



Press Release

Luxembourg, 9 December 2019

EU Auditors to examine cross-border cooperation programmes

Many EU internal border regions are under-developed and face socio-economic disparities. The European Court of Auditors is conducting an audit to assess whether the specific programmes financed under EU cohesion policy have tackled cross-border challenges effectively.

EU internal border regions cover 40 % of the EU's territory and are home to 30 % of its population. They are frequently underdeveloped, because existing administrative, logistic, legal and cultural barriers can limit their growth. According to a European Commission study, removing just 20 % of the impediments to cross-border cooperation would add 2 % to the regions' GDP and create up to 1 million jobs. EU cohesion policy aims to reduce obstacles and disparities through European Territorial Cooperation programmes, with a budget that amounted to over €10 billion for the 2014-2020 programming period.

“Reducing cross-border barriers would be beneficial to many EU territories and citizens”, said Ladislav Balko, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the audit. “We want to see whether the Commission and Member States have effectively addressed the physical and legal/administrative obstacles cross-border regions come across, fostering socio-economic growth and territorial integration”.

Most cross-border cooperation programmes support bilateral collaboration between neighbouring countries and/or maritime border regions; others focus on specific transnational challenges such as flood management or pollution, whereas the horizontal networking programmes encourage the exchange of good practice between all Member States. However, evaluations of earlier cooperation programmes noted their lack of focus, lack a coherent strategy, and limited synergies with the mainstream development programmes of these regions.

In this audit, the auditors will examine whether:

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' audit preview. The full preview is available at eca.europa.eu in English.

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- cooperation operational programmes focus on cross-border regions' needs and challenges, rather than general development needs, which could instead be addressed under other European Regional Development Fund programmes
- the selected projects are the ones that best address these cross-border needs and challenges
- synergies have been created with other EU policies, avoiding overlap
- results are sustainable.

Notes to Editors

EU cohesion policy supports European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes, or “Interreg programmes”, with funds from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). ETC support is provided through “cooperation operational programmes” (COPs), which engage partners from at least two Member States, or one Member State and a neighbouring third country. For the 2014-2020 programming period, the Commission approved 107 COPs. The allocated budget now stands at €10.1 billion. It is expected to fall to €8.4 billion for the 2021-2027 period.

The report on cross border cooperation will be published towards the end of 2020.

Audit previews provide information in relation to an ongoing audit task. They are based on preparatory work undertaken before the start of the audit and they should not be regarded as audit observations, conclusions or recommendations.

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