



# GROUP OF HIGH-LEVEL SPECIALISTS ON THE FUTURE OF COHESION POLICY

## Reinforcing territorial cooperation and addressing challenges on European integration

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Fifth meeting – Reinforcing territorial cooperation and addressing challenges on  
European integration



# Structure

Asked to address 3 questions:

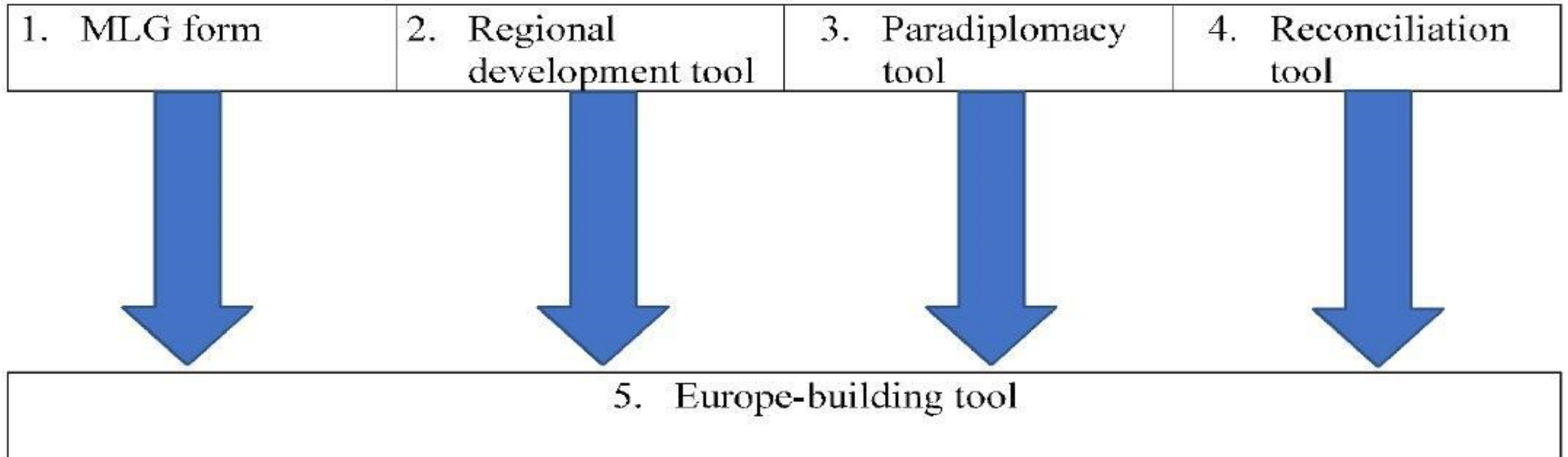
- Shall INTERREG focus more on building cooperation capacity/identity at the local and regional level or any relevant priority that would help tackle persistent cross-border obstacles?
- Should cooperation be further incentivised including in mainstream cohesion policy programmes? How?
- How to further improve the cooperation programmes between EU Member States and Neighbourhood regions?

*Many thanks to the following experts, who agreed to semi-structured interviews: Gyula Ocskay, Martin Guillermo Ramirez, Pavel Branda, Ondřej Havlíček, David Sventek, Rudolf Bauer*

