

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3645/06
by Brigitte Douay (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Appropriateness of NUTS classifications on either side of national borders in the application of regional policy

The allocation of European regional policy aid is closely linked to the system used to classify administrative units known as the common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS). This system was established by Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003¹ of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The map of European regions classified as NUTS 2 reveals some serious inconsistencies. Thus the Spanish and French regions are huge entities, while the Belgian provinces are very small. Whereas the division of administrative units under the NUTS system may be coherent at national level, it can appear arbitrary or highly imbalanced when comparing all Member States.

This state of affairs is of particular concern in border areas, such as between France and Belgium: the French region of Nord/Pas-de-Calais is classed as NUTS 2, whereas the neighbouring Belgian regions are classed as NUTS 1, and the Belgian administrative units classed as NUTS 2 are the provinces, which are smaller entities.

Thus the input for the indicators that serve as a basis for the allocation of regional EU aid is unfairly weighted: NUTS 2 regions are often very different from Member State to Member State, which can lead to differences in the allocation of structural funds between neighbouring border regions. The specific characteristics of large NUTS 2 regions are not taken sufficiently into account compared with smaller ones.

The development gaps that may result between areas on either side of national borders could damage EU cohesion policy, even though one of the objectives of cohesion policy is to lessen the negative effects of borders, particularly through cross-border cooperation programmes.

How can the existing differences across borders between NUTS regions of the same category, and the discrepancies and distortions to which they lead, be better taken into account? Are there plans to amend the current classification, or could the exceptions to Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 be widened in order to allow border areas to be treated more fairly, particularly after 2013?

¹ OJ L 154, 21.6.2003, p.1.