



9.6.2022

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition No 0819-21 by L.B. (German) on the organization of a Schengen festival on the German-Danish border

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner calls on the European Parliament and the European Commission to work together with Denmark and Germany to finance a cross-border festival with local artists and cultural workers. He states that since the refugee crisis in 2015 there have been temporary controls on the German-Danish border. During the Corona crisis the border was partially closed and it was only possible to cross for exceptional reasons. Therefore, with such a festival the EU could bind people to the idea of the European Union and the Schengen Agreement and promote again a sense of togetherness.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 10 December 2021. Information requested from Commission under Rule 227(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 9 June 2022

‘The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 has emphatically demonstrated how interdependent EU Member States and regions are. Unfortunately, it has also shown how fragile our internal borders can be and how quickly we can lose the benefits of an open space with free movement, even if only temporarily.

The Commission reacted swiftly within the limits of its legal mandate, by rapidly opening up ‘green corridors’ for the transit of essential goods and adopting two sets of guidelines on the free movement of workers and emergency assistance in cross border healthcare. In addition, based on a Commission proposal, Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475, and its

amendment (EU) 2021/119¹, took a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the crisis demonstrated that the degree of resilience of border areas depends largely on the institutional set-up and on the level of preparedness, which is often designed and decided at national level.

Therefore, the recently adopted Strategy for an Area of Freedom, Security and Justice without internal borders takes due consideration of the experience and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the Commission is at an early stage of preparing an amendment to the Schengen Borders Code to address the identified shortcomings of the current system.

The Commission welcomes the idea of the cross-border festival with local artists and cultural workers. The cross-border region between Germany and Denmark could experience innovative enrichment and expansion of tourism with such an event.

In this context, the Commission would like to draw the attention to the INTERREG VI-A Germany-Denmark cooperation programme. The programme is part of the European cohesion policy 2021-2027². At the same time, it complements the respective national European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programmes. The programme is a continuation of a number of cross-border cooperation programmes and initiatives aimed at developing border areas and reducing borders between countries, thus strengthening Europe's economic, social and territorial integration and promoting a sense of togetherness. The programme thus serves as a dedicated 'bridge builder' across the border.

Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation is one of the areas of support in the programme. The objective is to develop better conditions for a good quality of life, among other things, by strengthening the attractiveness of the border region for the benefit of citizens and visitors.

The programme provides also the opportunity to build up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to-people actions. The aim is to raise awareness among the population of the opportunities of the border region and to provide intercultural knowledge in order to create trust as an essential basis for a common cultural identity. Experience shows that this is best achieved through personal encounters across the border in the context of citizen projects. Encounters between citizens in the so-called "people-to-people" projects play a special role in reaching people, facilitating and promoting cross-border cooperation and establishing and maintaining relationships. It tries also to promote young people's interest in the neighbouring region at an early stage.

Projects such as a cross-border festival in the German-Danish border region could therefore attract interest and receive support from the programme.

¹ Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/119 of 1 February 2021 amending Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, *OJ L 361*, 2.2.2021, p. 1–6.

² The programme has been adopted on 29 April 2022.

The programme's website (<https://www.interreg-de-dk.eu>) is the main information platform. All relevant documents are available as downloads, where all dates and information relevant for the submission and implementation of a project are published.

The managing authority (Investitionsbank Schleswig-Holstein)³ and the joint secretariat, responsible for the implementation of the programme, will be available to you for all questions related to the programme throughout the project cycle.

Conclusion

For the Commission, it is important that cross-border cooperation continues and is further intensified in the future. Supporting the cross-border festival with local artists and cultural workers could contribute to better cross-border cooperation and trust building. Such an event would make the challenges of the border region visible, which would benefit the people on both sides of the border.⁷

³ The contact details of the Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat can be found on the website of the programme.