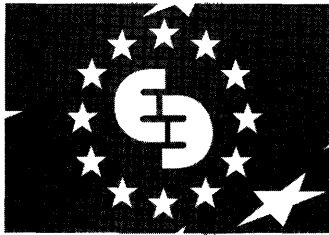


Economic and Social Committee
of the European Communities



EUROPE

**Cooperation for
European territorial
development**



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FOREWORD

A common European vision of spatial planning to boost cohesion within the Member States and across the Union - this is what the Economic and Social Committee intends to promote through the following two Opinions on the Commission document entitled "Europe 2000+ - Cooperation for European territorial development".

The Economic and Social Committee makes a technical assessment of the challenges facing regional development and discusses the practicalities of developing an integrated spatial planning policy. In addition, however, it has a political message to deliver to national and Community authorities.

The Economic and Social Committee's view is that the implementation of a European-level spatial planning policy is incontrovertible but must respect certain principles and procedures in the interests of efficacy and openness. It is with this in mind that the Committee calls upon the relevant authorities at the Intergovernmental Conference scheduled to begin in March 1996 to enshrine this policy in the Treaty.

Eugène MULLER

OPINION

of the

Economic and Social Committee

on

Europe 2000+

Cooperation for European territorial development

At its 324th Plenary Session (meeting of 29 March 1995), the Economic and Social Committee, acting under the third paragraph of Rule 23 of its Rules of Procedure, adopted, by a large majority with two abstentions, the following Opinion on

Europe 2000+ - Cooperation for European territorial development.

The Section for Regional Development and Town and Country Planning adopted its Opinion unanimously on 10 March 1995. The Rapporteur was Mr E. MULLER.

General comments

The Committee notes with satisfaction that some of the recommendations made in its Opinions on the earlier Communication "Europe 2000 - Outlook for the Development of the Community's Territory"¹ are now reflected in the Community's approach to spatial planning and more particularly in the new Communication.

The Committee is pleased to have the opportunity to give its views on the new Communication, which was welcomed by the informal Council in Leipzig in September 1994. The Communication lays the foundations for the framing of a "European Spatial Development Perspective" and for research work, pilot projects, and the establishment of a European network of research institutes ("European observatory").

The present Opinion represents an initial stance on the part of the Committee and is designed to aid the work of the informal Council in Strasbourg. It focuses on those aspects of the Communication which the Committee feels can be rapidly translated into cooperation-based spatial planning initiatives in tune with the new approach set out in the Communication, which the Committee broadly endorses.

This new approach reflects a growing public awareness of the need for a spatial planning policy drawn up in consultation with all the parties concerned - and, in particular, local and regional authorities and the socio-economic partners.

Hence the new cooperation-based policy must fit in with the wider objectives of economic and social cohesion and enhancement of the quality of life. Due account must also be taken of differing local circumstances, and of the need to work in partnership with the different players concerned. The Committee means to play its full advisory role in this.

Specific comments and recommendations

Pending more detailed examination of the Communication, the Committee wishes as of now to make a positive contribution to the informal Council in Strasbourg, and has decided to concentrate on the following aspects:

The Communication demonstrates the need for cooperation at various levels and in a number of spatial planning spheres, and sketches out broad lines for such cooperation. It shows that an EU spatial planning policy is urgently needed.

Such an objective is also supported by various Articles of the Treaty (Article 130 on cohesion, Article 129b on trans-

European networks, and Article 130s on the environment) and by several chapters of the White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment.

In the Committee's view, Article 129d of the Treaty (trans-European networks) can provide further justification for a spatial planning policy. The Council could usefully draw on this Article when drawing up the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP).

Further justification for the establishment of a European spatial planning policy is provided above all by the fact that spatial planning decisions are inextricably bound up with the implementation of other Community policies, because of the intermeshing and impact on spatial planning of the EU's mandatory policies.

The Committee considers that a European spatial planning policy must respect Member States' differing systems for allocating powers.

As a spatial planning policy can be put into effect in various ways, the Committee calls for explicit enshrinement of this policy in the revised Treaty to be drawn up at the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference. The Committee asks the Member States and Community authorities to begin work on this forthwith and to foster awareness of the justification of such a policy, while taking account of the subsidiarity principle, the overall reinforcement of competitiveness, and the specific features of each Member State.

The Committee views the function of the Committee on Spatial Development, and more especially the ESDP, as being to provide a practical analysis of developments since 1989, reflecting the changes which have occurred in a number of spheres. In this way it can help to meet the concerns of the public and the socio-occupational organizations, notably as regards quality of life.

