

**Consultation on the fifth report on economic,
social and territorial cohesion:
the future of cohesion policy**

On November 23rd, 2010, 15 local authorities bordering 8 straits of Europe have signed a Memorandum of Understanding in order to have recognition of the straits specificities and issues they face from the European authorities and, also, to allow cooperation projects to emerge, particularly through the INTERREG programmes. The local authorities involved in the *European Straits Initiative* partnership are:

- Pas-de-Calais County Council (France),
- Kent County Council (England),
- Uusimaa Regional Council (Finland)
- Harju County Government (Estonia)
- Kvarken Council (Finland and Sweden)
- Province of Trapani (Italy)
- Province of Messina (Italy)
- Province of Lecce (Italy)
- Province of Sassari (Italy)
- Province of Reggio di Calabria (Italy)
- Fehmarn Belt Committee (Denmark and Germany)
- District of Fier (Albania)
- District of Vlorë (Albania)
- Office of the environment of Corsica (France)
- National park of the Archipelago of la Maddalena (Italy)

Eleven of these partners have gathered to submit the present contribution to the consultation on the fifth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Contribution by the *EU Straits Initiative*

1- Recognise territories with specific geographical features: the Straits

The 5th report on economic, social and territorial cohesion refers to the Lisbon Treaty which defines territories with specific geographical features under the terms of Article 174 of the Treaty, consolidated in writing within the framework of the Lisbon Treaty. This states that, within the framework of action led concerning disadvantaged regions, “particular attention” must be given to “*regions with severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountainous regions*”.

The straits are zones which have a land and maritime double dimension. Narrow branches of water between two lands, they both separate and connect two land and maritime areas.

Based on this definition, the *EU Straits Initiative* partners highlight that the straits combine several characteristics which made them territories with specific geographical features:

- The strong border effect linked to the maritime character of the separation between the two banks can only be eased by a **cross-border management method**. The **straits therefore constitute laboratories for integration and European governing**.
- They **concentrate multiple issues**, including developed territories, and on a **scale which goes beyond the specific area of the strait**. There are nodal points which have a larger impact than their adjacent territories. Thus, the Pas de Calais strait affects London, Paris and Brussels. The existence of the Channel Tunnel has strong positive implications particularly in economic (business development), and environmental (decrease in air traffic) terms on the London-Paris-Brussels triangle. Likewise, the creation of a fixed link on the Fehmarn Belt would have a major impact on the development of the Malmö-Copenhagen-Hamburg triangle.
- **The straits involve international issues**, whether by the subjects which they bring to light (immigration, maritime transport of people and merchandise, economy of global trade, ...), or by their geographical situation itself (straits between Europe and developing countries like the Straits of Sicily, Gibraltar or Otranto).
- The straits are the scene of **specific problems** linked to the environment, maritime security, transport, logistics, migration, cultural interfaces, tourism... These specificities make the problems linked to state borders more acute and make the environmental, social and economic practices different. They can thus be used as referents and stimulators for the implementation of pilot initiatives in inclusive, sustainable and intelligent growth logic (see objectives of the 2020 Strategy).

Due to these characteristics, the straits appear **as territories with specific geographical features which must be recognised. As strategic places for the whole European Union, they require means and particular attention.**

Good management of the straits is essential for the EU in order for it to achieve the objectives of the 2020 strategy, particularly as regards sustainable development and economy and transport (the implementation of efficient sea motorways requires efficient management of the straits which constitute major geopolitical issues in a globalised economy).

The territorial cohesion policy and the integrated maritime policy must thus take the straits into consideration as territories with specific geographical features.

2- Rearticulate community and territorial logics in the INTERREG programmes

a. Definition logic of the relevant perimeters

The Lisbon Treaty has added territorial cohesion to the economic and social cohesion objectives. Thus, particular attention must be paid to the straits which are territories with specific geographical features.

Respecting the principle of subsidiarity, which is a central element of the dynamic of European construction, requires a change of perspectives in the definition of the eligibility zones of the INTERREG programmes. The merging of a descending (top-down) logic and an ascending (bottom-up) logic is consubstantial to the principle of subsidiarity. This articulation requirement must be reaffirmed during the definition of the eligible zones and the management processes of the INTERREG programmes.

If it is logical and coherent that the European Union defines the maximal perimeter and the “central core” of each INTERREG programme, it would be relevant and useful if within these limits, the definition of the parameter of the projects fell within the competence of local actors.

