



South-East Regional Authority

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Submission to the European Commission

on the

EU Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion

“Turning territorial diversity into strength”

February 2009

Introduction

The South-East Regional Authority welcomes the publication of the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, “*Turning territorial diversity into strength*” (COM(2008) 616 final) and welcomes the opportunity given to participate in the debate.

This submission broadly follows the format of the questions posed in Section 4 of the Green Paper. Before this, there are some general remarks about the South-East Regional Authority, the South-East NUTS¹ III Region of Ireland and the Green Paper itself.

The South-East Regional Authority (SERA)

The SERA is one of eight NUTS III Regional Authorities established on a statutory basis by central government in 1994. This was a small but significant step towards regionalisation in what is a largely centralised state in terms of government and public administration.

SERA, with its statutory base and democratic mandate, has a wide remit and general competence to act in the interest of the development of the South-East Region, and has played a valuable role in both articulating and bringing the needs and concerns of the region to the top of the political agenda. Working in close co-operation with local and public authorities, business, farming, employer and employee organisations, the third-level institutes and academia, the Authority has spearheaded efforts to have the overall concerns and requirements of the South-East addressed, particularly in the context of the National Development Plans 2000-2006 and 2007-2013 and the various EU support measures for Ireland. The continual focus has been to address the key issues that affect the overall development of the South-East region, particularly those that have traditionally inhibited its physical, social and economic welfare.

The South-East Region

The South-East Region covers an area of some 9,406 sq. kms. (13.5% of Ireland). The current population of the Region is 460,838 persons (Census 2006) or about 11% of the national population. The South-East Region is predominantly rural in character with the main urban centres being Waterford City (population 49,213), Kilkenny City (22,179) and the county towns of Carlow (20,724), Wexford (18,163), Clonmel (17,008) and Dungarvan (8,362).

Establishment, Powers and Functions of Regional Authorities

Eight Regional Authorities were established on a statutory basis in Ireland with effect from 1st January 1994 under the provisions of the Local Government Act, 1991 (Regional Authorities)(Establishment) Order, 1993. This Establishment Order was made by the Minister for the Environment, with the consent of the Minister for Finance, under Sections 3 and 43 of the Local Government Act, 1991.

¹ Nomenclature of Territorial Statistical Units (NUTS) is the nomenclature established by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) in order to have a single and coherent territorial distribution and classification system for the compilation of statistics.

The powers and functions of Regional Authorities are principally set out in Part III of the Establishment Order. In addition, the Planning and Development Act, 2000 conferred on the Authorities the power to make Regional Planning Guidelines for their functional areas.

The principal functions of the Regional Authorities are:

- Promotion of co-ordination in the provision of public services in the region
- Promotion of co-operation, joint action etc. between local authorities, public authorities and/or others
- Reviewing the overall development needs of the region and the making of statements on them as appropriate, and keeping under review the provision of public services in the region
- Reviewing the Development Plans of local authorities in the region and in adjoining regions
- Making Regional Planning Guidelines to inform and guide local development plans and implement the National Spatial Strategy at regional level
- Advising, reviewing and monitoring with respect to the National Development Plan and the EU co-financed National Strategic Reference Framework.

General Remarks on Green Paper

The SERA welcomes this Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion and acknowledges an effort by the European Commission to define the concept. The role played by local and regional government in the EU, and more specifically in achieving territorial cohesion, must be reiterated and strengthened and the importance of local and regional government in the planning, delivery and monitoring of territorial development, policies and instruments must be given greater priority.

Responses to Questions posed in Green Paper

1. Definition

The concept of Territorial Cohesion needs to be clearly defined in order to avoid misconceptions and misinterpretations. Many problems faced by territories are cross-sectoral and, therefore, effective solutions require an integrated approach. The concept of territorial cohesion should have social cohesion and sustainable development built into the definition.

The definition of territorial cohesion must include an emphasis on balanced regional development by reducing disparities, ensuring equal access by citizens to services, especially health and education, regardless of wherever they happen to live and work, avoiding territorial imbalances and by making sectoral policies with a spatial impact and regional policy more coherent.

Territorial cohesion applies at all spatial scales – European, National, Regional and Local and all tiers of governance have responsibilities in promoting it. Appropriate

governance structures which drive the implementation of the territorial cohesion concept must be developed.

Cohesion, whether it be economic, social or territorial must be an objective of all public policy to reduce disparities and combat inequalities. Adding the territorial dimension will mean that regional disparities will be taken into account. Issues such as accessibility and infrastructure, economic competitiveness and environmental matters may also require policies specific to rural territories.

