

# **How Europe comes to spatial planning: from the birth of regional policy to the Green Paper on territorial cohesion, the emergence of the Community as a player over more than 20 years**

(July 2009, translated from French)

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## **Introduction**

It is quite clear that the richness of Europe comes from its composite nature, and its extreme geographical, institutional and cultural diversity. This composite character has increased with successive enlargements and with the growth of the public administration systems of the Member States; and it is in this context, and on the foundations provided by regional policy, that Community interest in its territories and geography has slowly evolved, with the major challenge of managing this European space without endangering the identities that make it up.

If we look back over the process of planning and managing the European space, we find two stories unfolding:

- the way that the European Commission has by-passed and even permanently side-stepped the absence of any Community competence in spatial planning; the term ‘territorial cohesion’, which has gradually asserted itself, symbolises this strategy of avoidance;
- the slow process of creating a common culture to plan land use among all the Member States.

It is mainly the first story that interests us here – but not exclusively, such is the interaction between these two histories, Community and intergovernmental, converging in some periods and diverging in others.

## **1. 1975–1989: Awareness of the European dimension of spatial planning is slow to emerge**

The European Union (EU) showed little interest at the outset in the economic and political risks associated with inequalities between regions; indeed, in the Treaty of Rome, the aim of reducing these inequalities only appears in the preamble. Nor did Member States exhibit any particular interest in a European regional policy, and it was not until 1975 that the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was established. This was intended to reduce the regional imbalances cited before, created by “*a predominantly agricultural economy, industrial change and structural unemployment*”. It operated within a framework imposed by the Member States, without any direct involvement by

the territorial bodies and without any real European perspective, with the EU providing a financial instrument rather than a political strategy.

It was only in 1985, with the arrival of the Single Market, the acceleration of European integration, and the Single European Act (1986), that this started to change: **the Community cohesion (or regional) policy** was officially launched. It is worth recalling the territorial implication of a Community operating without any economic borders, namely that the crucial questions for the territories and the approaches to planning them could not be addressed only at the national or local level, independent of the European dimension.

In 1988, when the Structural Funds were reformed, cross-border cooperation became eligible for funding from the ERDF, and the Community cooperation initiative INTERREG-I was set up two years later. 1988 was also an important year for the seven outermost regions (ORs)<sup>1</sup>: these remote regions, combining structural socio-economic backwardness with geographical handicaps, did not receive special treatment under regional policy at this stage, but did obtain sectoral compensation (for agriculture and fisheries) in the form of “*Programmes of Options Specifically Relating to Remoteness and Insularity*” (POSEI).

In this nascent interest by the Commission in spatial planning, we must emphasise the driving role played by the Council of Europe and the European Parliament (see inset 1).

***Inset 1: The driving role played by the Council of Europe and the European Parliament***

The Council of Europe, a pan-European organisation created in 1949 and now encompassing 47 member countries, was the driving force behind a Community concern with spatial planning:

- The creation of CEMAT (the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning), to organise ongoing coordination of spatial planning among Member States, in 1968;
- The adoption of the *European Outline Convention*, to provide a legal framework for cross-border cooperation between territorial authorities, in Madrid in 1980;
- And above all, the adoption by ministers of the *European Spatial Planning Charter* in Torremolinos in 1983. This represents a decisive step forward because it provides both for the elaboration of a European structure for spatial planning and for the specific needs of the territories (urban, rural and frontier areas, mountains, islands, etc.) and the need to organise sectoral policies on a territorial basis. It may be regarded as the precursor of territorial cohesion.

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<sup>1</sup> The Canary Islands, Madeira, the Azores, Réunion, French Guyana, Guadeloupe and Martinique.

At the Community level, it was the European Parliament that launched the initiative (based in part on the work done by la CEMAT), particularly through:

- the so-called *Gendebien* resolution on a *European spatial planning policy*, adopted in 1983;
- the resolution concerning a *Coordinated spatial planning policy*, adopted in 1990;
- the resolution adopted in 1998, at the conclusion of preparations for the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), recognising that intergovernmental efforts had exhausted the possibilities for action and that it was essential to incorporate spatial planning into the Community framework;
- the report by Ambroise Guellec (2005), calling for territorial cohesion to be included in the strategies (Lisbon, Gothenburg) and sectoral policies of the EU.

