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ESPON at the COTER commission meeting in Cluj Napoca

Luxembourg, 27 March 2019

Post-2020 Cohesion Policy should bring places closer together

“Future Cohesion Policy should be about connecting places, bringing them closer together, to ensure that no place is left behind”. This was the final statement of the director of the **ESPON EGTC Ilona Raugze** summarizing ESPON’s recommendations on post-2020 Cohesion Policy at the meeting of **COTER Commission of the Committee of the Regions** that was held in Cluj Napoca, in Romania.

ESPON was invited both for the high-level conference that was organized by the Committee of the Regions, the Romanian Presidency and the City of Cluj and the formal meeting of the COTER Commission.

Mrs Raugze presented insights from ESPON research showing that **territorial disparities are projected to increase by 2035**, despite the positive effect of Cohesion Policy. Shrinking population has become the normal trajectory for many rural regions, as agriculture has been restructured and population and employment have become increasingly concentrated in urban centres.

At the same time, **over 45% of the European regions are confronted with marginalization** (Inner Peripheries) due to poor economic potential, demographic decline and lack of access to centres or services. Border regions, not only national but also regional, as well as non-urban and mountainous regions are more exposed to the threat of becoming Inner Peripheries.

As places become more interconnected and interdependent, development is not bound by administrative borders. **“Functional areas of different types – functional urban, cross-border, coastal, mountainous, transnational, river deltas etc. should become the new geographical scale for planning, governance and investment”**, said Mrs Raugze.

Functional approach allows increasing the efficiency of EU funded investment, avoiding its fragmentation and duplication and thus achieving results with limited resources. Furthermore, territorial cooperation within functional areas allows overcoming the negative effects of inner peripherality as it helps to reconnect remote places to their wider regions.

ESPON’s director presented **6 pillars for the successful design of regional development strategies beyond 2020**:

1. **Develop** a Long-term Sustainable development strategy for Europe to present a spatial vision and promote the development of different places.
2. **Follow** a visionary approach, supported by foresight methods that are not just relying on past data and analysis, but combine historic trends and potential developments.
3. **Address** the key development challenges that are related to:
 - technological change (digital society, post-carbon, and circular economy),
 - social change (migration and ageing),
 - environment (mitigating and adapting to climate change, scarcer resources)

- economic transformation (innovation ecosystems)

4. **Build** links among places and promote connectivity among them through a functional approach and more territorial cooperation. This approach is especially important for peripheral and lagging behind places.

5. **Ensure** that development policies are designed through a broad partnership with stakeholders beyond the public sector through multilevel governance to build ownership.

6. **Invest** in capacity building of local stakeholders to improve their engagement in strategic planning and implementation.

To ensure a more efficient post-2020 Cohesion Policy **quality of governance is a strong precondition**, concluded Mrs Raugze. ESPON advises developing new multi-level governance solutions beyond administrative borders, at the scale of functional geographies. We have identified many good practice examples in our research on the development of such governance models, but we need to move from good practices to mainstream practices.

During the official meeting of the COTER Commission the ESPON project [European Territorial Reference Framework](#) (ETRF) presented also insights on the challenges and developments that should be considered in the post 2020 Territorial Agenda.

The European Territorial Reference Framework is an ambitious ESPON project aiming to develop the framework for a potential long-term territorial development perspective for Europe and realistic mid-term policy proposals for the post-2020 Territorial Agenda.

Findings presented by one of the authors, **Andreu Ulled**, director of MCRIT, and professor **Jáček Szlachta** of the Warsaw School of Economics, chair of the Strategic Advisory Forum of the project, show a growing misalignment between administrative borders and economic and social activities as places are interlinked in more complicated ways than in the past. **Situations like Brexit usually add further complexities.**

On the other hand, **European political integration seems to be a successful example of how to bring places together beyond administrative limitations** and design development policies based on the needs of the people, not the borders. And Cohesion Policy played an important role in introducing this new/place-based governance.



Note to the Editors

ESPON is the European Territorial Observatory Network that provides scientific analyses and advice for territorial and sectoral policies in a number of contexts including economy and finance, unemployment, foreign direct investment, circular and low-carbon economy, healthcare, migration, etc. **ESPON** supports the discussions on the future of EU policies, notably the Cohesion Policy, as well as the upcoming preparation for the next generation of strategies and programmes at national, regional and local scales. **ESPON** is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund. More at: www.ESPON.eu

The **ESPON 2020 Programme** is a pan-European programme managed by the Luxembourgish Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructure on behalf of all EU Member States, Island Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland and co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund under Interreg.

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