



Euroregió Pirineus Mediterrània
Eurorégion Pyrénées-Méditerranée
Euroregión Pirineos Mediterráneo

Contribution of the Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean to the conclusions of the 5th report on economic, social and territorial cohesion: the future of the cohesion policy

A. Introduction

The Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean, founded in 2004, is a political cooperation project between the French regions of Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées, and the Spanish autonomous communities of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands.

The Euroregion, which puts into practice the determination for active cooperation, has led to concrete actions such as:

- Starting, in 2006, a call for applications for cultural projects
- Preparing a guidebook on food quality in the Euroregion
- Setting up a network of chambers of commerce

This authentic territorial development strategy has now the support of a common legal structure. In operation since April 2010, the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Pyrenees-Mediterranean has its headquarters in Toulouse, a Secretariat General in Barcelona and an office in Brussels. It was the third European Grouping to be established and the first which is entirely composed of regions.

The EGTC Pyrenees-Mediterranean is the translation into practice of the political will to cooperate of the Euroregion member regions. It allows the Euroregion to pursue its goals in numerous spheres, such as:



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- **Higher education and research**

The EGTC Pyrenees-Mediterranean is the driving force of the Euroregional strategy of developing a Eurocampus, which is the biggest European campus in what concerns the number of students. The Eurocampus Pyrenees-Mediterranean gathers higher education institutions with the aim of improving their competitiveness and favouring the mobility of students, teaching staff and researchers.

- **Culture**

Since 2010, the EGTC Pyrenees-Mediterranean has administered a call for applications for cultural projects funded by the four regions. This mechanism will be renewed in 2011.

- **Economic development**

Since December 2010, the EGTC Pyrenees-Mediterranean has become the first EGTC composed exclusively of regional governments to benefit from European co-funding. What is more, the EGTC is leading a project within the framework of the SUDOE transnational programme that seeks to federate the initiatives of the four regions in support of start-ups by means of business incubators.

Strengthened by this experience of integrated transnational cooperation, the Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean welcomes with satisfaction the publication of the 5th cohesion report and reaffirms the need for a strong cohesion policy for all regions.



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B. Our contribution

1. A strong cohesion policy for all the European regions, endowed with an ambitious budget

In a difficult economic context, economic, social and territorial cohesion policy reflects the spirit of solidarity which is at the very heart of the European construction and that needs to be reinforced in these times of crisis. Cooperation between European regions is a good example of this spirit.

We are convinced that cohesion policy must be sustained and endowed with a budget that enables it to produce a multiplier effect on our territories, our fellow citizens and our companies. The cohesion policy must have an ambitious budget so that it can make a significant contribution to meeting the aims of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

2. Strengthening governance

a) Macroregional strategies

The Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean will closely follow the European reflection on macroregions. At the present time, it is weighing up the added value of this initiative, which comes from the Council and which, for the moment, only affects Member States (the strategies for the Baltic Sea and the Danube are a good example of that).



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b) The emergence of cross-border cooperation between regions

We would like to draw attention to the importance of the Euroregional level. Many regions in Europe have decided to cooperate and to structure this cooperation around the EGTC instrument. This is true, particularly in the case of border regions.

Indeed, by becoming actual project territories, these areas of cooperation have an important role to play in straightening ties between local partners belonging to different Member States and that face common challenges. These areas are indispensable intermediaries of regional policy.

Persuaded of the role that the groups of regions have to play, Euroregions structure themselves around the legal instrument available to them: the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation, which is a tool for implementing European and Euroregional political strategies.

The Euroregions (or equivalent structures) are, therefore, an important level of governance and their EGTCs are tools at the service of regional policy, especially of the goal of territorial cooperation. Euroregions represent structured territories of projects, particularly if a Grouping for Territorial Cooperation has been constituted.

EGTCs also have the legitimacy to become structures of governance and management of European cohesion policy funds:

➤ Through part of the Competitiveness Objective of the operational programmes

The Competitiveness Objective regions seek ways of coordinating their actions, and the interest aroused by the creation of the EGTC instrument is a good example of this intention. These regions make an effort to think and act “in a European manner”. The ability to mobilise part of the operational programmes’ ERDF funds



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will allow them to make progress in regard to territorial cooperation and, therefore, move towards greater territorial cohesion.

Within the Competitiveness Objective framework, article 37-6-b of the ERDF regulation allows part of the funds of the regional operational programmes to be allocated to European territorial cooperation. We think that the Commission could, in the name of a “positive conditionality”, foster the use of this mechanism, in particular for the regions that have structured their cooperation in a EGTC. The Commission could also support this possibility for cooperation by drawing up guidelines based on the priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

➤ **In the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation Objective (see point 5.b. below)**

c) EGTCs, legitimate governance tools

As a cooperation instrument, the EGTC is a real multilevel governance tool that goes beyond the classical EU - Member State pair and enables the different institutions to work together in order to cope adequately with contemporary global challenges.