## Departure points – CBC should break the bubble

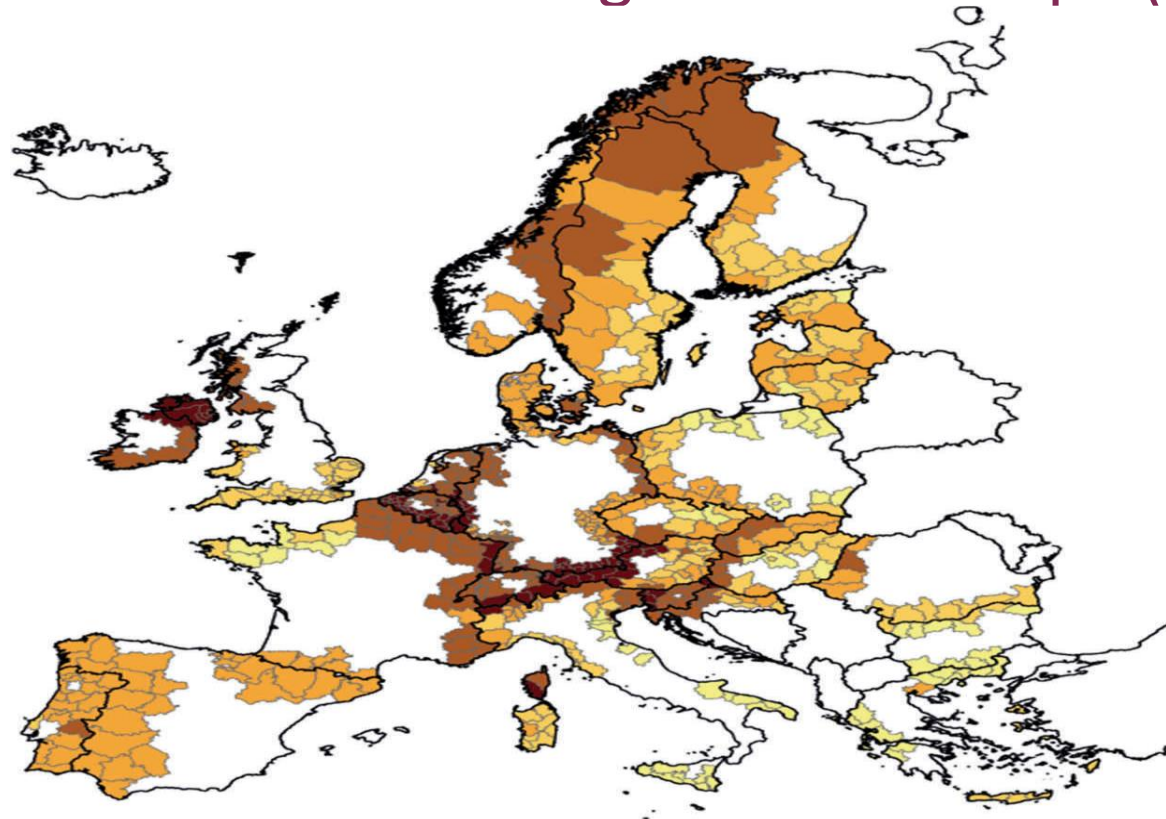
- Borderlands – home to one-third of Europeans – are different, but often neglected. National **border** is always a development **barrier**
- In the times of re-bordering, **INTERREG** is one of the key instruments promoting **de-bordering, multilateralism, and effective re-scaling**
- **The pandemic influenced borderlands** – dominance of national states complicated everyday lives in borderlands
- **The costs of imperfect CBI** add up to 458 billion euros, which accounts for 3% of the European GDP and 8.8% of the total land border regions' GDP. It also means losing more than 6 million jobs, which is 3% of total European employment and 8.6% of land border regions' employment (Capello et al., 2018)
- **Nothing can be considered granted in CBC.** Nothing is obvious. CBC creates soft-spaces, which are difficult to grasp for traditional administrations
- Mental, administrative, and technical **obstacles**, caused by the existence of the national border, acting as a development barrier, **persist**. Projects implemented across the border face more obstacles, stemming from two or more legislations, mentalities, and languages. They are also more endangered by external stressors – resilience-building is crucial here
- The ultimate **role of European institutions** in this partnership, **to support re-scaling**
- In some regions CBC = INTERREG
- Lack of reliable cross-border data - Eurobarometer 422, 2015, should be repeated

# What can CBC do? Dimensions/roles of CBC

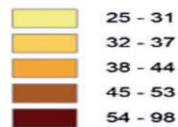


Source: Böhm 2021

# Level of cross-border integration in Europe (Durand, Decoville, 2020)



Integration index of border regions in Europe



0 250 500 Km

Authors: Durand F. & Decoville A., 2018  
Sources: Eurobarometer 422 (2015), European Commission (2015)

Model	Characteristics
Western Continental- the Rhineland countries B, L, and French border territories (North and East) as well as the German-Austrian borders	strong functional symmetric integration, high level of confidence on both sides of the borders, low number of actors involved in CBC
Northern European (Scandinavia)	fairly strong CBC dynamic, with emblematic cases such as Copenhagen-Malmö or Haparanda-Tornio, but the low population density complicates the cooperation
Central European model contact zone between the former Soviet bloc countries and the eastern regions of the German-speaking world	relatively low mutual propensity of people to have social mutual trust in their neighbours, strong mobilization of European cooperation tools, rather one-sided labour-force flows and density of actors involved in CBC projects
Eastern-European - Baltic countries, Romania, the northern and southern borders of Poland, the eastern borders HU and SK, and the Greek borders	low mutual social trust between populations living on either side of the border, low interpenetration of neighbouring border territories by the populations (few crossborder activities are observed) and numerous actors, depending on INTERREG
Southwestern Europe (Portugal, Spain, south of France, western Italy, Croatia)	weak cross-border activities, significant divergences on both sides of the borders with regard to the indicator of mutual social trust
Maritime model - INTERREG A program areas located on the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the Adriatic Sea coasts	low levels – on both sides of the border – of cross-border activities, trust toward foreign neighbours, and involvement in CBC projects
<i>Borders with Ukraine</i>	<i>Mainly Polish-Ukrainian, but to a certain extent also Hungarian/Romanian/Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands, with high levels of one-sided flows plus interactions caused after 24/02/22. Partly influenced by the application of kin-state/minority policies of PL and HU</i>
<i>Re-bordered zones after 24/02/22</i>	<i>Places with refrained CBI, mainly bordering Russia, in some regions heavily hit by the restrictions imposed after 24/02/22 (for example Karelia)</i>

Source: Durand and Decoville, 2020, modified



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## Shall Interreg focus more on building cooperation capacity/identity at the local and regional level to tackle persisting obstacles?

