

The importance of Interreg Europe in the new programming period 2021 - 2027!

While reading the draft legislation for the new financial perspective, particularly the European territorial cooperation goal, we were unpleasantly surprised and deeply displeased by the fact that no continuation of the current Interreg Europe programme is envisaged. We found this very problematic, as Interreg Europe is one of the main programmes of territorial cooperation, which cannot be suitably replaced by other programmes or interregional actions proposed.

We have actively participated in partnership in the previous and currently ongoing interregional programs and have, in addition to achieving the intended impacts of the projects, gained a first-hand insight into the benefits of the Interreg Europe programme.

INTERREG EUROPE is the programme that allows for **cooperation among any region within the European Union and even beyond (Norway, Switzerland)**, regardless of their geographical location and development status. This allows each region to analyse its own needs, scan other EU regions for a possible solution and propose a project, dedicated to experience, knowledge, or skill transfer between the regions for any geographical location within the European Union.

The programme, thus, tackles a variety of priorities and themes that influence the quality of life in different parts of the European Union. It supports the entrepreneurship, research and innovation, as well as resolves challenges of low-carbon economy, environment and resource efficiency. These are the priorities and themes that need to be addressed on various levels, therefore a programme for covering the innovativeness of SMEs cannot replace the variety and issues the regions across the entire EU are facing.

The interregional cooperation between all regions of the European Union has been empowering the regions and their public organisations to discuss, improve and implement the cohesion policy on national as well as on interregional level by enlarging the regional knowledge of civil servants as well as other organisations that work for the public good. By promoting such interregional cooperation within a common, unified framework the support of the more developed and more competitive regions was available to the regions lagging behind to narrow the development gap between more and less developed parts of the EU. This, in fact, is not only the very basic principle of the cohesion policy but even its primary objective.

By limiting the possibilities of regions to cooperate across the whole territory of the European Union, the pool of excellence, knowledge and experience from which cases of good practices could be identified and transferred will be reduced dramatically. Furthermore, there is also a much wider aspect the European Union that has to be taken into consideration. By failing to continue the support for EU regions to cooperate across the entire European Union, the efforts to establish a common EU identity will be undermined, which will deepen the divide between various parts of EU instead of bridging them. Therefore, a failure to continue the Interreg Europe programme is in direct contrast to what the cohesion policy stands for.

Therefore, we urge the Member States as well as the European Parliament to modify the draft cohesion policy regulation package in such a way that the Interreg Europe programme is continued and will keep bringing tangible benefits to EU regions and citizens on the ground.