

**Objective 3: future agenda for cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation**

**European Parliament resolution of 23 June 2011 on Objective 3: a challenge for territorial cooperation – the future agenda for cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation (2010/2155(INI))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Title XVIII thereof,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999<sup>1</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>2</sup>,
- having regard to Council Decision 2006/702/EC of 6 October 2006 on Community strategic guidelines on cohesion<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 7 October 2010 on EU cohesion and regional policy after 2013<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 July 2010 on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea and the role of macro-regions in the future cohesion policy<sup>5</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 20 May 2010 on the implementation of the synergies of research and innovation earmarked funds in Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 on the European Regional Development Fund and the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Development in cities and regions as well as in the Member States and the Union<sup>6</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 24 March 2009 on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion and the state of the debate on the future reform of cohesion policy<sup>7</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 19 February 2009 on the review of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument<sup>8</sup>,

---

<sup>1</sup> OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> OJ L 291, 21.10.2006, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2010)0356.

<sup>5</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2010)0254.

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 161 E, 31.5.2011, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> OJ C 117 E, 6.5.2010, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> OJ C 76 E, 25.3.2010, p. 83.

- having regard to its resolution of 21 February 2008 on the follow-up of the Territorial Agenda and the Leipzig Charter: Towards a European Action Programme for Spatial Development and Territorial Cohesion<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 1 December 2005 on the role of ‘Euroregions’ in the development of regional policy<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 28 September 2005 on the role of territorial cohesion in regional development<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 8 December 2010 entitled ‘European Union Strategy for Danube Region’ (COM(2010)0715) and the indicative action plan that accompanied the strategy (SEC(2010)1489),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 9 November 2010 entitled ‘Conclusions of the fifth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion: the future of cohesion policy’ (COM(2010)0642),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 19 October 2010 entitled ‘The EU Budget Review’ (COM(2010)0700) and the technical annexes thereto (SEC(2010)7000),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 6 October 2010 entitled ‘Regional Policy contributing to smart growth in Europe 2020’(COM(2010)0553),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 31 March 2010 entitled ‘Cohesion policy: Strategic Report 2010 on the implementation of the programmes 2007-2013’ (COM(2010)0110),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 10 June 2009 entitled ‘European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region’(COM(2009)0248) and the indicative action plan that accompanied the strategy (SEC(2009)0712/2),
- having regard to its resolution of 9 March 2011 on the European Strategy for the Atlantic Region, which mentioned the publication of a Commission communication scheduled for 2011<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 6 October 2008 entitled ‘Global Europe: Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion: Turning territorial diversity into strength’ (COM(2008)0616),
- having regard to the own-initiative opinion of 27 January 2011 of the Committee of the Regions on ‘New perspectives for the revision of the EGTC Regulation’,
- having regard to the independent report, drawn up at the Commission’s request, entitled ‘INTERREG III Community Initiative (2000-2006): Ex-Post Evaluation’ (No 2008.CE.16.0.AT.016),

---

<sup>1</sup> OJ C 184 E, 6.8.2009, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 285 E, 22.11.2006, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 227 E, 21.9.2006, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> Texts Adopted, P7\_TA(2011)0089.

