work in the neighbouring country, and a non-transparent cross-border labour market.

Companies in border areas frequently lack adequate knowledge of market possibilities, export opportunities and marketing resources across the border. They complain about the limited possibilities for exploiting research and development on the other side of the border and crowding-out effects due to better competitive conditions in the neighbouring country. Furthermore, access to public contracts and research and development programmes across the border is frequently limited. At the same time, it must be noted that these problems vary in intensity from one border region to another, and that some of them are tackling and counteracting these problems in sub-sectors, albeit with varying degrees of success.

The growing concentration effect of labour, services and capital in Europe's industrial centres must be counteracted through coordinated European and national policies, in particular through European spatial development, regional and transport policies and territorial cohesion in future EU policy.

The public primarily expects the border and cross-border regions to provide solutions to all these problems, but these regions are not primarily responsible for their causes. As a result, the problems that still exist in Europe continue to be concentrated at its borders, with particularly clear differences arising from, for example:

- different administrative structures and competences;
- dissimilar fiscal and social legislation;
- the fact that it is hard to establish cooperation amongst small and medium-sized enterprises, which lack cross-border supplier and sales markets that have developed over time;
- different spatial planning and planning laws;
- varying environmental and waste legislation;
- unresolved everyday border problems and absurdities;
- currency disparities (especially on the EU's external borders!);
- different transport systems, which are not geared to the requirements of the cross-border internal market;
- diverging labour markets, wage structures and social systems at external borders, which threaten to become sources of conflict and turn into explosive issues;
- a loss of security through opening borders (cross-border police cooperation has not been assured in the past in legal and organisational terms);
- growing cross-border tourism in conflict with nature conservation and protection of the environment;
- existing and future misinvestments in the service sector and social sphere due to inadequate cross-border trading areas and legal and financial barriers;
- difficulties in cross-border vocational training, which creates a lasting barrier to an open European internal market and a cross-border labour market;
- prejudices, stereotypes, and inadequate empathy and understanding for the different characteristics of one's neighbours, which exist on both sides of borders.

II. AEBR – a crucial partner of the EU Commission to the advantage of citizens and border regions

Since its foundation in 1971, the AEBR is the lobbying organisation and the spearhead of border regions at European level. In the same time the association is a service point for all border regions in the field questions with regard to cross-border cooperation, and a hub for exchange of experience between European border regions.

Main achievements of AEBR of the last 25 years are:

- Application and justification (1988) of funding for all border regions by the EU (INTERREG),
- consultation and training of all border regions (1990-2003) on behalf of the EU, DG Regio,
- Baseline studies for the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) on behalf of the Committee of the Regions and the EU (2001, 2004),
- Solution of daily border problems (in cooperation with the European Parliament and the European Commission)
- Support and consultation in the framework of the creation of new cross-border structures,
- Creation of an effective network of more than 100 border and cross-border regions,
- Recognised interlocutor of the EU Commission the highest level and of the most important politicians for Regional policy at the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions,
- Particular consideration of regions with special needs according to the Treaty of Lisbon,
- Cross-border cooperation as cornerstone of territorial cooperation, with its own regulation as political objective of the EU,
- On 22 October 2010 **Commissioner for Regional Policy Johannes Hahn** Stated in Dundalk/Northern Ireland, that the AEBR is the main interlocutor of the EU/DG REGIO as it comes to cross-border issues. He says that the association has made very valuable contributions to the debate on the future Cohesion Policy and to the generalisation of CBC in Europe. Most of the proposals for improvement submitted by the AEBR are taken into consideration in the regulations.

The main points taken into consideration in the new regulations, are:

- Better coordination between EU politics and national politics. The EU Commission is supposed to elaborate a strategic framework with general directives, facilitating a better coordination of its politics (realised by the EU framework regulation for all funds and partnership agreements with member States),
- Strengthening of the regional/local level by participation in the EU programmes (elaboration, implementation and evaluation), through the partnership agreements,
- Particular consideration of regions with special needs according to the Treaty of Lisbon. This includes border regions, often facing various particular problems (outermost regions, mountains, coasts, islands, scarcely populated regions) (realised in the regulations on cohesion and regional policy),
- Separate regulation on territorial cooperation (achieved),

- The three pillars of territorial cooperation “cross-border, transnational and interregional” should remain separated; priority on “cross-border”, with the most important funding (realised in the regulation on territorial cooperation),
- The separate regulation on territorial cooperation needs to allow more flexibility regarding objectives and priorities as it is the case in the Regional fund, and a clear simplification of administrative procedures, settlement and control (practical solutions have been elaborated) is needed (realised by new regulation),
- NUTS III level needs to apply for cross-border cooperation, neighbouring areas being included in justified cases (achieved),
- Better quality of cross-border programmes and projects is necessary. For this reason the EU Commission should provide concrete targets and elaborate quantitative and qualitative indicators, while accepting programme-specific criteria (realised in the regulations),
- Better use needs to be made of potentials of cross-border cooperation in the fields of health care, innovation & research, infrastructure, waste management, water management, energy, services, environment (realised by the orientation of the programmes to the Europe 2020 Strategy),
- Apart from economic development, infrastructure and employment, socio-cultural cooperation plays an important role in border areas (small project funds remain possible),
- Strengthening of the role of the programme secretariat (consultation and support), a common bank account, a better definition of a cross-border project and common eligibility are necessary in order to achieve better cross-border results (realised in the regulation on territorial cooperation, though further future improvements are possible).

