



EU informal ministerial meeting on territorial cohesion
Presidency conclusions
Rotterdam, 29th of November 2004

The Presidency concluded the following:

1. Territorial challenges

- 1.1 The Ministers took note of the demographic, economic, social and environmental challenges facing the recently enlarged EU territory, especially those emerging or intensifying since the adoption of the ESDP, including the effects of climate change, global competitiveness and high energy prices. They stressed, once again, the importance of territorial cohesion, both in strengthening competitiveness and reducing disparities within the cohesion framework, and the key role that cities play in this concern.
- 1.2 They observed that the diverse potentials of EU regions have not been sufficiently taken into account in the Lisbon Strategy¹ so far. They acknowledged that integrated spatial development approaches, enabling regions to exploit their endogenous potentials more effectively, can support the Lisbon aims.
- 1.3 They highlighted the increasing territorial impact of EU policies on the Member States and their regions. They recognised that inconsistencies between EU policies reduce their effectiveness and may lead to a sub-optimal allocation of EU resources.
- 1.4 They stressed that these territorial challenges require a coherent approach to the development of the EU territory that takes account of its diversity. They took note of the opportunities provided by existing European instruments and procedures to develop such an approach on the basis of the concept of territorial cohesion.

2. The need for a coherent approach to the development of the EU territory

- 2.1 The Ministers recognised that *territorial cohesion* adds to the concept of economic and social cohesion by translating the fundamental EU goal of balanced and sustainable development into a territorial setting. They recognised that it is both a multi-sectoral and a multi-level concept that can be implemented at regional/national, transnational and European levels. They acknowledged that it adds an integrated and long-term approach to the process of exploiting territorial potentials.
- 2.2 They recognised the need for regions and Member States to identify their unique development potential and their position in the European territory, and to place spatial development strategies in a transnational and European development context².
- 2.3 They called on the Commission and the Luxembourg Presidency, when preparing the 2005 Spring European Council, to take account of the observation that integrated spatial development approaches that enable regions and cities to exploit their potentials more effectively, can support the Lisbon aims.
- 2.4 They expressed the need for greater coherence between EU policies which have a territorial impact, and the need for those policies to take better account of Europe's great territorial and cultural diversity as an EU potential. They recognised the need to identify potential constraints and opportunities for territorial cohesion within EU policies.

¹ In this paper the Lisbon & Gothenburg Strategy are taken together under the wording 'the Lisbon Strategy'

² They built i.a. on the fruitful conclusions of the Galway conference on territorial cohesion that was held in May 2004 under the Irish Presidency.

- 2.5 They underlined the need for future EU Cohesion Policy to consider both sectoral and spatial components, thereby ensuring an integrated approach and coherence between national policy priorities and those for transnational and interregional cooperation. They stressed the importance of the strategic frameworks and operational programmes taking themes and principles into account that are crucial for promoting sustainable economic growth on the basis of territorial cohesion³.
- 2.6 They stressed the importance of European Territorial Cooperation as the successor to INTERREG. They emphasised that actions under this objective should be in harmony with the needs and priorities of the member states and their regions, allowing flexibility between cross-border and transnational cooperation. Also they emphasised the importance of focusing actions within European Territorial Cooperation on the trans-European structuring elements for the EU territory, the development and application of innovative and integrated spatial development approaches, and the exchange and dissemination of best practices on common issues. Moreover, they emphasised the need for strategic projects, linking national and regional spatial strategies to the Lisbon aims and the importance of extending spatial development cooperation beyond the new external borders of the EU under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument.

3. The role of the Ministers in promoting a coherent approach

- 3.1 The Ministers agreed to focus their efforts in the coming years on putting EU territorial issues and challenges on the EU political agenda. Their work will be based on the principles of:
- Integration: building on the ESDP, their cooperation is aimed at the integration of the territorial dimension into EU policies, taking account of regional diversity and the challenges of multi-level and multi-sectoral governance
 - No new procedures or rules: better use will be made of *existing* possibilities, including EU expert committees, impact assessments, existing Council structures and working groups
 - Subsidiarity
 - Facilitating development: efforts will be focused on facilitating the Lisbon Strategy and supporting efficiency in achieving cohesion.

4. Their policy agenda until 2007

- 4.1 The Ministers agreed that they will focus their agenda until 2007 on territorial cohesion with the aim of supporting the Lisbon ambitions by better exploiting Europe's diverse potentials. They agreed to identify more in detail:
- the contribution of integrated spatial development approaches towards enabling regions and cities to exploit their potentials more effectively,
 - the impact of EU policies on national and regional spatial policies and developments
 - key territorial challenges and issues for convergence, competitiveness and cooperation in the EU₂ considering the proposals of the EU Constitution and the Third Cohesion Report.
- 4.2 They agreed to translate these analyses into a short evidence-based synthesis document, making use of ESPON and other research results. This will offer the EU institutions, Member States, regions and other stakeholders an important insight into the 'territorial state of the Union' and a common information base to address key challenges and opportunities. A first draft of the synthesis document will be presented and discussed during the next informal ministerial conference, scheduled for June 16 and 17, 2005, under the Luxembourg EU Presidency.
- 4.3 They recognised the important role of ESPON in enabling a coherent approach to the development of the EU territory. They considered the continual observation of European territorial trends and developments a highly important instrument of support in pursuing territorial cohesion. They agreed to work with the Commission towards an agreement under the Luxembourg Presidency, defining the

³ These principles could include polycentric development and urban-rural partnerships, strengthening regional innovation capacities and parity of access, risk prevention, the use of development assets in nature and culture, and finally partnerships and integrated regional approaches. The themes refer to the trans-European structuring elements for the EU territory and their connection to secondary networks: transport, energy, ICT infrastructure, maritime links, water networks, ecological structures, cultural resources, urban networking, etc.

key priorities and a sustainable institutional framework for territorial observation and research networking after 2006.

- 4.4 They agreed to undertake actions to identify, disseminate and apply innovations and best practice resulting from transnational cooperation, making use i.a. of Interact. They underlined the importance of an assessment of the usefulness and effectiveness of the current transnational cooperation zones.
- 4.5 They asked the Dutch and the coming Presidencies, together with the Commission and the European Parliament, to facilitate the elaboration of the political agenda, to regularly monitor its progress and to prepare the synthesis document, and, moreover, to undertake efforts to stimulate the dialogue on territorial cohesion across disciplines and with local and regional actors in the coming years. Concerning the latter, they invited the Committee of the Regions to play an active role in this dialogue.

5. Evaluation and future cooperation

- 5.1 The Ministers agreed that by the end of 2006 or the beginning of 2007 their cooperation should be reviewed in view of the changing context after 2006 (new cohesion policy, probably a new Treaty).
- 5.2 They agreed that this review could consider the opportunities for discussing more strategic and integrated territorial affairs at EU level, the use of territorial analyses in the impact assessment of EU proposals as well as the use of spatial development expertise in EU expert groups.
- 5.3 Pending the new situation after 2006, the Ministers requested the Commission to ensure that there is adequate opportunity to discuss strategic and integrated territorial matters under the existing comitology.