## **2. 1990–1999: After lengthy negotiations, a European spatial development strategy is born**

### **2.1 Gestation of the ESDP, a series of shared documents**

The recognition of the European dimension of spatial planning at the end of the 1980s was shared only by the Commission and some Member States (principally the Netherlands and France). Most States exhibited a mixed response, and France decided to sponsor the idea by making it the focus of the first informal meeting of ministers responsible for spatial planning, attended by Jacques Delors, the then President of the Commission (Nantes, 1989).

There followed ten years of joint efforts aimed at establishing a European framework for national planning policies, taking in a series of ministerial meetings and **studies launched by the Commission:**

- The prospective document entitled *Europe 2000: Outlook for the development of the Community's territory* (EC, 1991), which proposed structuring European spatial planning around major sectoral initiatives whose territorial impact would extend beyond national frontiers: transport, telecommunications, energy and the environment. This approach was original in that it was based on an analysis of groups of regions at the European level (urban, rural, frontier areas, etc.) and not by Member State.
- This document was supplemented by *Europe 2000+, Cooperation for European territorial development* (EC, 1994), which defined the macro-regional areas for cooperation and presented a long-term vision and prospects for the coordinated development of the territory of the EU.
- Finally, the *Compendium of spatial planning systems and policies in the European Union* (EC, 1997-2000) analysed the institutional systems for

territorial development and land use. It highlighted the diversity of concepts and practice among the Member States.

At the end of these ten years of forward reflection and political negotiation, a joint text was approved, known as the *European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)*. This document established for the first time a strategic frame of reference for spatial development and so affirmed the involvement of the EU in this field. It emphasised the European dimension of national and regional policies, the territorial impact of sectoral policies, and the need for coordination between the various levels of public activity. Inset 2 summarises the contents.

### ***Inset 2: The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)***

The ESDP, adopted by the Member States and the European Commission at Potsdam in 1999, was the first European policy document on spatial planning. It provided a common, non-binding frame of reference, the outcome of a long period of analysis and negotiation, which was intended to promote a coordinated definition at the European level of the spatial development strategies and sectoral policies of the Member States.

It articulated a shared goal of sustainable development of European territory, combining cohesion, preservation of the natural and cultural heritage and fair competition.

It defined common guidelines such as:

- an increased awareness of the European dimension in national policies and in development strategies at the regional and local level;
- a strengthening of cooperation and networking among the territories.

It constituted a vector for new forms of governance, proposing a two-pronged approach to restructuring relationships between the States and the EU and among the States and territorial authorities in the long term.

The ESDP also established three major priorities (or guiding principles for sustainable development):

- polycentric development and stronger urban-rural partnerships;
- parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge;
- intelligent management of the natural and cultural heritage.

Sixty policy options were set out around these three priorities, and polycentric development occupied a central position. The aim was to support the development of areas of global integration and to form “growth engines” in the peripheral regions of the EU in order to maintain a territorial balance.

## **2.2 The ESDP adopts a far-from-anodyne vocabulary**

The vocabulary adopted by the ESDP, like its strategic content, was the result of a political compromise. For example, ideas of space and territory have different connotations in different cultures and the most widely accepted interpretation is as follows: *space* refers to an environment in which physical and economic events take place (we speak for example of air space, land space or sea space), while *territory* adds to this idea the societies and actors who live in it and the institutions that organise it. A *territory* is then seen as a living *space* administered and socially organised.

Transposing these ideas to the European level means that the *European space*, which is simply the aggregation of Member States, takes on a dimension of exchanges of goods and services, and constitutes an economic and social rather than a political frame of reference. The idea of *European territory* would then take in the political and institutional sphere, a potential source of conflict between players. The ESDP uses the more neutral idea of *space*.

As for *spatial planning*, this entails organising the distribution of activities across a territory, structuring a territory and the players in it around a vision of the desired development. This idea came out of the French model of public administration, which has no real equivalent in the other Member States, such is the variety of institutional systems (*spatial planning, land-use planning, physical planning, etc.*). It is often perceived as top-down and centralised; hence the use of the more neutral term *development*.