III. Objectives of cross-border cooperation

1. Smoothing out the interfaces of European spatial development policy

Spatial development today is considered synonymous with the deliberate organisation of the relationship between Man, economy and environment. In border and cross-border regions it includes the guiding principles of a sustainable arrangement and development of a space. The spatial development policies of the member countries, of the Council of Europe and the EU Member States must attach a high importance to cross-border cooperation (through the European Regional Development Charter, European Spatial Development Plan (ESDP), CEMAT Guiding Principles on sustainable development on the European continent, Territorial Agenda). The inclusion of territorial cohesion in future EU policies presents significant opportunities for implementation, including especially in border regions.

2. Overcoming border-related disadvantages and exploiting opportunities

2.1 Improving transport infrastructure

For border and cross-border regions that are still suffering as a result of their peripheral location in their country, and often in Europe as well, the construction and expansion of roads, railway links, airports, shipping routes and ports is vitally important. These create the necessary preconditions for cross-border cooperation. Within the context of the Trans-European Networks, new international and national connections must endow border and cross-border regions with region-specific links and enable them to use area-wide infrastructure, particularly with a view to eliminating border-related bottlenecks whilst

contributing to the internal development of border areas and their connection to national centres.

But international connections must not turn border and cross-border regions into mere transit zones. When transport infrastructure is built or expanded, consideration must be given to the interests of the people and regions affected and the requirements associated with protecting the environment, nature and landscapes. Consequently, transport infrastructure projects may only be carried out with the equal participation of the border and cross-border regions affected.

For the future development of border and cross-border regions on the EU's external borders and in Central and Eastern Europe in particular, the development of telematics and communications is presenting the border regions in question with some ground-breaking opportunities to escape their national (and sometimes also European) peripheral status and wipe out the traditional disadvantages due to their marginal location.

2.2 Promoting locational quality and common economic development

In the framework of Europe-wide disparities, in addition to territorial cohesion, cross-border cooperation is helping in particular to eliminate economic imbalances and obstacles in neighbouring border regions in a regionally manageable framework, in partnership with States and European authorities.

Whereas cross-border infrastructure frequently does no more than create the preconditions for better economic cooperation, a coordinated economic and labour market policy must directly improve regional and economic development on a cross-border basis.

Consequently, regional economic policy in border and cross-border regions should promote a dismantling of border-related differences in development and be integrated into the basic goals of national and European policies (for example, agricultural, structural, economic, spatial planning, regional and social policy objectives, and so forth). 'Regional cross-border development concepts' and 'operational programmes' must be drawn up and updated by the border and cross-border regions as bases for their joint development and then supported by national governments and the EU.

Cross-border programmes must serve to achieve concrete measures and projects that improve the cross-border cooperation of small and medium-sized enterprises, develop new cross-border relationships between producers and suppliers, eliminate border-related competitive disadvantages (as seen in public and private tendering procedures, administrative barriers and social dumping), promote cross-border vocational training and the mutual recognition of respective national qualifications, and enable a genuine cross-border labour market, the operation of cross-border enterprise zones, common public transport and the creation of cross-border supply and waste disposal facilities (for example, for rubbish and water) as well as of cross-border health care.

3. Improvement of cross-border protection of the environment and nature

Air, water and natural development do not stop at borders. As a result, effective environmental protection and nature conservation policy extending beyond borders is needed, and should be incorporated into a cross-border spatial planning model. Active landscape design in border and cross-border regions requires a joint approach just as much as the elimination of cross-border problems to do with air and water pollution, waste reduction, recycling and clearance, noise abatement, and flood-prone river basins. In so doing, attention must be paid to the substantial differences in environmental protection and nature conservation and the resultant priorities in individual border and cross-border regions.

4. *Promotion of cross-border cultural cooperation*

Overcoming mistrust and developing mutual confidence and grass-roots connections are key elements in any cross-border cooperation. Cross-border cultural cooperation is vitally important as an essential prerequisite for any further confidence-building measures. Knowledge of the entire cross-border region and its geographical, structural, economic, socio-cultural and historical conditions is a precondition for the active involvement of citizens and all other partners. It is also closely related to social and cultural encounters across borders.

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