The ESDP should be viewed as a first step towards translating the principles and guidelines set out in Europe 2000+ into concrete policy.

At all events, the Committee thinks that the ESDP should do more than sketch out new general concepts and guidelines based on broad principles such as promotion of economic and social cohesion, balanced and sustainable development, and respect for the subsidiarity principle and the cultural heritage.

¹ OJ C 287 of 4.11.1992 and OJ C 339 of 31.12.1991

The ESDP should also detail the fields to be covered, and should propose a mechanism for guaranteeing that projects are consistent with it and that proper cooperation arrangements are put in place, backed by a coordination instrument.

The document which has already been issued does not appear to provide a good starting point in this respect.

It will be up to the Strasbourg Council to identify possible action fields at EU level, within the context of the guidelines laid down in the ESDP. The legal status of the ESDP, and its effects on a European spatial planning policy, will also need clarification.

While welcoming the setting-up of the Committee on Spatial Development (CSD) which is drawing up the ESDP, the Committee considers that its role within the Community's advisory machinery needs to be more clearly defined, as do its tasks, objectives, membership and operating rules.

The Committee considers that, in the interests of effectiveness and openness, the CSD should closely involve representatives of the local and regional authorities and the relevant socio-economic partners in its work.

The Committee considers that the present CSD - which remains an instrument for cooperation between the Commission and the Member States - should aim to adopt an ESDP which sets out priorities and objectives, which is accepted by all the parties concerned, and which can provide a basis for all cooperation-based schemes at Community, national, regional or local level.

Thought must also be given to the status of the CSD, with a view to extending it beyond the "intergovernmental" stage. The Committee feels that with the enshrinement of spatial planning policy in the new Treaty, the CSD could be made an advisory committee.

Similarly, the Council of Spatial Planning Ministers should cease to be an informal Council.

The Committee welcomes the setting-up of the European observatory advocated in its earlier Opinion². The Opinion specified that the Observatory should enjoy "a certain independence vis-à-vis the national and Community authorities" and should be "backed up by a network of research

institutes and bodies in all the Member States". The Committee calls on the Strasbourg Council to define the duties and operating rules of this network.

The Committee will consider priority fields and actions at a later date, but feels that certain comments must be made as of now with a view to safeguarding and improving the quality of life.

It is clear that all future EU policy action - whether it concerns the internal market, EMU, competitiveness, employment, or internal and external security - will only succeed if special attention is paid to the quality of life in the Community.

Accordingly, spatial planning policy must be treated as a key factor in improving quality of life and must be equipped with the requisite practical means. By the same token, to mention only one example, a concrete link must be established between spatial planning and environment policy, and between spatial planning and regional policy.

Europe 2000+ and the ESDP identify certain transnational cooperation areas. An appropriate financial instrument must therefore be devised for implementing this cooperation, within the framework of an appropriate coordination mechanism. This could take the form of a specific Community initiative programme, since existing instruments (such as Interreg) do not meet the objectives of this policy, unless it proves possible to adapt and harness these instruments to the "cooperation for territorial development" scheme.

The Committee asks the informal Council to look into the scope for coordinating existing regional development instruments (Structural Funds, European Investment Fund, EIB) with those to be set up for spatial planning.

The Committee asks the Council to draw up forthwith a provisional schedule for the implementation of the ESDP and for the setting-up of the European observatory.

² Europe 2000 - Outlook for the Development of the Community's territory (OJ C 339 of 31.12.1991, point 4.6.)

Done at Brussels, 29 March 1995.

The President
of the
Economic and Social Committee

Carlos FERRER

The Secretary-General
of the
Economic and Social Committee

Simon-Pierre NOTHOMB

OPINION

of the

Economic and Social Committee

on

Europe 2000+

Cooperation for European territorial development

(Additional Opinion)

On 30 March 1995 the Economic and Social Committee, acting under the second and third paragraphs of Rule 23 of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative Opinion (additional Opinion) on

Europe 2000+ - Cooperation for European territorial development.

The Section for Regional Development and Town and Country Planning, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion by a majority with one abstention on 25 July 1995. The Rapporteur was Mr E. MULLER.

At its 328th Plenary Session (meeting of 13 September 1995), the Economic and Social Committee unanimously adopted the following Opinion in accordance with the second and third paragraphs of Rule 23 of its Rules of Procedure.

Introduction - the European dimension of spatial development

There has been much talk of a "European vision of spatial planning", for instance in the conclusions of the informal Ministerial meeting held in Strasbourg on 30 and 31 March 1995. This vision is important for Europe's future, for boosting cohesion within the Member States and across the Union; it is a realistic vision because it relates to political, economic, social, cultural and geographical developments; and it is therefore a vision which requires sustained consideration and concrete action.

