



Plenary meeting of Committee 2

Valencia, Comunitat Valenciana-E, 19th September 2008

Agenda ref.: 7

Original English

Document for information

**Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion –
Towards a harmonious and balanced development of the EU territory.
Turning diversity into strength**

*Summary of the draft version (June 2008)
AER Committee 1 “Economy and Regional Development”*

Context

1st mention of territorial cohesion: Regions and Territories in Europe – The Regions’ view of the territorial effects of European Policies, AER 1995.

Previously adopted at EU level: Territorial Agenda, Leipzig, May 2007

In the Lisbon Treaty, the concept of territorial cohesion appears 9 times, including the amendment of the *Protocol on social and economic cohesion*, transformed into *Protocol on social, economic and territorial cohesion*.

AER definition of Territorial Cohesion issued in June 2008

Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, to be issued by the European Commission 23rd September 2008

Consultation to follow the Green Paper: AER official contribution to be sent after approval by the AER General Assembly

Objective of the Green Paper:

The document is expected to :

- Propose a clear EU definition of “Territorial Cohesion”
- Pave the way for a public debate on how to better take into account the territorial dimension within EU and national sectoral policies and programmes.

The document also gives some views on possible new orientations for cohesion policy, trying to aggregate a place-based and integrated approach as a translation of the subsidiarity principle. Territorial cohesion means exploiting as much as possible the so-called “territorial capital” of a given geographical area.

THE DOCUMENT IS STRUCTURED AS FOLLOWS:

Introduction

Attempt to define territorial cohesion and its purpose:

“Territorial cohesion is about making these diverse territories develop in a harmonious and balanced way. [It] should thus enable territories to identify and take advantage of their [territorial capital].”

Second objective of the paper:

“The concept of territorial cohesion needs to be translated into policy orientations and priorities.”

Account of the situation of territorial cohesion in Europe today

- ❑ The EU has a unique settlement pattern, i.e. a dense network of medium-sized cities and towns, which guarantees a balanced population dispersion, with a limited number of metropolises unlike other Regions in the world.. This ensures subsequently a very high quality of life to the EU citizens.
- ❑ Imbalanced distribution of economic activities: economic and commercial hubs are heavily concentrated in a few European areas (so-called metro regions create nearly 67% of the total European GDP)
- ❑ **Over-exploitation of territorial resources:** the concentration of economic activities creates allocative inefficiencies and demonstrates a somewhat improper use of regional resources at EU level. (despite a regular dispersion of its population)
- ❑ **Under-exploitation of territorial resources:** in many other areas, increasing difficulties in accessing services of general interest. Moreover, the insulation of mountainous and island regions results in their lagging industry and a subsequently high rate of unemployment.
- ❑ Nevertheless, all European areas can effectively contribute to the development of European territories. Metro regions benefit from a dynamic industry sector and powerful innovation networks / Rural areas store a strong capacity to generate valuable capital with a tourism and leisure sector.

Conclusion:

The aim of an integrated territorial policy is therefore to **ensure a balanced exploitation of territorial resources, avoiding both their under- and over-exploitation**. For the European Commission, the key lies in linking different territories, which conducts to strengthen their assets and to maximize positive synergies. Close and effective cooperation between towns, cities and rural areas constitutes an essential point of the Commission’s proposals.

Special focus points:

Connecting territories

“To strengthen territorial capital, territories should be better connected.”

Uneven transport connections according to the European regions. Sometimes, there is a need to improve the road or railways networks, sometimes, need to find alternatives to road congestion. Also in terms of communication, wide imbalances in the repartition of broadband Internet access. Strongly interconnected energy networks are also needed.

Specific territories

There is a wide diversity of situation, even within the categories of specific territories: mountainous regions, islands and sparsely populated areas. What they have in common is their difficulty to achieve a higher critical mass due to their location, which does not mean that they cannot achieve very good economic and social results. Border areas: there is an important difference between Older Member States' internal borders and borders between new Member States, where there is still a strong need to facilitate cooperation. External borders are the most lagging-behind and need specific attention.

Access to Services of general interest

"Access to these services depends to a large degree on the settlement pattern" but not only
Health: Low access to hospital in territories with specific handicaps (see above)
Universities: very uneven access while this is a key asset in a territorial capital.
 Importance of ICT in health and education, to ease the access to these services.
 Difficulty also to access these services in densely populated areas, urban areas due to congestion effect, safety problems and poverty.

Environmental quality

The Green Paper concentrates on urban environmental problems, the two major sources of pollution being car-traffic and heating. The solution lies in coordinated strategies between cities and other levels of government.

How is territorial cohesion currently taken into account in the European Union?

At national level

"In many ways, therefore, territorial cohesion confirms and strengthens existing dimensions of cohesion policy."

Very few member states have followed the integrated territorial approach in their national strategies for the current programming period (Austria is named as one of the few) contrary to what was proclaimed in Ponta Delgada, in November 2007 at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on the Territorial Agenda.

Lack of synergies between cohesion policy and CAP in the programmes for rural areas.

"Overall, more can be done in the design of national strategies (...) to clarify the territorial dimension of interventions supported by cohesion policy."

At EU level

The EC identifies 5 Community policies which influence territorial cohesion:

- Transport
- Telecommunications
- CAP
- Environment
- State Aid

Questions for debate (consultation open until next year)

1. Is a place-based and integrated approach the most appropriate model for the development of the EU cohesion policy? For which policy is this particularly relevant?

2. What relevant themes should the concept and objective of territorial cohesion enclose?
3. When talking about territorial cohesion, which geographical approach to define a "territory"?
4. What kind of governance to achieve territorial cohesion?
5. How could we improve and make territorial cooperation more effective?
6. How to better coordinate sectoral and territorial policies?