



Progress on Territorial Cohesion in the EU:

**Reviewing the implementation of the Territorial Cohesion Objective
and the Territorial Agenda 2020
(Action 1 of the IT-LV-LU Trio Presidency)**

resulting in a reference document

**“Towards a better use of the European Territory –
Pathways for strengthening territorial cohesion in the European Union”**

*Input paper for the informal Ministerial Meeting on Territorial Cohesion
under the Luxembourgish Presidency*

26 November 2015 in Luxembourg

1. Setting the scene

The Luxembourgish Presidency presented, on behalf of the Trio, the results of the study¹ assessing the implementation of the Territorial Cohesion objective as well as the Territorial Agenda 2020 proposed as Action 1 of the IT-LV-LU Trio Presidency already under the Latvian presidency. The results of the study triggered a lively debate between Member States and European Institutions on the future of territorial cohesion and indicated potential ways to move forward. In order to take stock on the results of the debate and transfer it into a format which is easy to communicate a reference document was set-up called “Towards a better use of the European Territory Pathways for strengthening territorial cohesion in Europe” and brought to the attention of political level to initiate further action to be successively implemented where relevant by Member States and the EU institutions.

¹ See Spatial Foresight: “Assessment of Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda 2020 of the European Union” (2015)

2. Questions to the Ministers

The proposals on the content and the approach of the document “Towards a better use of the European Territory - Pathways for strengthening territorial cohesion in Europe” as a reference document inspiring the implementation of territorial cohesion in Europe and the application of the TA 2020 should guide a discussion of Ministers on the following points:

1. What are the most important access points of the pathway document, raising awareness and promoting action in the existing framework of instruments, institutions, and funding sources, in order to support territorial cohesion and the implementation of the TA 2020?
2. How and by what concrete measure or action raised in the reference document would your country or institution like to contribute to the better use of the European Territory for strengthening territorial cohesion in Europe?

“Towards a better use of the European Territory – Pathways for strengthening territorial cohesion in the European Union”

1. Context and purpose

This reference paper was presented by the Luxembourgish Presidency on behalf of the Trio Presidency and was discussed at the occasion of the Informal Ministerial Meeting on 26 November 2015 in Luxembourg. This reference paper was developed following an assessment and discussion initiated by the Trio Presidency on the state of implementation of the Territorial Cohesion objective in Europe. The assessment was motivated by the fact that the Lisbon Treaty, mentioning territorial cohesion as a new goal of the EU, has now been in force for five years.

Furthermore, the Territorial Agenda 2020 includes a clause indicating an evaluation of the necessity of a review in the year 2015. The debate about the implementation of territorial cohesion indicated some achievements, but also that more needs to be done. The TA 2020 is deemed to be still valid in its substance; however, a lack of communication and insufficient actions and activities are calling for a re-start of efforts to get the TA 2020 in motion. Many valuable proposals were made in support of a debate on how territorial cohesion could be improved in the existing framework of instruments, institutions, and funding sources by the means of raising awareness on the issue.

In order to strengthen the implementation of the Territorial Cohesion objective and the TA 2020, these proposals were summarised in this reference document. The idea of this document is to indicate pathways for actions and improvements in the implementation of territorial cohesion at the EU and the national level as these two levels are most prominently represented in debates at the EU level. In addition, there are also proposals that focus more on actions at the regional and local as well as transnational level.

The purpose of this reference document is to show interested and relevant actors and stakeholders how they can contribute to a better implementation of territorial cohesion and application of the TA 2020. Interested actors should use this document to identify issues and actions, which are welcomed at the ministerial level be effectively implemented. In this sense, the pathways indicated in this document should act as a source of inspiration for further follow-up and concrete action.

2. Access to the pathways

Pathways should lead to action and make a difference to the status quo. The debate took forward the following elements that were identified as cornerstones for strengthening territorial cohesion in Europe:

- The first element is the **production and provision of territorial evidence** mainly on territorial developments and the territorial impacts of policies, in order to raise awareness and increase the understanding that territory matters.
- The second element is the **creation of occasions for communicating and discussing political messages** with those policy-makers and stakeholders who are deciding on territorially relevant issues in order to create the necessary ownership.
- The third element is the **institutional anchoring of territorially relevant debates and policy making** in existing procedures.