The initiative sprang from the Commission, and was facilitated by the insertion in Article 10 of the 1989 ERDF Regulation of provisions for carrying out studies and analyses. In 1991 the Commission published a Communication entitled Europe 2000: Outlook for the Development of the Community's Territory. The Committee issued two Opinions¹ on the Communication.

The subsequent forward transnational studies² led to a growing appreciation of the spatial impact of the European integration brought by Community policies and to a more direct realization of the importance of spatial planning within a sustainable development process. This in turn led to the formulation - albeit still in theoretical terms - of "active" and "trend" development scenarios, and to the guidelines set out in the White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment which was issued at the end of 1993.

The same period saw the setting-up of the Committee on Spatial Development (CSD) and regular informal meetings of spatial planning and regional policy Ministers. Although these informal Councils are well aware of the importance of spatial planning, they risk getting bogged down in questions of competence, coordination and finance, just when the work and analyses undertaken in various quarters are bringing out the need for a coherent EU reference framework as a basis for concrete measures.

The Committee feels that the new Communication, which constitutes a forward study, will give the relevant authorities and public a better insight into the problems and the factors conducive to Europe's spatial development. The Communication has the merit of opening up new perspectives for practical courses of action that meet the needs of sustainable EU-level development.

The Committee notes that it issued an Own-initiative Opinion on this subject on 29 March. This Opinion was addressed to the informal Council of Ministers in Strasbourg on 30 and 31 March.

Cooperation: a feature of an EU-level spatial planning policy

Basic considerations

A European spatial planning strategy is an important precondition for sustainable development. Efforts to draw up such a strategy must be intensified.

Cooperation - in its various forms and levels, in the various political, economic, social and cultural spheres, and as it emerges, implicitly or explicitly, from the various chapters of the Communication - must be deployed as a valuable operational instrument that is crucial to the effectiveness of the strategy; the EU needs to adopt this strategy as soon as possible, thereby showing that it is willing and able to take charge of its future.

The first Communication on Europe 2000, published in 1991, looked mainly at the development prospects for Community territory. In presenting the case for a more global approach to European spatial planning, it sought to offer the national and regional authorities a coherent set of yardsticks for their programmes and action in this area.

Europe 2000+ takes a new approach by focusing principally on cooperation in spatial planning. The new focus means that cooperation and coordination measures significantly mould the implementation of Community and national policies for improving convergence and coherence at EU level.

The Committee views the Communication as a theoretical and practical instrument that is relevant not only to govern-

1 OJ C 339 of 31 December 1991

OJ C 287 of 4 November 1992

2 Including final reports on:

- the impact on regional development and the organization of Community territory of the south and east Mediterranean countries (Commission DG XVI, December 1992);

- prospective development of the Western Mediterranean regions (Commission DG XVI, June 1993);

- prospective study of the Alpine Arc and the Semi-Alpine regions (Commission DG XVI, June 1993).

ment decision-makers and specialists, but also to wide swathes of the general public. Information and consultation exercises targeted at national and regional socio-economic groupings should therefore be set up by the Commission and/or Member States.

Amongst the basic objectives to be pursued, the Committee would also highlight quality of life, in the sense of general wellbeing in one's spatial environment. This aspect is not sufficiently brought out in the Communication, no doubt because its importance goes without saying. It should be stressed that quality of life constitutes both the overriding objective of European spatial planning activity and the principal criterion for identifying appropriate solutions.

Various reports on the impact of Structural Fund assistance and on economic trends in the Member States note that serious economic and social disparities remain within the EU. There are a number of reasons for this.

From the Communication's descriptions and analyses of the situation and trends in national and cross-border regions, it emerges that the factors which work for or against the economic and social development of the regions generally have a direct cause-effect relationship with real or potential spatial development. It is thus clear that **spatial cohesion and economic and social cohesion are interlinked**.

Hence the need for programmes to improve spatial cohesion, involving cooperation measures to help tackle regional disparities and imbalances.

The treatment of spatial planning as a key condition for sustainable development should not be viewed solely in terms of major cross-border or transnational challenges, but also in inter-regional terms (urban and rural areas, industrial zones, the natural environment, etc.), with due respect for the regions' specific needs and resources. The ensuing pragmatic forms of cooperation can be used as a model and a spur for other regions throughout the EU. Local development initiatives can play a useful and locomotive role in such action, which in order to guarantee spatial cohesion will require a proper flow of information to the communities concerned, appropriate consultation channels, and a willingness on the part of the relevant authorities to organize systematic coordination and ongoing cooperation.

