

PORTUGAL 2007

EU INTERREGIONAL COOPERATION FORUM

Celebrating INTERREG IIIC – Launching INTERREG IVC 2007-2013

20th-21st September 2007

Minister of the Environment, Regional Planning and Development's Speech

Francisco Nunes Correia

Ms. Comissária Danuta Hubner

Ms Elisabeth Helander

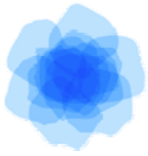
Mr. Pat Colgan

Ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to welcome you all and let me express how pleased I am to see this event being held in Portugal, as part of the host of activities taking place in connection with the Portuguese presidency in the area of Regional Development.

First, and before mentioning interregional cooperation, I would like to highlight the major change in the way that Structural Funds will be used in the 2007-2013 programme period, and which form a new Objective - "European Territorial Cooperation", in addition to the Objectives "Convergence" e "Regional Competitiveness and Employment". In effect, this is the first time that such emphasis and visibility has been given to the experience of INTERREG, not only giving greater importance to the political importance of this instrument for the development of the European Union but also seeking to consolidate the coordination mechanisms of the other instruments included in the other two objectives.

To this end, Community Strategic Guidelines regarding cohesion underline the importance of the territorial aspect of cohesion policy, proposing that the new generation of programmes see the promotion of territorial cohesion as an integral



part of the necessary effort to grant the European Union the opportunity to the agenda in the field of growth and jobs. These guidelines state that, and I quote, “the development of high-quality partnerships is equally essential, in association with national, regional, urban, rural and local stakeholders. Success in the area of territorial cohesion therefore depends on a comprehensive strategy which sets the framework within which specific objectives and actions are pursued”.

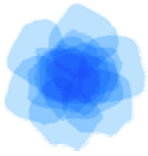
It is our belief that the objective of Territorial Cooperation will play a very important role in guaranteeing the balance and sustainability of the development of the entire community territory, via the sharing of the development strategies for national, regional and local territories and the creation of network that are specially adapted to the exchange of ideas that are part of national and regional programmes.

Against this background, I believe it opportune to make some brief reflections on the preparatory work for the new programme period in Portugal.

Within a setting of considerable complexity resulting from the political and economic situation of the European Union and specific issues of this new phase of community funds, the Portuguese Government made major changes in preparing the NSRF, in relation to the previous CSF. This was done, not in order to repeat the achieve more of the same, but to innovate and to seek solutions to the structural weaknesses that the country needs to overcome. This was how new strategic priorities, new guiding principles and a new model of government were defined.

In relation to the new strategic priorities, the Government decided that the main goals are improving the population’s qualifications, making the country more competitive and greater investment in national territory. These are the most important objectives for the development of Portuguese society and for the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy.

In relation to the new guiding principles, those that were established were ones of concentration, selectivity, economic viability and financial sustainability, territorial cohesion and investment and the management and strategic monitoring of activity.



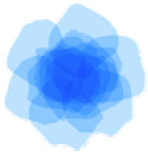
Taking an innovative approach, Portugal considered the European Territorial Cooperation Objective as an integral part of the NSRF and as a key mechanism for the implementation of cohesion policy objectives and the process of European integration. Within this context, cooperation programmes should respect the guiding principles and strategic priorities referred to in the NSRF framework, benefiting from the link to other programmes such as regional programmes that will complement this type of action, in relation to financial objectives and resources.

We believe that the European Territorial Cooperation, on all three of its fronts – cross border, trans-national and interregional, is of great importance to Portugal and we would like to highlight how positively we feel about the INTERREG programmes and the great expectations we have for the new programmes, in view of the consolidation of joint interventions by Member-States in the field of integrated territorial development.

However, today's theme is interregional cooperation, that which aims to promote synergies between the main players in regional, national and community cohesion policy, in order to improve the management of structural intervention in Europe and increase its effectiveness in the achievement of the renewed Lisbon Agenda.

During the period 2002-2006, INTERREG IIIC permitted the non-neighbouring regions of the European Union to cooperate through the establishment of networks, where via knowledge sharing and exchange of experience, they sought to contribute to the greater effectiveness of policies and mechanisms geared towards sustainable development with repercussions on a European, national and regional level. The experience was a success. Let me emphasise that over 260 projects were approved, involving approximately 2,600 regional and local bodies. Portugal actively participated in a total of 58 projects, alongside 79 bodies from other Member-States.

