

**Main messages from the Conference on territorial cohesion and  
the future of the cohesion policy - Paris - 30 and October 31, 2008**

In order to widen the debate on the main challenges of the implementation of the Territorial Agenda, with the discussion on territorial cohesion and the future of the cohesion policy, the French Presidency of the European Council organized on October 30 and 31, 2008 at the Palais des Congrès, in Paris, a large conference of cities and regions, in partnership with the European commission, the Committee of the Regions and the Association of the French Regions. **More than 1000 participants gathered, coming from the 27 Member States**, 4 invited countries and Community and international authorities.

During the workshops held on the first day as well as during the roundtables of the next day, some strong messages coming from territories were expressed and could feed our reflexions.

- On territorial cohesion: all participants seem to agree on a broad definition of this concept, including the idea of “a fair access to infrastructures and services on all territories”, and the capacity “to support any territory having a strategy for the future”. **Local actors wish to escape the narrow semantic debate to give territorial cohesion a political translation and pass to concrete measures for implementation.**
- A very strong consensus was expressed on the need for involving all European policies, financial or regulatory. **Territorial cohesion cannot be reduced to a new orientation of the cohesion policy, but it must “put in coherence” the sector policies, and even give them “a soul supplement”.**
- The principle of “territorial impact assessments” was frequently quoted as one of the conditions of a good implication of sector policies, as well as the need for developing new indicators to seize the reality of territories beyond GDP. This should not be seen as an additional bureaucratic constraint, but indeed like an essential preliminary stage towards a better involvement of these policies in terms of territorial cohesion. It is in addition necessary to better know territories, to refine indicators, definitions, geographical scales. All speakers agree on the need for developing the “strategic capacity of territories”.
- In terms of governance, participants advocated for a more horizontal vision of subsidiarity - participants even spoke about “horizontal cosidiarity” - to underline the need for involving all local actors (social partners, trade unions, businesses, NGOs,...) in the development of integrated territorial strategies.
- **Participants in the workshop on “CAP and rural policies” insisted on the fact that the CAP and the cohesion policy share actually a common goal in terms of territorial cohesion, and that it is essential not to regard them as competitors. A better coordination (at least, some going up to claiming their simple fusion) was**

**strongly claimed**, being regarded as a condition of integration of policies on the ground and a guarantee of effectiveness.

- If the idea of a uniform rural policy laid down at Community level does not appear a good solution for anybody, the rural problems must be apprehended as a specific challenge, within the scope of territorial cohesion.
- **The acknowledgment of the crucial role of the local and regional Authorities in the field of issues related with climate change appears essential** to participants in the workshop on the Sustainable development strategy and the adaptation of territories to climate change. Local and regional authorities are already not only much involved, but are important partners along national States for a good consideration of the diversity of situations. While States give the impression to be interested only in the questions of struggle against emissions of greenhouse effect gas, local and regional actors consider the problems of adaptation are more closely connected and must be tackled simultaneously (“it is better to prevent than to cure”, or, in terms of adaptation, “the earlier, the better”...).
- Rather than eco-conditionality, participants in the workshop on “sustainable development” have proposed the term of “**eco-preference**”, that is to say favouring the projects which are the most compatible with a genuine sustainable development.
- With respect to the “**Lisbon process**”, participants in the workshop put forward the idea of “horizontal subsidiarity”, or “**cosidiarity**”, aiming at extending subsidiarity between geographical levels by entrusting at the local level **the responsibility for action to the best situated actors in order to get results**, and in particular to economic actors and SMEs.
- For this reason participants deemed that **the Lisbon strategy cannot be reduced to a uniform “earmarking”**, but actions must result from a true analysis of the limiting factors of economic development or innovation, taken in its broadest meaning. In certain cases, that can pass through structuring investments, in other cases it is more a question of promoting innovation, in its broadest meaning here again.
- On the basis of the analysis of the most various case studies, participants in the workshop on “**governance and territorial cohesion**” insisted on the **need for pragmatic approaches of the organizations to set up**, beyond the borders and the institutional roles of the ones and others.
- Examples such as the EGTC Hungary-Slovakia (European grouping of territorial cooperation) which goes up to the integration of tax systems, or the territorialisation of the fisheries policy by the DG MARE, constitute laboratories of ideas for more voluntary future approaches of crossing between sector policies on the territories. Eventually, **the concrete practices of the territorial development are guiding the organizations and having a concrete impact on the institutional evolutions**.
- In connection with the future of the cohesion policy, a broad consensus was expressed on the need it concerns all citizens and European regions, and that “it supports any territory having a strategy for the future”. Participants, namely

regional and local authorities who are directly interested in this policy, strongly stressed the multiple threats which could constitute the temptation of a renationalization, or a dilution of the cohesion policy within sector policies (“the cohesion policy and the Lisbon strategy must fertilized each other mutually provided that they are not confused”), a reduction in credits or an exclusive targeting towards certain territories.

- **The importance of territorial cooperation was largely stressed**, with strong assumptions such as “devoting 15% of the budget of the cohesion policy to territorial cooperation”. Between the 1% of the current budget and this high assumption, the positions were diverse, however all stressing the importance of cross-border cooperation, a “laboratory of ideas and pragmatic solutions to the problems faced on the ground”, as much as transnational cooperation on spaces tagged as “Meso-Europes”.
- More generally, **given the dire international situation we are facing, some participants stated that what we need is a “New deal” for public investments**, and the regional policy would be naturally the privileged instrument, able to bring financing to project promoters, even to the most remote ones from the big decision-making centres.
- **The concern with the performance of the programs financed by structural funds** strongly was also underlined, while insisting on the measure of the real impact of policies in terms of daily life, competitiveness, sustainability of employment.