In order to bring home the importance of spatial development at all levels and the need for appropriate cooperation measures to incorporate it in EU policies, it is worth considering such aspects as **competition between regions or the overall competitiveness of a region** within the context of spatial planning.

A region's competitiveness (i.e. its ability to attract and retain economic activities and generate a high rate of employment) does not depend solely on its infrastructure and other large-scale facilities, or the efficiency of its transport and telecommunications systems, particularly its long-distance communications network. It will also depend on the ability and determination of the authorities, who must systematically endeavour to make their region more competitive, and on the ability of the region's economic and social interest groups to act together. And it will also

increasingly depend on the quality of its land and environment, the balance of its urban fabric, and also on the ability of its residents to achieve a balance between innovation and the traditions that have shaped their cultural identity. The Committee would stress here that the specific vitality and attractiveness of a region can also enhance its complementarity.

The promotion of regional competitiveness and complementarity implies respect for a series of principles, many of which are bound up with the long-term safeguarding of internal balances. These principles must be geared to the diversity of regional contexts; the physiognomy of regions whose planning adheres to these principles will thus vary greatly. The major contribution of Community or inter-state spatial planning will be to lay down a set of principles which, by the virtue of its moral force, will eventually be accepted by all players in the various sectors and at the various levels.

The fixing of these principles, and more importantly the operation of the subsidiarity principle when they are implemented, will rapidly bring out the need for a partnership between the different tiers and sectors of decision-making. The growth of regional competitiveness will increasingly be a joint undertaking. This is the spirit which should underpin the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), on which the Committee on Spatial Development has now begun work.

As the Committee noted in its earlier Opinion³, it trusts that the ESDP, setting out priorities and objectives, will be accepted by all the parties concerned and will provide a basis for all cooperation-based schemes at Community, national, regional or local level.

Key spatial development challenges

The Communication accurately identifies a number of problems which pose major challenges for spatial development. The Committee is therefore ready to follow and support the Commission initiative.

The Committee considers that the launch of work on the ESDP brings a need for consideration of the methods and procedures to be used for drawing up the perspective. This vital first stage of the project remains somewhat vague and has not been given a formal footing by the authorities concerned. The Committee calls on these authorities - including the Commission - to give thought to this matter.

The Committee suggests that the following principles be borne in mind during this exercise:

- consideration of regional dynamics, potential and problems occurring at the levels where the interlinkage and interactions described above can operate to best effect. It is necessary to ascertain which factors help regions to develop and which hold them back, and to see where these factors occur, assess their impact, and define the

³ OJ C 133 of 31 May 1995

action to be taken by the authorities and partners most directly concerned;

- the possibility of catering for the diversity of geographical, socio-economic and cultural situations which underpin regional organization. Given the widening scale of the challenges, EU-level spatial planning should be underpinned by a single corpus of principles and basic criteria. Measures must however be decided in the light of local particularities; above all, societies must be seen within their geographical context;
- the possibility of coordinating decision-making, both between sectoral policies and at the interface of bottom-up (especially local development) and top-down initiatives (Community and national policies). The coordination of policies which are important for spatial planning (including competition policy) is of decisive importance in this respect. The subsidiarity principle can only be respected by trying to bring the bottom-up and top-down approaches closer together.

In the light of the above, and emphasizing the complexity and scale of the problem, the Committee thinks that the framing of the ESDP must be seen above all as a partnership process operating at a relevant level, and involving all interested parties, allowing practical account to be taken not only of outside influences on development processes but also of the interactions and synergies between regional development players and decision-makers. Consultation of the socio-economic partners and the role of the ESC will be considered in chapter 3.

The decision to draw up the ESDP sprang from the informal Council held in Liège in 1993, and was subsequently confirmed. In this connection, the Committee would reiterate a point made in its earlier Opinions, which noted that the justification for an integrated spatial planning policy stems mainly from the implementation of Community sectoral policies and their impact on different districts, regions and Member States and on the EU as a whole. Spatial planning measures and cooperation schemes must therefore take account of the interplay between these policies.

The Committee would point out that the society of today and tomorrow is, and will be, shaped by different factors from those of the past. Hence it will also have a different conception of the relations between geographical patterns and development on the one hand, and living, working and leisure patterns on the other. The energy and imagination of the "planners" will therefore have to focus above all on the qualitative side of spatial development.

The Committee considers that while work on the ESDP must draw on the data set out in the Communication, it will also have to bear in mind the above considerations when tackling the problems and challenges arising in various spheres. These may warrant measures on a Community scale, which the Committee will discuss in more detail later.