- having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A7-0110/2011),
- A. whereas the European Union currently comprises 27 Member States and 271 regions,
- B. whereas around 37,5% of Europe's population lives in border regions,
- C. whereas informal cooperation arrangements, the Euroregions, the Eurodistricts, the EGTCs, Council of Europe initiatives, the successive Treaties and the EU's secondary legislation have all contributed to establishing stronger and more sustainable links between territories,
- D. whereas, although the foundations for territorial cooperation have been laid, many challenges still remain, the nature of which depends on the history and degree of maturity of cooperation arrangements,
- E. whereas, having 'abolished' borders in the Treaties, what matters is lessening their impact on our people's daily lives,
- F. whereas regional policy aims to promote the harmonious development of regions by strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion in the European Union,
- G. whereas the 'Territorial Cooperation' objective, one of the components of cohesion policy, contributes to 'ever closer union among the peoples of Europe' by reducing the barriers between territories and regions,
- H. whereas, at the EU's external borders, the territorial cooperation objective is one aspect of the pre-accession process and of the implementation of neighbourhood policy, and whereas, consequently, coordination of the relevant Community arrangements must be improved,
- I. whereas territorial cooperation, i.e. cooperation between the inhabitants of different regions, is an ongoing learning process which creates a feeling of community and of having a shared future,
- J. whereas citizens must be placed at the centre of the priorities of territorial cooperation, and therefore a place-based approach should be advocated,
- K. whereas closer territorial cooperation is dependent on progress made with European integration and coordination in all fields that contributes to European integration and territorial cohesion, and whereas territorial cooperation in itself is a testbed for European integration,
- L. whereas only few investments take place in trans-European transport networks (TEN) in border regions, although it is precisely at the cross-border interfaces that modernisation is urgently required, and where it sees an instance of classic European added value in the removal of cross-border infrastructure barriers,
- M. whereas the basic regulation governing the Structural Funds and the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty have considerably increased the importance accorded to territorial cooperation,
- N. whereas the ex-post evaluation of the INTERREG III programmes for the 2000-2006

programming period offers conclusive proof of the added value of this objective for the European project,

***Strengthening the ‘territorial cooperation’ objective***

1. Points out that territorial cooperation aims to help territories and regions to work together in tackling their common challenges, to reduce the physical, cultural, administrative and regulatory barriers to such cooperation and to lessen the ‘border effect’;
2. Is convinced of the European added value of territorial cooperation and the key role it plays in deepening the internal market and fostering closer European integration in several sectoral policies, and calls for territorial cooperation to remain one of the pillars of cohesion policy;
3. Stresses that the objective of territorial cooperation, based on the principle of economic, social and territorial cohesion, concerns all the EU's regions in that it helps to promote the harmonious development of the Union as a whole;
4. Believes that territorial cooperation has proved its effectiveness and that its potential as a source of competitiveness has so far been insufficiently tapped as a result of the inadequate resources allocated to it; calls for the budget for the ‘territorial cooperation’ objective to increase from 2,5% in the current programming period to at least 7% of the overall cohesion policy budget for the next programming period;
5. Advocates retaining the current structure of Objective 3, which is divided into three components (cross-border (component A), transnational (component B) and interregional (component C)), and the current emphasis on the cross-border component, which receives at least 70% of the territorial cooperation budget; notes that there should be a fair and equitable distribution of funds under the programme for all regions;
6. Considers that, if a distinction should continue to be made between the cross-border component (component A), which meets the local needs of cross-border population catchment areas, and the transnational component (component B), including the so-called macroregional scale, which facilitates cooperation over wider strategic areas, better coordination between the two components is needed;
7. Calls furthermore – with a view to ensuring the coherence and continuity of territorial cooperation measures and given the strategic nature of the projects in question – for greater flexibility in exploiting the scope offered by Article 21 of the ERDF Regulation with regard to the location of cross-border and transnational cooperation activities, incorporating maritime regions; to that end, calls for a certain flexibility in the application of the geographical limit of 150 km set for cross-border cooperation programmes for coastal and maritime regions;
8. Considers, nonetheless, that the integration of such regions with and their opening up to geographical areas outside the EU is not and cannot be simply a function of their geographical remoteness, as the wealth of historical, linguistic and cultural bonds linking them to various parts of the world gives them a key role to play in the deepening of such relations, to the benefit of the EU's global presence;
9. Underlines the crucial role of territorial cooperation in delivering the EU2020 objectives;

calls for forward thinking to ascertain the strategic needs of each border region and area of cooperation in connection with this strategy, and, subsequently, for European territorial cooperation to be integrated in, and tailored to, all levels of strategic planning: European, national, regional and local; urges the Commission to clarify, without delay, its proposals on the thematic concentration of funds, with reference to an EU 2020 ‘thematic menu’;

