

Setting up of a European platform of support structures for cross-border cooperation at national level

At a major international conference in Budapest on 9th and 10th December 2010, **under the patronage of the President of Hungary**, Dr. Pál SCHMITT, and in the presence of Dr László KÖVÉR, Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary, the representatives of **four support organizations**¹ involved at national level (MOT for France, CESCO for Hungary, Grensmakelaar for the Netherlands and Working Communities Galicia-North Portugal and Castilla y León-North Portugal for the Spanish-Portuguese border) have signed the **Budapest Declaration**, aiming at **setting-up a European platform** of support structures for cross-border cooperation at national level

This Declaration expresses their intention:

- to create professional supporting network for multilevel organized cross-border cooperation, including the national level, in Europe;
- to share experiences acquired during their operation, and realize common initiatives and projects;
- to remove obstacles to the development of border or cross-border areas, and also participate in developing these territories.

The Budapest conference

In presence of high-level national and European representatives, the debates highlighted the added value of support structures for cross-border cooperation:

- Point of view of the European Commission, **Simona POHLOVÁ**, Programme Manager, European Commission, Directorate General for Regional Policy:

“Support structures at the national level are very important for some member states. In order for all these structures to reach the maximum potential support to cross border cooperation, there is a need to work in coherence and seek for synergies. A platform enabling all these structures to exchange views and work together for the mutual goal - more effective, more strategic cross-border cooperation - would be welcome by the European Commission.”

- Point of view from French authorities, **Pierre RICARD**, French Interministerial Agency for Spatial Planning and Regional Attractiveness (DATAR), France:

“France has undertaken to develop a multi-level governance related to cross-border cooperation. This multi-level governance needs to function properly, a real support structure for information, support, training and dissemination. It requires both a global view of the cross-

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See page 3, a short presentation of the four organizations. The undersigned of the Declaration are, for the Spanish/Portuguese border: Nuño ALMEIDA, Coordinator of the Working Communities Galicia-North Portugal and Castilla y León-North Portugal ; for France (MOT): Dr. Hans-Günther CLEV, Director General of the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière; for the Netherlands: Auke Van der GOOT, Senior Advisor, Ministry of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations; for Hungary (CESCI): György KOCZISZKY, President of the Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives.

border fact and a pragmatic approach and differentiated into contact with field partners, on each border, taking into account the economic, sociological, historical and cultural territories."

- Declaration of **Dr László KÖVÉR, Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary**, during the signing ceremony of the Budapest Declaration:

"Cross-border cooperation contributes to regional development and European integration for the benefit of citizens and must have the support of States. On the eve of the Hungarian presidency of the European Union, Hungary welcomes the signing of the Budapest Declaration and undertakes to support the implementation of the objectives outlined in this document in the coming years."

The context - Why create a European platform ?

In Europe, **almost a third of the population of the twenty seven member states lives in cross-border areas.**

In the Balkan area, the total border lengths represent 6 560 km and 34.5 million inhabitants (24% of the total population of these countries)

A strong need in Central Europe

More fragmented than others, the Balkan area must face the need to rebuilt confidence after the conflicts of the 90's, with problems related to the integration of minorities.

Also, cross-border cooperation can be a very practical way to overcome old barriers and to improve the regional and economic development in the whole area. In more and more countries of the world, cross-border cooperation represents an operative approach to solve daily problems of the citizens living in border areas, to overcome barriers in the development of concrete projects and to activate the whole potential of economic development of the border regions.

Local authorities and the central state have to cooperate in order to achieve that aim. And it seems to be more and more necessary to develop co-operation and coordination structures integrating the local, the regional and the state level: that tools of coordination are required at each level and the coordination must be organized between the levels.

A need to develop the exchanges between the countries

Models of organizing cross-border cooperation already exists in some European countries (France, Portugal, the Netherlands) or have just been created as in Hungary (the CESC1) (see next page for a short presentation of each model). and encountered difficulties can be solved in the exchange of experiences between countries and the example of other models in Europe.

In the same time, cooperation between the national support structures is needed in order to organize a common feedback to the European Commission and the European Parliament when bi- or multilateral treaties cannot solve the remaining problems or faced with the impossibility in some cases, to adapt the framework to a multitude of different neighborhoods (in France: 9 borders).

Those factors led the signers of the Declaration of Budapest to create this European platform on December 10th, 2010 in Budapest.

Budapest Declaration – Presentation of the four networked organizations

MOT and the system in France

Association and interdepartmental entity to support cross-border cooperation, the MOT includes about fifty members representatives of local authorities, States, associations, cross-border structures, companies, federations,... mainly active on the French borders. Its activities can be divided into four main headings: operational assistance, networking and training, support in defining overall strategies and European activities. It also acts as an intermediary between local stakeholders, and national and European authorities. MOT is presided by Michel Delebarre².

At the national level, following a Parliamentary report issued in June 2010, work is currently in progress to implement an institutionalized interministerial coordination, in which MOT may intervene as a technical support.

CESCI and the system in Hungary

New association set up in November 2009, CESCI (Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives) is a tool for technical assistance in support of the Hungarian border local authorities (counties, cities) and cross-border structures (Euroregions). It allows their networking and brings up the needs from local to central level.

At the central level, there are: a Secretary of State in charge of cross-border cooperation, an Interministerial Commission for cross-border cooperation and a National Development Agency (responsible for the management of EU funds).

The system in the Netherlands

With a centralized organization, the Netherlands have implemented a "Grensmakelaar (a cross-border mediator) to solve problems related to cross-border cooperation. Its role is to identify barriers by cooperating with neighboring countries to reach a "common agenda", and search out solutions at the national level. A Task Force on the border, composed of representatives of border regions and departments, was also created to support the work of the Grensmakelaar, and technical working groups on specific themes such as employment, education, health, safety, environment, public transport, spatial planning.

The organization at the border Spain/North Portugal

The system relates more specifically the border between North of Portugal and Galicia (Spain). At central level, a cross-border "referent" is present in each Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on each side and a Joint Committee on cross-border cooperation directed by the two MFAs.

At the decentralized level, on the Portuguese side they are: a Coordination Committee and Regional Development of the Region Norte and a cross-border referent and on the Galicia side: a cross-border referent.

Several cross-border structures support the system:

- EGTC "Galicia / Norte Portugal: established in 2008, its function is to establish a common strategic plan and monitoring the cooperation,
- Working Community Galicia / Norte Portugal: Established in 1991, its objective is to promote the technical and institutional exchange
- Euroregion Galicia / Norte Portugal ", which includes all stakeholders involved in cross-border cooperation.

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