The EU's high level of urbanization obliges it to devote special attention to problems and trends in urban areas. The Committee broadly approves the Communication's analysis which offers valuable information on situations and trends and argues the case for a balanced urban system in the regions, Member States and in the EU as a whole.

Such a stance is justified by the sharp economic, social, environmental, cultural and structural changes which have greatly influenced urban development and which have implications for the economic and social cohesion of the regions and the Member States. Given the strong interaction between urban development and spatial planning, appropriate mechanisms will certainly have to be found for coordinating spatial planning measures in order to give concrete form to this integrated move towards a sustainable development which now has to be viewed on a European scale.

In its policy conclusions, the Communication lists some measures to promote the development of small and medium-sized towns and help them to play their proper role in their respective regions. The Communication rightly notes that such measures can help to achieve a better spatial balance between population and employment. This underlines the close link between, and shared focus of, problems whose solution is vital if we are to boost the competitiveness of these towns in line with the role assigned to them within their region by the authorities and partners concerned, and thus do our utmost to enhance overall living, working and personal development conditions.

It should be stressed that urban policy is mainly a matter for the local, regional and national authorities, although its transnational dimension is becoming increasingly apparent. The Committee would here note that various Community programmes have been implemented. However, there is still no EU strategy for improving urban balance. The Committee hopes that the studies undertaken in this complex area will be reflected in the ESDP. In the light of the general trends identified and on the basis of an urban typology to be drawn up, the ESDP should outline a strategy involving practical proposals to the Member States and the EU. This strategy will also have to address the problems which surround the funding system and present and future operation of the Structural Funds.

With a view to improving the EU's urban balance, it will be necessary to pinpoint the factors behind such problems as excessive urbanization or suburbanization, the devitalization of city centres in general, and in old industrial regions in particular, and the worsening position of many small and medium-sized towns in isolated and outlying rural areas.

Similarly, with a view to clarifying the spheres of action and the allocation of responsibilities, the ESDP should offer pointers for possible measures of Community interest to decentralize over-congested areas, diversify urban economies according to regional needs, enhance urban growth points in disadvantaged areas, stimulate and develop multi-centred urban networks, control urban sprawl and promote a new partnership between town and country.

The Committee has already addressed the question of rural areas⁴ and thinks that they too have to be borne in mind when dealing with spatial cohesion and the improvement of overall spatial balance.

The ESDP should also seek to avert certain perverse effects which the trans-European networks and new transport and telecommunications technologies could have on regions which are less well served.

In this connection, steps must be taken to ensure that policies adopted for these sectors do not thwart the objective of economic and social cohesion or act as an excessive spur to the growth of large towns by sidelining areas where investment in trans-European networks, transport and telecommunications is less profitable, i.e. making some regions much more attractive than others. The Committee views the development of secondary networks that can help spread the benefits of the main networks at intra-regional level as critically important for the future of the EU's regions.

Measures should thus be devised to tackle harmful congestion and limit traffic in congested areas, for example by promoting multimodal transport or offering alternative itineraries. Measures should also be taken to improve links with less accessible regions, including the non-EU Mediterranean countries and those of central and eastern Europe, and to develop regional feeder and transversal networks to back the main networks.

The Communication also highlights the thorny problem of reducing the imbalance between the present limited mobility of the workforce and the growing spatial volatility of employment. The problems which this creates, such as the emergence and persistence of unemployment blackspots, should be addressed by creating more long-term jobs; this can be done by economic policies which mobilize more local resources and offer businesses high-quality services and infrastructure facilities, and by making more effective use of the potential mobility of the population - a factor which could breathe new life into certain medium-sized towns or rural areas.

Judicious promotion of new activities and small businesses can help towards the stable development of both urban and rural areas. In rural areas the promotion of micro-businesses would be appropriate.

Concrete measures should also be devised to offer more effective protection of the natural and cultural heritage, this being vital for retaining underlying balance, quality of life and local identity.

The ESDP could pinpoint ways of handling the pressures on the natural environment, created by productive activities and infrastructure, through the use of a "green audit" which factors in environmental costs, respect for the specific sensitivities of the regions concerned and landscaping. The ESDP could also consider ways of incorporating heritage conservation measures in regional development programmes.

