

ESPON Conference

Speech by G. Stahl, CoR Secretary General

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I. Political context

This meeting is being held at a crucial time for the European cohesion policy agenda:

Legal package of structural funds guidelines and regulations has been formally adopted and the operational programmes for the period 2007-2013 are being discussed between the Commission and the Member states. We are now looking forward to observing the starting phase of implementation for structural actions

- Next week, the Commission will publish the fourth Cohesion report, which will give us an accurate snapshot of the disparities between regions in Europe and highlight the catch-up trends in the Europe of 27
- Finally, this Thursday and Friday the German Presidency will organise an informal Ministerial meeting on urban affairs and territorial policy, which is intended to adopt two important policy documents on sustainable cities and a territorial agenda

II. Need to put territorial cohesion back at the centre of discussion

It is high time to make the concept of territorial cohesion a reality in a landscape dominated by the Lisbon strategy:

- the territorial dimension of cohesion policy is fundamental to the Committee of the Regions, as it neatly summarises our concerns as regards the implementation of multi-level governance
- The Committee's representatives at the Convention actively worked towards the recognition of this third dimension of cohesion in the Constitutional Treaty

- territorial cohesion is a horizontal priority. It goes well beyond identifying areas with specific handicaps that require special treatment, such as the outermost regions, islands, external borders, upland areas, areas of low population density, arctic regions, etc.

- the concept of territorial cohesion takes in dimensions of sustainability and solidarity.

I will give a few examples:

- Polycentrism
- Urban dimension
- Relationship of cities with their immediate surroundings, and in particular the countryside

III. Several overall trends

- National policies have less of an influence on economic and regional development
- More responsibilities for regional and local authorities in the European Economic and Monetary Union
- In more and more member states this is reflected by international changes:
« devolution », « decentralisation » and
« federalism »

IV. What is the picture presented by empirical data

- Foreign investment , foreign companies and foreign markets
- Reduced divergence between member states means that
 - EMU is helping convergence
 - Cohesion policy is effectively contributing to reducing divergence between member states
- Increased divergence between regions and within member states
 - Regions are more exposed to international competition

V. What are the policy consequences for the RLA

- Must develop their own regional or local development concept
- Must participate in specialised international networks and follow best practices in other regions to remain competitive (Lisbon Monitoring Network)
- Must be present in European debate (Committee of the Region)

VI. Contribution of Espon

Espon can help to provide essential data to allow the LRA to keep their own strategies up-dated

- Provides a scientific platform for parties involved in research into territorial development
- Reports on the territorial dimension of development and sectoral policies

The Espon 2013 Programme could provide essential contributions in the area of the 5 priorities:

- Applied research on territorial development, competitiveness and cohesion: Evidence on territorial trends, perspectives and policy impacts
- Targeted analyses based on user demand: A European perspective to the development of different types of territories
- Scientific platform and tools: Territorial indicators and data, analytical tools and scientific support
- Capitalisation, ownership and participation: Capacity building, dialogue and networking
- Technical assistance, analytical support and Communication.

VI. Conclusions

What is needed for the implementation of territorial cohesion?

- Effective multilevel governance system taking into account the best European experience (see final assessment by the Commission services of the national strategic reference frameworks and the operational programmes

- To deepen this message on the European agenda : informal ministerial meeting
 - Leipzig (Urban Charter, Territorial Agenda)
 - Territorial dialogue of the CoR in February 2008
 - Regions for economic change
 - Spring Council in 2008 and mid-term review of the revised Lisbon process
 - 2008 Budget review

- To implement multilevel governance at the national level
 - Operational programmes
 - National Lisbon reform programmes
 - Interregional and transborder cooperation
 - Sectoral policies (like maritime policies, GMES regions)