

4th Stakeholders' Workshop Brussels, 15 December 2016

Workshop summary

The workshop was divided into two sessions: a morning session and an afternoon session. The morning session started with three roundtables, where the participants of the workshop were split into smaller groups. The roundtable session was followed by a reporting back session, where a designated rapporteur summarised the main conclusions of his roundtable group. The afternoon session took place in the form of a plenary discussion where the participants could present their feedback on the draft conclusions and recommendations paper.

The objective of the **morning session** was to identify possible solutions and suggestions to overcome legal and administrative obstacles. The roundtables focused on three specific areas, in order to discuss more in-depth:

- (1) Engaging Citizens and Stakeholders;
- (2) Better Regulation and Policy Coordination; and
- (3) the Role of Interreg.

Here below are the main conclusions from the comments of the stakeholders in each roundtable:

1. Engaging Citizens and Stakeholders

a) The stakeholders agreed that Interreg has the potential to be a **platform** for engaging citizens and stakeholders in the work with overcoming border obstacles. The process to establish a platform would already be an achievement by bringing together relevant stakeholders and citizens in order for them to exchange their views and expectations.

b) Another important element that was mentioned was the potential in Interreg to contribute to the **funding of cross-border statistics and data** to e.g. demonstrate the costs of cross-border obstacles. Eurostat could here play a crucial role to in contributing to the conducting of

territorial impacts of cross-border obstacles.

2. Better Regulation and Policy Coordination

a) It was mentioned firstly that a successful **multi-level governance approach** will need the support and political backing from *all* levels. The stakeholders here stated that the availability of data plays a crucial role in that context to firstly, document the added value of cross-border cooperation and secondly, promote increased cooperation between regions (also in particular policy fields).

b) Several stakeholders underlined the importance of better **coordination** between mainstream and cross-border cooperation programmes and the reinforcement of institutional capacity in cross-border regions.

3. The Role of Interreg

The discussion began by looking back on the historical development of Interreg:

a) In the past, the stakeholders stated that they have encountered difficulties in the **implementation of projects**. The allocated duration of three years for projects does not consider the preliminary work that shortens the actual time for the implementation to - more or less - one and a half years.

b) As a consequence, it was mentioned that Interreg has undergone an **unfortunate change** from taking away the emphasis on citizens and information towards areas such as innovation and transport. It was mentioned that Interreg has to find a way back to its very objective to focus on citizens and on improving their lives.

c) In sum, it was stated that Interreg has to find a way back to its very objective to focus on citizens and on improving their lives, and that the **future objective of Interreg** should include communication. In relation to this, it was mentioned that governments at all levels should take the lead to spread the added value of overcoming cross-border obstacles and of cohesion policy to the public.

The objective of the **afternoon session** was to allow the stakeholders to provide their input on the draft conclusions- and recommendations

paper from the study on *Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions*. The overall feedback from the stakeholders was positive and they welcomed the content of the report, however there was still room for improvement and comments have been provided to the Commission both orally and in writing.