

COTER-O12

Brussels, 29 April 2003

OPINION
of the
Committee of the Regions

of 10 April 2003

on
Territorial cohesion

The Committee of the Regions,

HAVING REGARD TO the decision of its Bureau of 14 May 2002, under the fifth paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to draw up an opinion on territorial cohesion and to instruct the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy to carry out the preparatory work;

HAVING REGARD TO its opinion of 14 January 1999 on the European Spatial Development Perspective (rapporteur: **Mrs du Granrut**; co-rapporteur: **Mr Knape**) (CdR 266/1998)¹;

HAVING REGARD TO its opinion of 15 February 2001 on the Structure and goals of European regional policy in the context of enlargement and globalisation: opening of the debate (rapporteur: **Mr Klär**, D-PES) (CdR 157/2000)²;

HAVING REGARD TO its opinion of 14 November 2001 on the Second report on economic and social cohesion (rapporteurs: **Mr Zaplana Hernández-Soro**, E-EPP, and **Mr Tindemans**, NL-PES) (CdR 74/2001)³;

HAVING REGARD TO its opinion of 10 October 2002 on the Commission Communication: First progress report on economic and social cohesion (rapporteur: **Mr D'Ambrosio**, I-PES) (CdR 101/2002);

HAVING REGARD TO its study on territorial cohesion in Europe, submitted by the Study group on European politics (CdR 195/2002);

HAVING REGARD TO the draft opinion (CdR 388/2002 rev. 1) adopted by the Commission on Territorial Cohesion Policy on 19 February 2003 (rapporteur: **Mr Valcárcel Siso**, E-EPP, President of the Region of Murcia);

WHEREAS cohesion is one of the fundamental objectives of the European Union;

WHEREAS the territorial dimension of cohesion figures among the priorities of the European Commission's Second report on economic and social cohesion, published in January 2001;

WHEREAS regional and cohesion policy constitutes one of the European Union's most important Community policies;

WHEREAS consideration of territorial cohesion is crucial, since it lies at the heart of the debate on the future of regional and cohesion policy after 2006;

WHEREAS there is a need to press forward with consideration of this subject;

adopted the following opinion at its 49th plenary session of 9 and 10 April 2003 (meeting of 10 April).

1. Views of the Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions,

Territorial cohesion: a fundamental dimension of cohesion

1. **recognises** certain difficulties in characterising the territorial dimension of cohesion, but nevertheless wishes to draw attention to the advances made in scientific work since the adoption of the European Spatial Planning Perspective (ESDP) in 1999;
2. **believes**, however, that no appraisal of cohesion should be restricted to the economic and social dimensions alone, measured through statistical indicators calculated at EU Member State level, and that a clearer understanding of the reality of cohesion must include reference to sub-state territorial units;
3. **is convinced** that under these conditions, cohesion must be viewed at regional level in order to show up the disparities in development which presently exist both between and within Member States, in the light of the continued existence of a development model based on relations between the centre and the periphery;
4. therefore **considers** that territorial cohesion must be understood as an objective in reducing disparities in development between European regions, to be achieved by reorganising Community territory in such a way as to enable polycentric, harmonious, balanced and sustainable development. In relation to its intraregional dimension, territorial cohesion must be understood as setting the objective of reducing development disparities and physical or economic dislocation within European regions by means of spatial planning and other public policies with a territorial impact, mainly promoted by Europe's regional and local authorities and aimed at constructing a balanced, polycentric EU territorial development model. In this regard, special attention must be given to

regions suffering permanent geographic disadvantages (island or upland regions, or those with low population density), to the most remote regions and to regions with specific characteristics (rural, periurban and cross-border regions);

5. **is of the view** that a polycentric model for Community spatial development is the only way to put all the EU's regions on an equal footing regarding development;
6. **recalls** that although there is no reference to territorial cohesion in Articles 2, 3 or 158 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, it is explicitly mentioned in Article 16.

Territorial cohesion: significant examples of current and future disparities in development between Community territories

The Committee of the Regions

7. **notes** that disparities in development within the EU are particularly marked in two indicators: per capital GDP and unemployment rates;
8. **but points out** that disparities are greater still when calculated at regional rather than national level. In 1999, the difference in per capita GDP between NUTS 2 level regions stood at 1 to 4.7, while between Member States it was 1 to 2.7. Unemployment rates also reveal a clear gap: in 2000 the difference between NUTS 2 level regions was 1 to 16.2, while between Member States it was 1 to 5.1;
9. **regrets** that these indicators and trends over recent years show that major disparities remain between NUTS II and NUTS III areas, although they have been reduced between states;
10. **is concerned** that the disparities between regions revealed by these indicators have increased in certain Member States;
11. **emphasises** the fact that other statistical indicators also highlight disparities between the regions and Member States of the EU. These include the demographic factor, accessibility, research and innovation potential, and education and training;
12. **notes** that the forthcoming enlargement will mean a widening in disparities between its different territories. Enlargement will entail an appreciable increase in GDP and unemployment disparities at both national and regional/local levels, putting the real challenge of territorial cohesion into clear focus at all territorial levels;
13. **is convinced** that against this backdrop, only a real political determination on the part of the EU to pursue the objective of territorial cohesion can reduce the present territorial imbalances between the major urban regions at the core of the EU and its outlying regions. Enlargement will only exacerbate these imbalances.

2. Recommendations of the Committee of the Regions

Recommendations to boost territorial cohesion

The Committee of the Regions

1. **urges** that territorial cohesion be made a policy objective with the same status as economic and social cohesion;
2. in consequence **calls for** Articles 2, 3 and 158 of the Treaty establishing the European Community to be amended, enshrining territorial cohesion as one of the main policy objectives to be pursued at Community level. Its inclusion should be confirmed in the future constitutional treaty, in order to equip the European Union with the appropriate tools;
3. **is convinced** that stronger territorial cohesion, for the purpose of reducing disparities between European regions, entails a reorganisation of European territory allowing polycentric development to take place;
4. **is aware** that polycentric development is impossible without:
 - adopting a genuine spatial blueprint, resulting in more closely coordinated action by the different institutional levels in the field;
 - bringing Community sectoral policies with a strong territorial impact more into line with the objective of cohesion. This is particularly relevant in the case of the CAP, the final form of which will determine whether rural areas are given a new impetus or whether, at least in the case of the more fragile areas, they turn into desert, with the resulting disturbance of the rural/urban territorial balance in the affected areas;
 - continuing a real Community regional policy which is not restricted to Objective 1 regions, but covers all other regions under a new Objective 2.
5. **recommends** modifying regional policy by incorporating the territorial dimension, with a view making a real contribution to polycentric European spatial development through a stronger network of small and medium-sized urban centres in the regions of the periphery, to act as vectors for growth and development, without overlooking the need to maintain a balanced relationship between urban and rural areas thereby creating synergies. This tissue of urban centres would boost the efficacy and competitiveness of entire regions through the creation of cooperation networks;
6. **considers** that this change in Community regional policy must be accompanied by joint coordination between this policy and those on employment and social affairs (ESF), rural development (EAGGF), and fisheries (FIFG);
7. **suggests** that community sectoral policies be given a territorial dimension so that they can help achieve the objective of cohesion. This suggestion is particularly relevant to sectoral policies having a major territorial impact such as transport, research, innovation and agricultural and environmental policy;
8. **believes** that better coordination between regional policy and Community sectoral policies is essential. By the same token, the need for consistency between competition

and regional policies must not be overlooked;

9. **supports** the view that in order to achieve greater territorial cohesion, an institutional framework better suited to good territorial governance needs to be introduced;
10. **considers** that in order to boost the incentive effect and efficacy of Community action, public sector action should be better coordinated between the Community, national, regional and local levels. This could be done in the form, for example, of tripartite agreements, in keeping with the constitutional arrangements of each Member State.

Brussels, 10 April 2003.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

Albert Bore

Vincenzo Falcone

¹ OJ C 93 of 6.4.1999, p.36.

² OJ C 148 of 18.5.2001, p.25.

³ OJ C 107 of 3.5.2002, p.27.

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CdR 388/2002 fin FR-ES/PM/ym

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