Objective 3: a challenge for territorial cooperation - the future agenda for cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation

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The European Parliament adopted by 612 votes to 46, with 15 abstentions, a resolution on Objective 3: a challenge for territorial cooperation – the future agenda for cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation.

Parliament recalls that around 37.5% of Europe's population lives in border regions. 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. 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. 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’.

(1) Strengthening the ‘territorial cooperation’ objective: Parliament 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. It calls for territorial cooperation to **remain one of the pillars of cohesion policy**.

Members call 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. They also advocate 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. There should be a fair and equitable distribution of funds under the programme for all regions.

With a view to ensuring the coherence and continuity of territorial cooperation measures and given the strategic nature of the projects in question, the resolution calls 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.

Members also underline the crucial role of territorial cooperation in delivering the Europe 2020objectives, and call for forward thinking to ascertain the strategic needs of each border region and area of cooperation in connection with this strategy.

They want 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. The Commission and Member States are asked to consider other relevant, strategic and measurable criteria that could reflect the needs of territories without undermining the most important criterion: demography.

(2) Mainstreaming territorial cooperation: Parliament believes that the mainstreaming of the ‘territorial cooperation’ objective with the ‘convergence’ and ‘competitiveness and employment’ objectives is

needed. It 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.

The resolution encourages 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. It also encourages the Commission and Member States to promote the coordination of policies in cross-border regions and the labour market.

(3) Adopting a territorial approach in implementing other EU policies: Members note that approaches along the lines of the Baltic Sea Strategy can enhance cross-border cooperation. They point 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.

Parliament asks the Commission to conduct an in-depth study of the results of the first macro-regional strategies implemented, noting 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.

It 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**.

Pointing out that territorial cooperation concerns both the **EU's internal and external borders,** Members stress the difficulties encountered by third countries in obtaining co-financing under the arrangements for cooperation provided for in the ERDF Regulation. They ask 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). They are convinced of the ultimate necessity to reintegrate the ENPI cross-border cooperation programmes into the Territorial Cooperation Objective of cohesion policy.

(4) Facilitating the establishment of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs): Parliament 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. It 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. It also stresses their key role in contributing to the successful implementation of a multi-level governance model.

(5) Simplifying implementation: Members believe 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.

They invite the Commission to propose specific measures which (i) simplify rules on auditing and control, with 'one management authority per programme' as a guiding principle; (ii) authorise more systematic standard-rate costing and the funding of small projects by means of fixed amounts; (iii) lay down more detailed EU rules on eligibility for funding; (iv) make for greater flexibility in the implementation of automatic decommitments; (v) increase technical assistance.

The resolution calls on the Commission to clarify, as soon as possible, the provisions governing the principle of conditionality intended for territorial cooperation.

(6) Raising the profile of territorial cooperation: Members ask the Commission to come up with ways to raise the profile of EGTCs and their activities among territorial cooperation stakeholders and the general public. They suggest 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 invite 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.