

**EDITORIAL**

*The Regional Framework Operation "Change on Borders" has been formally approved by the INTERREG IIIC Steering Committee in September 2003. Since, a considerable amount of work has been invested for launching the programme.*

*During the past 7 months, the administrative and technical support structure for the RFO has been established and joint work on the strategic RFO-themes was launched. In addition, "Change on Borders" has gone online and a first call for a submission of RFO-internal projects has been realised.*

*This first RFO-newsletter therefore aims at giving a brief overview on what has been achieved up to the end of May/June 2004.*

*We wish to thank all regional Main Partners who have worked hard for making this very challenging initiative "getting operational".*

*Ilka Meisel*  
*RFO-Co-ordinator*

**THE RFO "CHANGE ON BORDERS"**

The Regional Framework Operation "Change on Borders" is a kind of mini-programme promoting structured inter-regional co-operation among 27 different border regions in the European Union and beyond.

The RFO is part financed under the Community Initiative Programme INTERREG IIIC "West Zone" and will receive EU funding of 4.9 million EUR.

Interregional co-operation among European border regions within **the RFO aims at**

- enhancing and further deepening an exchange of experience on themes of major importance for cross-border co-operation,
- directly transferring and applying best practice in the design and elaboration of new policy approaches or cross-border projects,
- widely disseminating this information to border regions, cross-border regions and other actors involved in cross-border co-operation,

- further improving the effectiveness of the project based implementation process of INTERREG IIIA programmes and other EU-programmes supporting cross-border co-operation.

**LATEST NEWS**

**1<sup>st</sup> CALL FOR RFO-INTERNAL PROJECTS IS NOW CLOSED**

The first call for a submission of proposals on RFO-internal projects (Sub-theme Working Groups, SWGs) has been opened in March 2004 and was formally closed on Monday, the 24th of May 2004.

The RFO-Helpdesk has received 2 SWG-applications. They are currently assessed against the pre-defined eligibility and content-selection criteria.

The results of the pre-assessment will be communicated to the Steering Committee of the RFO. A decision on the final approval of these SWG-applications will be taken by the Steering Committee.

The mini-programme "Change on Borders" supports different types of **inter-regional activities in favour of cross-border co-operation.**

**"Thematic Forums (TFs)"** are platforms for strategic co-operation among the Regional Main Partners.

**"Sub-theme Working Groups" (SWGs)** are RFO-internal projects co-financed by the programme, which have

been selected and approved after regular open calls for submission of proposal.

**"Annual Conferences"** are major international events that aim at integrating all activities of the RFO (TFs and SWGs) and at widely disseminating the co-operation results achieved.

**"RFO management and co-ordination as well as technical assistance activities"**, delegated by

the RFO-Lead Partner to specific structures with an outstanding experience in their respective field of responsibility.

All these activities aim at implementing the **co-operation strategy of the mini-programme "Change on Borders"**, which focuses on 3 basic priority themes.

Each thematic strand of the RFO is composed of 3 specific sub-themes (see overview table below).

<b>Thematic Strand of the RFO</b>	<b>Related Sub-themes</b>
<b>Promoting an integrated, well-coordinated and environment friendly development of cross-border areas.</b>	<p><b>Sub-theme 1:</b> Horizontal co-operation among border regions that share similar geographical features.</p> <p><b>Sub-theme 2:</b> Governance in border regions and co-operation in the context of joint cross-border structures.</p> <p><b>Sub-theme 3:</b> Cross-border co-operation in the field of environment and integrated management of water resources.</p>
<b>Further development of the economic fabric and of the labour market in border regions / cross-border regions.</b>	<p><b>Sub-theme 4:</b> Cross-border co-operation in the field of SME development, R&amp;D and innovation.</p> <p><b>Sub-theme 5:</b> Cross-border co-operation in the field of labour market.</p> <p><b>Sub-theme 6:</b> Cross border co-operation in the field of tourism development.</p>
<b>Promoting the socio-cultural integration between border regions and closer contacts among citizens.</b>	<p><b>Sub-theme 7:</b> Cross-border co-operation strengthening the social cohesion in border regions.</p> <p><b>Sub-theme 8:</b> Cross-border co-operation in the field of training &amp; education or other measures facilitating people's mobility across borders.</p> <p><b>Sub-theme 9:</b> Cross-border co-operation on culture, media and people-to-people activities.</p>

### **OVERVIEW ON PAST ACTIVITIES**

Since its start in September 2003, the Regional Framework Operation "Change on Borders" has already realised a considerable number of activities.