10. Calls for funds to be allocated for each programme of territorial cooperation on the basis of harmonised criteria so as to provide a strategic, integrated response to the needs and specificities of each territory or area involved; invites in this respect the Commission and the Member States to consider other relevant, strategic and measurable criteria that could reflect the needs of territories without undermining the most important criterion: demography;
11. Stresses once again the importance of interregional cooperation (component C), but deplores the lack of funds allocated to it; suggests, therefore, a reconsideration of the EU cofinancing rate limit of this component, devoting attention also to its capacity to act as an incentive, for participants from the regions covered by the ‘competitiveness and employment’ objective in order to raise the number of projects in this component C, and calls for the thematic areas of cooperation to be widened to encompass governance and management of operational programmes as well as territorial development;
12. Encourages also regions to make better use of the scope for interregional cooperation offered within their operational programmes by the basic regulation<sup>1</sup>; advocates, therefore, that the ‘interregional’ component of Objective 3 should also cover the coordination and running of such projects, the pooling of know-how and the exchange of good practices;
13. Stresses, for the future territorial cooperation operational programmes, the importance of the support of INTERACT and the capacity for successful assistance schemes, which could draw inspiration from the RC LACE project; calls for more effective coordination between INTERACT, URBACT, ESPON and component C, with a view to better implementing Objective 3;
14. Supports ESPON in its activities but suggests that opportunities for active involvement in its research into territorial development matters should be made more accessible to local and regional authorities while easier practical deployment of the resulting findings should be assured;
15. Welcomes the success of the URBACT sustainable urban development programme and calls for its renewal and expansion into a significant and widely accessible initiative to offer opportunities for shared learning and transferability with regard to local urban challenges;
16. Invites the Commission to look into ways of involving local and regional councillors in these Europe-wide networks for the exchange of experiences and good practices, as a first step to implement the Erasmus project for local and regional elected representatives;
17. Reiterates that involving sub-national actors in the achievement of the EU objectives is a precondition to effectively implement territorial cohesion;

### ***Mainstreaming territorial cooperation***

---

<sup>1</sup> Article 37(6)(b).

18. Believes that the mainstreaming of the 'territorial cooperation' objective with the 'convergence' and 'competitiveness and employment' objectives is needed; calls for the programming to be better coordinated than it has been before; suggests that regional operational programmes should have the option to take an interest and participate in the cross-border, transnational and interregional projects that concern them by defining a territorial approach to the allocation of funding, for the benefit of priority projects, like the connection to the trans-European networks in border regions, identified in advance and in consultation with their partners in the programmes, in accordance with the principles of multi-level governance and partnership, which will allow better exploitation of the potential of territorial cooperation thanks to the relations developed among private and public actors across borders;
19. Encourages the Member States and regions to set up multi-regional operational programmes to address common territorial problems; such as the presence of a mountain range or a river basin which characterises the territory;
20. Encourages the Commission and Member States to promote the coordination of policies in cross-border regions and the labour market, so as to ensure that issues of distortion of competition do not arise within the framework of economic and territorial integration;
21. Considers that cross-border cooperation programmes are also important in order to be effective and achieve results with regard to strategies that concern poverty reduction and integration of disadvantaged groups into European mainstream society; calls for this issue to be considered when designing the regulatory framework and for it to be ensured that in disadvantaged regions appropriate measures are available for participation in European regional development programmes;

***Adopting a territorial approach in implementing other EU policies***

22. Notes that approaches along the lines of the Baltic Sea Strategy can enhance cross-border cooperation; considers that macro-strategies should take full account of other regional cooperation programmes in order to generate synergies; points out that the concept of macro-regions, a Council initiative, came into being as an experimental, logical way of coordinating common projects covering a very large territory, characterised by common territorial problems, with a view to making use of the advantages of an integrated, multisectoral and territorial approach based on common strategic actions receiving support from existing funds;
23. Points out that such strategies as exist or may exist in the future should provide a basis for more strategic and 'joined up' approaches to be realised via the relevant territorial cooperation instruments but are not generating new funds in the EU budget, and do not provide for the establishment of new institutions or the application of new legislation;
24. Asks the Commission to conduct an in-depth study of the results of the first macro-regional strategies implemented; believes that the process has met with a level of interest that should be built on, with lessons being learnt for the implementation of future new macro-regional strategies;
25. Points out that the Territorial Cooperation Objective can accommodate cooperation on a macroregional scale, especially within its transnational strand;