The Committee Opinion of 29 March 1995 raised the problem of minimum coordination rules. Cooperation schemes

will only be possible and effective if they are backed by practicable coordination mechanisms. Suffice it to note that major efforts are still needed to improve coordination of the Structural Funds, even though they operate in a relatively centralized EU system. Coordination is bound to prove much more difficult (especially given that spatial trends are heavily influenced by Community structural policies) in the spatial planning field, where plans will mostly be devised at Member State, region, district or cross-border level. It will therefore be necessary to define broad coordination rules for decision-makers and operators, covering the available instruments for the planning, funding and implementation of international, cross-border and EU cooperation schemes. These rules and mechanisms will require a clear definition of responsibilities, and should also help to make the measures more transparent and more acceptable to the economic and social circles concerned.

In this context, the (possibly enlarged) CSD could perhaps consider the contribution of the planned Observatory.

At all events, the Committee feels that the ESDP should include a code of conduct on coordination. This should not mean the establishment of a new coordinating body, but simply a clearer definition of the role and responsibilities of the various players.

Problems specific to certain areas

Alongside the more general challenges outlined above, mention should be made of certain problems that are specific to certain regions and call for instigation or support by the EU of cooperation measures.

Over time, the growth of the Community has led to a convergence of interests and has changed the spatial position of its Member States:

- the opening of the EU's internal borders alters the development possibilities of what were previously border or peripheral regions; they must now take part in cross-border cooperation schemes;
- the new Member States and regions located on the outskirts of the EU will be called on to act as a link with neighbouring third countries in many spheres directly bound up with internal and external spatial planning. Cooperation relations will have to be established with a view to sustained development of the EU;
- political changes which have shifted some of the EU's external borders (e.g. in Germany) have created economic, social and environmental disparities. These bring a need for new spatial planning initiatives which also concern the EU;
- other regions (Mediterranean, Atlantic rim) have recently formed the subject of Committee Opinions which concluded that spatial planning problems should be allowed for in development forecasts⁵.

4 OJ C 161 of 14 June 1993

5 OJ C 133 of 31 May 1995
OJ C 393 of 31 December 1994

With a view to "a territory with greater solidarity, organized more equitably and respecting economic and social cohesion", the Communication stresses the importance of transfer and equalization mechanisms, and the need to give them careful consideration. It goes on to propose a series of measures to improve the EU's spatial balance. The Committee feels that these will be of a Community nature. The Communication envisages four action areas: development of cross-border cooperation; reducing the isolation of peripheral regions; balanced development of the urban system; and preservation of the rich rural heritage.

The Committee considers that multilateral and EU cooperation schemes will inevitably be needed in other spheres. It notes that Section B of the Communication makes interesting comments on developments in specific areas and discusses the main problems facing urban, rural and border areas. Another chapter looks at the protection of open spaces and water resources. The Committee has no detailed comments on these subjects, which clearly need serious consideration in the context of an integrated EU spatial planning policy.

The Committee feels, however, that alongside the above-mentioned regions, other specific areas also need consideration. The Committee draws attention to the special position of upland areas, and would refer to its Opinion on this subject⁶.

Pursuit of an integrated spatial planning policy - some key strategic aspects

The Committee considers that spatial development, particularly via the ESDP, has a fundamental role to play in the pursuit of balanced, sustainable development of the EU.

It considers that the challenges outlined above should be used to establish cooperation and coordination channels, given the degree of interdependence both between Community policies and between national and Community policies.

For example, the spatial pattern of transport networks greatly influences urban development and hence the degree of pressure which suburbanization places on the countryside. Consequently, the quality and competitiveness of a given region can only be guaranteed over the long term by an integrated planning policy conducted at a scale which allows account to be taken of these interdependences. This raises the question of the best level for action, and of the planning and implementation procedures.

Special attention must also be paid to transnational areas where there is a strong push towards integration, and where the abovementioned challenges are supplemented by others caused by cross-border competition, inconsistencies and disparities, and by the absence of spatial planning machinery and procedures operating at the same level as the integration processes.

The Committee thinks that cooperation and coordination - at levels which have yet to be defined - will facilitate the adoption of an integrated spatial planning approach which caters for these interdependences.

This approach, following the principles enshrined in the Treaty, will no doubt help to strike a constructive balance between Community measures to facilitate the integration process and measures to further cooperation and coordination between Member States.

The Committee voiced its view on the application of the subsidiarity principle in its Opinion of 2 June 1992⁷. Its position remains unchanged.

The Committee nevertheless realizes how difficult it may be in practice to allocate responsibilities between the various decision-making levels in a clear, satisfactory manner. To resolve this as satisfactorily as possible, early agreement on truly European objectives is vital. This process, which should be included in the ESDP, could be made more transparent and effective by devising appropriate information, consultation and participation arrangements.

The Committee reiterates the call made in earlier Opinions for a transnational approach which, unlike Interreg, is not limited to cross-border schemes.

