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*Plenary sitting*

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**A9-0415/2023**

7.12.2023

# REPORT

on current and future challenges regarding cross-border cooperation with  
neighbouring countries  
(2023/2076(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

Rapporteur: Daniel Buda

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## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### **on current and future challenges regarding cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries (2023/2076(INI))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union and Articles 4, 162, 174 to 178 and 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2022/562 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 April 2022 amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) No 223/2014 as regards Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE)<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC)<sup>5</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission proposal of 29 May 2018 for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context (COM(2018)0373),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 September 2017 entitled 'Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions' (COM(2017)0534),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 April 2020 entitled 'Guidelines

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> OJ L 109, 8.4.2022, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 19.

on EU Emergency Assistance on Cross-Border Cooperation in Healthcare related to the COVID-19 crisis’<sup>6</sup>,

- having regard to the Commission communication of 30 September 2020 on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (COM(2020)0625),
- having regard to its resolution of 15 September 2022 on economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU: the 8th Cohesion Report<sup>7</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 9 May 2023 on the role of cohesion policy in addressing multidimensional environmental challenges in the Mediterranean basin<sup>8</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2018 on lagging regions in the EU<sup>9</sup>,
- having regard to the study entitled ‘EU lagging regions: state of play and future challenges’, published by its Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services on 26 October 2020<sup>10</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 11 September 2018 on boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions<sup>11</sup>,
- having regard to the 2022 report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change entitled ‘Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’<sup>12</sup>,
- having regard to the agreement adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015 (the Paris Agreement),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 19 April 2021 on a renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new agenda for the Mediterranean,
- having regard to the resolution of the European Committee of the Regions of 1 July 2021 on a vision for Europe: The Future of Cross-border Cooperation<sup>13</sup>,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions of

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<sup>6</sup> OJ C 111 I, 3.4.2020, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> OJ C 125, 5.4.2023, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> Texts adopted, P9\_TA(2023)0133.

<sup>9</sup> OJ C 162, 10.5.2019, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Study – European lagging regions: state of play and future challenges, European Parliament, Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services, September 2020.

<sup>11</sup> OJ C 433, 23.12.2019, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Shukla, P.R. et al., eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> OJ C 440, 29.10.2021, p. 6.

8 February 2017 entitled ‘Missing transport links in border regions’<sup>14</sup>,

- having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A9-0415/2023),
- A. whereas EU cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries, whether at land or sea borders, covering 184 regions, 33 countries and 260 million inhabitants, is key to EU policies;
- B. whereas Article 8 of the Treaty on European Union provides that the Union should develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming at establishing an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation;
- C. whereas cross-border cooperation is an important step in the EU pre-accession process of candidate countries;
- D. whereas cross-border cooperation contributes to peace and sustainable development along the EU’s external borders, supports democratic reforms, respect for European values, the economic and social development of border areas, including environmental protection, public health services and safety and security measures, contributes to the EU objectives for a smarter, greener and more connected EU and Neighbourhood, as well as to addressing regional needs regarding good cooperation, governance and common challenges, helps to promote mutual understanding and trust and contributes to preventing future conflicts and wars through instruments such as PEACE+ programme;
- E. whereas the current geopolitical situation reaffirms the importance of stability and democratic development in the countries and regions at the EU’s external borders;
- F. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic and, in particular, Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine have had a profound effect on all cross-border cooperation programmes supported by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI-CBC), which include Russia and Belarus, with a major impact on half of the programmes proposed for the period 2021-2027; whereas cohesion policy can help cross-border cooperation provided that its strategic approach is kept and a robust budget is agreed on;
- G. whereas brain drain disproportionately affects some less developed border regions and, if left unaddressed, will have long-term negative effects on the EU’s future;
- H. whereas mass departures from some border regions, particularly by young people and skilled workers, illustrates the lack of economic development in such regions; whereas cross-border cooperation can help to create new employment opportunities and sustainable economic development;

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<sup>14</sup> OJ C 207, 30.6.2017, p. 19.

