16th September

Conclusions of Secretary of State Camille Gira

(Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructure, Luxembourg)

These two days had indeed a very charged agenda. But they are only a first step towards the future and therefore I would like to invite you warmly to revisit the presentations and to use them in your further work. All conference materials will be uploaded to the dedicated website.

(1) Interreg exists now since a quarter of a century and our two-days conference celebrating this anniversary has clearly revealed two essential aspects:

- When looking back on 25 years of Interreg, it becomes clear that territorial cooperation is central to the construction of a common European space and that it is a cornerstone of the European integration process.
- When looking ahead –to the next 25 years it becomes evident that we need a clear vision for the desired territorial situation in 2040 and also concrete expectations about the ways and means by which this vision can be reached.

(2) The important European added value of Interreg becomes especially evident if it is looked at from four different perspectives.
• **Interreg has a socio-economic added value.** It initiated additional cooperative socio-economic development processes in smaller and larger contiguous areas stretching across the political borders of European countries (cross-border and transnational cooperation), but also in individual cities and regions across the EU (interregional cooperation).

• **Interreg has an added value for sustainable development.** It initiated additional joint approaches and cooperative solutions which helped to address or tackle environmental and climate change related problems that are transgressing national borders.

• **Interreg has a socio-cultural added value.** It established an increasingly dense European cooperation culture between organisations and individuals. This also allowed building up a considerable stock of new knowledge through joint working relations at programme- and project level as well as through mutual learning processes. By all this, Interreg has enhanced a better understanding between different cultures and communities in Europe.

• **Finally, Interreg has also an important political-institutional added value.** It significantly widened and intensified political and administrative exchange relations across Europe. This introduced a European perspective into the day-to-day activities of public administrations and the delivery of many public policies at all levels. Furthermore, also a new practice of cooperative self-organisation was initiated between regions and local authorities from different countries which would not exist at this scale without Interreg.

For all this we should be aware, what changes the Digital Revolution has brought, especially for rural and remote areas. Today it is possible to have access to the same information at the same time and also to be well connected to others, whether you are living in a big city or in a small rural village. And also cross-
border cooperation between small villages is made easier. But these new opportunities for the European territories cannot be fully exploited, especially for job creation, by just providing the new technology. It needs amongst others know-how and training and we have seen a good example of how to organise this effectively from the Interreg IVC project ENGAGE.

(3) The contributions from outside “the Interreg box” showed that there are a number of aspects, which are worth being considered attentively in order to improve future territorial cooperation.

On the one hand, these are six key elements of human cooperation, which emerge from behavioural and evolutionary biology. They were presented in form of a “cooperation hexagon”:

- **trust building** as the foundational layer for cooperation to work,
- **communication,**
- **reputation,**
- **fairness** as a crucial aspect for cooperation to last in time,
- **enforcement,** in the form of awards and punishments,
- **and we-identity.**

These all are possible entry points in order to improve cooperation

On the other hand, the **theory of diffusion of innovation offers a** more integrated understanding of innovation and of the different steps and aspects for its diffusion.

It may help to better understand how to establish Interreg more firmly as an “EU-wide laboratory” that develops and experiments new ideas and innovative approaches in a wide range of themes and public policies.
We could see Interreg as a powerful instrument for the diffusion of innovation across Europe.

(4) Later on we directed our view away from the EU context towards other macro-geographical regions of the world. We could see that the basic cooperation philosophy of Interreg is also in Latin America and West Africa considered relevant for promoting peace, stability and regional integration.

Cross-border cooperation already exists in both zones, but also transnational and interregional cooperation approaches could potentially be of use. They could establish complementary frameworks which allow

- to address major challenges at a larger territorial scale;
- fostering or further expanding the existing localised cross-border cooperation.

2015 is also the European year of development as promoted under the EU development cooperation. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supports an initiative on the Articulation of Territorial Networks for Sustainable Human Development (ART). In the light of the new post 2015 global development agenda the UNDP-ART initiative proposes to use in partnership the European Interreg experience for the support of the implementation of the new global agenda. Especially with the involvement of local, regional and national partners and the well structured exchange and transfer of good practices Interreg could systematically inform national and local development processes in partner countries.

At the same time, however, also Interreg can learn from cooperation experiences in other parts of the world.
Two general visions appear from a summary of stakeholder replies to a survey conducted by DG Regio, which asked for the desired future status of the EU territory and of individual EU regions:

- In 25 years from now, the EU territory will be more prosperous and spatially cohesive as well as more sustainable and inclusive, open to our European neighbours and to the rest of the world, while being governed more efficiently and democratic and also closer to its citizens.

- In 25 years from now, individual EU regions will be well connected with good accessibility and will have a healthy environment, which offers a good quality of life as well as by an open-minded and inclusive society that cares for people of all ages and origins.

It is obvious that these general visions need to be made more concrete at various levels. The efforts of the municipality of Norrköping (Sweden) show impressively how this can be achieved at the local level. The ESPON map showing national territorial visions, made clear, that there is need for stronger coordination. Therefore further concretisation is also needed at the cross-border and transnational levels. But current practices suggest that there is still considerable scope for further improvements. Therefore, many more long-term cross-border and transnational development concepts should be elaborated and also be applied in practice.

Territorial research evidence, for example from the ESPON programme, suggests that several challenges for our societies and other EU-wide developments have important spatial implications which need to be considered by future territorial cooperation. Interreg should therefore contribute to

- halting further environmental degradation,
• improving resource efficiency,
• promoting sustainable mobility,
• combating climate change,
• mitigating the effects of demographic change,
• reducing legal or administrative obstacles which will continue to exist at many EU borders.

(8) The stakeholders responding to the survey realised for this conference expect that, in overall terms, **Interreg remains an important and positive instrument for the European integration process which facilitates and fosters cooperation between Europe's territories.**

For this to be achieved, **Interreg should**

• have a clear function within the system of EU support programmes,
• maintain its basic cooperation philosophy (and the three types of cooperation),
• focus on promoting an integrated and sustainable socio-economic territorial development,
• maintain and further strengthen its character as a “laboratory” for experimentation and innovation,
• continue to promote cross-cultural cooperation at grassroots level
• and should be less bureaucratic.

(9) Our conference has clearly illustrated that there is no alternative to cooperation.

Considering this, the Luxembourg EU-Council Presidency has already become active in a number of points:
• it launched a discussion on a voluntary instrument in order to overcome legal and administrative obstacles and,
• it organized a workshop on the potential of small and medium cities in cross-border polycentric regions.

Furthermore there will be an agenda point “Territorial Cooperation” at the General Affairs Council on 18th November, for which Luxembourg is currently preparing an input paper taking into consideration the conclusions of this conference.

But let me end with some personal reflections:

Nowadays we can see that more and more people are moving to a sharing economy. At the same time there is a move from competition to cooperation and we should build bridges, not fences!

I think you should communicate even more about your work and I hope that you have regained energy and hope during the last two days for the challenges ahead.

And last but not least, I would like to thank all those who have made this fabulous event possible!