

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Stakeholders' Workshop Brussels, 27 September 2016

### *Workshop summary*

The workshop was split into two sessions: a morning session and an afternoon session, where the group of stakeholders was split into five smaller roundtables to allow for more in depth-discussions. Each roundtable session was followed by a plenary session where a designated rapporteur reported back on the main conclusions from each roundtable. The conclusions in this document are based upon this reporting.

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The objective of the **morning session** was to identify the main conclusions from the case studies, *i.e.* to try to identify how this case study has (tried to) find a solution to the problem on its border, what remains to be solved and how this could be done.

These discussions are summarised on the [Info regio-website](#) in the form of three drawings per roundtable: 1 on the obstacle(s), 1 on the discussions that took place during the morning and 1 on the potential solution(s).

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The objective of the **afternoon session** was to put the discussion on a more general level and draw conclusions on first recommendations based upon the morning's discussions. Focus was on identifying recommendations that could relatively easily be transferred to different cross-border regions (hence, not too border specific).

Based upon the reporting of the five rapporteurs, some overall conclusions could be drawn:

1. There is a need for **awareness-raising** on the benefits of cross-border cooperation, both to decision-makers and to the general public.

More specifically, there is a great lack of knowledge (data/evidence) on actual flows across borders, which hampers the possibility to

showcase the benefits of increased cooperation, as well as where some main bottlenecks to further cooperation are. One potential solution to this is further harmonisation of data sets ensuring better quality of cross-border data, which according to the conclusions from the day should be done at European level, in close collaboration with national statistical services.

**2.** The **governance** aspect was discussed in-depth by all tables and touched both upon institutional and strategic dimensions.

The stakeholders wholeheartedly agreed that all levels of government and many different types of actors needs to be involved in solving of border obstacles, including European, national, regional and local, as well as private actors, civil society and social partners. In order to do so there is a need to have different fora:

Firstly, **at European level** one should identify relevant fora for cooperation. One possibility is to use existing fora such as the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), but other fora could be created as well.

Secondly, **fora for each border region** also need to be established in order for the cooperation to be more adapted to the 'regional reality'. This in order to create a platform for relevant actors to meet and identify issues of common concern, create a division of responsibility and ensure follow-up on the prioritised areas of cooperation. For a group of borders a limited number of Member States (and third countries) could agree easier on legal solutions than on EU level (e.g. BeNeLux, Nordic Council or countries cooperating in a Macro-regional Strategy).

Thirdly, it is considered that there is a great need for **information** to citizens, businesses and public administrations. The creation of one-stop-shops could be a solution to this particular issue, which at the same time would contribute to increased levels of information on the situation on the particular border – ultimately contributing to awareness-raising.

Concerning **strategy**, the development of more and better adapted

cross-border strategies was considered a potentially useful tool for a more coherent, long-term development of the border region, also giving a clearer mandate to solve border obstacles for the actors involved.

The idea of **pilot projects** was also presented, where solutions that potentially would be transferred to other borders, could be piloted on one particular border. This could either be done through financing via a particular scheme, or simply by allowing for *ad hoc* solutions on particular borders (*c.f.* experimental zones).

3. A third aspect that was discussed was **harmonisation** of legislation, for example through strengthening existing legislation (and very importantly: ensuring the implementation of mutually agreed rules) together with the possibilities of developing new instruments comparable to the EGTC method (light, flexible and voluntary).

Related to this, the need for better adapted **impact assessments** was voiced, more specifically performing territorial impact assessments with a strong border dimension when developing new legislation – be it national or European.

4. **Interreg** programmes and their established structures/partners were mentioned as a potentially important part in solving border obstacles. No clear conclusion was drawn on what kind of role Interreg might play, but the stakeholders agreed that there is a need to reflect on the role of Interreg and cohesion policy for the future.

5. The stakeholders also underlined the importance of having a clear **'people' dimension** when working with border obstacles, in order to make the general public more involved in the process. This could be done for example through Peer2Peer projects, language learning, border ambassadors etc.