- I. whereas the fragile political, economic and security situation in North Africa and the management of the migration crisis highlight the need for cooperation in the Mediterranean basin;
- J. whereas border regions are often sensitive to tensions and conflicts, and cross-border cooperation and regional diplomacy have a positive impact on preventing and resolving disputes and potential crises;

### ***General considerations on Interreg NEXT programmes***

- 1. Welcomes the alignment of Interreg NEXT programmes with Interreg programmes as this has the potential to simplify procedures, enhance synergies between programmes and increase the effectiveness of European investments; highlights, however, the need for more simplified procedures in both the evaluation phase and the implementation phase of the projects, with a greater focus on the quantifiable results, where appropriate, and the overall impact on the regions' development and citizens' lives;
- 2. Underlines that local and regional authorities play a key role in cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries through their knowledge of the geographical, cultural, linguistic and social situation, the opportunities, the constraints and the shared challenges;
- 3. Emphasises the importance of cross-border projects, including people-to-people projects, in bringing people together and, in that way, opening up new potential for sustainable local development and cross-border cooperation; stresses the importance of cross-border investments in enhancing innovations, technology transfer, common solutions and synergies between the different programmes and, in that way, increasing territorial cohesion beyond administrative borders and strengthening solidarity;
- 4. Stresses that the allocation for the period 2021-2027 is far from optimal and consequently underlines the importance of strengthening the financing of these programmes; welcomes the greater accountability of third countries for recoveries from private-sector beneficiaries; emphasises the importance of the rule of law and a level playing field for all beneficiaries, whether public or private, and underlines the need to encourage the involvement of private investors, alongside public investment, in the sustainable development of border regions and third countries by making more funds available;
- 5. Welcomes the possibility for managing authorities to transmit data to the Commission electronically, but at the same time points out that more frequent data transmission should not lead to greater bureaucratisation; stresses, therefore, the importance of interoperable systems that could automatically submit data to a common database and encourages the Commission to further develop cooperation with third countries in this regard;
- 6. Expresses its concern that large infrastructure projects will no longer be subject to approval by the Commission;
- 7. Welcomes the removal of the limit on EU funding for large infrastructure projects and believes that sustainable infrastructure development contributes to socio-economic

growth in cross-border regions; underlines, at the same time, the necessity of involving the public and private sectors, which could lead to more innovation and the development of infrastructure relating to the energy sector, transport, communication and digitalisation;

8. Raises the point that major challenges faced by the EU can also be met by promoting cross-border cooperation between neighbouring regions (e.g. a sustainable future for the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea and other maritime basins; a sustainable future for the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Carpathians and other mountain ranges; a sustainable future for the large river basins of the Rhine, the Danube, the Meuse, and so on);
9. Emphasises that cross-border cooperation is an important step in EU pre-accession processes, which encourages candidate countries to share experiences and learn how the EU functions internally; highlights that this helps to bring EU initiatives and objectives closer to candidate countries, to share experiences and to begin the economic and social convergence process; stresses that candidate countries that have participated in cross-border cooperation will, at the time of EU accession, already be familiar with EU programmes and projects;
10. Highlights the crucial role of cross-border cooperation in the sustainable management of natural resources and climate change challenges, including natural disasters, environment, biodiversity and food security, as well as ecosystems in border areas; emphasises, in this context, the importance of prevention and of the development of local and regional plans for climate change adaptation measures across borders; highlights the need to increase efforts to fight climate change and enhance climate change mitigation in these regions in particular in order to align with EU climate targets;
11. Underlines the potential of cross-border cooperation, particularly in more sparsely populated cross-border areas, in such fields as renewable energy and the circular economy, and calls for better use to be made of existing opportunities to develop the sustainable economy and quality jobs;