Among the **most important steps** made up to June 2004 are the...

- organisation 2 RFO-Steering Committee meetings in November 2003 and June 2004,
- setting-up of an overall management system for the programme "Change on Borders" as well as of a technical support unit, the RFO-Helpdesk,
- the first Annual Conference in March 2004,
- establishment of 3 Thematic Forums, with a joint kick off meeting for all Forums organised in Trieste / Italy (May 2004),
- creation of an RFO-Internet site presenting the programme "Change on Borders" in the World Wide Web,
- completion of the 1<sup>st</sup> call for SWG proposals.

### **RFO-MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR CO-OPERATION**

Right after the formal approval of the RFO in 2003, the German Land North Rhine-Westphalia, as overall responsible Lead Partner for "Change on Borders", has established the required RFO-management structures (RFO-Coordinator, RFO-Financial Manager) and a technical support backbone (RFO-Helpdesk).

**Overall co-ordination of the RFO** is assured by an "Independent INTERREG IIIC Unit established within the common INTERREG IIIA secretariat".

On behalf of the Lead Partner, the RFO-coordinator acts as the secretariat for the RFO-Steering Committee and ensures timely and correct activity reporting against the INTERREG IIIC secretariat in Lille.

Since May 2005 the staff of the RFO-Co-ordination Unit consists of 3 persons, working full-time or part-time for the project. They can be contacted directly for all general questions relating to the mini-programme "Change on Borders".

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The **RFO-Helpdesk** is a specific structure providing targeted technical assistance for co-operation within the mini-programme "Change on Borders".

The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) assumes the role of the RFO-Helpdesk, mainly due to its extensive and long-lasting experience in cross-border co-operation throughout the whole of Europe.

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The RFO-Helpdesk assists

the content-oriented strategic work of the 3 Thematic Forums. It also actively supports all phases of the project-based implementation process of "Change on Borders" (e.g. initiation of SWG-initiatives, active support for SWG-partner search, pre-assessment of SWG-applications, ongoing support to approved SWGs).

Tasks related to **financial management and overall financial reporting of the RFO** have been delegated to the "Landesbank NRW". With effect from 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2004, the bank has been given a new name (NRW.BANK), a new legal foundation and a new structure.

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The NRW.BANK as Financial Manager of the RFO will also be an important actor in the context of the project-based implementation process: successfully selected and approved SWGs need to conclude an "implementation treaty"

with the NRW.BANK, which contains procedural and technical provisions that need to be observed.

**THE ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE 2004**

The first Annual Conference of "Change on Borders" was held in Düsseldorf on 1st of March 2004.

All participants have been welcomed by the Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry for Economy and Labour of the Land North Rhine-Westphalia, Mr. Jörg Bickenbach (see photo below). He expressed his appreciation of the support that all Main Partners have given to the preparation of this challenging project.



The welcome was followed by a short introduction given by Mrs. Puschmann, who is responsible for the RFO in the Ministry of Economics and Labour. She underlined that the Conference was aimed above all at starting the thematic work of the RFO.

During the morning-session, the RFO partners have discussed all important administrative aspects and nominated of a Lead Region for each Thematic Forum.

Mr. Jens Gabbe, representing the RFO-Helpdesk, summarised the content of the recently published 3<sup>rd</sup> Cohesion report of the EU on economic and social cohesion.

In addition, he outlined the concept of a new EU-legal instrument for decentralised cross-border cooperation and presented the main rationale of a future Community programme supporting cross-border co-operation at the EU's new external borders (New Neighbourhood Instrument).

During the **afternoon session**, the different RFO-member regions discussed the particular focus of joint work to be followed by each of the 3 Thematic Forums.



