



EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION. Post-2020

1. European Territorial Cooperation. Cohesion Policy Context

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), commonly known as Interreg, is an integral part of the Cohesion Policy, as established in the Treaty.

Although 2.8% of the total Cohesion Policy resources of the European Union are allocated, in the 2014-2020 period, to the European Territorial Cooperation objective, it is important to note that joint support has been given over the years for many investments in different areas, such as culture, tourism, innovation, sustainable development and the circular economy. These investments have had a positive impact on economic growth, particularly in cross-border territories. This has resulted in improved quality of life for the citizens of said territories.

One noteworthy aspect of ETC is that it allows multilevel participation. This has enabled public administrations— at the national, regional and local levels—as well as civil society, NGOs, businesses, academia and others, to cooperate, and, in short, learn from each other, seeking synergies among the different territories of the European Union.

For this reason, although European Territorial Cooperation does not have an “immediate” impact on a territory, we must take into account that all of these Programmes and particularly “Cross-Border Cooperation” are at the heart of European integration, creating, over the course of these years, a culture of long-term cooperation. The foundation has already been laid for institutional cooperation that goes well beyond projects co-financed within Interreg, by establishing structures for cooperation that have an impact on policies towards territories. Thanks to Interreg, public authorities and citizens can, in short, feel the improvement in the process of European integration in their daily lives.

For all these reasons, cooperation is required because it reflects the importance and relevance of the European project.

Spain considers that from 2020 onwards funds should also be allocated for European Territorial Cooperation programmes, to allow them to continue making a significant contribution to the process of integration of the EU, at least to the same degree that they have in the current period. New variables for distribution in cooperation could be established, provided the *status quo* of each Member State is not altered.



The overall financial allocation of each program should come from two resources, namely, a contribution from each Member State as it has been so far (allocation that should be used for the beneficiaries of said Member State) plus an additional financial allocation from the European Commission.

The management of these funds should continue to be decentralized, as the Programmes should take into account the specific features of the different territories that make up the EU.

It is important to ensure the following areas for territorial cooperation: cross-border cooperation, transnational cooperation, and co-financing of innovative actions or pilot projects that enable the results obtained to be transferred to other EU territories, thus permitting greater capitalization of results.

There should be greater complementarity between all areas of cooperation and the different existing strategies, as well as other co-financing instruments that act horizontally in Cohesion Policy.

It is also very important that there is coordination between the actions carried out by the ERDF (in the different national/regional mainstream programmes) and the ESF, provided that these actions have an impact on cooperation.

Cooperation should include new cross-cutting matters in its programming that are relevant to our territories, such as depopulation and ageing.

As regards Cooperation, Spain considers that it is necessary to maintain existing conditions for geographical coverage of ETC programmes: the NUTS 3 level for cross-border cooperation and NUTS 2 for transnational cooperation.

However, we consider it important to bolster cooperation of island territories that have common problems. To this end, within the NUTS III level, the criterion of the distance of 150 km from the border should be eliminated.

The particularity of the ultra-peripheral regions should continue to be taken into account in the allocation of resources.

It is necessary to continue promoting cooperation with neighbouring countries on the external borders of the EU.



a) Cross-border cooperation

As stated in Communication from the Commission COM(2017)534, internal border regions in the EU cover 40% of the EU territory and account for 30% of the population. The Communication affirms in its conclusions that “...border regions can increase their contribution to the socio-economic well-being of EU citizens...”.

Spain participates in two Cross-border Cooperation Programmes with our neighbouring countries Portugal and France. High demand from projects to co-finance and interest in cross-border cooperation in these two areas, together with the high level of involvement of institutions at the national, local and regional levels in resolving cross-border problems, all make it necessary for the financial resources allocated for the post-2020 period to be at least the same as those allocated for the current period.

It is very important that this Cohesion Policy has a bearing on border territories, taking into account the specificities of each border and each area of cooperation. It would also be necessary to define open strategies for each sector to cover the specific needs of each territory, although there is a concentration of resources in a limited number of areas of intervention.

As in the previous period, a financial allocation should be made by the European Commission to complete the co-financing of the cooperation programme with Morocco. Although in the 2014-2020 period it has finally proved impossible to approve this Programme, we consider that there are many potential cooperation actions with this country.

b) Transnational cooperation

Transnational cooperation is a necessity and complements cross-border cooperation. Transnational programmes should address the cross-border maritime issues that cannot be addressed through cross-border cooperation, and should also focus on territories' common problems that go beyond their borders. To increase the impact of such Programmes, they should be coordinated with sectoral strategies.

c) Innovative cooperation actions

To complement cooperation actions, we consider it important to co-finance innovative projects in key areas, with the aim of resolving existing problems that prevent full integration of territories.

It is crucial that these innovative actions are not co-financed in isolation, and that instead their results can be transferred to projects financed in the field of cooperation.



2. Questions to consider when implementing ETC programmes post-2020:

2.1.- Simplification of the legal framework and management procedures.

It is important to establish a single regulation for ETC programmes and ENI programmes.

The ETC regulation should take into account the specificities of co-financing cooperation, avoiding contradictions or misinterpretations when applying mainstream ERDF regulations.

Management procedures should be “truly” simplified, to a greater extent. Management has been increasingly complex and very inflexible in each programming period, with rigid management procedures. This rigidity in the system is directly opposed to the need to undertake actions rapidly, to ensure that they have an impact in a territory.

The administrative workload must be reduced, rather than being increased in each period as at present. This burden is a deterrent for potential beneficiaries.

We should bolster elements that allow for simplification, such as simplified costs. These should have clear, precise rules from the EC from the outset.

It is crucial that management is harmonized, with common rules for all ETC programmes (as regards the same standards for application/selection of projects, a single computer program), and for other programmes, such as Horizon 2020 and Life, since many beneficiaries of these are also beneficiaries of ETC programmes. This would allow a single governance model to be established.

2.2.- Proportionality.

This criterion is key in ETC—the ETC requirements are the same as those for national/regional mainstream programmes co-financed by the ERDF.

The rules applied to the Programmes should be more flexible in ETC. For example, in cooperation the issue of state aid has less of an impact on competition and the rules discourage private partners from participating.

2.3.- Flexibility and elimination of punitive logic.

It is important that management of these Programmes is focused on prevention rather than correction.

Audits should be involved to prevent over-regulation, and clear rules should be established at the outset of the programming.



Control activities should focus on the results achieved by projects, rather than on financial details.

Controls on Programmes should be more efficient, with a single audit. Occasionally, the number of controls and lack of coordination thereof prevent rapid implementation of projects and fulfilment of the ultimate goal: efficient implementation of the Programmes.

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