INTERREG IVC is, therefore, an investment in the continuity of this type of cooperation, adjusting its objectives to the new global and territorial challenges at the heart of Europe and taking into account the guidelines of cohesion policy for the 2007-2013 period, namely the consolidation of the implementation of the renewed Lisbon Agenda. To this end, I would like to highlight the European Commission's



project “The Regions for Economic Change”, especially the part geared towards obtaining quick and efficient results in the implementation of Lisbon Agenda goals, on the part of the structural intervention of the “Convergence” and “Competitiveness and Employment” Objectives within the context of achieving earmarking, which will greatly contribute to consolidating the pro-active and strategic management of the interventions of NSRF Operational Programmes.

I am very pleased to say that this forum effectively marks the opening of the proposal period for the new programme and I hope that these two days become the stage for the beginning of interaction between key-players and project promoters in the search for and identification of potential partners.

Identifying common goals and defining shared strategies for cooperation in a new programme period is a new challenge for old partners.

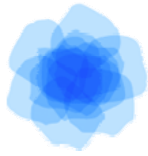
Portugal recognises how importance INTERREG IIIC was and is committed to consolidation of common strategies and wider development programmes, as a way of obtaining balanced socio-economic development throughout Europe.

Before finishing, I would like to focus on the regional policy initiatives that will take place during the Portuguese Presidency.

It is worth mentioning that this Presidency has come about at a unique time. On one hand, the second half of 2007 marks the effective beginning of the 2007-2013 programme period in all Member-States, with the implementation in the field of new structures of governance, with the preparation of regulation of the Operational Programmes and initial approval of first projects.

On the other hand, it is desirable that this period involves honest and open debate about the future of cohesion policy, a debate that is enriched with the European Commission’s recent publication of the 4th Cohesion Report

The first phase of the reviewed Lisbon Strategy (2005-2008) is coming to an end and it is necessary to prepare a new phase to be launched in 2008, which overall should preserve the stability that is necessary in order for the national appropriation of



Lisbon Strategy to be consolidated. At the same time, adjustments and improvements should be introduced to ensure that its potential is fully realised.

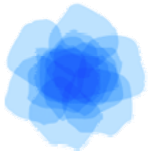
Accordingly, the activities and events that take place throughout the Presidency are geared towards two fundamental objectives: i) to contribute to the promotion of the correct application of the policies drawn up for the 2007-2013 period; ii) start the debate on the future of post-2013 cohesion policy.

In relation to the first objective, the promoting the correct application of the policies drawn up for the 2007-2013 period, it is worth mentioning the Informal Meeting of Regional Policy Ministers, the IQ-Net Network meeting and the participation of the Presidency in Open Days.

Allow me to highlight the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Regional Policy and Territorial Planning taking place in Ponta Delgada, Azores, on 23rd and 24th November. One of the objectives of this meeting of ministers is to discuss the Commissions report on the way cohesion policy resources are mobilised for the renewed Lisbon Strategy (*earmarking*). This debate will constitute the first and main element of quantitative and qualitative monitoring of the level of commitment to the Lisbon Agenda, a commitment that was made by Member-States within the scope of their National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and respective Operational Programmes (OP). The meeting in the Azores will also have a future and strategic aspect that I will mention later.

Still against a backdrop of promoting the implementation of policies drawn up for the 2007-2013 period, the second IQ-Net meeting in 2007 will take place in Portugal, in Faro, from 14th to 16th November. This is a network that brings together regional and national partners in Structural Funds programmes from all over the European Union. Its goal is to improve the programme quality of Structural Funds via the sharing of experience. The Portuguese IQ-Net meeting will focus on the important issue of assessed indicators of the NSRF and the OP and their strategic monitoring.

Finally, let me draw your attention to the “Open Days 2007” that will take place in Brussels from 8th to 11th October, a joint effort from the Committee of the Regions



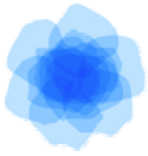
and the European Commission that has the support and enthusiastic participation of the Portuguese Participation.

