

EDITORIAL

During the first quarter of 2006 the RFO "Change on Borders" focused its attention on the Annual Conference as well as on the support of sub-projects in getting up and running.

In the meantime, already 15 RFO sub-projects are realised, far more than expected. Due to still available project funds for some of our Main Partner regions an additional call was opened. Therefore I would like to encourage actors involved in cross-border cooperation to use this very last opportunity for the submission of proposals directed towards the improvement of regional policy instruments in the framework of cross border cooperation.

Beyond the resume of RFO-achievements, the 6th RFO-newsletter is focusing on possibilities of the new structural funds programming period 2007-2013.

Ilka Meisel
RFO-Coordinator



Greek organising team of the Annual Conference and Thematic Forums in March 2006

Results of the RFO "Change on Borders"

On 24 March 2006 the third "Change on Borders"-Annual Conference took place and the Lead Partner was very pleased that the South Aegean region took the effort of being the host of the meeting.

On behalf of the Lead Partner, Ms Meisel welcomed the participants and presented an overview of the achievements reached in the course of the year 2005. She highlighted the number of sub-projects already approved and running, showing the interest for the cooperation in the RFO framework.

The successful cooperation work was also demonstrated by three sub-projects presenting their first results and achievements. Remarkable was moreover the work within the Thematic Forums, which can be put into an appearance. In the framework of a previous Thematic Forum in Saxony, for example, a vivid film about European cooperation has been produced, which illustrates the European integration process very transparent.

But in defiance of all these positive outcomes, there are still many challenges and obstacles in cross-border cooperation. In the opinion of

the Main Partners, in particular the different political structures, the different responsibilities as well as the lack of money for cross-border activities often hinder an effective cooperation across administrative boundaries. In this context, it might be necessary to put more emphasis on the development of practical policy approaches in the future work of the Thematic Forums within this RFO.

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**Kick-off meeting
"Rhine Bicycle Path"**

The RFO Main Partner Regions Gelderland (NL), North Rhine-Westphalia (DE), Alsace (FR) and Regio Basiliensis (CH) as well as the associated regions Baden-Württemberg (DE), Rhineland-Palatinate (DE), Hesse (DE), Utrecht (NL) and South-Holland (NL) are working together in order to develop a joint communication and marketing concept linking existing cross-border bicycle paths along the entire Rhine. The project is led by the Euregio Rhine-Waal (a Dutch-German association under public law). It runs until June 2007 and aims at setting joint standards for an entire bicycle path along the Rhine. Thus, it should be possible to book a "Rhine bicycle tour" as one package.

The kick-off meeting was held in Duisburg, North Rhine-Westphalia (DE) on 2-3 March 2006.

Besides general project management issues and requirements for a proper implementation also the content related work was discussed in detail.



Participants of the Rhine Bicycle Path workshop

The river Rhine is not only a characteristic feature of the abutting cantons, states and provinces through which it flows, but also a natural border between countries such as France and Switzerland with a large potential for cross-border tourism activities.

Until today regional bicycle paths have been developed in almost all regions alongside the Rhine; however a joint qualitative standard and marketing strategies are still missing. Therefore the first workshop focused on the exchange of experiences concerning existing bicycle offers along the Rhine in order to elaborate an analysis which will serve as starting point for the joint communication and marketing concept.

It turned out that bicycle tourism development of the involved regions differs in structure, implementation and importance. Whereas in Switzerland e.g. bicycle tourism is handled as a national matter (responsibility in one hand), other regions have hardly defined their bicycle tourism approach up to now. Sometimes the responsibility is not even clear and several experts (one for the path, one for the signposting and one for the safety...) have to be consulted in order to develop the tourism offers and infrastructure.

From different perspectives the experts discussed and defined common infrastructure quality standards like e.g. broadness of the path in respect of national regulations. The next workshop is scheduled for the end of May 2006. By then the regional experts will process their work and act as regional multiplier in order to guaranty sufficient regional backing and a high quality "Rhine Bicycle Path".

**Presentation at the
10th Tri-national Congress
in Freiburg/DE**

For the first time, the RFO "Change on Borders" was presented outside its "core partnership area". The Lead Partner of the RFO "Change on Borders" was invited by the Upper Rhine area to present the project's activities. The RFO Main Partners Regio Basiliensis (CH) and Alsace Region (FR) are located in the Upper Rhine area, therefore the presentation focused on sub-projects (like Business to Science) in which the regions are involved.