The Committee considers that such an approach is vital. New geographical solidarity areas are emerging - for instance in the Mediterranean, Atlantic rim and Baltic - which require consistent spatial planning and the organization of interregional cooperation, since most of these groupings straddle national borders and cover a much larger area than that of traditional cooperation in border areas.

The problem of partnership has to be viewed in the context of an integrated policy. It must be based on a single corpus of spatial planning principles drawn up at European level. The partnership could usefully follow the principles set out in Article 4 of the framework Regulation governing the Structural Funds, on which the Committee has already issued Opinions⁸.

So as to give the ordinary citizen a constructive role in a sphere which significantly affects future living conditions, the Committee emphasizes the urgent need to devise better arrangements for involving the public and more especially the socio-economic groupings who are directly involved in this unavoidable process of adaptation and change. The Committee asks the Commission and Council and, through them, the CSD to consider the following points:

- the spatial planning work under way for some time at the Council of Europe is worth highlighting. In April 1995 the Council of Europe, UK Environment Ministry and Planning Inspectorate held a seminar on public involvement in spatial planning in various European countries. The Committee was represented at this seminar, and it asks the EU authorities to take note of the other Council of Europe work on spatial planning and of the reports and conclusions which will be submitted to the forthcoming European conference of spatial planning Ministers;

6 OJ C 175 of 4 July 1988

7 OJ C 287 of 4 November 1992

8 OJ C 393 of 31 December 1994

OJ C 127 of 7 May 1994

- it must be acknowledged that the fundamental problem of how to inform, consult and involve the socio-economic partners raises complex questions which must mainly be resolved at local, regional or national level, depending on the system operated in the individual Member States. Comparative studies can act as a spur and facilitate change. The "compendium" of spatial planning systems should therefore also cover public participation. New forms of consultation should also be devised, and the spatial planning observatory could perhaps play a useful role in this;
- as an EU advisory body with an overview of the various aspects of all Community policies and their reciprocal implications, the Committee could undoubtedly provide a forum for briefings, hearings and consultation of the population groups which it represents. In this way it could help to identify the broad lines of an integrated EU spatial planning policy. The establishment of appropriate lines of consultation is thus vital.

Where possible, and with the help of forward studies, the integrated EU spatial planning policy must consider the wider development of Europe, recent political changes in eastern Europe, and the development of the countries to the south and east of the EU.

An analysis will therefore be needed of factors relevant to European spatial planning, notably:

- demographic trends, especially population growth and ageing;
- immigration and emigration linked to economic and social change, regional disparities and the employment situation.

A possible action scenario - procedures, mechanisms and instruments to be set in train

In the Communication, the Commission sets out to demonstrate the need for EU spatial planning cooperation and suggests ways and means of achieving it. However, excessive time should not be spent on defining political principles, procedural criteria and development scenarios. The emphasis now should be on the setting-up of operational mechanisms and concrete instruments.

The Committee Opinion of 29 March 1995 offered a number of proposals for translating the descriptions and analyses into concrete actions. The Committee considers that the conclusions of the informal Council in Strasbourg only take up some of these proposals, and might give the impression that the relevant authorities are reluctant to take more decisive action.

Referring back to its abovementioned Opinion of 29 March 1995, the Committee reiterates its concern regarding the definition of the CSD's duties and its role within the Community's advisory machinery, given its membership and operation.

Whilst the setting-up of the CSD is in principle to be welcomed, the Committee would point out that it was set

up by an informal Council and appears to operate in isolation from the relevant local and regional authorities and socio-economic partners. This is unhelpful to all the parties concerned, and is not conducive to openness and effectiveness. The Committee therefore stresses the urgent need to review the status of the CSD, and calls for prompt consideration of the possibility of involving the ESC more closely in the framing of the ESDP. For instance, a hearing could be organized with the socio-economic interest groups and national, regional and local authorities; these are insufficiently informed and involved in current work on the ESDP.

Again with a view to making the CSD more open, the earlier Committee Opinion stressed the need for an EU spatial planning policy which respects Member States' differing systems for allocating powers. A number of Articles of the Treaty, as well as other basic considerations, already offer pointers for such a policy.

The Committee therefore asks that, without prejudice to the above comments, the CSD be given consultative committee status once spatial planning is enshrined in the new Treaty. *Mutatis mutandis*, the Councils of spatial planning Ministers should then cease to be informal.

The scale and importance of the issue bring a need for clear and precise arrangements concerning powers, consultation and responsibilities.

The Committee Opinion of 29 March includes comments on the operation of the spatial planning observatory. This observatory (or network of specialist institutes) could perhaps help to draw up certain relevant aspects of the ESDP. The question also arises of whether and to what extent the observatory can contribute to the partnership.

