

Conclusions from the Congress on smart cooperation

**“Cities and regions cooperating across
borders: an opportunity to overcome crisis”
25-26 June 2012
in La Coruña, Spain**

Introduction

Nearly 400 participants met on 25 and 26 June at La Coruña in Spain at the "1st Congress on Smart Cooperation - Territorial Cooperation fostering European integration: Cities and Regions linking across borders", organized by the CECICN (Conference of European Cross-border and Interregional City Networks)¹. Many personalities² and stakeholders from all decision levels, local, regional, national and European, have come to La Coruña.

The conference confirmed the importance of raising the following five key ideas on smart cooperation in order to put European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) at the core of the debate on future Cohesion Policy:

- ≡ 1st Financing Territorial Cooperation in Cohesion Policy
- ≡ 2nd Improving the strategic dimension of cooperation
- ≡ 3rd Reinforcing governance
- ≡ 4th Developing the tools
- ≡ 5th Contributing to the Single Market

The European representatives have been particularly receptive to the proposals issued by the strategic document prepared jointly by the CECICN and the AEBR³ and discussed in the workshops of the conference. This document demonstrates that the European Territorial Cooperation has proved its European, political, institutional, economic and socio-cultural added value.

Discussions also showed that European Territorial Cooperation gives life to projects designed to meet the needs of the territories and their inhabitants, and to boost local and regional economies. The challenges that Europe is facing today cannot be solved without a sustained cooperation, and that the message has to be brought to all levels (European, national, regional and local). It is essential to place the European Territorial Cooperation both at the heart of the EU 2020 strategy and the revival of the single market. It is cohesion policy itself that defined it as "vital" to get out of the crisis.

Some key messages from the plenary sessions

José Durão Barroso, president of the European Commission, confirmed in a video message the **proposed increase in the budget for the ETC strand of the cohesion policy** for the next programming period, a sum of almost 12 billion euros. It will be debated by the Member States in autumn.

Michel Delebarre summed up **"the response to this crisis is more Europe, more cooperation between cities and regions across borders"**. In addition to the need for a sufficient budget for the

¹ The CECICN was born in 2010. Its objective is to promote territorial cooperation among border cities in Europe and to reinforce the message concerning the importance of territorial cooperation. CECICN involves six cooperation networks that represent more than 500 cities in border regions and 37% of European population: the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT), the Union of Baltic Cities (UBC), the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities (FAIC), MedCities, the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities (CAAC) and the Iberian Network of Cross-border Bodies (RIET).

² Among them: Michel Delebarre, President of COTER, Committee of the Regions and president of the MOT, Per Bødker Andersen, President of the CECICN and President of the Union of the Baltic Cities, Carlos Negreira, Mayor of A Coruña, Alberto Núñez Feijóo, Regional President of Galicia, Marta Fernández Currás, Spanish Secretary of State for budget and expenditure, Ann-Sofi Backgren, AEBR Vice-President, Ana Miranda, MEP, Representative of the Parliamentary Committee on Regional Development, José Palma Andrés, Director of European Territorial Cooperation, DG REGIO and Henrik Mørch, Head of Unit, DG MARKT. See also program of the conference.

³ Association of European Border Regions.

European cohesion policy, he emphasized the importance of finding mechanisms to allow a greater association of local stakeholders as Europe needs to be built on its territories.

Ana Miranda emphasized the commitment of the European Parliament for regional development: **“Cohesion policy must play a critical role to promote the creation of employment and to promote social inclusion**, particularly in border regions, often isolated and less well connected in comparison to non-border territories”. The budget for territorial cooperation was considered too low by the European Parliament who wished to raise it from 3.48% to 7% of the total budget for cohesion policy.

Further key messages have been put forward by the participants of the Conference:

To overcome the current crisis cohesion policy needs to be implemented in **all policy sectors**, not only the economic sector.

A **multi-level dialogue needs to be promoted** more than ever, both "vertically" (between the local, regional, national and European levels) and "horizontally" by putting in place a solid link to civil society.

There is a **necessity to "simplify" the management of the European programs and projects**.

European and cross-border strategies should systematically take into account local experiences. In this sense the experience of governance structures like the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is particularly innovative and should serve as an example to advance the European framework.

Cross-border territories are the ideal **laboratories for the European construction**, as borders encounter difficulties (legal, administrative, linguistic, etc.) but also offer untapped development potential for their inhabitants and businesses, on a daily basis.

A **better coordination between the operational programs and the local projects** needs to be organized, border by border.

A **support for "small projects"** must be maintained as they are essential to forge the cross-border territorial identity and as they allow to implication of the inhabitants.

Results from the six workshops and two parallel sessions

The Conference has been organized around 6 workshops and 2 parallel sessions of which each has worked on its specific conclusions:

- ≡ Workshop 1 – Macro-regions, coordinated by Xunta de Galicia
- ≡ Workshop 2 – Smart Cross-border Cooperation, coordinated by RIET
- ≡ Workshop 3 – Cooperating in the EU external borders, coordinated by MedCities
- ≡ Workshop 4 – Cooperation contributing to smart growth, coordinated by UBC
- ≡ Workshop 5 – Cooperation contributing to sustainable growth: An Atlantic Strategy to reduce carbon footprint emissions, coordinated by the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities
- ≡ Workshop 6 – Tools for cooperation, coordinated by MOT
- ≡ Parallel Session 1 – Multilevel Governance of cross-border cooperation
- ≡ Parallel Session 2 – Macro-regional Strategies: the future of the Atlantic Area

Final conclusion and next steps

The President of the CECICN, Per Bødker Andersen concluded that CECICN must continue to contribute to a Europe of growth, jobs and a better quality of life for its citizens. **CECICN will therefore continue to claim the contribution of European Territorial Cooperation to the EU 2020 strategy, the Single Market and Cohesion Policy**, and this:

- ≡ At European level together with the Directorates Generals of the European Commission concerned (as for example in link with the Urban and Territorial cohesion Inter-service group, etc.).
- ≡ At European level as partner of the Committee of the Regions (as for example concerning the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Platform, etc.).
- ≡ At European level as partner of the European Parliament.
- ≡ At national level together with the Member States, for example concerning the process of territorial and urban agendas.
- ≡ And concerning all levels within the strategic follow up of Cohesion Policy.