

Summary of the workshop

Interreg identity, during the ***Art of Cooperation 2024 Conference***

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Moderator: Sebastian BONIS – Managing Director, Optimeast Europe Srl

Speakers:

Nikoletta HORVÁTH – Deputy Head of MA, Interreg Hungary-Slovakia, Interreg IPA Hungary-Serbia and Interreg NEXT Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Programmes, Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Gérard THOMAS – Attaché, Division des affaires internationales et coopération territoriale européenne (Luxembourg)

Jozef MICHÁLEK – Programme Manager, European Commission, DG REGIO

Merike NIITEPÕLD – Head of Managing Authority, Central Baltic Programme 2021-2027

Interreg represents a key element of the EU cohesion policy as it is instrumental in addressing territorial differences both within the Union, and in relation to its neighbours and its outermost regions. Interreg Programmes could be referred to as small scale EU laboratories, where problems are tackled and solved together, facilitating dialogue and decisions made by consensus.

Interreg Programmes are very similar when it comes to their main objective of bringing stakeholders together and seeking to jointly develop and apply solutions. At the same time, it must be noted that Interreg Programs also differ significantly. The variety is manyfold and goes beyond the three strands defined by the European Cohesion Policy Legislation: there are, among others, maritime cooperation Programmes, Programmes which are covering areas of similar cultural backgrounds, as well as Programmes which are covering territories of very different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. “Unity in diversity” best describes the community of Interreg Programmes. This notion should also be acknowledged in the coming regulatory framework. Therefore the European Commission needs to reaffirm the implementation of cohesion policy within the context of multilevel governance, and by balancing the need for legislative certainty with an adequate degree of flexibility, so as to engage with the various needs of the different types of Programmes.

Interreg proved its efficiency and resilience in times of crisis when it demonstrated an exceptional capacity to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. Nevertheless, due to its limited resources, one needs to be realistic about what can be expected from Interreg Programmes. There are situations when Interreg Programmes can solve specific problems manifested across national borders as well as situations that surpass its ability to resolve. The main strength of Interreg is to build trust, to acknowledge and preserve cross-border values as well as to identify and analyse the obstacles which are hindering the cross-border cooperation and to propose solutions for their removal. Therefore, it needs to be evaluated how Interreg can support the use of the mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context, which is currently under development.

The participants agreed that Interreg is a valuable and efficient instrument that needs to be continued in the future. There is an obvious need for its continuous adaptation and evolution, to better addresses the new and various challenges which are set before it. Nevertheless, these changes need to be carefully considered and applied only when they are certain of generating a positive impact to the Programmes and cross-border regions which they serve.