Similarly, the French word *schéma* (as in the Schéma de Développement de l'Espace Communautaire) became a *perspective* in English (the European Spatial Development Perspective, or ESDP).

But above all, spatial planning as such is in no way a Community competence. There is in fact no connection between this idea and that of economic and social cohesion enshrined in Article 158 of the EC Treaty. The environment is the only field in which a European competence may be exercised in matters of spatial planning (Article 175 EC), and anyway, the term is applied only to land use, which is very restrictive compared to the ambitions articulated by the ESDP.

It follows that the EU can only operate at the level of incentives, and the limitations of the ESDP are evident: it can offer guidelines for sharing the responsibility for sustainable development of the European space, and a plan for progressive cohesion, but it has no operational content that might commit the States and territorial authorities. The final document is therefore devoid of quantitative objectives and the few charts included in it are of a purely analytical character. The fact remains, however, that the ESDP constitutes a strong political gesture, breaking with decades of unspoken resistance from the Member States as they strove to insulate the management of their territories from supra-national influences.

### **2.3 Some important work carried out in parallel**

In parallel with the preparation of the ESDP, the Commission launched two initiatives more or less related to spatial planning:

- The first, in 1994, concerned **trans-national cooperation**: the Community initiative INTERREG II.C. This was intended to promote trans-national cooperation and balanced development within macro-regional areas (the Atlantic Arc, the Alpine Region, etc.), as identified in EUROPE 2000+. It complements existing programmes of cross-border cooperation, and spatial planning issues occupy an essential place within it: sustainable development of metropolitan areas, water and flood management, and common methods for spatial planning.
- The other, in 1996, concerned the **integrated management of coastal areas**: the objective of the European demonstration programme ICZM (Integrated Coastal Zone Management) was to test the feasibility of an integrated approach to managing the problems encountered by coastal areas, particularly conflicts between competing groups of users – tourism, fishing and aquaculture, urban development, offshore energy, environmental protection, etc. In 2000, this programme resulted in a European strategy<sup>2</sup>, offering Member States an integrated territorial “model” for managing coastal areas, heavily influenced by the framework and the principles behind the ESDP.

Another element reflected the growing interest among the Member States and particularly the territorial authorities in the European dimension of spatial planning; this was the **birth of the idea of territorial cohesion**, put forward by Robert Savy at a meeting of the Assembly of European Regions (AER) in 1995 (report on *Regions and territories in Europe*); this territorial cohesion was to make a discreet entry two years later into the Amsterdam Treaty, Article 16 stipulating that services of general economic interest (SGEIs) should work to promote *social and territorial cohesion*. Support for this concept would later be picked up by effective lobbying by a number of organisations (CPMR, CEMR, etc.).

### **3. 2000-2007: Contrasting developments in the Commission and the Member States**

The ESDP was the starting point for fresh cooperation between players and was to encourage a new form of discussion taking account of the territories when drawing up policies and action plans at the different levels of decision-making (Community, national, regional); the same was true of territorial cohesion. This

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<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission “On integrated coastal zone management: a strategy for Europe” COM(2000) 547.

then seems an opportune moment to examine their position in strategies and practices at the European level.

### 3.1 What has happened at the Community level?

#### *At the strategic level*

We have Commissioner Michel Barnier (2000-2004) to thank for supporting the concept of territorial cohesion, both in the preparation of the future Constitution, subsequently transformed into the Lisbon Treaty, and in the strategic documents issuing from the Commission:

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> report on cohesion, “*Unity, solidarity, diversity for Europe, its people and its territory*”, published in 2001, referred to the ESDP and highlighted the main territorial imbalances within the EU, particularly between regions of the same country and at the infra-regional level; it presented the difficulties experienced by frontier areas and regions affected by geographical constraints (ORs, mountains, islands). It devoted a separate chapter to territorial cohesion, presenting it as a way of taking greater account of these imbalances that traditional regional policy had been unable to correct.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> report on cohesion, “*Towards a new partnership for growth, jobs and cohesion*”, published in 2004, went further, highlighting new territorial trends (dynamism of the internal borders of the EU, peri-urbanisation, etc.), making reference to polycentric development and proposing a concise definition of territorial cohesion.

