

MEMO

To: ECTP-CEU

From: Jan Vogelij

Re. Territorial Cohesion

The meeting of EU Member State DGs on Territorial Cohesion took place on April 3 in Malta, under Maltese presidency of the European Union.

The working level NTCCP meeting of March 2 (see account of meeting in my 08/03 MEMO) prepared for this DG level meeting.

The content of several proposals tabled in this meeting reflected clearly suggestions and recommendations made in earlier meetings on behalf of ECTP-CEU.

1. Territories with Geographic Specificities

The Maltese Presidency presented its report. The special attention of this grouping of territories, often called “handicapped regions” relates to the specific policy for supporting development in these territories and the Maltese interest. The central issue for development is poor accessibility in order to develop opportunities for economic (niche) activities. Instead of focussing on handicaps, specific opportunities are to be identified. Strengthening the resilience of isolated settlements requires integrated place-based approaches. It is recognized that the reality on the ground is not reflected sufficiently in the mainstream economic criteria of GDP. Attention should be devoted to quality of life as well.

ESPON issued a policy brief under the title: Shaping New Policies in Specific Types of Territories in Europe. Key messages are:

- Real place based approaches require tailor made plans and not a generalized “ territorial typology” approach. The territorial potentials based on the specific historical, cultural, natural, social capital should be the base of development policies.
- Place-based strategies should aim at diversification of economic activities. Multi activity based on smart solutions and small-scale agriculture and fisheries are to be fostered. Mainstream solutions should not be aimed at; specific assets offer niche opportunities. Besides, policy actions should address impacts of seasonal variation and decline of population, specific economic activities and bottle necks in accessibility.

Both reports with policy recommendations were generally welcomed and supported.

2. Smart Villages concept

The report based on the Cork (2) declaration about agricultural villages was presented on behalf of the Commission. General critics were aired about this activity of DG Agri: Is this category of settlements requiring an approach different from integrated place-based planning? It seems a parallel activity.

3. Review of Territorial Agenda 2020

First ESPON presented its proposal for a Territorial Development Reference Framework. An agreed long-term spatial development vision is needed because the territorial dimension is missing in Europe 2020, the Territorial Agenda 2020 must be strengthened and sector policies having territorial impacts should be coordinated. But there are also the UN sustainable development goals and the Urban Agenda for the EU, which require a broader framework. This envisaged ESPON project builds on the Europe 2050 ESPON study and the results of the ESPON Futures study. Agreement is required from the DGs about the way forward.

The Commission strongly supports this initiative.

Also CEMR is supportive and asks whether the timeframe for applying results in the revision of the Territorial Agenda is sufficient.

On behalf of ECTP-CEU this initiative is also strongly welcomed, expressing the hope that it would be as influential as the ESDP of 1999. The times seem ripe for a long-term development vision for future Europe. The large challenge will be to create a broad agreement, not only on the process, but also on the content.

Entering in such a planning process requires choices and selections, impacting different, often conflicting interests. So the magnitude of this project must not be underestimated. The ambitious proposal of ESPON it is not a normal ESPON study process, but a complex interactive policy making process, which requires time.

ECTP-CEU would be happy to be involved and support the process and the debates.

Germany also expresses its support explicitly.

Others agreed on the way forward.

The terminating trio Presidency (NL, SK, MT) focused its common evaluation of their combined 18 months Presidency period on the review of the Territorial Agenda 2020. Particularly, the crosscutting issues like climate change, polycentricity, better regulations and geographic specificities were addressed and recommended for the new Territorial Agenda.

- Regarding Climate Change, one of the key messages was: Harmonisation of the Territorial Agenda 2020 with the Urban Agenda leading to better cooperation via spatial planning as an interdisciplinary tool which can incorporate climate change adaptation according to territorial consequences and challenges.
- Polycentric development evoked next key messages: Polycentric structures are crucial for ensuring distribution of resources and services, minimizing inefficient mobility and reflecting local specific potentials. Multi-actor decision-making is a precondition for implementing morphologic and functional polycentricity. It requires better involvement of local and regional actors in multilevel governance.
- Better Regulations lead to discussions about applying scenarios and visions contributing to European and national policies. Territorial Impact Assessment can be seen as a tool for creating insight in the way European regulations influence national planning and spatial development. Key messages were: Visions and scenarios are pro-active tools for better regulation and simplification in the context of territorial development. Planning and cooperation at all levels is crucial. Integrated approaches

help in avoiding conflicts and gaps in regulations and prevent delayed implementation and inefficient investments. There is a need for more flexible and tailor-made solutions in EU legislation to contribute to territorial cohesion and national spatial planning.

- The sections about Territories with Geographical Specificities concluded among others in next message: acknowledge the different dynamics of competitiveness in different territories with geographical specificities. Also the real impact of accessibility on economic development should be established.

4. Cross border problems

The Luxembourg lead working group addressing cross border obstacles reported its conclusions and recommendations. Main obstacles still are: Financial support is less accessible: the capital city is far away and less aware of the magnitude of the problems in the periphery; relevant institutions are lacking, despite new legal entities like EEIG and EGTC; differences in legal and procedural norms are still main obstacles. Cross border cooperation among the Nordic countries is less problematic, but in other border areas it is still muddling through. An obvious reason is that the involved actors are not influential on the legislation process in the capital city.

The group proposes a new legal tool which would allow actors to find specific solutions and provide certainty on basis of what they called an ECBC (European Cross Border Convention) a platform at EU level, which through specific procedures can create room for tailor made solutions.

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to the Council of the EU meetings on

Territorial Cohesion and Urban Matters