



**Speech of Secretary of State Camille Gira,
Ministry for Sustainable development and Infrastructure**

Press Conference 15th September 2015 Redange

Dear Commissioner Crețu,
Dear Mayor of the Municipality of Redange,
Dear representatives of the press,
Dear Interreg projects partners,
Dear friends,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you here today in **Redange** for a press conference on the occasion of the celebration of **25 years of Interreg**. Today and tomorrow we celebrate this anniversary with a **major conference at the University in Belval** and I was very happy about the opportunity to organize this event together with the European Commission and the Interact programme.

Instead of holding this press conference in Belval, we want to show some Interreg projects to you right on the spot.

We also want to show that Interreg and related European financial support is not only needed and does not only create benefits in the bigger cities. We have many **small municipalities** and we promote a so-called **polycentric development** in order to ensure good living and

working conditions for the citizens all over the country. Due to their size small municipalities rely on cooperation and functional networking with other municipalities and multiple partners, also beyond the borders, to follow-up such development strategies.

For a small country like the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg the management and **cooperation across-borders** also plays an important role and as a founding member of the European Union the spirit of cooperation has always been a core issue. Cooperation across borders is not a matter of choice for Luxembourg, but it is a prerequisite for the sustainable development of a country, which experiences **border obstacles, border effects and cross-border interdependencies** of such magnitude.

Nowadays about one hundred and seventy thousand (170 000) **commuters** travel from the neighbouring countries into Luxembourg every day, which represents more than forty percent of the work force of Luxembourg. In the Greater Region we count more than two hundred and twenty thousand (220 000) commuters, which constitutes the highest percentage of cross-border commuters in the European Union. It is obvious that this creates huge challenges with regard to transport, the environment and the housing market in Luxembourg but also in the neighbouring regions.

Which role does Interreg play in this setting?

Since 1990 the **cross-border Interreg** programme in the Greater Region has supported many important bilateral projects close to the citizens and we will look at examples later on. But increasingly we can also see the development of projects, which support the strategic development

objectives of the Greater Region, like for example the network of Universities and the network of Nature Parks of the Greater Region, as well as the “Task Force Commuters” and the “Mobility Centre”. These projects promote the development towards a **functional cross-border metropolitan area**, which the Greater Region had put on the agenda in order to respond to the different territorial challenges.

For Luxembourg the cross-border cooperation is surely most important; however **transnational** Interreg cooperation with our partners of the Interreg Northwest Europe programme as from 1994 on has been relevant, because there are many issues, like for example freight transport or environmental challenges and innovation which reach out far beyond the Greater Region. Last but not least the opportunity of European wide exchange and transfer of good practices and capacity building in the framework of **interregional** cooperation which started in the year 2000 is most valuable for Luxembourg partners in order to learn and to build up trustful networks all across Europe.

Today I am very happy to see the **positive evolution** in the number of Interreg projects and partnerships over the last 25 years and you will find statistics with figures in the press kit.

I consider these activities as important contributions to European integration and territorial cohesion.

For today we have deliberately chosen projects in the field of the environment and energy. One of the main topics of the Luxembourgish presidency is the **Climate Conference** in Paris in December, and the idea is to show how Interreg can contribute to ease climate change and to achieve other important environmental goals.

Fortunately the linkage between local and global issues is increasingly recognized. For 22 year I was the mayor of Beckerich, which is a neighbouring municipality to Redange and I have to admit, that I am not entirely neutral today, as during this time I was involved in one of the projects, which will be presented. From this **I had experienced myself the benefits of European cooperation**, but also the challenges. My personal experience and conclusion about Interreg is definitely positive and we can virtually see the impact of projects here on the ground. It is assuring to realize that Europe can work well on the local and regional level and that reliable partnerships across borders can create improvements for the territories involved, provided that there is political will and support.

It is therefore my great pleasure today, to **visit together with you three Interreg projects** here in the Maison de l'Eau and I would like to thank very much Patrice Verscheure from the Maison de l'Eau and Marc Neu, from the energy atelier for their hospitality and willingness to share insights about their interesting Interreg projects.

Thank you very much!