

1. Implementation of the First Action Programme

Madam Chair,

First of all, I would like to thank the Presidency for its efforts and the enthusiasm with which it has taken up the Action Programme. Keeping everyone on board is no easy task, congratulations on the stimulating way you have managed to lead us all.

It is now six months since we adopted the First Action Programme to implement the EU Territorial Agenda. And already it is clear that the member states are working hard on implementing the Territorial Action Programme.

In implementing the Action Programme we should keep focusing on its added value. And I firmly believe that the Territorial Agenda and the Action Programme have created added value: the ministers have clearly committed themselves to improving territorial cohesion in Europe without permitting the concept to become overly restrictive. The Territorial Agenda and its Action Programme are becoming better known, and such principles as multi-level governance are being applied in an informal and practical manner, and- and this is to be regarded of crucial importance- sector-based ministries are increasingly being involved on an informal basis.

Now, zooming in on the excellent interim progress report, presented by the Slovenian Presidency, I would like to draw to your attention, more specifically, two points. But only after stating that, in general, the Netherlands can support the Presidency's approach and recommendations.

Firstly, we appreciate the concern expressed by the Presidency about actions not taken up yet. Sharing the view that those actions are certainly still worthwhile, at the same time the Netherlands would like to stress that we should continue to take up those actions on a step by step base. Even at this moment it is difficult to coordinate all activities and to find the necessary resources in the Member States to make it all possible. So, let's take one step at a time and prevent ourselves from drowning in too many implementing actions at once.

Secondly, the discussion on indicators. To be honest, we feel a bit uncomfortable looking at the elaborated set of indicators presented for us here. In general, indicators are useful to

demonstrate results, to provide for early warning to help the authorities in taking action and communicate the results to the general public.

On the other hand, implementation of any indicator requires resources: monitoring, keeping track, reporting, interpretation. We must therefore be careful and selective not to create an administrative burden we cannot handle. What indicator really provides the crucial information we need for further actions or to promote the impact of the Action Programme?

Let's therefore moderate our use of indicators and make sure that they are needed, simple, voluntary and clear, and contribute to the NTCCP's core task. Let's make sure that we will not have to use new indicators for every single action. We think the idea of Germany might offer a way out. But further in depth discussion still will be needed.

2. Reports on the implementation of specific actions

Madam Chair,

The Netherlands is implementing **action 2.2 of the Territorial Agenda** together with France, Slovenia, Poland, Portugal, the UK, Austria and the European Commission. This action is concerned with the member states' experiences of territorial impact and its assessment. It also considers the valuable experiences of stakeholders with territorial impact.

This action is all about learning from each other: learning from the experiences of Member States of the territorial impact of EU policy and legislation, and learning from the experiences in Member States about good practices how to deal with territorial impact.

The goals of this action are:

- to gain more insight into the various aspects of the territorial impact of EU sectoral policies and legislation at national, regional and local level (content);
- to collate existing knowledge and experience of how various member states and regions assess the territorial impact of EU legislation or policy proposals and how they organise their national points of view on the Commissions' proposals (procedure; process);
- to gain more insight into useful principles on the assessment of territorial impact that are of the disposal of those who are interested;
- to persuade the Commission to add territorial notions to the impact assessment system already in place for all EU policies (EU level).

We have drawn up a questionnaire to gain more insight into the member states' experiences. The answers will help us achieve the goals of this action. I hope you are able to complete and return the questionnaire by 28 June.

Given the importance we attach to learning from each other, this action will be concluded with a seminar. This could be added in annex II as well.

3. Territorial cohesion process

Thank you Madam Chair,

The process is also high on the agenda in the Netherlands. The Netherlands welcomes the inclusion of this goal in the Treaty of Lisbon. It will increase the member states' and European Commission's ability to achieve the goals of the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategy. It will also place the spatial and regional aspects of economic growth and sustainability in the spotlight.

The Netherlands recognises the importance of the process and discussion of territorial cohesion. The Dutch government will therefore on short notice send a paper to the European Commission to inform the debate on territorial cohesion.

The Netherlands thinks territorial cohesion is a complex concept. We also feel that territorial cohesion should be implemented by means of three distinct policy lines. These three policy lines must be closely aligned in the future:

1. The first line is that EU sectoral policy proposals should take into account their territorial impact;
2. The second line is that EU policy should partly be based on territorial analyses;
3. The third line is that territorial cohesion should be actively involved in regional and agricultural policy.

Concerning the first line, the impact of European policy and legislative proposals on the territorial cohesion of European regions and European territory as a whole should be assessed. Therefore we stress the importance of developing a kind of spatial impact analysis.

Concerning the second line, at European level, analyses should be made, for example by ESPON, of the spatial development of European territory. The territorial impact of the European and global challenges facing the European Union could then be assessed. The knowledge obtained could benefit the development of policies on European wide challenges, like climate change, at the appropriate governance levels. The main priority for the

Netherlands is to base effective spatial development policy on the principles of subsidiary and multi-level governance. The member states are responsible for spatial planning and implement policy through their local authorities. A separate European spatial policy is not the way forward in our view.

3. Territorial cohesion plays an important part in European regional policy and rural development policy. The Netherlands feel that a sustainable regional development can best be achieved through an integrated approach based on the strengths of the regions. Goal is to exploit in the best possible way the development potential of a region, based on specific social, economical, natural and cultural distribution of features like geographical position, size, accessibility, quality of the surroundings, climate etc.

In conclusion, the Netherlands has identified various opportunities. This concept of territorial cohesion will help increase the effectiveness of European policy and enhance the coordination of spatial structures in Europe, but more focus and multi level understanding is needed. The Netherlands therefore strongly supports the Commission's plan to pursue a common understanding of territorial cohesion. We look forward to the rest of the process with interest.

Thank you very much.