#### ***Cross-border cooperation with the Eastern Neighbourhood***

12. Welcomes the suspension of cross-border cooperation with Russia and Belarus as a consequence of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the re-routing of funds to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, which has fundamentally changed the European security architecture; emphasises, consequently, the need for cooperation on security policy in order to achieve the common goals of reliable collective deterrence and defence within the framework of cross-border cooperation;
13. Draws attention to the difficult situation of regions sharing a border with Russia and Belarus following the suspension of cross-border cooperation with these countries and encourages the Commission to work closely with the affected Member States to find sustainable solutions to address the social and economic challenges in these regions;
14. Calls for funds from cross-border programmes to be used for the development of sustainable transport infrastructure, including the construction of railway connections

and storage facilities near the EU's borders with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, in order to streamline the flow of goods and grain so as to ensure global food security, contribute to fostering the development of a sustainable economy for both countries and help frontline Member States, as well as Moldova and Ukraine, to meet these challenges;

15. Recognises the importance of promoting local and regional culture and heritage conservation and educational and economic exchanges between border regions in order to strengthen mutual understanding of neighbours' customs and create major incentives for multilingual education; underlines the importance of inclusive education with regard to democratic values and the need to support greater quality in this field;
16. Calls for support for more sustainable infrastructure projects that contribute to improving the connectivity of cross-border regions, boosting mobility within and between these regions and enhancing quality of life and opportunities for the regions' residents, along with projects addressing the need for infrastructure;
17. Recognises the immense efforts made by national governments, regional and local authorities and civil society in the EU Member States situated around Ukraine, as well as the efforts of the Republic of Moldova, to host displaced Ukrainians and address all the challenges arising from the Russia's war of aggression, including the matter of grain from Ukraine and the lack of transport infrastructure; calls, in this regard, for appropriate support to be given, including through cross-border cooperation programmes, to meet emerging needs;
18. Underlines that although it is not at open war with Russia, the Republic of Moldova also has conflict zones supported by Russia and has welcomed a large number of Ukrainian refugees, and that Moldova's economic and social situation was greatly affected by the cessation of its commercial relations with Russia; stresses, therefore, that solid investments and an open market are highly necessary and that common projects are more than welcome in all economic and social fields;
19. Is outraged by the human losses and the destruction of homes and infrastructure in Ukraine; stresses the active role that cross-border cooperation programmes and the New European Bauhaus should play in sustainable post-war reconstruction and underlines the urgent need to support local and regional authorities in Ukraine while continuing to help neighbouring regions and encouraging increased cooperation;
20. Welcomes the initiative for the inclusion of Ukraine in the URBACT European Territorial Cooperation programme and the accession of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova as observer members of the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON);
21. Deplores Russia's use of its energy sources as a means of exerting political and economic pressure; calls for swift inquiries into economic cooperation with Russia in the energy sectors of some Member States, along with further action to bolster renewables and enhance energy efficiency in order to reduce dependence on Russia in those Member States that have drastically decreased their cooperation with the aggressor and were affected by the sanctions, including neighbouring countries;



22. Deplores the increase in Russia's influence in neighbouring countries, particularly through the use of manipulation and disinformation on both traditional media and online social media, and underlines the importance of enhancing cooperation with those countries, particularly in the education and cultural sectors, in order to keep their citizens informed and educated about democratic values;