The regions have also presented more concrete suggestions for potential RFO-internal projects, the Sub-theme Working Groups (SWGs), which are the main tools for implementing the RFO-strategy.

### **THE 3 THEMATIC FORUMS**

During the first half of 2004, the 3 Thematic Forums of "Change on Borders" have been formally established. They are the platforms for joint interregional work among the main partner regions involved in the RFO and focus each on one particular theme of the programme strategy.

A "Lead Region" has been nominated at the Annual Conference in March 2004 for each Thematic Forum.

Every Lead Region will be responsible for organising and animating the common work process on the particular theme that will be established among the interested RFO-Main Partner regions (see overview tables below).

More recently, a **joint kick off meeting of all 3 Thematic Forums has been organised in Trieste / Italy (6th and 7th of May 2004).**

During the first half day, organisational matters regarding the joint work

process have been discussed. This helped further clarifying important matters that are the basis of a future development of the Forums.

The rest of the kick-off meeting was divided into 3 half-day sessions, each dedicated to one Thematic Forum. The discussions have been led in an informal and participative way, directly involving the audience.

During this process, several ideas for RFO-internal projects - the Sub-theme Working Groups (SWGs) - were presented and discussed among the present main partners.

#### **Lead Region for Thematic Forum 1:**

**"Promoting an integrated, well-coordinated and environment friendly development of cross-border areas"**

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#### **Lead Region for Thematic Forum 2:**

**"Further development of the economic fabric and of the labour market in border regions / cross-border regions"**

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#### **Lead Region for Thematic Forum 3:**

**"Promoting the socio-cultural integration between border regions and closer contacts among citizens"**

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## "CHANGE ON BORDERS" IN THE WORLD WIDE WEB

With the completed design of an RFO-Website, "Change on Borders" has gone online and is now present in the World Wide Web since the mid of May 2004. The RFO-Website can be consulted by everybody under the following reference:

[www.change-on-borders.net](http://www.change-on-borders.net)

The "Start Page" of the RFO-Website contains general background information regarding the programme "Change on Borders" (e.g. basic objectives, thematic strands, RFO-activities)

The "Partnership Page" lists the regional main partners involved in "Change on Borders" and provides a list of members sitting on the programme Steering Committee.

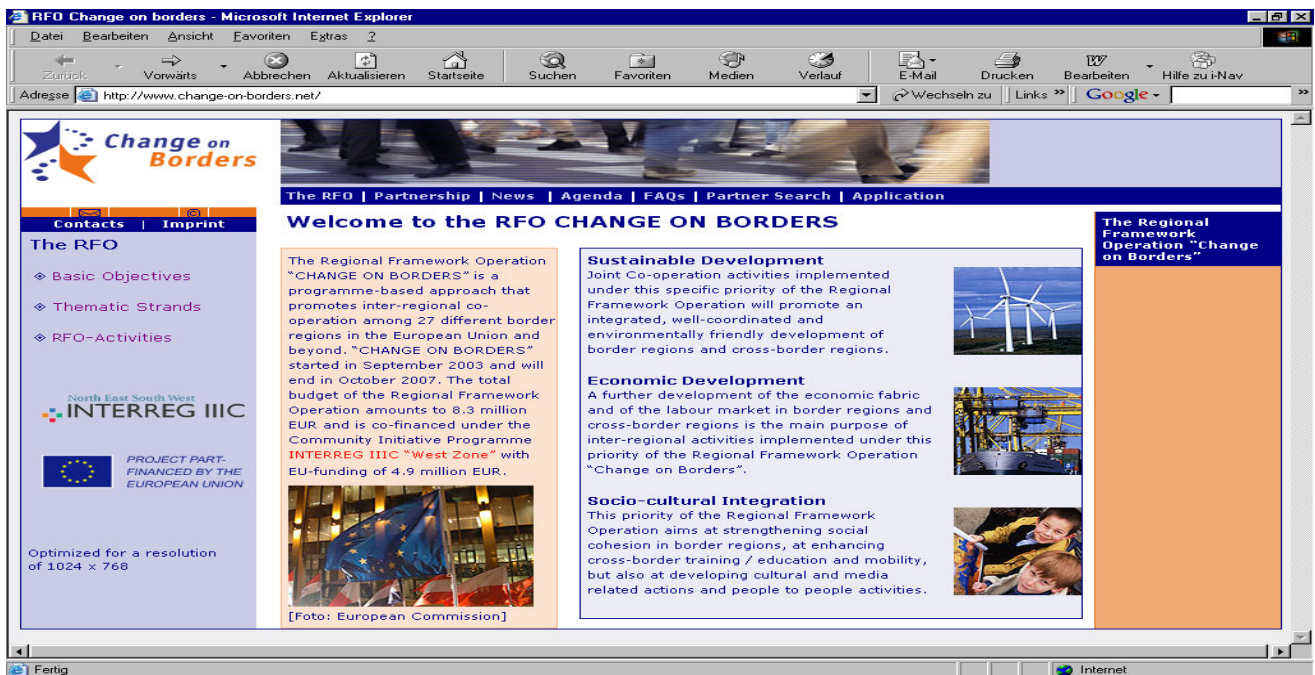
The "News Section" gives updated information on the most important activities supported under the programme "Change on Borders".