These **access points** need to be developed at the initiative of **actors** or **groups of actors** (e.g. Member States together) with **concrete content** (e.g. addressing the EU 2020 strategy) and **action** (e.g. formulating a position – based on evidence and addressing this position at a particular occasion/event). The pathways are meant to indicate possible content and actions to be taken by relevant actors. This paper asks the actors to initiate any relevant action by defining the content and **creating the occasion** to move forward.

This shall happen under the consideration of the **subsidiarity principle** as in a **multi-level governance** approach, as the appropriate level of decision-making varies depending on the policy fields and the division of decision-making powers in a Member State or region. This may imply the delegation of decision-making powers to regional or local stakeholders and the involvement of local communities and citizens.

In this context, **voluntary implementation** partnerships for territorial development between different levels of government (national-regional-local) could be agreed in order to **promote concrete strategies and projects**, despite a lack of formal instruments, by committing all involved actors to the achievement of common objectives.

3. Access point: Evidence and storyline

- *Involving those institutions which can support the production of territorial evidence by collecting data (Eurostat and national statistical offices) and developing methodologies (ESPON, JRC, DG Regio, national institutes) is key for establishing the storyline.*
- *ESPON can become even more user-oriented and communication-friendly. Many results and tools produced by ESPON might be considered as ‘prototypes’; the next step is to further test and fine-tune them to achieve a stronger user-orientation. In addition, a direct evidence*

support (such as policy briefs, scenarios, background reports) for dialogue situations with sector policies and other stakeholders should be regularly implemented.

- The use of *analytical means and evidence support of the European Commission* (DG Regio and the JRC) should further explored.
- *National and regional research capacities and institutions* shall be involved and contribute by reporting from the national and transitional perspective.
- A first *political interpretation of territorial evidence and easy-to-communicate storyline* why territory matters are seen as serious obstacles to overcome. The link between territorial evidence and territorial cohesion as a political objective as expressed in the TA 2020 has to be better sustained.
- *Territorial impact studies and territorial scenarios, as a kind of eye-openers, are suitable tools* for getting the attention of decision-makers. However, this material needs to be brought to the attention of the relevant decision-makers and not to the attention of “whom it may concern”.

4. Access point: Creating the occasion

- *Open dialogue*: Many of the dialogue-related efforts are focused on convincing other policy sectors to take the territorial dimension or the territorial impacts of their policies into consideration. Moreover, territorial policy stakeholders may need to learn more about the reasoning and objectives of sectoral policies and present their ideas in light of the question how territorial policies can support or complement these approaches.
- *Annual or bi-annual conferences* to create regular occasions for a dialogue with selected sector policies. The example of a sectoral dialogue under the Belgian Presidency back in 2010 is an often cited example of what can be done.
- *Existing conference circles or planned conferences*: It should be considered to add the dimension of a sectoral dialogue in events already foreseen. Such possibilities could be searched for in the European and national context.
- *TIA and scenarios as eye-openers*: Evidence is important for supporting the dialogue with others and underpinning statements on the territorial dimension. Territorial impact studies and territorial scenarios are suitable tools for getting the attention of decision-makers.
- *Stronger implementation focus*: Taking the example of the TA 2020, the debates and papers need to move from the agreement on general principles to more result-oriented implementing actions. This could, for example, be done by reconsidering and potentially revising the role of the European Commission, the NTCCP and ESPON.
- *Concrete policy papers*: Specific themes of the TA 2020 can be interpreted differently at different moments in time. Short and more concrete papers providing a territorial policy contribution to larger on-going policy debates could provide new impetus to the implementation of TA 2020 objectives and priorities. For instance, every year there could be one such paper that is tabled at a high-level or even informal meeting of Ministers responsible for Territorial Cohesion and then further disseminated.