The EGTC creates multilevel governance by formalising the commitment of its members to projects that structure cooperation and thus adds stability, transparency and clarity to common cooperation activities.

d) Territorial pacts

We consider it essential to reaffirm the Euroregions (or equivalent structures) as an important level of governance and their EGTCs as a tool at the service of regional



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policy. Consolidating the links between the NUTS 2 institutional levels can only contribute favourably to the construction of a solidarity-based Europe in accordance with local reality and the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The groupings of cross-border regions, such as the Euroregions, want, on the one hand, to find specific solutions to the problems associated to their geographical situation and, on the other, to benefit from the synergies arising from the potential for development generated by proximity and the exchange of ideas, means, actors, etc.

With this strategy, which identifies cooperation goals to be achieved, the conclusion of a contract between the European Commission and a Euroregion structured as an EGTC could bring the Union closer to the citizens and provide a framework for the intervention of European and national funds.

This contract, or pact, which would cover a Euroregional territory of projects, could become a framework for territorial cooperation experiments in managing European funds specifically earmarked for joint projects. The driving effect the European funds have on cooperation will be greater if they are the result of first level integrated cooperation within a strategic framework. This strategic framework would be structured around the Europe 2020 Strategy priorities for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

3. Broadening the admissibility criteria based on GDP per capita

In the context of the current regional policy programming, GDP per capita is used as the only indicator for a regions' eligibility. Nevertheless, this indicator, on its own, cannot reflect the complexity of the concept of cohesion, which is much broader. New indicators – territorialised statistics - are needed to give a true picture of a regions' level of development.



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In view of this, the Europe 2020 Strategy goals should be included as a point of reference, in accordance with the Union's general policy framework.



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4. The need to simplify the EGTC regulation

While it is true that EGTCs have the capacity to help take better advantage of the resources of a particular territory by means of the interaction of different institutional levels, the regulation governing them still contains numerous references to national law that delay or prevent a homogeneous application to all European territories.

The Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean is in favour of simplifying the EGTC regulation so as to support their development. This simplification must necessarily involve:

- the laws governing the EGTCs' personnel and tax regime
- a reduction in the time taken by current procedures.

Moreover, we call for the EGTC regulation to facilitate direct implementation, less subject to the contingencies of national interpretations, which on certain occasions go against the objectives being pursued.

5. The architecture of cohesion policy

a) The Territorial Cooperation Objective

The Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean welcomes with satisfaction the reference to territorial cooperation, which maintains its present structure along three lines. Nevertheless, it expresses its concern regarding the concrete forms of this structure and the way the budget is broken down between these three lines.

b) Cross-border cooperation

In regard to cross-border cooperation, the Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean calls for:



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- **A shift from NUTS 3 to NUTS 2**

It would be advisable for NUTS 2 zones to be taken into account in cross-border cooperation programmes instead of NUTS 3 zones, as it happens at the moment. Many cooperation areas are launched and structured around the EGTC legal instrument. Nevertheless, these border areas consisting in NUTS 2 zones (which are smaller than the SUDOE or North-west Europe interregional areas) go beyond the classical limits of the current programmes based on NUTS 3 zones.

The changeover to NUTS 2 would allow the integration of areas which are part of a project focusing on cooperation, such as a Euroregion. In this way, these cross-border project territories would be able to participate fully in cross-border cooperation programmes.

- **Application, in the case of island regions, of “cross-border territory” status to the maritime basin**

In the case of island areas, the rule according to which the maritime borders must be separated by less than 150 kilometres limits the insular regions' possibilities of participating in regional organisations such as the Euroregions, of which they are in fact a part.



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Moreover, it should be remembered that:

- Article 174 of the Lisbon Treaty states that, among the regions concerned by the economic, social and territorial cohesion policy, particular attention shall be paid to *“regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions”*.
- The European Parliament, in a resolution of 22 September 2010, called for *“the dropping of the distance-related criterion (150 km) used for the purpose of classifying islands as border regions eligible for financing under cross-border cooperation programmes coming under the cohesion policy Territorial Cooperation Objective or the European Neighbourhood Policy; [and claimed for it to be considered] that, if it is necessary to establish some kind of limit, it would be more appropriate, in the case of island regions, for the cross-border territory condition to be applied at maritime basin level”*.

Taking into account the arguments set out here, we call for the elimination of this 150 km rule for island regions. Therefore, in the next programming period, the wording of the European Funds regulations should exclude the application of the geographical limit on cross-border cooperation and apply, in the case of the island regions, cross-border territory condition to the maritime basin.

Also available in:

Spanish: http://www.euroregio.eu/eu/Images/cohesion_es_tcm329-140788.pdf

Catalan: http://www.euroregio.eu/eu/Images/cohesion_cat2_tcm329-140789.pdf

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