From 2004 onwards, there were signs of a shifting of Community interest in territorial cohesion:

- It is true that the *Community strategic guidelines on cohesion*, drawn up by the Commission in 2004 and adopted by the Council in 2006, contain ingredients from the preceding documents: they urge Member States and regions to “*promote balanced development and pay particular attention to specific geographical circumstances*” and make reference to polycentric development. The Community strategic guidelines on rural development (a strategic document relating to the second pillar of the CAP) take a similar line, mentioning that “*the programmes can make a positive contribution to territorial cohesion*”. Still, territorial cohesion occupies a marginal position in the Community strategic guidelines compared to the three priority axes relating to competitiveness issued from the Lisbon Agenda: attractiveness, innovation and employment. Because of this, territorial cohesion rarely figures in negotiations between the Commission and the Member States on national strategic priorities and the content of these programmes. The stage is clearly set for “Lisbonisation”, the option that has helped to save the policy of cohesion

from the scalpel wielded by certain net contributors to the Community budget who were especially critical during the budget debates in 2004-2006. This process of “Lisbonisation” also found its way into the Commission following the publication in 2003 of the report by the economist André Sapir entitled “*An agenda for a growing Europe*” which was sharply critical of the CAP and the cohesion policy, which it saw as costly and ineffective, in contrast to policies calculated to encourage competitiveness (research, innovation, etc.).

- Finally, the 4<sup>th</sup> report on cohesion, entitled *Growing regions, growing Europe* (2007), confirmed this decline in the importance accorded to territorial cohesion; it no longer merited a separate chapter and was presented from a purely analytical standpoint, looking at territorial trends: the concentration of wealth around capital cities, peri-urbanisation, and demographic decline in some rural areas.

In the midst of this shift in Community interest away from territorial cohesion, one exception is however worth mentioning: **the strategy towards the Outermost Regions**. The Commission in effect proposed that its cohesion policy should address the specific handicaps faced by the ORs, as mentioned in Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty (*remoteness, insularity, small size, difficult topography and climate, economic dependence on a few products*). A European strategy for these regions was adopted in 2004 and, more importantly, a specific allocation to compensate for the additional costs associated with these handicaps was put in place in 2007.

### *At the operational level*

The incorporation of the ESDP and territorial cohesion into programme planning remained implicit and limited: there was in fact no question of “targeting” European aid based on the ESDP because there was no European policy on spatial planning. At the outside, the ESDP promoted a more qualitative approach and more thorough discussion on the use of the structural funds, the localisation of investment and the territorialisation of policies.

However, the Commission went on to establish two instruments arising directly out of the ESDP and its Action Plan (Tampere, October 1999):

- **greater territorial cooperation** by way of INTERREG.III and its three strands (transnational, cross-border, inter-regional): this was undoubtedly the best vector to bring together national practices for spatial planning; a real lever for partnership, it would involve a growing number of territorial authorities and gradually gain in strength to become, in the 2007-2013 programme period, an objective in its own right (referred to as “European territorial cooperation”) within cohesion policy. Transnational cooperation, based on INTERREG II.C (see above), was to enable the definition of shared visions for managing macro-regional areas,

organising the concerns of the ESDP around the idea of polycentric development.

**- a European research network for spatial planning:** in 2002, the Commission and the Member States established the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON), which was designed to improve understanding of the dynamics of the territories and the territorial impact of sectoral policies. It took five years of negotiations with Member States (the decision was taken in 1997) and a preliminary programme of studies for ESPON to see the light of day, starting from the proposals from the Commission. This network has since evolved considerably; it has developed a forward-looking approach, added a European dimension to national research into spatial planning and promoted the creation of a common scientific culture in this area; it has also fostered closer links between scientists, administrations and political decision-makers.

### **3.2 And what of the Member States?**

The ESDP quickly established itself among specialists in spatial planning as a laboratory for analysing shared concepts such as territorial cohesion, polycentrism, governance and an integrated approach. The French presidency of the Council in 2000 then sponsored discussions on polycentric development and the spatial management of so-called “global integration” areas.