In its Opinion of 29 March, which was submitted to the informal Strasbourg Council, the Committee stressed the need to devise instruments for activating cooperation in European spatial planning projects.

With respect to Community spatial planning, the Strasbourg Council felt that pilot transnational schemes could be launched very soon on the initiative of the Commission, and could be financed under Article 10 of the ERDF Regulation. Joint transnational and interregional cooperation actions could be covered by extending the Interreg initiative.

The Committee urges the Commission to put forward proposals to this effect.

The question also arises of the role of the Structural Funds and their possible impact in strengthening the spirit and practice of integrated planning, coordination and cooperation.

The problem also arises of coordinating Community measures and those of the EIB and EIF.

The Leipzig informal Council of spatial planning Ministers (September 1994) supported an initiative based on European action areas for integrated spatial planning. The Committee would like this initiative to be generalized, and

immediate practical measures to be taken. These might involve the framing of scenarios, examination of the spatial impact of Community policies, and implementation of pilot planning schemes.

With a view to boosting cooperation, and in line with the conclusions of the Strasbourg informal Council, the Committee urges the Commission to launch studies and pilot schemes. These should focus on potential spatial planning areas, and particularly on transnational areas where there is a strong pull towards integration and on areas which receive significant Community funding. Such schemes could for instance be launched for highly urbanized transnational areas; for corridors along which major infrastructure projects are planned; for outlying or landlocked regions in which spatial cohesion needs to be strengthened; for areas where economic regeneration requires intervention on a wider geographical level (linkage of employment catchment areas, establishment of urban networks, etc.); for rural areas threatened by depopulation; or for areas needing special environmental protection and regeneration (coastal areas and estuaries, forests, upland regions, etc.) or greater protection against natural disasters (floods, earthquake zones, etc.). The large areas where cooperation has already begun (Atlantic rim, Mediterranean, Alps, Baltic, border regions) should receive priority attention here.

Lastly, the Committee calls for educational measures covering both planning strategies and implementing procedures. Initiatives undertaken in certain Member States (e.g. "Raumordnungskonferenzen" in Germany) could be used as a starting point for similar schemes elsewhere.

The Committee also considers that planned CSF funding should be conditional *inter alia* on the submission of a spatial development plan, drawn up in conjunction with the parties concerned.

Conclusions

The need for an EU spatial planning policy is incontrovertible: it is borne out not only by the above considerations and by the Europe 2000+ Communication, but also by a number of Articles of the Treaty and by various chapters of the White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment.

The Committee stresses the close links and interdependence with other Community policies, and the direct relationship between spatial cohesion and economic and social cohesion.

Done at Brussels, 13 September 1995

The President
of the
Economic and Social Committee

Carlos FERRER

The Committee considers that the framing of an EU spatial planning policy must respect certain principles and procedures, in the interests of efficacy and openness.

The Communication seeks to promote spatial planning cooperation, and various informal Councils have instructed the Committee on Spatial Development to draw up a European Spatial Development Perspective.

The Committee considers that the ESDP must be tailored to regional trends and potentialities, and must respect the regions' geographical, socio-economic and cultural differences. Decisions must be coordinated at all levels (possibly by means of a code of conduct), with due respect for the subsidiarity principle. All the relevant players must work together in partnership, and account must be taken of the qualitative aspect of spatial development.

While welcoming the setting-up of the CSD, the Committee stresses that the CSD is an intergovernmental body established by an informal Council, and that in carrying out its work it disregards the principle that the various interested parties should be informed and consulted. The Committee has always been adamant that this principle should be respected, in the interests of efficacy and openness.

The Committee therefore considers that the CSD should cease to be an intergovernmental body and be made a consultative committee which should then draw up the ESDP in consultation with local and regional authorities and socio-economic partners. The Committee reiterates its intention to be closely involved in the work of the CSD, under a procedure yet to be decided (e.g. hearings). It also considers that the Observatory could play a useful part in the work.

The Committee calls on the Commission to improve the coordination between the relevant Directorates-General, including the Directorate-General for Competition. As of now, the Committee also asks the Commission to launch studies and pilot schemes focusing on potential spatial planning areas. This is in line with the conclusions of the Strasbourg informal Council.

In the light of all the above considerations, the Committee considers that spatial planning policy must be accorded the status it deserves at Community level. The Committee therefore calls on the relevant authorities at the 1996 intergovernmental conference to enshrine this policy in the Treaty.

The Secretary-General
of the
Economic and Social Committee

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Catalogue Number: ESC-95-021-EN