### ***Cooperation relating to sea basins***

#### *Black Sea basin*

23. Stresses the importance of granting increased financial support to the programme, given the security challenges in the Black Sea resulting from Russian attacks and the blockade on sea and Danube ports, which aim to prevent grain shipments that are essential to Ukraine's economy; highlights the security risk that these attacks pose to the Member States that have borders with Ukraine;
24. Highlights the potential of Black Sea energy sources, which are capable of contributing to a sustainable energy future in the EU too; stresses that, despite their potential, renewable energy resources remain largely untapped;
25. Considers that the Interreg NEXT Black Sea basin programme should facilitate sustainable economic development and the efficient management of shared resources;
26. Emphasises the importance of developing sustainable tourism in Black Sea coastal regions and advocates for all the actors involved to take a responsible approach to environmental protection;
27. Calls for a strong focus on the Black Sea, enhancing regional cooperation to address security issues, including those related to regional conflicts and energy security, and encouraging projects to upgrade ports and related infrastructure and increase their connections to existing transport hubs; calls in particular, therefore, for their connection to TEN-T corridors;
28. Insists that a cohesive strategy should be adopted for the Black Sea area and that synergies should be developed with the Danube Programme 2021-2027;

#### *Mediterranean basin*

29. Underlines the importance of strong economic and social partnerships with third countries from the Mediterranean basin; welcomes the fact that the number of countries participating in 2021-2027 Interreg Euro-MED programmes is on the rise;
30. Asks for a more coordinated and efficient use of existing funds, within the framework of current social, climate and environmental rules, to increase the competitiveness of the Mediterranean basin while fostering the potential of onshore and offshore renewable energy;
31. Considers that cross-border programmes must play an active role in addressing common security challenges and aim for regional stability;

32. Calls for migration flows to be managed and irregular migration and human trafficking to be combated, including by funding projects aiming to receive, care for and provide training for migrants to help them face the challenges of a competitive economic environment and better understand and respect European values, while fostering inclusiveness on both sides of the Mediterranean;
33. Recognises the crucial role of research and innovation in natural disaster risk prevention, sustainable water management and CO<sub>2</sub> reduction and underlines the need to prioritise projects that have quantifiable objectives in terms of economic, social and environmental impact;
34. Stresses that, despite their potential, renewable energy resources remain largely untapped and that this potential should be stimulated, including by involving SMEs and mid-cap companies;
35. Welcomes the WestMed sea basin strategy in the Western Mediterranean and Interreg programmes such as MARITTIMO as good examples of direct and diversified cooperation, including at regional level, with shared objectives;
36. Welcomes the progress of the Adriatic-Ionian macro-regional strategy (EUSAIR), which has mobilised the member countries and their regions, third countries and their local authorities; considers EUSAIR a successful example in which the Union proved to be a driving force and a vector of openness; maintains that these same principles and a similar common approach must be applied to the other areas of the Mediterranean;
37. Invites the European Council to ask the Commission to submit a detailed macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean, taking into account its New Agenda for the Mediterranean, in particular section 5 thereof ('Green transition: climate change resilience, energy and environment'), and to adopt it; deplores the continuous degradation of the environment in the entire Mediterranean sea basin, the loss of biodiversity and the increase in air and marine pollution, particularly with plastic and domestic waste, and calls for these to be avoided, limited and managed by promoting the circular economy;

### ***Challenges in the field of cross-border cooperation***

38. Notes that the existence of different legal and institutional frameworks creates additional obstacles to project implementation and therefore makes the implementation of projects a challenge; recalls that administrative procedures can be complex and time-consuming, which may discourage local and regional authorities from participating in territorial cooperation; calls on the Commission to help simplify these procedures by making them more accessible and transparent;
39. Notes that language barriers and cultural differences make communication more difficult and may lead to administrative burdens, which should be overcome through appropriate measures;
40. Stresses that differences exist between states when it comes to the competences of authorities, as well as changes in regional authorities, which can cause delays; believes

that dialogue between local authorities should be encouraged and the participation of civil society in territorial cooperation projects should be fostered, involving non-governmental organisations, social enterprises and other stakeholders;