Despite its status and lack of operational focus, the ESDP was to have a substantial influence in strengthening the European dimension of several national and regional spatial planning strategies and projects. These included the *National Spatial Strategy* developed in Ireland (and more recently in Slovenia and in Portugal), the *Spatial Plan* in Northern Ireland, and the *Regional Spatial Development Strategy* in Wallonia. However, this influence remained patchy: some States suffered from an unfavourable institutional organisation, others displayed a clear lack of political will and a “sovereignist” sensitivity towards this supra-national strategy.

Ultimately the ESDP, apart from the territorial cooperation programmes, did not sit well with existing spatial planning instruments and practices. It was ignored by those responsible for sectoral policies, even though it showed the extent to which these policies (on transport networks, agriculture and the environment) shaped the territories of the EU.

After a special effort by the Belgian presidency of the Council to focus on sectoral policies and to implement the ESDP Action Plan, the years 2001-2004 were marked by a slow-down in the debate among the Member States, possibly attributable to their investment in implementing the INTERREG and ESPON programmes.

Things moved forward again with the Dutch presidency of the Council (Rotterdam, 2004) and a wider dialogue began: this brought together the

European institutions and various European representatives of the territorial bodies and helped to relaunch intergovernmental discussions in the wake of the ESDP. We should point out that this resumption of intergovernmental support came just at the point when Community support showed signs of running out of steam.

This process culminated in the adoption by the ministers responsible for spatial planning of the Territorial Agenda (in Leipzig in May 2007). This document defined an intergovernmental programme of work up to 2011, relaunched the ESDP by picking up its objectives (balanced, sustainable development) and principles (territorial cooperation, coherence between policies), and added two new priorities:

- to promote regional “clusters” for the purpose of European innovation and competitiveness;
- to promote transnational and cross-border risk management, particularly in relation to the effects of climate change.

The Territorial Agenda also advances the idea of basing territorial development policies around the realisation of their individual potential (territorial capital). Finally, the Territorial Agenda was supplemented by the *Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities*, adopted at the same time by the ministers responsible for urban development. A link between spatial planning and urban development policies was thus established at the European level.

In November 2007 in the Azores, the same ministers took a further step forward by adopting an Action Programme to implement the Territorial Agenda, from which we can highlight two main strands of action:

- to influence the European “big dossiers” and Community sectoral policies to give them a territorial and urban dimension;
- to reinforce territorial governance in the EU and the Member States.

This represents a continuation of the ESDP as well as starting to translate it into concrete actions.

However, although the intergovernmental dialogue is enabling Europe to progress slowly towards a common spatial planning culture, driven by a few “locomotive” countries, we have to recognise that the operational aspect is still disappointing. The decisions taken by the Council make it brutally clear to the ministers responsible for spatial planning how limited is their role in negotiations on cohesion policy: an excellent example is the reduction in the budget earmarked for transnational cooperation compared to the Commission proposals supported by these same ministers. Another difficulty is that the lines of action defined in the Azores mainly involve other ministers than those responsible for spatial planning, and these sectoral ministers are reluctant to engage with the process.

## **4. 2008-2009: Return of Community interest; towards a convergent vision between the Commission and the Member States?**

### **4.1 The Green Paper on territorial cohesion and the questions raised**

Under pressure from the European Parliament, and in response to the request articulated in the Territorial Agenda for a report from the Commission on territorial cohesion, the Commission adopted a Green Paper on the subject in October 2008. This Green Paper<sup>3</sup>, whose sub-title “*Turning territorial diversity into strength*” speaks volumes, set off a five-month debate on territorial cohesion and the options for putting it into practice.

Apart from summarising the main territorial trends, the Green Paper identifies three levers for action:

- overcoming differences in density by a "reasonable" concentration,
- overcoming distance by connecting the territories,
- overcoming divisions by way of cooperation.

It identifies 22 questions, grouped into **6 sets** to structure the debate:

- defining territorial cohesion: balanced and sustainable development of European territory, but also a need to help all the territories to realise their specific potential, to reverse unsustainable trends (urban sprawl, urbanisation of coastlines, etc.), and to anticipate the effects of climate change;
- defining the scale and scope of European action:  
is it necessary to pay specific attention to territories suffering a geographical handicap (mountains, islands, sparsely populated northern regions)? how can the scale of intervention (regional classification, the NUTS 2 level) be adapted to the nature and needs of development?
- improving European territorial cooperation (across frontiers);
- reinforcing coordination between territorial policies and sectoral policies that have a territorial impact (“horizontal” coordination);
- identifying new partnerships (e.g. the role of local players);
- improving understanding of territorial cohesion (e.g. by measuring it).

