

**Question for written answer E-000597/2024/rev.1
to the Commission**

Rule 138

Mauri Pekkarinen (Renew)

Subject: A regional external border programme for EU Member States to alleviate the effects of the Ukraine war

The Interreg programmes are part of the EU's regional and structural policy whose purpose is to support border areas within the EU and between EU countries and third countries. On both sides of the 1 344 km-long border between Finland and Russia, the Interreg programmes have alleviated problems caused by the border, improved infrastructure and supported cross-border cooperation and interaction in almost every area of life. The programmes are intended for cooperation with friendly neighbours on Europe's borders.

When Putin's Russia attacked Ukraine, this kind of cooperation ceased in border regions in Finland, the Baltic countries and Poland. This resulted in significant economic problems for these regions. As a consequence of the war, the Interreg funding intended for these external borders was frozen and the regions were transferred to other programmes. The resources intended for the development of border areas were reduced where they should have been increased.

The current Interreg programmes are not flexible enough to sufficiently support these areas that border a hostile neighbour – Russia or Belarus.

The report of the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy appointed by the Commission, 'Forging a sustainable future together: Cohesion for a competitive and inclusive Europe', was published on 20 February 2024. It too recognises a need to respond to war and political instability and calls for special attention to be paid to border regions affected by war.

Given the above, I would like to ask:

1. What action has the Commission taken to support external border areas of the EU that border a hostile neighbour?
2. If the current Interreg programmes continue to be insufficiently flexible to offer the necessary assistance to regions that border countries at war, is it possible to build a new regional external border programme specifically for these border regions to alleviate the effects of war?

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