26. Advocates the use of transnational programmes to support these territorial strategies by coordinating the work of devising, framing and steering macro-regional strategies, albeit without this leading to unnecessary duplication of the EU's budget structures by creating specific budget lines for different macro-regions;
27. Stresses at the same time that the aims of macro-regional strategies complement the aims of micro-regional cross-border cooperation and may encompass them, but cannot replace them; stresses for this reason that the cross-border component of territorial cooperation must be preserved as a distinct and legitimate element in its own right;
28. Is convinced that the transnational component of Objective 3 can help to improve cooperation in the context of macro-regional strategies by involving regional and local authorities and civil society more closely in the implementation of practical initiatives;
29. Believes that any transnational strategy must take due account of the scope of coordination with the trans-European transport network guidelines and the strategies pursued under the integrated maritime policy;
30. Points out that territorial cooperation concerns both the EU's internal and external borders, including matters relating to current and future macro-regional strategies; stresses the difficulties encountered by third countries in obtaining cofinancing under the arrangements for cooperation provided for in the ERDF Regulation; asks the Commission to consider how to create more effective synergies between initiatives under the ERDF, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the European Development Fund (EDF), and calls on it to submit a proposal for a new Neighbourhood Policy as soon as possible; calls for a simplification and harmonisation of the rules governing access to the different sources of financing, in order to ensure compatibility and facilitate their use by beneficiaries;
31. Calls on the Commission, in view of the special nature of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, to transfer responsibility for managing it to the Commission's DG Regional Development, albeit taking into account external relations aspects; notes that, in its present form, ENPI does not provide an adequate basis for taking account of the specific features of cross-border cooperation; believes that consideration should be given to separating it from the administration of external relations at least in those cases in which third countries participating in external border cooperation also fund the cooperation;
32. Calls for implementation of the Wider Neighbourhood Action Plan for the EU's outermost regions, announced in Commission Communication COM(2004)0343; stresses, therefore, the need for coherent multisectoral action in areas of EU policy concerning the outermost regions and, in particular, for internal and external components to be coordinated more effectively by means of a catchment area strategy;
33. Recalls that a White Paper on territorial cohesion as a follow-up to the Green Paper would represent a timely instrument to clarify how to implement territorial cohesion through multi-level governance in the future regional policy and provide material for the debate on the next legislative package;
34. States that the conditions for cross-border cooperation in the ENPI are not sufficient for its appropriate development; advocates, therefore, more effective coordination between the various Commission directorates-general concerned; is convinced of the ultimate necessity

to reintegrate the ENPI cross-border cooperation programmes into the Territorial Cooperation Objective of cohesion policy;

***Facilitating the establishment of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs)***

35. Considers that EGTCs represent a unique, highly valuable territorial governance instrument which meets a need for structured cooperation with reference to financing, the legal status of projects and multi-level governance; recalls that the instrument of EGTC must be promoted as a tool to set up systems of cross-border governance, ensuring the ownership of the different policies at regional and local level; also stresses their key role in contributing to the successful implementation of a multi-level governance model;
36. Highlights the fact that EGTCs can contribute not only to territorial cohesion but also to social cohesion: points out that this instrument has the best capacity to bring the different cultural and linguistic communities closer to each other, promote peaceful coexistence in a diverse Europe and make European added value visible to the citizen;
37. Recommends that a first assessment of the EGTCs in place be carried out, with a view to learning from these initial experiences;
38. Believes, however, that their establishment must be facilitated and calls on the Commission to propose amendments to Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council on EGTCs without delay, taking due account of the problems identified by the local and regional authorities and the groupings already in place and on the basis of work undertaken by the Committee of the Regions, with a view to:
  - clarifying the status of EGTC under the legal systems of the Member States in order to achieve an appropriate legal alignment in this respect,
  - allowing EGTCs to be established by stakeholders based in a Member State and in a third country,
  - redrafting Article 4(3) to ensure stricter compliance with the three-month deadline for the processing of applications to set up an EGTC,
  - simplifying the laws governing staffing,
  - ensuring that the tax rules for EGTCs are no less favourable than other legal arrangements governing the implementation of cooperation projects or programmes;
39. Calls for the allocation of global grants to EGTCs with projects that reflect the objectives and strategies of the relevant cooperation programmes, on the basis of common cross-border development strategies, in order to enable them to directly manage Structural Fund appropriations, and programmes, as well as for the multinational and multilateral nature of EGTCs to be better reflected in regulations governing the other European funds, with a view to improving their access to other sources of financing;
40. Welcomes the launch by the Committee of the Regions of the European EGTC Platform, which aims to facilitate the exchange of experiences, the pooling of best practices and the provision of technical support for EGTCs;
41. Takes the view that cross-border EGTCs offer an excellent opportunity to build Europe at