### **4.2 Main points of the debate and ideas to be pursued by the Commission**

This debate, launched on a Commission web site, produced a frenzied response that exceeded all expectations, attracting around 390 contributions. It involved institutions and members of the public well beyond the usual audience of experts and institutional players in the field of spatial planning.

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<sup>3</sup> Communication from the Commission “Green paper on territorial cohesion: turning territorial diversity into strength”, COM (2008) 616.

The **priorities** put forward naturally varied according to the respondent: sustainable development, reconciliation of territorial cohesion and competitiveness, mechanisms to foster solidarity between territories, fair access to services, the importance of rural and urban territories, issues for “specific” territories, and coordination of policies.

The majority of responses focussed on three points:

- **so-called “specific” territories with geographical handicaps:** while geography is undoubtedly a factor, the socio-economic situation of these territories remains crucial for policy action, and analyses need to determine the extent to which these geographical handicaps are reflected in socio-economic difficulties.
- **territorial cooperation** (particularly cross-border and transnational): this is essential, and the role of the European bodies is considered extremely legitimate; it constitutes an excellent laboratory for European integration; the strategic nature of this instrument should be enhanced and its boundaries could be more flexible;
- **knowledge of the territories:** we need to analyse territorial diversity and growth, and define indicators to express territorial realities (accessibility, population density, exposure to risks, etc.), based particularly on the work of ESPON.

The debate also prompted the Commission to look more deeply into **three key questions:**

- **The definition of territorial cohesion:**

The distinction to be made with spatial planning, for which the competence remains national or regional, is clearly established but the role to be devolved to the European bodies in relation to territorial cohesion varies according to the respondent. A single Community-level definition of the idea of territorial cohesion would “freeze discussion” and would make little sense given the range of interpretations found among the Member States. Nevertheless, we suggest a personal interpretation of this concept, in the hope of moving towards a common understanding (see inset 3).

***Inset 3: Territorial cohesion: towards a common understanding***

*(attempt at a personal definition by the author)*

By territorial cohesion, we mean on the one hand a political objective in the early growth of the EU, an ideal state for the European territory, and on the other, certain principles of governance to enable this objective to be attained.

*Three priorities:*

1. To work towards more balanced, inclusive and sustainable development at every level, exploiting the diversity of the territories (including the specific conditions arising from their geography);
2. To achieve greater integration of the territories, both among themselves and within the European whole, securing the support of citizens for the European project;
3. To give to all citizens equal opportunities of living conditions and fair access to essential goods and services of general interest.

*Three principles of governance based on an integrated approach:*

1. “Vertical” coordination, to produce greater fluidity and devolution of decisions across the territorial layers (multi-level governance);
2. “Horizontal” coordination between territorial policies and sectoral policies that have an impact on the territories;
3. Definition of integrated strategies for cooperation between territories at “functional” levels transcending administrative boundaries.

***To sum up territorial cohesion,***

The will to achieve balanced, inclusive and sustainable development of territories and to make value of their specific potential, by taking an integrated, partnership-based approach to organising cooperation between territories at all levels and coordinating the policies applicable to these territories.

**- The importance of the “new functional geographies”:**

The administrative boundaries do not always match the levels of breakdown of the forces of development or the levels of involvement of the partnerships, and there is a constant need to define more functional, and therefore more relevant, boundaries: cross-border groupings, functional urban regions, mountain "massifs", catchment areas for employment, *territoires vécus, pays and intercommunalité* in France, *Metropolregionen* in Germany, *sustainable communities* in the UK, and so on.

Cohesion policy could offer greater flexibility for intervention, enabling a more effective response to the needs of the territories, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity (e.g. multi-regional programmes).