41. Stresses the necessity of developing a long-term exchange and entrepreneurial collaboration programmes between institutions and businesses in cross-border regions to promote sustainable economic development and of enhancing administrative coordination between participating states by further developing, reorganising or, where appropriate, setting up sustainable functional structures for cross-border cooperation and networks;
42. Underlines the importance of establishing a short- and medium-term intercultural exchange system to promote the learning of common languages, foster a deeper understanding of regional cultures and facilitate collaboration between cross-border communities, highlighting that this system should also include entrepreneurial and administrative aspects to stimulate economic and administrative development;
43. States the need to adapt programmes to the individual needs and specifics of each participating country/region; calls for further efforts to be made in this regard;
44. Notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on border regions and has affected the implementation of current programmes and projects;
45. Points out that the lack of adequate transport infrastructure and networks, particularly when it comes to maritime and island cross-border cooperation, hampers trade and mobility and complicates cooperation;
46. Points to the specific challenges of maritime borders and the need to recognise them as specific borders with their own needs, particularly in view of language and cultural differences, administrative and legal burdens, socio-economic disparities and environmental issues;

#### ***Cross-border cooperation opportunities***

47. Stresses that in view of multiple crises and conflicts, cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries requires investment in the resilience of countries and societies and that partnership priorities should contribute to substantially improving living conditions on both sides of the border, including by ensuring inclusive sustainable development, social justice, employment opportunities and economic prosperity;
48. Considers that cross-border cooperation may contribute significantly to strengthening local and regional democracy and the administrative capacities of partner countries; highlights the importance of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) in facilitating and promoting territorial cooperation, in particular on the management of cross-border transport services or hospitals, the implementation or management of cross-border development projects and the exchange of knowledge and best practices;
49. Highlights the importance for EU cross-border programmes to include culture as an important indicator of regional development, in particular in border areas where

people living on both sides of the border share the same cultural and linguistic background, in order to ensure lively regions and increase the regions' attractiveness, increase cultural exchange and promote diversity and solidarity beyond EU borders;

50. Highlights the fact that the programmes offer opportunities for an in-depth dialogue with a range of stakeholders including civil society representatives, local and regional authorities, academia, citizens, NGOs and the private sector; stresses in particular the importance of cross-border programmes for the EU candidate countries, as they provide local and national authorities with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with EU legislation;
51. Notes that cross-border cooperation may contribute further to reducing regional disparities, promoting economic and social development, gender mainstreaming, employment, trade and territorial cohesion, and improving the mobility of people and the connectivity of the regions;
52. Stresses the importance of cross-border cooperation on digitalisation and underlines the need for common projects on digital infrastructure, particularly in public services, in order to provide a coherent and efficient public sector focused on the needs of all;
53. Stresses that the EU and the Member States should cooperate more closely with neighbouring countries in the field of healthcare and emergency services and should enhance the capacity of SMEs and mid-caps to operate across borders;
54. Stresses the importance of networking and benchmarking in eliminating obstacles to cross-border cooperation and notes that this should enable the better use of tools, such as EGTCs, the Integrated Territorial Investment tool and the Community-Led Local Development strategy;
55. Stresses the crucial role that investments in high-quality public services have on building social resilience and coping with economic, health and social crises;
56. Welcomes the UK Government's continued commitment to the PEACE programme, which plays a key role for cooperation between the border regions of Ireland and Northern Ireland;
57. Underlines the vital role of the PEACE PLUS programme in maintaining good neighbourly relations in the regions and ensuring their socio-economic development;

### ***Policy recommendations***

58. Recommends greater complementarity between projects and stresses the need for synergies with other EU funding tools that have the same geographical and thematic coverage in order to avoid any double funding; emphasises the need, during the programming period 2021- 2027, for the targeted programmes to clearly identify the requirements and priorities that are common to the regions along the EU's external borders and to complement other EU-funded initiatives, not overlap with them;
59. Considers that the role of EU macro-regional strategies in addressing challenges related to border regions should be further enhanced;

