



Draft

**JOINT DECLARATION
BY THE ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION
AND THE CONFERENCE OF ATLANTIC
ARC CITIES
IN FAVOUR OF A COHESION POLICY AS
CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO THE CITIZEN
AND THE INTEGRATION OF URBAN
ISSUES IN REGIONAL POLICY**



June 2004

The regions and cities of the Atlantic Arc welcome the proposals put forward by the European Commission in the third cohesion report. In particular they approve the Commission's proposal to maintain a regional policy covering the whole of the European Union, and thus welcome the "regional competitiveness and employment" objective, while stressing that this must be a priority objective aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of the cities and regions of Europe as a whole. They warn however against any attempt to re-nationalise cohesion policy, and state once again the need for these ambitious proposals to be matched with realistic community financing.

The Atlantic Arc Commission and the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities, meeting in General Assembly respectively on 25 June and 2 July 2004, adopt a joint declaration demonstrating their attachment to a European cohesion policy designed and managed at a level as close as possible to the citizens. They also defend the integration of urban issues into regional policy. The two organisations indicate by this declaration their intention to work together towards this aim throughout the negotiations that will commence at the end of the summer 2004 on the regulatory and budgetary aspects of the policy.

1. Integration of urban issues in regional policy

The Atlantic Arc Commission and the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities consider it a prior condition that *all* local and regional authorities take part in designing and formulating the programmes, both national and regional, to which the cohesion policy will give rise. The two organisations will pay particular attention to the effective implementation on the ground of the principles of subsidiarity, decentralisation and partnership, as proposed in the third cohesion report and which should permit a genuine, useful and coherent involvement of local and regional authorities in all their diversity and complementarity.

The Atlantic Arc Commission and the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities welcome the recognition of the regions as key players in European growth and competitiveness. The economic approach, in relation with regional planning and development, should involve all local and regional authorities concerned in a real partnership via the delegation of responsibilities within the framework of the institutional system of each Member State.

The regions and cities of the Atlantic Arc welcome the proposal to include urban issues in the "regional competitiveness and employment" objective via URBAN+. With a view to the polycentric development of Europe, a goal to which the local and regional authorities of the Atlantic Arc are particularly attached, an urban strand needs to be proposed within each regional programme, co-financed by the ERDF under the two objectives of "convergence" and "regional competitiveness and employment". The first interim reports of the Atlantic Spatial Development Perspective project, whose work is coordinated by the Atlantic Arc Commission, show that the Atlantic cities, irrespective of their size, are the principal drivers of regional development in areas that are for the most part rural. It is therefore recommended that urban issues be included in the wider frame of regional development in order to achieve greater coherence and, as a result of coordination, optimise the use of resources.

This approach aims to take into account the whole range of urban problems (regeneration, social problems, economic development) with a view to a harmonious and competitive development of the region as a whole.

Concerning the social strand, implemented through the ESF, the Atlantic Arc Commission and the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities hope that this will not be limited to the framework of national programmes. The cities and the regions are involved, in different ways in the different countries, in the effective implementation of the European strategy on employment in relation to education and training, life-long learning, the enhancement of human capital, and access to the employment market for sections of the population in difficulties.

Part of the ESF should be used on a regional basis and, as for the ERDF, all the regional partners should be involved in designing and implementing the programmes. The European Commission and Member States can provide the overall guidelines, but the definition of specific programmes, adapted to local needs, must be done at a level as close as possible to the citizen.

The regulations for the various Structural Funds, due to be prepared by July 2004, should lay down principles for *binding* partnerships and an obligation for all the local and regional partners to work together, in liaison with national governments. These rules should of course be flexible, and take account of the different jurisdictions of local and regional authorities in the different countries. They should however lay down the conditions for a real and effective partnership.

This is the one single condition under which the regions will become full players in and drivers of a balanced development of the Union, thus achieving the Lisbon and Göteborg objectives, and the cities will play their pivotal role in this development in favour of growth while also working to improve the well-being of their citizens. It is on this condition too that the principles set out in the report concerning respect of the principles of subsidiarity, partnership and decentralisation in the interest of the policies adopted will become a reality.

2. European territorial cooperation

The regions and cities of the Atlantic Arc warmly welcome the Commission's proposals to consider territorial cooperation as an objective in itself of cohesion policy, and to dedicate to it a budget twice that of Interreg III.

In the light of past experience of cooperation under the Interreg IIC and IIB Atlantic Area programmes, and the outlook for cooperation for the future, it is vital that the Atlantic area is maintained as such as a cooperation area. At the same time, a certain flexibility should be introduced, and the definition and management of this new objective, in which the regions and cities will have to play an active role, simplified. The new generation of territorial cooperation programmes will necessarily imply a strengthening of the effective role of the regions in their management and monitoring structures. A declaration on this aspect is currently being drafted.

Proposals

Consequently, the regions and cities of the Atlantic Arc agree to:

- ✓ Set up, in September, a joint working group on regional policy, aiming to monitor the work of the Commission and the Council on regional policy and to work on formulating concrete proposals for the procedures for decentralised management with relation to the design and implementation of cohesion policy, notably concerning the integration of urban issues in regional policy.
- ✓ Together defend a pertinent cooperation area and a management programme adapted to the needs of those involved in Atlantic territorial cooperation.

They ask in this context to be considered by the Commission and the Council as a key partner during the coming negotiations on the regulations and budget of the cohesion policy.