INTERREG’S ROLE IN THE FUTURE OF EU COHESION POLICY

Dear Sir/Madam, 28.02.08

First & foremost, EU’s cohesion policy needs to be reconciled with the economic principle of comparative advantage. From this perspective, the notion of regional cooperation is essential to produce a diversified economic base and is fundamental to further regional cohesion. This principle needs to be strongly supported in those EU programmes which can implement policy at regional level.

INTERREG, for instance, supports the development of a diversified European economic development and help regions to innovate in their specific territorial assets. The importance of such territorial cooperation programmes should not be overlooked in the context of EU Cohesion Policy: they are essential in helping regions exploit their endogenous potential. Such support should be provided regardless of a region’s territorial composition; whether they are large urban agglomerations at the cutting edge of the knowledge economy, or former industrial areas striving to keep pace with economic change. MINEWATER is a notable example of an INTERREG project of the IIIB North-West Europe programme, which, extracted geothermal heat from water trapped in mines energy to heat and cool buildings. Such innovative projects demonstrate how declining industries (and the communities which suffer as a result) can be revived through EU funding instruments.

Other regions, such as the West of Scotland, have a long tradition of mechanical and heavy engineering. This area still has fine capabilities and potential- for example, the Wier Group, Auld Valves and BAE systems etc. These sectors are poorly understood, under-represented in government thinking and yet crucially important as engines of innovation and competitiveness. Unfortunately, run-of-the-mill policy think often neglects these sectors in favour of the ‘sexy’ clusters (biotech, software, media, finance etc). If Cohesion Policy is to overcome such challenges, INTERREG- and the premium its places on cooperation- can be the vanguard of a stronger, more cohesive Europe.

Rory Moody