60. Recommends, in the area of cross-border governance, developing a fully integrated infrastructure strategy (road, rail, water), taking into account the cross-border region as a whole; stresses the importance of developing more sustainable mobility solutions throughout cross-border areas, including through the TEN-T policy; calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote smart mobility;
61. Recommends promoting EU financial instruments with added social and economic value in order to raise the level of awareness about the benefits of the EU;
62. Calls on the Commission to reduce the bureaucratic burden, considerably simplify procedures and reduce hurdles related to different legislation; insists that this should make it possible to meet the real needs of cross-border areas; stresses that sustainable and inclusive development requires action at all levels; explicitly recognises the importance of paying attention to rural areas in cross-border regions, as they are particularly affected by demographic challenges;
63. Calls for better coordination, dialogue and a further exchange of best practices between regions and states, for instance through a platform like INTERREG Europe; urges the Commission and the Member States to enhance cooperation in this regard and calls for the Member States to provide local and regional authorities with the tools and resources they need to foster ambitious cross-border cooperation; states that public educational and cultural services should be open, accessible and affordable to citizens from both sides of the borders;
64. Stresses that, in accordance with the partnership principle, regional and local authorities and representatives of civil society and the private sector should be involved, to the greatest extent possible, in the preparation and implementation of projects from the outset; calls on the Commission to consider providing technical support to local and regional authorities in neighbouring countries to help them develop and implement territorial cooperation projects; further calls for guidelines to be drawn up in this regard;
65. Calls on the Commission to continue integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into the future action plans for cross-border cooperation so that no place and no one is left behind;
66. Calls on the Commission to further cooperate with partner states to promote cross-border cooperation, supplying, where necessary, know-how in order to help counterpart authorities in partner countries and improve the information provided to them with respect to the procedures and conditions for accessing EU funding;
67. Calls for the overall budget for cross-border territorial cooperation to be increased;
68. Considers that the creation of joint cross-border local government councils, such as the one established between Romania and Moldova to help develop joint projects of mutual interest, could be an example to be followed;
69. Encourages efforts to bring partner countries closer to the EU, stimulate internal reform and capacity-building at local and regional level and promote local democracy, multilevel governance and decentralised cooperation, including through cooperation

within EuroNest and the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) for the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM) for the Southern Neighbourhood;

70. Stresses the need to step up efforts and allocate more resources with respect to cross-border projects aimed at developing IT infrastructure and expanding access to broadband networks so as to support economic and social cooperation between cross-border regions; highlights the key role that technology and the innovations brought by artificial intelligence can play in strengthening links, promoting sustainable development and improving and simplifying administrative procedures;
71. Emphasises the importance of identifying and avoiding project overlaps and unnecessary expenditures between different European programmes and initiatives;
72. Recommends conducting periodic evaluations of cross-border cooperation projects to ensure the efficient use of EU financial resources;

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73. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the European Council, the Council, the Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national and regional parliaments of the Member States.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

This own-initiative report (INI) has been produced in the wake of the Special Report of the European Court of Auditors<sup>1</sup> which found that cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries provided valuable support, but pointed out that the programmes started late and that their complementarity with other EU-funded programmes was insufficient. The own-initiative report covers cross-border cooperation (CBC) between EU Member States and the neighbourhood region that are co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), owing to Türkiye's participation in the Interreg NEXT MED and Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin programmes.

Cross-border cooperation is a key element of the EU's policy towards its neighbours, promoting cooperation between EU countries and neighbouring countries sharing a land or sea border. CBC contributes to sustainable development along the EU's external borders, and helps reduce differences in living standards and address common challenges.

Cross-border cooperation programmes have brought relevant and valuable support to regions on both sides of the borders. This report illustrates the benefits and challenges of working together. It also highlights the role of the European Union in the development of border regions.