Regional and local actors involved in "Change on Borders" will also have at their disposal an "Agenda Section", which provides them with information on forthcoming meetings, seminars and workshops.

The Website section on "Frequently Asked

Questions (FAQs)" contains a limited number of useful download documents, which aim at answering the most important questions that different actors might have with regard to "Change on Borders" (i.e. fact sheet on Thematic Forums, fact sheet on SWGs, support document on the submission, selection and approval process of SWGs).

Finally, the website contains two specific features that are designed for those actors willing to become involved in RFO-projects, which can receive funding under the programme (i.e. Sub-theme Working Groups):



The screenshot shows the website interface in a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window. The address bar displays <http://www.change-on-borders.net/>. The website header includes the logo and navigation links: The RFO | Partnership | News | Agenda | FAQs | Partner Search | Application. The main content area is titled "Welcome to the RFO CHANGE ON BORDERS" and features three columns of text and images. The left column lists "Basic Objectives", "Thematic Strands", and "RFO-Activities". The middle column describes the programme's goals and funding. The right column lists "Sustainable Development", "Economic Development", and "Socio-cultural Integration". The footer includes the text "Optimized for a resolution of 1024 x 768" and "Fertig".

The **"RFO-Partner Search Forum"** gives the opportunity to realise an online research of additional participants for a future SWG-project and provides a list of suggested SWG-project ideas that still search for additional partners.

The **"Applications"** section contains useful downloads with technical background information for setting up Sub-theme Working Groups as well as all necessary application forms that need to be filled in by project promoters.

#### FORTHCOMING RFO-ACTIVITIES

The **RFO-Steering Committee** will meet in Düsseldorf on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2004. Among other issues, the RFO-SC will also decide on the 2 SWG-applications that were submitted during the 1<sup>st</sup> call for proposals.

New **open calls for a submission of SWG-project proposals** will be organised in the second half of 2004 (2<sup>nd</sup> call) and in the first half of 2005 (3<sup>rd</sup> call).

The **RFO-Helpdesk** will organise **SWG-support workshops** that shall assist promoters of new SWG-ideas in preparing their project submission.

Workshops will take place before the opening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> call for SWG-proposals. All actors currently preparing an SWG-application are invited to attend this workshop. More detailed information will soon be available in the "Agenda-Section" of the RFO-website.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2004, the **3 Thematic Forums** will organise their **regular workshops**. According to the currently available information, these workshops will be held

- in Navarra / Spain (Thematic Forum 1),
- in Overijssel / Netherlands (Thematic Forum 2)
- in Bolzano / Italy (Thematic Forum 3).

More detailed information will soon be available in the "Agenda-Section" of the RFO-website.

The **RFO-Helpdesk** will start preparing targeted **background studies** that aim at supporting the content-oriented work of the 3 Thematic Forums.

#### IMPRESSUM

The RFO-Newsletter is a 4-monthly publication of the INTERREG IIIC project "Change on Borders".

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