

European Commission adopts Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion

The European Commission adopted the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion today, signalling the start of a major consultation with regional and local authorities, associations, NGOs, civil society and other organisations, aimed at achieving a better and shared understanding of territorial cohesion and its implications for the future of the EU's regional policy. Commission President José Manuel Barroso and Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hübner, together with French Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries Michel Barnier, representing the EU Presidency, and the President of the Committee of the Regions, Luc Van den Brande, will hold a first debate on the issues raised by the Green Paper at today's launch ceremony of the OPEN DAYS 2008 European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels. The Commission is publishing the Green Paper in response to a request by Member States and the European Parliament.

"I am convinced that territorial cohesion can help us improve the competitiveness of our territories, the well-being of our citizens, wherever they live, and the quality of our environment. It's about how we best turn our territorial diversity into a strength through a flexible and differentiated policy that delivers long-term results. Territorial cohesion is about adapting to today's realities and today's challenges. It is a European model for sustainable jobs and growth," said Commissioner Hübner.

Territorial Cohesion: the story so far

The debate on territorial cohesion began in the early Nineties and led to the adoption by Member States of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) in 1999. The Commission developed the ESDP by reinforcing cooperation through the INTERREG programme and establishing the European Spatial Observatory Network (ESPON). The debate culminated in the adoption of the Territorial Agenda and its Action Plan by Member States last year ([IP/07/1756](#)).

Balancing territorial, economic and social development

- Europe's territory has its own distinct settlement pattern, compared to the rest of the world. Only 7% of the overall EU population lives in cities of over 5 million inhabitants, as against 25% in the United States. Europe has so far managed to maintain a relative balance between urbanisation and the preservation of rural areas. This contributes to the European way of life. The Green Paper highlights this asset and suggests means to avoid depopulation or urban sprawl. The following three key concepts need to be translated into policy actions:

- **Overcoming differences in density.** Agglomerations can foster both positive and negative effects. For instance, there can be increased focus on innovation and productivity and at the same time, more pollution and deeper social exclusion. The Green Paper suggests that better coordination is key to enabling cities and their surrounding regions to complement their strengths to ensure that each territory can maximise its contribution to the prosperity of the Union as a whole. Or put another way, to ensure Europe is greater than the sum of its parts.
- **Overcoming distance.** Access to public services, efficient modes of transport, reliable energy networks, and broadband Internet remain unevenly distributed across the Union. In remote rural areas, on average 40% of people live further than a 30-minute drive from a hospital and 43% live more than one hour's drive from a university. In 2007, household access to broadband Internet was on average 15 percentage points lower than in urban areas.
- **Overcoming administrative borders.** Environmental problems, associated with climate-change, flooding, biodiversity loss, or commuting do not respect borders and better co-operation is needed to meet these challenges. Cohesion policy promotes cooperation through the INTERREG programmes, but the Green Paper underlines that much needs to be done. The EU is already stepping up its actions in the Baltic Sea Region and Danube River Basin, for instance, where stronger co-operation is seen as crucial to tackle environmental problems and to boost competitiveness.

The Green Paper also highlights the challenges faced by regions with specific geographical features, for instance, mountains or island regions.

Territorial Cohesion – a priority for the EU Presidency

Two major events this autumn will contribute to the public consultation launched by the Green Paper: the French Presidency Conference on Territorial Cohesion and the Future of Cohesion Policy, which will take place in Paris on 30-31 October, and the informal meeting of ministers responsible for spatial planning and regional development in Marseille on 25-26 November.

Notes for Editors

Territorial cohesion is the third dimension of cohesion, together with social and economic cohesion. As a support to the debate on the Green Paper, the Commission is providing data on GDP distribution, access to airports, distribution of patent applications and other indicators. The public consultation runs until the end of February 2009, and the Commission will present an analysis of the results in late spring 2009. For more information, click on the following link:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultation/terco/index_en.htm

The OPEN DAYS 2008 website is at <http://www.opendays.europa.eu>