Exhibitions stand at the Tri-national Congress

Regional and inter-regional cooperation of SMEs

On 21 March 2006 a Thematic Forum took place on the island of Syros (GR) in order to exchange experiences in the field of "regional and interregional cooperation of SMEs". With the purpose of giving an insight into the hosting region, Ms Kalkavoura presented information about the South Aegean region, which is situated in the South East of Greece. Together with the island of Cyprus it is the South-Eastern external border of the European Union. In the South Aegean region 48 inhabited and 31 uninhabited islands are situated, furthermore numerous rocky islands exist in the region. The region covers approx. 4% of Greece's total surface. The region is characterised by a rich cultural and natural heritage, which is one reason, why tourism is very important for the regions' local economy.



The South Aegean Region within Europe, Cartography: Province of Overijssel

More and more it is tried to attract various groups of tourists and offer special attractions on the different islands of the region.

On behalf of the South Aegean region, Mr Elias Koukous presented with various examples that the South Aegean region is very agile regarding their involvement in European projects. Several cooperations within INTERACT, EQUAL as well as INTERREG IIIB or INTERREG IIIA on the Greece-Turkey border are part of the region's every day life. The cooperation along the Greek-Turkish border will be one of the biggest challenges of the future.

Further presentations dealt with innovation in the context of sustainable tourism. The South Aegean region aims at presenting itself and its numerous tourist attractions, therefore new concepts of sustainable tourism will be in the centre of the region's future promotion.

The Cyclades for example tried to offer different activities depending on the characteristics of each island such as cruises by boat, water sport activities, walking through natural paths or health tourism. The main target group for those islands is the "sportive or alternative tourist" for whom the protection of the area is a concern.



Ms Kalkavoura presenting the South Aegean region

As Lead Participant of the RFO sub-project "Business to Science" Mr Carlini presented the Regional Innovation Policy of Friuli-Venezia Giulia (IT). The region has a very successful research structure with three universities and about 100 research centres. As a result, the region's efforts to support the knowledge transfer from laboratories to companies are very ambitious. As Mr Carlini stressed, Science Parks or Business Innovation Centres show that the strategy of adopting new regional legislations on innovation and increasing the resources dedicated to innovation is very successful. Many new companies have been created. This development also has a remarkable employment impact on the region. But the region also endeavours integrating itself in the EU innovation policy.

Friuli-Venezia Giulia is also actively promoting innovation in its area at cross-border and trans-national level. In this context, for example, the Slovenian-Italian border area jointly offers a critical mass of resources in Nano-biotechnology.

As the EU Nano-sciences and Nanotechnologies Action plan 2005 – 2009 has set a priority to promote "European Poles of Excellence", the Slovenian-Italian area is trying to succeed in hosting such a pole. The work within the RFO Sub-project "Business to Science to Business" could support this effort.

European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

On the second day of the meeting in Greece, a workshop about the European Commissions' proposal of implementing a legal instrument called "European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation" (EGTC) in the context of a Thematic Forum 1 meeting took place. Menelaos Hatzia-postolidis from East-Macedonia Thrace (GR) as organiser of the workshop as well as Risto Poutiainen from North Karelia (FI), Lead Region of Thematic Forum 1, gave a brief introduction into the subject and stressed the importance

of an instrument for border regions, particularly for effective cross-border cooperation.

With the EGTC the European Commission intends to address obstacles hindering institutional cooperation as Member States, regional or local authorities have experienced important difficulties in carrying out actions of cross-border, trans-national or interregional cooperation within the framework of differing national laws and procedures. Therefore a legal instrument at Community level is proposed, which allows the creation of trans-European groupings under public law in the Community territory.

Ms Panopoulou from the Hellenic Ministry of Economy and Finance (GR) reported on the proceedings regarding the new regulations for structural funds and the discussion between Member States and the European Council. She points out, that several questions like e.g. "Who can be member of the EGTC", "What is understood by 'legal entity'?" or "Who will verify the status of members?" still have to be clarified.

An agreement has already been found regarding the legal situation: for the EGTC the national legislation of the country applies, where the EGTC is based.



Ms Panopoulou from the Hellenic Ministry of Economy

In case of a conflict, the national law of the country where the person/institution is situated has to be adopted. The financing of the EGTC might be possible by technical assistance or by membership fees.