territorial level with the involvement of EU citizens; calls on cross-border EGTCs to launch and run when appropriate a ‘cross-border civil society forum’ and to support cross-border citizens’ initiatives;

### ***Simplifying implementation***

42. Believes that the implementation of territorial cooperation programmes remains overly complicated and considers that Objective 3 needs a separate regulation to reflect the inherently international character of its activities; believes that at present too many different administrative authorities have to be involved in implementing programmes and therefore calls for significant simplification in this respect;
43. Invites the Commission to propose specific measures which simplify rules on auditing and control, with ‘one management authority per programme’ as a guiding principle, authorise more systematic standard-rate costing and the funding of small projects by means of fixed amounts, lay down more detailed EU rules on eligibility for funding, make for greater flexibility in the implementation of automatic decommitments, increase technical assistance with a view to ensuring that the management bodies concentrate more on the launching and strategic support of projects and delivery of results, rather than merely on management and whether applications comply with administrative rules;
44. Calls on the Member States to simplify their national provisions, which very often add administrative burden not required by the Community rules;
45. Calls on the Commission to clarify, as soon as possible, the provisions governing the principle of conditionality intended for territorial cooperation; considers that, if this conditionality is to create the conditions for better and more effective use of funds, it must not further complicate implementation, to the detriment of programme managers and beneficiaries;
46. Stresses, furthermore, that arrangements for involving private stakeholders must be broadened and simplified; recommends setting up financial engineering systems, along the lines of the JEREMIE and JESSICA initiatives, to facilitate cross-border projects which are vectors of economic development, the participation of private stakeholders and the establishment of public-private partnerships;

### ***Raising the profile of territorial cooperation***

47. Deplores the low profile of territorial cooperation, in the eyes of both national and local authorities and the general public, and therefore calls for more effective communication on completed projects;
48. Asks the Commission to come up with ways to raise the profile of EGTCs and their activities among territorial cooperation stakeholders and the general public;
49. Considers that the close cultural and linguistic links between border regions in different Member States, a legacy of history, must be exploited in order to boost cross-border cooperation;
50. Considers that, by helping to fulfil the Europe 2020 strategy’s objective of intelligent and inclusive growth, increased cooperation on education and culture would raise the level of

participation of citizens and NGOs as well as contribute to the raising of the profile of territorial cooperation and breaking down the 'mental borders' that still set citizens apart from one another;

51. Calls for better coordination between managing authorities and already existing cross-border institutions like Euroregions during the implementation of cross-border programmes so as to guarantee for projects a high level of quality, transparency and closeness to the citizen;
52. Asks for more effective coordination of communication between all stakeholders involved in the process of implementing territorial cooperation initiatives, suggests that all programmes in the same component should be recognisable by their use of a single identifiable logo (e.g. reinstatement of the well-recognised 'INTERREG' tag) in tandem with each programme's logo (perhaps of a standardised visual size), and invites the Commission, by the start of the next programming period, to come up with a large-scale media and awareness-raising campaign for border regions on the benefits and achievements of territorial cooperation;

◦

◦      ◦

53. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Member States.