**Relations between rural and urban areas** also fit into a pattern of functional boundaries: rural and urban environments are merging into new configurations, among which peri-urban areas, for example, have assumed considerable importance. These relations also raise issues of common governance between neighbouring territories in constant contact with each other. Rethinking rural-urban relations is not a new idea, appearing in the ESPD, the work of ESPON and the Territorial Agenda. At the end of 2008, the Commission launched a series of seminars to take this

discussion further, and the examples of common governance of these territories within the Member States constitute priority areas for analysis.

**- And the coordination of Community policies, a much more delicate question:**

The Green Paper confirms, if confirmation were needed, that territorial cohesion cannot be viewed only in the light of regional policy, but that it has a horizontal aspect and also concerns those sectoral policies that have an impact on the territories. The opinions voiced to this effect by some ministers responsible for spatial planning (such as Dominique Voynet in 2000, under the French presidency of the Council), have sadly had no effect. The political culture of the Member States is excessively compartmentalised and only very few countries, such as Luxembourg and the Netherlands, have been able to organise any kind of horizontal coordination of sectoral competences within their institutional systems. The same was true of the Commission; aware of this gap, it took stock of the territorial dimension of Community policies in its internal report entitled *Community policies and spatial planning* in 1998. This finding was confirmed during the preparation of the White Paper on Governance (2000-2001), which mentions the need to analyse the territorial impact of policies such as those for transport, energy or the environment: indeed, it is by analysing this territorial impact that we highlight the contradictions and conflicting effects of the different policies. European transport networks illustrate this shortcoming perfectly: while these networks ought to contribute to territorial cohesion by linking remote and peripheral regions to the centre of Europe, the chosen projects are almost all aimed at reducing congestion on the main routes to and from this centre, based on the criterion of traffic density. Another example is State aid (for regional purposes) to companies regulated by competition policy: This heavily influences the location of these companies and the development of the territories and so should be drawn up in close coordination with cohesion policy. Hence, these policies are very often devoid of any overall coherence, for want of any coordinating mechanisms.

The objective of territorial cohesion demands that we move beyond the field of territorial policies alone to ensure that they are articulated to sectoral policies that have a territorial impact (the CAP, transport, competition, the environment, etc.), with the territory constituting the operational framework for such a link. The joint discussions on this subject initiated in 2008 between several Directorates-General of the Commission would be worth expanding upon. This is undoubtedly the most important project for the next few years.

### **4.3 Two integrated Community strategies inspired by territorial cohesion**

## *Maritime Spatial Planning*

In November 2008, the Commission adopted a *Roadmap for Maritime Spatial Planning*<sup>4</sup>, making strategic planning the main instrument of the integrated European maritime policy adopted the year before. This roadmap in fact proposes a tool for improved decision-making through an integrated approach to relations between territories (including the land-sea interface) and the articulation of actions taken at different levels (local, regional, maritime basin). It provides an integrated framework to ensure that the sectoral policies affecting the maritime sphere (transport, renewable energy sources, the environment, research and observation, tourism, fishing and aquaculture) act in a coordinated way and resolve potential conflicts of use.

The integrated maritime policy for the EU, with its ambitious action plan and this “guide” to planning, remains **the most ambitious example within the Community of an attempt to coordinate the different policies** applicable to a space. While it is clear that the implementation of this plan is the responsibility of the Member States, the Community dimension will maintain the overall coherence of the process.

Finally, the roadmap identifies **10 principles, most of them similar to those of territorial cohesion**: in particular, intervention at the most appropriate level, strategic planning, extended partnership, territorial cooperation, coordination of policies, coherence between instruments, scientific knowledge, etc. These principles and their modalities of application are currently the subject of intensive discussion with the Member States.

## *EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region*

The Baltic Sea Region, which currently includes eight Member States plus Norway and part of Russia, is one of the oldest spheres of cooperation within the EU, and was in need of updating. That is why the European Council asked the Commission in December 2007 to draw up a European strategy for this region and to adopt it by June 2009 at the latest<sup>5</sup>.

This strategy established an integrated framework to enable the territories in this region to address the great challenges facing them together, particularly those of an environmental nature (e.g. marine pollution). Various units within the Commission were involved in producing it, along with the States, regions and authorities concerned, and civil society was consulted.

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<sup>4</sup> Communication from the Commission – “Roadmap for Maritime Spatial Planning: Achieving Common Principles in the EU”, COM (2008) 791.