The report turns the spotlight on cross-border cooperation following the dramatic developments in Ukraine. As a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and Belarus's support of that aggression, the implementation of the ENI-CBC programmes with Ukraine, Moldova, Russia and Belarus has been significantly disrupted. The Commission has suspended all financing agreements with Russia and Belarus, meaning that no payments could be made to partners in Russia and Belarus after the hostilities began. Mitigating measures have been adopted at EU level to establish the specifics of the programmes experiencing 'implementation disruption', thus allowing these cross-border programmes to continue solely on Member State territory.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to cancellations or delays in some projects. Since cross-border regions suffered severe consequences following the introduction of restrictive measures due to the pandemic, project implementation has often been uneven and deadlines have been postponed.

Your rapporteur proposes an INI report divided into 7 chapters which seek to present the key features of cross-border cooperation in the light of the most recent events.

The report begins by presenting some key features of the Interreg NEXT programmes and the main changes as compared to the ENI-CBC programmes, such as the simplification of procedures through the alignment of Interreg NEXT programmes with Interreg programmes.

Your rapporteur also highlights the specific issues relating to cooperation with the Eastern Neighbourhood, stressing the importance of using the new Interreg NEXT cross-border programmes to deliver tangible projects that contribute to Ukraine's connectivity with the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/cross-border-27-2022/en/index.html>



regions of the European Union and also make the transport of goods and grain more efficient. In addition, the report emphasises the importance of the programmes when it comes to post-war reconstruction.

In particular, the report covers the challenges of cooperation in the Black Sea area and the Mediterranean basin. Those challenges include issues such as regional development, the environment, transport infrastructure, migration and security. The report highlights the importance of the Interreg NEXT programmes both for managing migration flows and for achieving energy security.

Your rapporteur identifies administrative and language barriers and legal uncertainties as the main obstacles to project implementation. The uncertain political situation in many countries in the Mediterranean basin, the war in Ukraine and, not least, the current security situation in the Black Sea, are all serving to exacerbate the challenges to cooperation.

Last but not least, the policy recommendations made focus on greater complementarity between projects and synergies between funds, as well as the maximum simplification of procedures.

Your rapporteur believes that the Interreg NEXT programmes are not just an opportunity to contribute to sound cooperation between border regions, but also have what it takes to address the real challenges facing contemporary society, be this the war in Ukraine or migration issues in the Mediterranean basin.



**ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS  
FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT**

The rapporteur declares under his exclusive responsibility that he did not receive input from any entity or person to be mentioned in this Annex pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure.

## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

<b>Date adopted</b>	30.11.2023
<b>Result of final vote</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">+:</div> <div>27</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">-:</div> <div>0</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">0:</div> <div>0</div> </div>
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	François Alfonsi, Pascal Arimont, Isabel Benjumea Benjumea, Tom Berendsen, Stéphane Bijoux, Vlad-Marius Botoș, Andrea Cozzolino, Manolis Kefalogiannis, Nora Mebarek, Alin Mituța, Andželika Anna Mozdżanowska, Niklas Nienaß, Andrey Novakov, Younous Omarjee, Witold Pahl, Wolfram Pirchner, Caroline Roose, Marcos Ros Sempere, André Rougé
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Daniel Buda, Isabel Carvalhais, Katalin Cseh, Mónica Silvana González, Elena Lizzi, Denis Nesci, Bronis Ropë
<b>Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote</b>	Francisco Guerreiro

## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

27	+
ECR	Andželika Anna Mozdżanowska, Denis Nesci
ID	Elena Lizzi, André Rougé
NI	Andrea Cozzolino
PPE	Pascal Arimont, Isabel Benjumea Benjumea, Tom Berendsen, Daniel Buda, Manolis Kefalogiannis, Andrey Novakov, Witold Pahl, Wolfram Pirchner
Renew	Stéphane Bijoux, Vlad-Marius Botoș, Katalin Cseh, Alin Mituța
S&D	Isabel Carvalhais, Mónica Silvana González, Nora Mebarek, Marcos Ros Sempere
The Left	Younous Omarjee
Verts/ALE	François Alfonsi, Francisco Guerreiro, Niklas Nienäb, Caroline Roose, Bronis Ropé

0	-

0	0

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention