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Transfrontier co-operation in Europe

Working Group on Inter-regional Co-operation
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Summary

Transfrontier co-operation between local and regional authorities is an important part of the Council of Europe's work to promote democratic stability and good neighbourliness between states and regions. It is a key political task for the Council of Europe that needs to be organised by regional and local authorities in partnership with national bodies.

As such, transfrontier co-operation is exercised by those authorities closest to the citizens in full respect of the principles of subsidiarity and partnership. Thanks to this proximity, co-operation is centred around the preoccupations of the authorities, citizens and structures in those areas and can deal with the specific issues encountered by border regions.

A sustainable cross border spatial and regional development policy must gain in importance as the elimination of daily border problems and the enhancement of socio-cultural co-operation are a foundation for sustainable economic development. Transfrontier co-operation can also contribute to achieving European integration, to strengthening social and territorial cohesion, to promoting the active participation of all citizens, as well as to intercultural dialogue.

The Congress has an important role to play in analysing the operation and evolution of co-operation structures, in activities to support and set up new structures, as well as in studying specific themes such as minorities in frontier regions.

¹ L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD: European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress
NR: Members not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress



A. DRAFT RESOLUTION²

1. Transfrontier co-operation between local and regional authorities is an important part of the Council of Europe's work to promote democratic stability and good neighbourliness between states and regions and thus the Organisation's values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, including minorities' rights, and the safeguard of cultural diversity. It is a key political task for the Council of Europe that needs to be implemented at regional/local level in partnership with the national bodies in each area.

2. Since the Congress' last report on the subject,³ the state of transfrontier co-operation in Europe has changed decisively. Efforts towards cross border co-operation have been intensified considerably; the Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation (2005)2 on good practices in and reducing obstacles to transfrontier and international co-operation between territorial communities or authorities; the "Matching Opportunities for Regions in Europe – MORE" Project was set up to assist local and regional authorities in their transfrontier co-operation; the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 1829 (2008) on transfrontier co-operation; the Congress launched two Euroregions.

3. Organised and implemented by local and regional authorities, transfrontier co-operation is exercised by those authorities closest to the citizens in full respect of the principles of subsidiarity and partnership. Thanks to this proximity, co-operation is centred around the preoccupations of the authorities, citizens and structures in those areas and can deal with the specific issues encountered by border regions.

4. The specific knowledge and competencies of other local actors such as NGOs, local businesses, trades unions and other structures are the foundations for transfrontier co-operation. They contribute to the socio-cultural and economic development of border regions, for example through the learning of one's neighbour's language, co-operation between schools and youth organisations, the development of clusters, exchange of innovative ideas, jointly funded research, and so on.

5. Borders can divide areas with a common culture just as they can divide areas with different cultures. Where cultures are different, transfrontier co-operation can bring these together to meet within border areas giving rise to exchanges between groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds thus contributing to social and cultural integration, mutual trust and a culture of tolerance which can be but beneficial in the prevention of conflicts.

6. Europe's diversity, reflected in its social and cultural life as well as its administrative and political structures, meets in transfrontier exchanges. These differences, which cannot be overcome through the harmonisation of national laws, can be reconciled thanks to co-operation at local and regional level across borders, thus helping to prevent cross border conflicts and to overcome psychological barriers.

7. Transfrontier co-operation thus contributes to greater social, economic and territorial cohesion in Europe.

² Preliminary draft resolution and preliminary draft recommendation approved by the Working Group on 19 February 2009.

Members of the Working Group:

KH. Lambertz (Chair), U. Aldegren, JP. Heider, P. Jansen, K. Kontogeorgos, G. Krug, OA. Kvaløy, P. Madsen, G. Marmo, B. Petrisch, P. Receveur, N. Romanova, A. Saltykov.

N.B. : The names of members who took part in the vote are in italics.

Secretariat of the Working Group: J. Hunting

³ Promoting transfrontier co-operation: an important factor of democratic stability in Europe, HM. Tschudi, 2002.

8. Different funding programmes from the European Union (EU), such as the Interreg Programme, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) make an important contribution to the successful implementation of cross border co-operation programmes.

9. As for the Congress, it is conscious that these types of co-operation offer enhanced possibilities for citizen participation due to the proximity of local and regional authorities to citizens.

10. The Congress underlines the fact that transfrontier co-operation does not require the creation of additional administrative levels but can be organised either on an ad hoc or long term basis, based on a formal or informal agreement, with or without a specific legal status.

11. Moreover, the Congress is convinced that public-private transfrontier partnerships can contribute to the economic development of border regions. In addition, transfrontier co-operation can further European integration, the economic development of European regions, the strengthening of social and territorial cohesion, the promotion of the active participation of all citizens, as well as intercultural dialogue.

12. The Congress notes the successful results of cross border co-operation programmes and projects which deal with problems specific to border regions, and the long standing co-operation between other cross border structures such as in the Upper Rhine area. It has itself launched its own Euroregional initiatives, namely the Adriatic Euroregion and the Black Sea Euroregion.

13. Bearing in mind these facts, the Congress considers transfrontier co-operation must be one of its priorities over the next 10 years.

14. *Thus, it instructs its Working Group on Inter-regional Co-operation to monitor the development of inter-territorial, that is to say transfrontier and inter-regional co-operation, in its different forms. In particular the Working Group could analyse the operation and evolution of the various co-operation structures which exist, for example Euroregions, as well as study specific themes, such as minorities in border areas, and transmit its findings to the relevant bodies of the Congress and/or Council of Europe as appropriate.*

15. *Moreover, the Congress invites local and regional authorities in the Council of Europe member states to:*

a. build on historic and cultural links by engaging in cross border co-operation so as to build bridges and trust between all citizens and to promote intercultural dialogue and good neighbourliness between regions and states;

b. set up cross border co-operation structures where necessary, or adhere to existing ones, for example Euroregions or similar arrangements, to address the issues specific to border regions, or join forces to benefit from expertise and best practise from both sides of borders, for example in the provision of healthcare, emergency response structures, environmental protection, etc;

c. help reduce disparities between regions by promoting regional economic growth through co-operation with local businesses, chambers of commerce, universities and research institutions to improve infrastructure, transport, tourism, education, research, co-operation between small and medium-sized enterprises, to open up the job market and create additional jobs in border regions through transfrontier co-operation ventures;

d. improve the mobility of European citizens by working with national governments in order to find solutions to the constraints posed by borders such as current visa regulations, customs clearance regulations, bottlenecks at crossings, etc;

e. promote exchanges of experts, especially with east European countries, to provide technical and administrative assistance as well as exchanges of best practises by ensuring the availability of adequate national and European funding for developing such exchanges.

B. DRAFT RECOMMENDATION⁴

1. Transfrontier co-operation between local and regional authorities is an important part of the Council of Europe's work to promote democratic stability and good neighbourliness between states and regions and thus the Organisation's values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, including minorities' rights, and the safeguard of cultural diversity. It is a key political task for the Council of Europe that needs to be implemented at regional/local level in partnership with the national bodies in each area.

2. Since the Congress' last report on the subject,⁵ the state of transfrontier co-operation in Europe has changed decisively. Efforts towards cross border co-operation have been intensified considerably; the Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation (2005)2 on good practices in and reducing obstacles to transfrontier and international co-operation between territorial communities or authorities; the "Matching Opportunities for Regions in Europe – MORE" Project was set up to assist local and regional authorities in their transfrontier co-operation; the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 1829 (2008) on transfrontier co-operation; the Congress launched two Euroregions.

3. The face of Europe has evolved over the years. Borders between the European Union member states have come down and following its enlargement, new EU external borders have come into being. An increased number of Council of Europe member states are now part of this European Union borderless space however political borders still exist between many others.

4. Organised and implemented by local and regional authorities, transfrontier co-operation is exercised by those authorities closest to the citizens in full respect of the principles of subsidiarity and partnership. Thanks to this proximity, co-operation is centred around the preoccupations of the authorities, citizens and structures in those areas and can deal with the specific issues encountered by border regions.

5. The specific knowledge and competencies of other local actors such as NGOs, local businesses, trades unions and other structures are the foundations for transfrontier co-operation. They contribute to the social-cultural and economic development of border regions, for example through the setting up of activity centres, exchange of innovative ideas, jointly funded research.

6. Borders can divide areas with a common culture just as they can divide areas with different cultures. Where cultures are different, transfrontier co-operation can bring these together to meet within border areas giving rise to exchanges between groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds thus contributing to social and cultural integration, mutual trust and a culture of tolerance which can be but beneficial in the prevention of conflicts.

7. Transfrontier co-operation thus contributes to greater social, economic and territorial cohesion in Europe.

8. Different funding programmes from the European Union (EU), such as the Interreg Programme, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), make an important contribution to the successful implementation of cross border co-operation programmes.

9. For its part, the Congress is convinced of the contribution transfrontier co-operation can make to European integration, to the economic development of European regions, to strengthening social and territorial cohesion, to promoting the active participation of all citizens, as well as to intercultural dialogue.

⁴ See footnote 2.

⁵ Promoting transfrontier co-operation: an important factor of democratic stability in Europe, HM. Tschudi, 2002.

10. Moreover, the Congress notes the successful results of cross border co-operation programmes and projects which deal with problems specific to border regions, and the long standing co-operation between other cross border structures such as in the Upper Rhine area. It has itself launched its own Euroregional initiatives, namely the Adriatic Euroregion and the Black Sea Euroregion.

11. The Congress welcomes the on-going commitment of the Parliamentary Assembly to transfrontier co-operation (Recommendation 1829 (2008)).

12. *Consequently, the Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to:*

a. include, in its intergovernmental programme of activities, consideration of the difficulties encountered by border regions in day-to-day affairs which are specific to those regions by virtue of their position at national borders, for example the provision of cross border healthcare, the status of transfrontier workers and social security cover, emergency response mechanisms, etc.

b. support exchanges between experts and of advice in line with the report's recommendations.

13. *Invites the governments of Council of Europe member states to:*

a. promote the conclusion of bi- or trilateral agreements and arrangements as foreseen in Article 1 of the Madrid Outline Convention, and provide financial instruments conducive to the setting up of transfrontier co-operation projects;

b. support Euroregions or similar structures as successful tools for transfrontier co-operation;

c. actively promote transfrontier co-operation and encourage and enable local and regional authorities to enter into agreements where the need arises in particular by reducing obstacles in accordance with Recommendation Rec(2005)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on good practices in and reducing obstacles to transfrontier and inter-territorial co-operation between territorial communities or authorities;

d. work towards generally facilitating border crossing by local citizens, transfrontier workers, business representatives, and others who are required to regularly cross borders in their daily activities. This can be done by such measures as, for example, allowing a more flexible allocation of visas, ie long term or multiple; visa deliverance outside of capital cities (eg the case of Strasbourg which is entrusted to issue identity cards and passports thanks to an agreement with the French state authorities); additional crossings accessible to people living and working around borders; accelerated customs clearance procedures; or single shared buildings at checkpoints;

e. be aware that issues tackled at national level can take on a specificity of their own at cross border level, for example the situation of minorities, provision of healthcare services, employment, transport, infrastructure, and, where feasible, formulate national policies in these fields in co-ordination with the local and regional authorities concerned;

f. sign and ratify the Protocol n° 3 to the Madrid Outline Convention on Euroregional Co-operation Groupings;

g. guarantee national part-funding of transfrontier co-operation projects.

14. Urges the European Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government, who will meet in Utrecht (Netherlands) in November 2009, to reflect on ways of furthering and supporting transfrontier co-operation through the conclusion of inter-state agreements, the setting up of legal and administrative frameworks and the provision of funding.

15. Requests the European Commission explore the possibility of implementing joint co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union programmes for supporting transfrontier co-operation projects through the EU's Interreg Programme, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). This approach should be integrated, from the outset, into the concept of the future territorial cohesion policy.

C. EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM⁶

I. Introduction

1. The Council of Europe has been dealing with cross border co-operation since the mid 60s, in particular spatial development, regional policy and the consolidation of a democratic Europe, and has contributed substantially to its development across Europe. Due to the advancing integration process and the extension of its competencies, the European Union (EU) became politically and financially actively involved in cross border co-operation in the mid 80s.

2. The face of Europe has changed somewhat over the past few years, Council of Europe membership has increased to 47 countries and two successive EU enlargements have created new internal and external borders. This has resulted in new Council of Europe and EU legal instruments for facilitating cross border co-operation.

II. The current state of affairs

3. All these processes have a direct effect on all border/cross border regions within the Council of Europe member states (especially in the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Moldova and the Caucasus) and beyond (Belarus) as well as on the current internal and external borders of the EU. They have led to a substantial geographic expansion and intensification of cross border co-operation in Europe.

4. Cross border co-operation is one of the important items on the political agenda in Europe as it contributes substantially to European integration. It is most successful at regional/local level and therefore closely linked to regional/local democracy, indeed decentralisation is the foundation for successful co-operation, and is implemented by Euroregions and other similar structures, of which many new ones have emerged in recent years. However, there is a new generation of invisible problems and obstacles, due in part to significant differences in tax and social laws, in labour legislation, and so on, which has arisen due to the increased mobility on former EU internal borders and for which new solutions need to be sought.

5. In the Council of Europe, a different terminology is used to that in the EU making understanding more difficult (eg "transfrontier" instead of "cross border", "inter-regional/international" and "transnational/trans-European" with a different context), and it is strongly recommended to adopt a common terminology in the future to avoid misunderstandings.

6. Cross border co-operation frequently builds on historical and/or cultural links and often reflects strong common territorial interests. However efficient and effective co-operation among border regions is often difficult to accomplish due to different legislative systems, administrative and political structures and different distributions of competencies between local, national and European levels of governance. Whereas central governments might still play a decision-making role in centralised and decentralised unitary countries, this role lies with the participant regional and local authorities in regionalised and federalised states.

7. Cross border structures do not constitute an additional administrative level, but are rather a cross border interface to enhance co-operation between regional/local and national bodies on either side of a border, competencies remain with the nation state. These tailor-made joint structures, be they legal entities or informal bodies, are a key factor in the development of cross border co-operation whether it takes the form of ad hoc short term projects or long term, development oriented co-operation.

⁶ Prepared with the contribution of J. Gabbe, AEBR (see study in the appendix to this report (CG(17)5 appendix)).

III. Instruments for co-operation

Main legal instruments and their added value

8. The main legal instruments are the Council of Europe Madrid Convention and its Protocols and the EU European Grouping for Territorial Co-operation (EGTC).

9. The European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (1980), or Madrid Convention, and its First Additional Protocol (1998) were important steps forward in the process of creating an adequate legal framework for decentralised cross border co-operation. It was a catalyst for a Europe-wide process that consisted of legally "backing" cross border co-operation among regional and local authorities via the conclusion of additional treaties between states and led to the conclusion of a large number of inter-state agreements or treaties. The new protocol n° 3 (drafted 2009) contains basic rules governing the setting up, powers, legal capacity and responsibilities of Euroregional Co-operation Groups (EGCs). In substance, the law of the state in which the body is set up is applicable to the ECG, subject to a minimum set of rules and guarantees.

10. The EU European Grouping for Territorial Co-operation (EGTC) (2006) or Regulation 1082 aims to facilitate the setting up of legal entities for cross border co-operation of which member states, regional or local authorities, associations or any other public body can become members. The EGTC solves the issues of financial liability vis-à-vis external and internal partners and legal personality, but has not addressed the issue of the implementation of sovereign rights on the other side of a border without impinging on national competencies.

11. There is a clear added value to European legal instruments as they allow for full, decentralised co-operation, be it short or long term, based on public law (and thus subject to supervision according to that law) with legally defined liabilities (financial, decision-making, etc).

Council of Europe activities in the field of cross border co-operation

12. Cross border co-operation is an essential feature of the Council of Europe's activities to promote democratic stability and mutual understanding between nations through enhanced dialogue, joint action and institution-building at local and cross border levels. Along with, in particular, two Committee of Ministers' recommendations on reducing obstacles to transfrontier and inter-territorial co-operation and on the teaching of neighbouring languages in border regions, a new project - "Matching Opportunities for Regions in Europe - MORE" - aims to provide local and regional authorities with practical support for their transfrontier co-operation. The project comprises three pillars: (i) a European database on cross border and inter-territorial co-operation between regions and other territorial authorities, (ii) facilitating access to training on transfrontier co-operation by establishing a network of research institutions and (iii) drawing up training modules in the field of cross border co-operation.

13. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe continues to place importance on cross border co-operation and adopted, in January 2008, Recommendation 1829 (2008) on transfrontier co-operation.⁷

14. In 2002, the Congress nominated Hans-Martin Tschudi as the first rapporteur on transfrontier co-operation who wrote the first report on the subject. The Congress created a Working Group on Inter-regional Co-operation in 2007, chaired by the current rapporteur Karl-Heinz Lambertz, which is responsible for monitoring the Congress' inter-regional and transfrontier co-operation activities including supporting the implementation of instruments which provide the legal framework for cross border and inter-territorial co-operation and support to the Congress' Euroregions.

⁷ Doc 11475, report on transfrontier co-operation, Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, Rapporteur: Mr Ivan POPESCU, Ukraine, Socialist Group.

Council of Europe Euroregions

15. The Congress attaches particular importance to all aspects of the development and integration of the regions surrounding semi-closed seas. This concern was given concrete expression in the establishment of the Adriatic and Black Sea Euroregions.

16. The Adriatic Euroregion (launched in 2006) covers 22 local and regional authorities from six countries with Adriatic coastlines, alongside the national governments and European institutions. It is therefore not confined to transfrontier co-operation between countries sharing common borders, but involves different political and economic entities geographically distant from each other. The Euroregion's geographical scope makes it a major factor for European integration and a frontline interlocutor for the Council of Europe and the European Union.

17. The Black Sea Euroregion was established in 2008 when fifteen municipalities from five countries signed its Statutes. Inter-regional co-operation is seen as an essential instrument for development in the region and the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union in January 2007 created a new eastern EU border and opportunities for co-operation, certain projects could be funded by European Union instruments.

Influences on cross border co-operation

18. Either there is a need to co-operate across a border or not. If there is a need, it has to be done in order to overcome the barriers for the benefit of citizens – with or without European funding programmes. European funding only accelerates the process of cross border co-operation and the implementation of own regional cross border aims and strategies.

19. Furthermore, experience shows that socio-cultural co-operation is just as important as economic co-operation, indeed it is very often a pre-condition for successful economic co-operation. Cross border co-operation also depends on individual persons. They have to get acquainted with their neighbour, understand why s/he is different. On this basis, they can build up trust and confidence without which there will be no successful cross border co-operation.

20. Obstacles to cross border co-operation exist, ie legal, administrative, linguistic, however certain aspects enhance co-operation such as its proximity to citizens, the involvement of politicians and partnerships with all stakeholders.

IV. Added value of cross border co-operation

21. The added value of cross border co-operation can be measured in European, political, institutional, socio-economic and socio-cultural terms. The European added value stems from people's desire to co-operate in adjacent border areas thus making a valuable contribution to the promotion of peace, freedom, security and the protection of human rights.

22. The advance of European integration or the implementation of the subsidiarity principle constitute a political added value, while the active involvement of citizens, authorities and political/social groupings on both sides of the border are institutional advantages. The socio-economic benefits include developments in fields such as tourism, research, SMEs, job creation, the environment and so on, and knowledge of one's neighbouring country's language, history and culture bring socio-cultural added value.

23. Cross border cultural co-operation thus becomes a building block of regional development which fosters a supportive cross border environment for economy, trade and delivery of services.

24. Specifically, cross border co-operation benefits national measures thanks to: the additionality of cross border programmes and projects; synergies through cross border co-operation; joint research and innovation, health care, waste management, etc; cross border networking; exchange of best practice and know-how; spin-off effects by overcoming borders; and efficient cross border resource management.

V. Typologies of border/cross border regions

25. A number of attempts have been made to elaborate typologies of the variety of existing border and cross border regions in Europe. Two different classifications will be given here: geo-political and qualitative.

Geopolitical classification

26. The first criterion is size - the geographical scope of the region. A distinction may be drawn between small regions (micro-regions), medium-sized regions (meso-regions) and large regions (meta-regions).

27. The complexity of the border region is a second typological criterion. The more countries, regions, languages and different levels of powers and responsibilities that coexist within a border region, the greater its complexity.

28. A third criterion is the characteristics of the border itself. The type of border greatly influences co-operation between regions. Where the border is synonymous with a scar, a distinction must be drawn between natural borders, which present a physical barrier to co-operation and communication between different countries (mountain chain, ocean or continental waters, semi-closed sea such as the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Adriatic) and legal frontiers. These barriers, which are less visible but may be just as great a hindrance to transfrontier co-operation, are of two kinds: peaceful legal frontiers and those that are conflictual (minorities, religions, ethnic groups, etc).

29. In addition to the above-mentioned typology, border regions may be classified according to their geographical location in relation to the European Union:

- a. regions bordering on the internal frontiers of the former 15-member European Union;
- b. regions bordering on frontiers that have become internal frontiers following the last two EU enlargement operations;
- c. regions bordering on the EU's current external borders with countries that are candidates for membership;
- d. regions bordering on the EU's current external borders with countries that are not EU candidates and have no prospect of becoming so;
- e. regions with no border with an EU country (eg some regions in Ukraine).

30. This classification makes it easier to understand the diversity, and in particular the specificity, of the challenges facing border regions.

Qualitative classification

31. The AEBR typology completes this geopolitical typology with a qualitative approach to co-operation in border and cross border regions. It aims to classify existing border and cross border regions in Europe according to the respective degree of cross border integration achieved. The typology focuses on general cross border co-operation which means that European and national funding programmes are considered only as one part of all day-to-day cross border actions implemented in a given border/cross border area.

VI. Outlook

Cross border co-operation - a European issue and a political objective

32. Cross border co-operation should be taken up as a European issue and a political objective for the Council of Europe and the European Union in all policy areas.

33. Bilateral or trilateral cross border co-operation at regional/local level facilitates partnerships that will balance and reconcile the differences that exist in Europe due to the diversity of cultures, and different political, social, administrative and legal systems. No state in Europe will alter its tried and trusted structures, competencies and powers on account of the problems that arise in border regions. Few citizens will wish to sacrifice aspects of their everyday lives for the cause of European harmonisation, particularly where this would result in the loss of Europe's diversity/regional identity. Despite the reduction of barriers along the EU's internal and external borders, economic, social and legal problems and obstructions to co-operation affecting the population on either side of each border will persist.

34. Cross border co-operation at regional/local level will therefore remain a necessity over the long term not just in order to prevent cross border conflicts and overcome psychological barriers, but, above all, to cultivate partnerships within border regions and promote interculturality, with all the often very different social partners on either side of each border, and externally, with national governments.

35. The sovereignty of the state ends at its borders, however, the differences and problems at these borders continue to exist and require sustainable solutions that should be supported at both national and European levels.

Conclusion

36. Cross border co-operation is a key political task for the Council of Europe and the European Union that needs to be implemented at regional/local level in partnership with national bodies. It is a reference for: European integration and social cohesion; the peaceful coexistence of people, including respect for diversity and the rights of minorities; the respect for the principles of partnership and subsidiarity; the active participation of citizens, politicians, authorities and social groups in cross border co-operation; reconciliation, tolerance and equality, in spite of any differences between the respective partners; social, cultural and economic interwoven co-operation, extending as far as cross border integration, without undermining state sovereignty; intercultural dialogue; and a Europe for citizens in their communities, regions and countries.

37. To travel down this road towards a 'Europe without borders' in the 21st century, joint action by the Council of Europe, the European Union, the OSCE, national governments, regions and the local level is as essential as mutual solidarity between border and cross border regions.

Recommendations

38. Cross border co-operation at regional/local levels is a key task however it requires more confidence from state authorities. In order to smooth out distinctions in European spatial development and to abolish economic and infrastructural obstacles, a sustainable cross border spatial and regional development policy must gain in importance as the elimination of daily border problems and the enhancement of socio-cultural co-operation are a foundation for sustainable economic development, important in these times of economic and financial crisis.

39. The implementation of the Madrid Convention and its additional protocols requires the conclusion of bi- and trilateral agreements by national governments, and Council of Europe member states should envisage signing and ratifying the Protocol N° 3 in order that it may enter into force as soon as possible. There is a need for EU support programmes as a means of guaranteeing long-term national co-funding. There is also a need for setting up Euroregions and similar structures, which are important and successful elements in cross border co-operation and need to be strengthened by common bodies, common secretariats and financial resources. Finally, it would be more practical to use a common terminology in all spheres.

40. On the external borders of the EU and the borders between east European states, the focus of cross border co-operation should be on: strengthening regional/local democracies and co-operation structures; regional specific economic development; eliminating economic disparities; environmental protection; genuine cross border programmes and projects; greater regional and local participation and responsibility in European programmes; enhancing cross border mobility, without encouraging political or economic migration.