

## **PERSPECTIVES AND NEXT STEPS TOWARDS TERRITORIAL COHESION**

### **Introduction**

Territorial cohesion is enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty and will become, once the treaty is ratified, one of the common main objectives of the EU and a shared competence between the Member states and the EU. Adding territorial cohesion recognises explicitly that geography matters. In other words, more consideration needs to be given in all the Union's policies to the need for the harmonious and balanced development of the Union's territory, with the objective of better exploiting of its diversity and potential.

Since the ESDP, a lot has been written on territorial cohesion; the European Commission provided the first formal attempt at a definition in the 2004 3d cohesion report: *“the concept of territorial cohesion extends beyond the notion of economic and social cohesion by both adding to it and reinforcing it. In terms of policy, the objective is to help achieve a more balanced development by reducing existing disparities, preventing territorial imbalances and by making both sectoral policies which have a spatial impact and regional policies more coherent. The concern is also to improve integration and encourage cooperation between regions.”* In a more expressive manner, it stated that *“Nobody should be disadvantaged by the place she or he is living or working in on the territory of the EU”*.

Several reports from the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions added to this approach. Under the influence of the lobby of the regions and cities, the concept was first introduced in the draft constitutional treaty which was rejected in 2005.

### **1. What are the questions to be discussed about territorial cohesion and its introduction in the treaty?**

In fact, territorial cohesion is not a new concept although we don't have a clear definition of it up to now. What is new is that its introduction in the treaty will provide a legal basis to build political applications, notably, as part of the cohesion policy. In order to build those political applications and to communicate policy

priorities to the stakeholders, **we need a clear and common understanding both of the concept of territorial cohesion and the instruments to achieve it.**

(I don't think it would be neither possible nor desirable to reach an academic definition, given that the national circumstances are very different as the answers to a questionnaire of the Commission showed it.)

This elaboration on territorial cohesion is made necessary because of the persistence of disparities as acknowledged by the 4th cohesion Report :

- convergence progressed between the States and between the majority of the regions but the disparities are growing between the regions inside Member States and within regions and cities. It is thus necessary to better take into account those imbalances as well as the subregional disparities;
- the territorial dynamics which are at work increase imbalances and disparities (depopulation, urban sprawl, polarization of economic development, etc). These dynamics must be better studied and taken into account in the political answers;
- geographical or natural specificities can be lived like handicaps causing remoteness, isolation (ultraperiphericity, insularity). These specificities are recognized by the cohesion policy, undoubtedly would have they to be taken better into account under territorial cohesion;
- the main challenges (globalisation, climate change, evolution of demography, etc;) will undoubtedly increase the disparities and imbalances between regions and territories.

The principles that should guide the reflexion on territorial cohesion are:

- equity: one should not be penalized by the localization of his (her) employment or home;
- solidarity: to make so that the territories which have less favourable conditions or which are handicapped by the geography can benefit from a redistribution and equalization of the financial resources;
- efficiency: to connect the territories so that together they are positioned better in the worldwide competition.

The main components coming in our mind when talking about territorial cohesion are:

- a balanced and polycentric development of the territory but also a sustainable use of territorial resources to increase competitiveness and reduce disparities (mixed approach);
- the accessibility of the territory;
- service provision to both citizens and business in all part of the territory is one of the cornerstones of territorial cohesion policy;
- the multilevel governance, the coordination of sectoral policies
- territorial cooperation

Which are the stages of the process to lay down a policy of territorial cohesion?

- to make a diagnosis of disparities (ESPON);
- to define what would be an “equitable or cohesive” situation”;
- to make political arbitrations (which disparities to treat or not to treat?);
- to decide what policies and mechanisms of redistribution and equalization to set up at which territorial level of the public action : local, regional, national or European (this also implies to work on subsidiarity).

## **2. Steps forward during the French Presidency**

The upcoming French Presidency of the EU intends to give a central role to territorial cohesion:

- first, in the implementation of the 1<sup>st</sup> action programme of the territorial agenda of the EU;
- second, in preparing a contribution of the European ministers to the debate that the Commission will launch after the publication of the green Book, with a special consideration given to the consequences for the cohesion policy.

### **a) The implementation of the 1<sup>st</sup> action programme of the territorial agenda**

The Territorial Agenda, which was designed to be a political framework to deal with territorial questions in the EU, is dedicated to territorial cohesion. It does not develop on the meaning but more on the process towards achieving territorial cohesion.

France has proposed actions consisting in *preparing and promoting contributions of the ministers in charge of territorial policies and cohesion policy to the debate on the future of the most relevant EU policies from the point of view of sustainable spatial development and territorial cohesion.*

For that purpose, we have set up transnational working groups which in order to prepare those contributions on:

- the reform of the CAP and rural development policy;
- the future of the Lisbon strategy;
- the redevelopment of the sustainable development strategy focusing on climate change and energy;
- the future of the cohesion policy.

In all those political domains, the ministers will propose that the policies will contribute better to territorial cohesion and how they could do it.

## **b) The debate that the Commission will launch after the publication of the green Book**

The Ministers in charge of spatial development and the one in charge of the cohesion policy, when different, will be proposed a contribution to the public debate which will be launched by the Commission after the publication of the Green Book. This contribution will be linked to the one on the future of the cohesion policy because territorial cohesion will find an application within the cohesion policy although it concerns all the EU policies which have a territorial impact.

### **3. The demands to be addressed to ESPON in this field**

ESPON 2006 has already achieved a lot of results in this field: all the projects dealing with the territorial impact of the main EU policies, all the indicators related to the state of the territory, etc.

ESPON 2013 will have to build on that and go further, notably by:

- providing methodology and tools for territorial diagnoses;
- helping measuring the disparities by creating new indicators and indexes;
- improving a territorial information system based on observation (territorial dynamics and trends), impact analysis (TIA), scenarios ;
- making those analyses on the 5 levels (not only 3): local, regional, national, European and Europe in the world.

## **Conclusion**

As a conclusion, I would like to emphasise the importance for the UE to include the neighbouring countries when dealing with territorial cohesion.

Not only the ones which will sooner or later join the EU (although we know big of a challenge the last enlargements have been for territorial cohesion of the EU).

But also because the external borders of the EU are of the outmost importance to assure the place of Europe in the world and for the success of the EU policies.

The question of the relations with the neighbouring country will be a major issue for the cohesion policy in the future and the convergence at the external borders will have to be taken into an increased consideration, more than it is know with the neighbouring policy.