In other words, the structure of the cross-border cooperation programmes should authorise greater flexibility in the definition of the eligibility perimeters of the programmes and projects in order to better integrate the issues of territories with specific geographical features.

Thus, in the case of the INTERREG programmes, the following would be defined:

- A central geographical zone, limited to the territories where cross-border proximity is a **reality**. This zone would automatically be an eligible zone for the INTERREG programme. The straits territories are practically the only real territories in the case of maritime cross-border cooperation programmes.
- A maximal geographic zone, where cross-border project cooperation is possible, based on **common problems** linked to the Europe 2020 objectives. This zone would only potentially be eligible, but under the same conditions as the central zone, if it becomes one.
- The **propagation methods of the eligible zone** (like a wave) from the central geographic core to the adjacent territories. A “ricochet” logic is thus essential: the nature of the project, the specificity of the zone, the partners involved would be the criteria justifying the extension of the eligible zone beyond the central core. Thus the eligible zone of a project focusing on coastal erosion could affect the whole of the maximal geographic zone, as all the coastal territories are affected by the phenomenon.

This proposal substitutes for the notions of eligible and adjacent zones – the definition of which has been shown not to be greatly adapted to local dynamics, the notions of central geographic zones, based on the real cross-border territory, and maximal geographic zones.

b. Opening to integrated transversal projects

The constraint of choosing a single topic for the projects presented within the framework of territorial cooperation programmes can limit the range of the project and its impact on the territory. Numerous zones, particularly zones with specific geographical features such as the straits, are areas where there is a concentration of different and interconnected issues which must be approached in a joint manner.

To face this, the programmes should authorise, from the development stage, integrated, and multi-topic transversal projects. So that this possibility is not a breach in the pursuit of the Europe 2020 objectives, these transversal projects should be led by leading authorities. Moreover, the project’s increase in value compared with the back-seat approach and its impact on the territory should be clearly stated in the programme documents.

In order to take the temporalities of the development processes into account, “emerging” projects, which are less accomplished at the time of the development of the programmes, could also be identified in the Operational Programmes (OPs) with the possibility of integration during the mid-term review.

In accordance with this logic, the OPs would be structured as follows:

- General priorities of the programme
- Integrated transversal projects led by a leading authority (with precision on the money devoted to these projects)
 - o projects identified during the writing of the OP
 - o emerging projects susceptible to be integrated during the mid-term review.

c. Impact on the method of governing

These integrated transversal projects will be identified by the programme partners. The choice of organisations involved in governing the programmes (design, implementation) is therefore essential. It is important that a place and a role are reserved for sub-regional organisations, entities better able, through their proximity with the territories, to guarantee good awareness of the development disparities existing in the regions, and thus the efficiency of the programmes.

To take into account the particular needs of the territories with specific geographical features, other measures could be developed such as the ERDF subsidies for projects located in these zones, or the development of particular indicators.

3- Rationalise and simplify the operating methods

In addition, partners in the *EU Straits Initiative* request that the development procedures and management of the development and investment partnership contracts take into account the cross-border political and administrative reality. To this end they ask for:

- The development and investment partnership contracts to let the possibility for territorial cooperation OPs to take into account the priorities of all partner states of the programme,
- Specific simplification measures, such as aligning eligibility procedures, certification and expenses audit on both sides of the borders on the same programme. This alignment should not however be done following the principal of the lowest bidder of the most restrictive rules, but, on the contrary, enable a simplified and thus more efficient use of European funding.
- Opportunities of advances on European funding at the start of the project in order to enable the operators to begin their actions more calmly. Indeed the cooperation projects need to face particularly restrictive administrative and financial complexities as a consequence of national administrative and political systems.

The simplification of implementation rules, particularly financial, should be pointed out when the whole geographical entity involves an extra EU partner (e.g. Albania, Tunisia) as efficient governing of certain territories such as the Straits needs the involvement of a non Community partner.

Summary

The partners of the *EU Straits Initiative* ask for:

- **The straits to be recognised as territories with specific geographical features which require particular attention,**
- **The cross-border cooperation programmes to allow more flexibility in the definition of eligible zones for programmes and projects in order to take into account the issues of territories with specific geographical features,**
- **A budget for cross-border cooperation programmes to be devoted to integrated transversal projects led by leading organisations, particularly in territories with specific geographical features,**
- **Development and investment partnership contracts to be coherent with the cross-border logics,**
- **The management procedures for the cooperation programmes to be flexible and shared on both sides of the borders.**