<sup>5</sup> Communication from the Commission concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, COM (2009) 248.

The strategy identifies four development priorities: to enable a sustainable environment, to enhance the region's prosperity, to increase accessibility and attractiveness, and to ensure safety and security in the region. It assigns a coordinating and monitoring role to the Commission, with the other territorial players bearing the responsibility for implementing the actions.

This is the first time that the EU has drawn up a cooperation strategy for a macro-regional area on such a comprehensive basis of partnership. This involves no new competences, no new legislation or institutions, and no new funding. Rather, the exercise is about **putting into practice the principles of territorial cohesion**: a strategic vision for the development of a macro-regional area, creating synergies between a host of players, joint governance of the territories, coordinating sectoral policies at different levels, and implementing mechanisms for observation. Nor is it intended to be a standard model, but rather an experimental long-term pilot to test a strategic arrangement that might serve as an example to other regions. At its summit in June 2009, the European Council expressed its satisfaction with this initial work and asked the Commission to put forward a strategy for the Danube region by the end of 2010.

## **Conclusion and outlook**

The Community and intergovernmental march towards territorial cohesion has been long and chaotic. Since 1986, and the official birth of the cohesion policy, the Commission and the other European institutions have contributed to the growth of a shared sense of responsibility in this area, without seeking to standardise the spatial planning cultures.

Although there has been clear progress in raising awareness of the issues and analysing territorial questions, progress in identifying concrete actions has been disappointing. Many contributors to the debate initiated by the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion have been quick to point this out, calling for a White Paper from the Commission aimed at defining such actions.

However, there is every reason for us to define a real political goal:

- the great challenges facing the world (globalisation and the magnifying effect of the economic and financial crisis, climate change, demographic shocks, energy dependence) and the excesses of polarised development (metropolisation, pressures of urban development on coastlines, etc.) have conspicuously asymmetric effects on the territories;
- the lack of territorial cohesion is costly to society (costs of urbanisation, desertification, etc.) and the benefits of defining more "localised" policies are beyond dispute;
- public expectations in relation to more balanced, inclusive and sustainable development of the territories, offering citizens equality of

opportunity and living standards, are becoming more pressing, as is the need for public policies affecting the territories to be more transparent. It is in light of the need for a political response to these challenges that we have to interpret the inclusion in the **Lisbon Treaty** – whatever the possible doubts as to its ratification – of territorial cohesion alongside the economic and social aspects of cohesion, as a shared objective and competence of the EU. The Treaty also reminds us that geography and the territories matter, by stipulating that special attention should be paid to a whole list of areas mentioned explicitly including those *suffering from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps*.

In the short term, from the point of view of cohesion policy, this demands concrete proposals in the course of drawing up the Community “legislative package” for 2014-2020, based on the issues raised by the Commission in the Green Paper.

In the long term, the challenge is quite a different one, and should entail drawing up an integrated strategy in the form of a framework document applicable to the whole territory of the EU: an ambitious strategy, with sustainable development as its overarching principle, which would reconcile the objectives of territorial cohesion and competitiveness, and could impose a set of territorial conditions on Community aid allocated to sectoral policies; a strategy that would remove the barriers between players, sectors and levels of public intervention; a strategy that would trigger a kind of territorial “reflex” in the decision-makers and practitioners of territorial development, incorporating territorial considerations into every stage of planning (diagnosis, choice of priorities, methods, monitoring, evaluation of results and impact). The macro-regional spheres of transnational cooperation constitute excellent laboratories for governance and could prefigure such a strategy: the example of the Baltic Sea region has much to teach us in this context.

While European spatial planning as a legal competence is not up for discussion, territorial cohesion, soon to be enshrined as a shared objective of the EU, could address the same ambitions: as we have seen, it represents a major issue for territorial governance, for an integrated approach and coordination of policies.

Acknowledging the existence of a European *space* and dealing with its organisation, as we have done so far, is no longer sufficient: we will have to “make the jump” towards a shared strategic planning of the European *territory*, based on an overall vision of its future development. Such a desire (a political “voluntarism” perhaps?) can only be based on a genuine project of political solidarity, which is still lacking in the EU; a project in which all Community policies work towards greater integration among its people and territories.

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