For the purpose of monitoring the new instrument, it is foreseen to present an evaluation report five years after its realisation in order to be able to improve the regulation based on the experiences gathered in the meantime.

Mr Gsodam (Committee of the Regions) supported Ms Panopoulou in underlining the necessity of such a legal instrument in order to simplify cross border cooperation. He also supported the European Commission's proposal and points out, that all the Member States should finally approve the EGTC. In the current

proposal, all Member States have a two months time frame in order to prove whether the regulation has been implemented correctly before it is approved. In order to get an overview on all existing European Groupings, which will be founded, it is foreseen to install a database where the EGTCs will be listed and best-practice examples will be provided.

Mr Gabbe from the Association of European Border Regions is also a strong proponent of the legal instrument as it allows basing the cross-border cooperation on public law. He stressed that with the EGTC, the cross-border cooperation will depend less on changing majorities or opinions at political or administrative level.

As the recourse to EGTC is optional, already existing agreements on territorial cooperation between Member States, regional or local authorities are not replaced.



Mr Gsodam from the Committee of the Regions

Competencies of public authorities such as e.g. police authority cannot be subject of the convention of cross-border groupings.

Further information on the EGTC proposal can be obtained at:

www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy

Territorial Cooperation Programmes 2007 – 2013

In the context of the Annual Conference, Ms Panopoulou described the draft regulation proposal for the European Territorial Cooperation.

The Community Initiative will become an objective of its own as new Objective 3 "European Territorial Cooperation" (ETC).

Regarding cross-border cooperation, it is planned to reduce the high number of programmes and come to larger cooperation areas along borders. It is expected, that this will reduce administrative costs and bring new innovative projects. "One programme for each border or group of borders" is the motto.

The Territorial cooperation programmes should focus on the Lisbon and Gothenburg priorities in line with the "Regional competitive and employment" objectives. According to the

new proposal, there should be a simple, transparent and consistent programme framework for project applicants as well as thematically organised application and selection proceedings.

Lubelskie's Marshall visits the Dutch- German border region

The Polish Marshall from the RFO Main Partner Region Lubelskie visited the Province of Gelderland (NL) on 11-12 April 2006.

As part of the stay, the Marshall also visited the Dutch-German border region, especially the Euregio Rhine-Waal in Kleve (DE) to get to know more about the regions' cross-border structure. The RFO "Change on Borders" including examples of sub-projects was also presented in this context.

The Province of Gelderland and the Lubelskie Region are using the RFO as an opportunity to extent and deepen their contacts by participating jointly in RFO sub-projects e.g. *Knowledge Roadmap* (investigation on knowledge based development as a potential for border regions), *RiverCross* (water management across borders) or *MENT* (cross-border tourism concepts).

**Lead Participants in
Düsseldorf on
02 February 2006**

Already for the second time, the RFO - Co-ordination Unit organised a seminar for Lead Participants of approved sub-projects. Since many new sub-projects have been approved in the meantime, numerous Lead Participants took the chance to attend the seminar in Düsseldorf.

Main intention of this seminar was to explain specific requirements in order to facilitate a smooth sub-project implementation. In addition, questions concerning reporting, audit procedures, financial flow and monitoring of the projects were in the centre of the meeting.

Many sub-projects' representatives used the opportunity to discuss individual challenges with the RFO Coordination Unit, the Financial manager and the Lead Partner's auditor.

Further information can be provided on request: change-on-borders@mwme.nrw.de



Lead Participants during the seminar in Düsseldorf

**Next dates and
deadlines**

As some budget is remaining within the framework of the RFO "Change on Borders" a **fourth call** is opened in order to enable the implementation of small sub-projects. As possible topics "cross-border police cooperation" or "cross-border risk management" could be of interest as these themes have not been tackled so far. New sub-projects can only have a maximum length of one year.

This very last call for project proposals within the RFO is still running until 19 May 2006. Applicants are encouraged to contact the representative of their respective Main Partner region as soon as possible in order to check whether the region still has budget available.

A **Thematic Forum 2** meeting as well as a **Steering Committee** meeting will take place on 16 / 17 June 2006 in Papenburg (DE), Lower Saxony and will be organised by the Ems Dollart Region. The topic of the Thematic Forum meeting will focus on "water tourism and cultural heritage". Experts from the RFO Main Partner regions are invited to participate and can obtain further information from the Ems Dollart Region.

IMPRESSUM

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