- INTERREG should address not only "economical" cohesion, but mainly **“ideational” cohesion**, as it should contribute to narrowing the mental distance between Europeans, which will allow them to benefit from mutual complementarities, originating from differences – **ideational convergence** will contribute to the economic one
- To do this, **strong CB institutions are needed**, having the CBC as their core business (the size of different CB actors substantially differs, which is then reflected in the volume of CB interactions)
- **CB institutions are key players in CB resilience**. The continuous capacity building of CBC institutions and governance structures is absolutely necessary for the efficient delivery of cross-border tasks. Further incentivization of the EGTCs in INTERREGs could be considered
- **INTERREG should** keep its actors active and **include the new ones**, including those capable to act as **multipliers**. There is a strong need to look for new actors (non-actors), as we might be kept in the „trap of routine“ and missing something
- Use of lump-sum-based simplified schemes, P2P schemes should be promoted in more programmes, as these soft projects tend to reduce the often-existing bandwidth of unfamiliarity/indifference
- Removing administrative and legal obstacles to CBC, as these often prevent the proper functioning of the internal market – **capitalising on B-Solutions** (connecting obstacles-process of their monitoring-their elimination with the help INTERREG and involvement of CBC actors)

## Should cooperation be further incentivised including in mainstream cohesion policy programmes? How?

- Advent of national state can be reflected also in the design of the OPs, as these can become (even more) border-blind
- Borders often divide two economically weak regions, sometimes facing structurally similar problems, also resulting from their peripheral location – **double periphery**
- Collaboration at the level of neighbouring countries, which would closely coordinate in the framework national mainstream programmes, inspired by the local actors involved in the development of strategies of **cross-border functional areas (CBFAs)**
- Urban centres are often located in border areas and the **borders hinder their development and the exploitation of their functions in a 360° circle, the CBFAs can be a topic where cooperation can be highlighted with success.** And similarly, rural development policy is another subject where cooperation can be highlighted as border regions are in many cases underdeveloped rural areas. Moreover, sometimes their development cannot be realised without the involvement of towns/cities located on the other side of the border
- **Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)** and Community Led Local Development (CLLD) should be made more “border-sensitive” in the borderland territories. This could also be done by means of the **coordination of the preparation of these place-based mechanisms in the next programming period.** Having a CPS in the ITIs/CLLDs in two neighbouring territories would promote CBFAs
- Lack of statistical data and the incompatibility/incommensurability of statistics of adjacent countries (Ocskay, 2020). This has implications for both cross-border regions - where the attempts to monitor the cross-border processes largely differ - as well as for Member States, which are not always aware of the impacts of their interventions in borderlands. Hence, the mainstream programmes could, at least in their ex-ante evaluation phase, conduct certain cross-border/borderland impact analyses



## How to further improve the cooperation programmes between EU Member States and Neighbourhood Region?

- Special regimes on external borders shall be reflected in INTERREG programmes – the need to reconcile „border-related economy“, border-crossing management, including mitigating „hard borders“ effect, transfer of European values, and fostering mutual trust
- The added value of „transnational planning“ for both/all partners involved in the programme
- The new reality of EU regions bordering Russia and Belarus, such as Finnish, Baltic, and Polish regions, should be taken into account, given the reduced potential for utilizing the border as a resource. It is essential for these regions to receive support from mainstream programs to **adapt to the new border management requirements**

# Concluding summary I

- Actors involved in CBC should make greater use of **place-based approaches**. Regions with the potential to become cross-border functional areas should identify their specific development needs and consider preparing cross-border or border-sensitive Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs). **Consider pilot actions to promote the creation of CBFAs**
- As part of an expanded use of place-based approaches, **eliminate thematic concentration** within INTERREG programs, as it limits development opportunities in certain areas
- Efforts should be made to **overcome "border blindness"** by enhancing coordination between „mainstream“ programs. The preparation of development plans and projects that involve coordination between two or more countries can lead to tangible benefits
- The emergence of **functional cross-border soft spaces** can help to increase - for example by the means of cross-border public service - the quality of life in the places where national investment covering just one part of the border would be too costly
- The use of bottom-up approaches should be complemented by the top-down management of interventions, particularly in areas linked to centrally-owned competences
- The **use of simplified schemes**, particularly in people-to-people interactions, including the creation of predefined activities, should be furthered

# Concluding summary II

- The main importance of INTERREG programmes should be seen in their **contribution to cross-border cohesion**, narrowing the mental distance between Europeans, which will allow them to benefit from mutual complementarities
- National states applied one-size-fits-all solutions, and ignored the needs of people from borderlands, creating thus feeling of “a second category of Europeans”. Hence, European institutions should continue to act as natural partners of CBRs, as these substantially contribute to the concept of Europe of Regions
- INTERREG should continue to prioritise **capacity building of CB institutions** – the quality of CB governance structures can influence the quality of life in borderlands
- To enhance cross-border integration, it is necessary to look for **new actors**
- CBC can engage citizens, preventing them from „being left out“ feelings
- INTERREG is unique and irreplaceable. Its existence, despite its low allocations, “forces” national states to cooperate and focus on borderlands. Without this instrument, the support of borderlands in the entire EU would be much weaker, as Member States approach the CBC differently
- It would be worth considering **higher allocations for INTERREG**, also as a symbolic message for both Member States as well as people from borderlands