5. Access point: Actors and institutional anchoring at the European and national level

- *Role of the European Commission as well as Member States*: Territorial Cohesion as a Union objective provides the legitimation for a stronger involvement of the European Commission in Territorial Cohesion matters where appropriate. Suggestions of what a stronger involvement might consist of are:

- *Stronger advocacy of the territorial dimension* and tools like Territorial Impact Assessments among other policy sectors at the EU level, in the Member States, regions and cities. The Impact Assessment procedure of the Commission still needs to be filled with live at this end.
- *Better coordination of EU policies* and better communication of these efforts and their results. This includes the identification of territorial aspects in EU and national policies and also the identification of key players of sector policies who can influence the territorial matters in relevant policies.
- Improved *communication on territorial matters*. Regular publications and/or (bi-) annual conferences where the territorial policy community meets other policy sectors.
- This should be supported by regularly addressing topics related to Territorial Cohesion and the territorial dimension in *sectoral policies at EU General Affairs Council* meetings.
- *Joining the effort of the European institutions* including the European Parliament, European Commission, Committee of Regions and Economic and Social Committee, as well as the European Investment Bank.

6. Access point: Content-related debates

- *Improved links to Urban Policy*: In particular urban policy and the prospective EU Urban Agenda seem to be closely linked to the TA 2020 and, above all, seem to be able to reach further policy communities. Where the content of both policy fields is closely related, one might even consider joining efforts for defining common strategies.
- *Preparing for policy debates on future policies*: As territorial policymaking comprises a strategic dimension, upcoming discussions might be of particular interest (non-exhaustive list):
 - The review of the Europe 2020 Strategy
 - The Investment Plan for Europe
 - The EU Urban Agenda
 - The 2030 Framework for Climate and Energy Policy
 - The Digital Agenda for Europe
 - The Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)
 - The Maritime Spatial Planning Directive
 - Cohesion Policy post-2020
 - The Impact Assessment procedure in the context of the Better Regulation initiative
 - Intra- and extra-EU Migration, including the situation of refugees

7. Access point: Local and regional actors

- The *principles of the TA 2020 and the place-based approach* are often applied at the local and regional level, but without direct reference to the TA 2020 and rather as an innovative governance arrangement. Efforts could be undertaken to make more visible what is done at the local and regional level.²

² For example, the study “Place-Based Territorially Sensitive and Integrated Approach” (Zaucha & Świątek, 2013), the study “Territorial Agenda 2020 put in practice: Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of Cohesion Policy by a place-based approach” (CSIL, 2015), or the study “Local and Regional Partners Contributing to Europe 2020: Multi-level governance in support of Europe 2020” (Spatial Foresight, 2015).

- *Encourage actors at the local and regional level to find new solutions* and display a pro-active attitude with regards to including the TA 2020 principles in their projects. NTCCP members may play an important role in their countries.

8. Access point: Scenarios and Vision in the context of a TA 2020+

- As regards a potential revision of the TA 2020 at this moment in time, the *challenges and priorities are still perceived to be relevant*. Before addressing a revision, the *communication should be improved* and concrete measures that fit into the focus of the TA 2020 should be implemented. A revision always bears the risk of redirecting the focus of the stakeholders on introspection rather than on an outward-looking engagement with other sectors. And this is something which should be avoided for the moment. Achieving *Territorial Cohesion is a long-term process* that requires commitment and engagement. A cycle of revision would deflect attention from the actual process and halt the debate across sectors as well as levels of government and with stakeholders.
- The preparations for developing a *Territorial Agenda post-2020 should start in the year 2018 under the coordination of* the Trio presidency of United Kingdom, Estonia and Bulgaria with the aim of concluding the process in the year 2020 under the Trio presidency of Austria, Romania and Finland from. This revision should be based on the lessons learned from the implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2020, the preparations of Cohesion policy post-2020, and the follow-up of the Europe 2020 Strategy. A revision of the TA 2020 should be informed by a long-term territorial scenario and visioning process involving relevant stakeholders from all sectors and levels of government.

The *pathway document is an “open source document”* to be further developed, updated or complemented, and it will gain life by being used and transferred into action by the European institutions, national and regional governments, local authorities and all stakeholders and actors active to promote territorial development and cohesion in Europe.