As you know, the theme of this 5th edition of the Open Days is "*Making it happen: regions deliver growth and jobs*". For four days, a new generation of cohesion policy programmes, which will be implemented from 2007 onwards, will be analysed in more than 100 seminars and working groups. With the presence of 212 regions and cities from all over Europe and around 3,000 experts and decision-makers in the field of regional policy, this is, without doubt, the most important event and the one with the greatest impact at community level in the field of regional policy. Our thanks go to the Committee of the Regions for organising this event in conjunction with the European Commission.

Portugal will play an active role, with the North, Lisbon, Algarve, Alentejo and Azores regions involved in various conglomerates, special mention going to CCDR Lisbon and Vale do Tejo, as the leader of a five-region group (Canary Islands, Sicily, Venice, Algarve and Lisbon), in a conglomerate whose theme is "Water as a factor of competitiveness: a path for sustainable development". The North is participating in the "Celtic Regions" conglomerate, led by Wales. The Alentejo is part of the "Open Innovating Regions", jointly led by the central regions of Italy (Abruzzio, Lazio, Marche, Tuscany, Umbria). The Azores participate in the "The Atlantic as a Factor of Competitiveness" conglomerate, which is led by Cantabria. The Centre and Madeira regions, although not part of any conglomerate, will be actively participating in various seminars that will take place during the event.

I would like to emphasise the contribution that these events make to increasing territorial competitiveness, in the sense of achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy and Sustainable Development.

I mentioned a second set of initiatives that will take place during the Portuguese Presidency and that aim to start a debate about the future of cohesion policy, a debate that, naturally, should continue in 2008 and 2009.



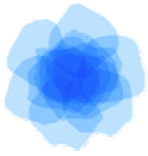
The 4th Cohesion Report contains an update of the European analysis of regional convergence and a first analysis of the NSRF and the Member-States Operational Programmes for the 2007-2013 programme period. This report, which was presented to the Council by Commissioner Danuta Hubner on 23rd July, indicates the major issues that will lead the debate about the future of cohesion policy. The Committee of the Region's findings are also an important contribution.

It is with great expectation and interest that the Cohesion Forum takes place in Brussels on 27th and 28th September. This Forum is the time *par excellence* to analyse the 4th Cohesion Report and is an initiative by the European Commission to which the Portuguese Presidency will be associated to the highest possible level, believing that a prior reflection upon the matter of cohesion policy and its future, that includes stakeholders is of the utmost importance. Both our Prime Minister and I will actively participate in the debates of that forum, in order to trace the future contour of cohesion policy. I hope to see you there, so we can continue our debates during the Cohesion Forum.

The abovementioned Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Regional Policy and Territorial Planning, taking place in the Azores, on 23rd and 24th November, will do the Cohesion Forum follow-up, bestowing continuity upon this long-term and strategic debate. This Informal Meeting of Ministers comes at a crucial time in the discussion and for that reason it should be seen as a forum to deal with the issue of the future of cohesion policies in greater depth and in a more open fashion, giving the Member-States an opportunity to freely express their opinions in an informal atmosphere.

Also at this Informal Meeting, the Ministers that are responsible for territorial planning will have the chance to discuss and approve the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Territorial Agenda approved in Leipzig. This Action Plan is being prepared under Portugal's guidance in conjunction with other Member-States and the Commission.

Portugal is also lending continuity to the decisions of the Ministerial Meeting in Leipzig on urban development, particularly in relation to the coordination of European



networks that exchange experiences, learning, competencies and new knowledge acquisition, as well as the beginning of the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities.

In conclusion, I believe I can state that all the events and issues mentioned will contribute significantly to a consolidation of economic, social and territorial cohesion among Member-States and within the borders of each Member-State. This is a goal that we fully associate ourselves with and will demonstrate throughout the Portuguese Presidency.

As I have already highlighted, interregional cooperation as an essential aspect of territorial cooperation makes an essential contribution and brings a new dimension to the European Union's Cohesion Policy.

For this reason, we are particularly pleased that this Interregional Cooperation Forum is taking place here and I hope the work is productive and can contribute to a Europe of greater prosperity and solidarity.

Thank you very much.