2. Scale and Scope of Territorial Action

There is a role for the EU in promoting territorial cohesion within broad framework parameters. The aim of the EU in relation to territorial cohesion should not be to create a top-down and separate EU territorial policy but to integrate the EU's territorial dimension framework into national and regional policies using existing instruments and structures.

The challenge of territorial cohesion adds an integrated and long-term approach to the process of exploiting territorial potentials in the EU that has to be addressed at, and across, different policy levels (regional, national, transnational and EU) and across sectors (agriculture, transport, environment, regional-economic development, competition etc).

Each region has a specific territorial capital that is distinct from that of other areas and generates a higher return for certain kinds of investments than for others, since these are better suited to the particular area and use its assets and potential more effectively. Public policies aimed at promoting territorial development and limiting disparities should first and foremost help areas to develop their territorial capital and to maximise their competitive advantage. The promotion of regional innovation strategies and the exploitation of regional territorial capital is therefore an important prerequisite for improving the global competitiveness of the whole EU territory. Governance plays a key role in this respect as the promotion of sustainable growth means ensuring that national territorial policy is compatible with the development policies in the regions and cities and at the EU level.

3. Better Co-operation

The Commission should play a facilitation role in encouraging and supporting territorial cooperation. It should facilitate governance arrangements to address policy issues according to type and scale.

Since its establishment, the SERA has been a partner in many INTERREG projects whereby the regions of Europe form partnerships to work together on common projects. By sharing knowledge and experience, these partnerships enable the regions involved to develop new solutions to economic, social and environmental challenges. In principle, INTERREG is a very worthwhile programme, but the level and scale of controls, administration work and limitations in financial expenditure mean that the programmes may not be as effective as they might be.

The EU needs to clearly define the concept of “territorial cohesion” and what it expects of the Member States. Each Member State should then provide a plan/framework each year, within the EU’s parameter, of its goals, objectives and actions and the means of achieving them and these should be examined and agreed by the EU – through a formal process.

There may not be a need for new forms of territorial cooperation as there are sufficient programmes and tools available (e.g. IGTC and INTERREG). Nevertheless, these need to be developed and strengthened to allow actors embrace them in the fullest sense to achieve territorial cohesion.

The Commission is in a strong position to facilitate the establishment of networks and exchange of experiences between territories, providing a platform to transfer knowledge and disseminate best practice, pooling of resources, holding best practice models etc.

4. Better Co-ordination

“Territorial Cohesion” proofing of sectoral policies must be a prerequisite for all policies going forward. The development of sectoral policies should take into account, at all levels, the impact policies will have territorially in the regions.

The Regional Authority wishes to emphasize the need to enhance territorial governance at national and regional level. Governance structures already in existence at regional level must be used more effectively to engage with relevant regional stakeholders in sector-specific policy areas.

Analytical tools to assist the process of “territorial cohesion” proofing of policies could be developed.

At the regional level, Authorities must be empowered to co-ordinate and ensure coherence of sectoral policies in a territorial context. In the Irish context, the NUTS III Regional Authorities are the ideal mechanism to ensure horizontal and vertical integration of sectoral policies. Proper resourcing (legislative and financial) needs to be in place in order for coherence to be achieved.

5 New Territorial Partnerships

The involvement of all actors in achieving territorial cohesion is required. Many processes and forms already exist at local, regional and national level to include such actors in policy formulation and implementation. It may be necessary to examine these in order to strengthen and deepen such engagement and participation.

It is vital that the democratic process is participative and inclusive at all tiers. Improving participation should stimulate interest and confidence. The EU should promote governance as a process of partnership, co-operation and networking, moving away from levels and hierarchies. This approach would give further democratic legitimacy and would include civil society.

6. Improving Understanding of Territorial Cohesion

Cohesion indicators must be analysed over several years in order to obtain an accurate picture of territorial characteristics and trends. Multiple variables and a wide variety of indicators should also be used.

Conclusion

The Authority welcomes the opportunity to make this contribution and requests that the views contained herein be considered and taken into account, where appropriate.

The SERA strongly endorses the concept of territorial cohesion in order to advance competitiveness, offer equal access to services irrespective of where citizens live and work and to ensure the sustainable development of the European Union.

The role played by local and regional government in the EU must be fully recognised in achieving territorial cohesion. Local and Regional Authorities can play an important role in assisting in the implementation of EU and national plans at local and regional level.

Regional Authorities, by virtue of this statutory remit and overall co-ordinating role with respect to strategic planning and public services provision in their Regions, are ideally placed to play a valuable role in turning territorial diversity into strength. The future White Paper should recognise the role that the Regional Authorities play in this regard and allocate adequate responsibilities and resources to them accordingly.

The Authority would also welcome any further opportunity to elaborate on the views expressed herein.