

lower the cost of public services. It is particularly important from the regional point of view that resources available under the Fifth Framework Programme and other resources available to the Commission are used to

increase awareness of the practical opportunities offered by electronic signatures and to support implementation of European applications and services that will boost the use of electronic signatures.

Brussels, 14 January 1999.

*The President*  
*of the Committee of the Regions*  
Manfred DAMMEYER

## Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'European Spatial Development Perspective'

(1999/C 93/07)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP);

having regard to the decision taken by the European Commission on 8 June 1998, under the first paragraph of Article 198c of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to consult the Committee of the Regions on the matter;

having regard to the decision taken by its Bureau on 15 July 1998 to direct Commission 4 for Spatial Planning, Urban Issues, Energy and Environment to draw up the relevant opinion;

having regard to the draft Opinion (CdR 266/98 rev. 2) adopted by Commission 4 on 11 December 1998 (rapporteur: Ms Claude de Granrut, co-rapporteur: Mr Anders Knape),

adopted the following opinion at its plenary session of 13 and 14 January 1999 (meeting of 14 January) by a majority vote.

### 1. General comments

#### 1.1. *The ESDP's objectives and approach*

1.1.1. The decision to frame the ESDP reflects the EU's determination to meet world economic challenges at a time when it is boosting its economic integration, recognizes the growing role of local and regional authorities in spatial development, and is preparing for the accession of the central and eastern European countries. This determination goes hand in hand with the three fundamental goals set by the Leipzig informal council of spatial planning ministers, namely economic and social cohesion, sustainable development, and competitive but mutually supportive regions.

To this end, the ESDP proposes a comprehensive concept of spatial development that has integrated, relevant scope and facilitates more balanced, effective and responsible land-use and better management of the EU's natural, human and technological resources.

In order to cater for regional differences and the complexity of the socio-economic challenges to be faced, this concept postulates a decision-making process which involves the various tiers of authority and which helps to ensure that Member States' spatial development measures are mutually consistent and complementary.

1.1.2. The ESDP also proposes effective integration of the spatial impact of Community policies, thus securing added value and drawing maximum benefit

from EU measures. Implementation of the ESDP will therefore require horizontal and vertical coordination of the Community's sectoral policies, together with action by the various geographical tiers of authority involved in spatial planning.

In offering an overview of the EU area, the ESDP invites Member States and regional and local authorities to identify and take account of spatial problems which transcend their own borders. Although the ESDP is presented as a reference document which is non-binding, it lends legitimacy to the proposed concept of spatial planning and to the consultation process which this concept will trigger, and to the need to view any spatial planning measures in the wider European context.

To reinforce this last point, the ESDP proposes four rapidly evolving areas of spatial planning which are relevant to the EU as a whole. The document also analyses the impact of Community policies on EU spatial development.

The four areas are:

- implementation of a new urban policy;
- partnership between towns and countryside, and the role of rural areas;
- measures concerning transport, communications and access to knowledge;
- safeguarding of Europe's cultural and natural heritage.

The ESDP considers that the spatial impact of Community policies (the CAP, Structural Funds, environment, competition, transport and communications infrastructure) is not neutral, and must be analysed; the aim should be to increase synergies between these policies and to optimize their economic and social effects.

## 1.2. *General comments and critical analysis*

1.2.1. The COR recognizes the careful analysis and consideration which has gone into the ESDP, and the illustrative value of the tables and maps, although the latter could be further improved<sup>(1)</sup>.

On the whole, the COR considers that the spatial development concept proposed by the ESDP provides an important contribution to EU integration; European integration will not be complete without spatial integration.

For the moment, the ESDP is to form a reference document for national, regional and local players involved in spatial planning. The practices of these players — and the institutions to which they belong — vary greatly, but the ESDP must nevertheless offer firm, innovative benchmarks that represent an advance on existing practices and tools, institutional or otherwise. In other words, the ESDP must not become a new planning tier which can encroach on national, regional or local spheres of responsibility; instead, the ESDP must convince these authorities that it offers a valuable stimulus to their policies and can help to make their action more effective. However, there are certain areas where the ESDP's analysis could be improved.

1.2.2. The ESDP could usefully have highlighted the spatial aspects of economic globalization, and their medium and long-term impact on trade flows, business location, financial markets, relations between the world's main cities, the activities of EU gateway-cities and ports, and energy supply conditions. Such an analysis would have made it possible to more effectively gauge the risks of increasing regional imbalances as outlined in the cohesion report and, therefore, to emphasize the priority policy objectives to be pursued in the coming years to combat such risks as effectively as possible and prepare post-2006 policies accordingly.

The same is true of EU enlargement. The candidate countries are more than just additions to EU territory; they are countries with a past, a heritage and resources, as well as economic weaknesses which will impact on EU spatial organization. Substantial forward analysis needs to be carried out in the near future on the direct and indirect spatial impact of enlargement on both current and future Member States.

The ESDP should give more consideration to the strategic role of the EU's southern regions as a natural interface between the European continent and the countries on the southern side of the Mediterranean, and as an area which could make a greater contribution to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation policy. The ESDP should also put forward guidelines for addressing the specific problems of upland areas.

<sup>(1)</sup> The reference here is to the draft distributed at the Glasgow informal council in June 1998.

1.2.3. The ESDP could also have scrutinized the spatial impact of the growing interdependence between Member States, the single market, the free movement of people and capital, the spread of new technologies and the introduction of the euro, considering their possible impact on the attractiveness of certain areas and the establishment of new development corridors.

These considerations could have led on to a comparative study of the spatial organization of Europe's traditional development axes, and their weaknesses in terms of the new concept of spatial development put forward in the ESDP. This would have given an idea of the role played by a particular city or city network in providing a 'centre of gravity'; the impact of the establishment of appropriate transport infrastructure; and the contribution of research centres to boosting the economy and enhancing employment potential in lagging regions.

1.2.4. The ESDP cites the Interreg IIC pilot schemes as an example of the benefits of transnational cooperation and as proof that it helps make optimum use of investment. The ESDP could usefully have included some more closely targeted regional partnership activities which, while involving smaller geographical areas or areas suffering permanent geographical handicaps, such as climate, isolated or insular situation, altitude or relief, would have produced more immediately apparent spatial and economic results. This would also address the limitations presented by the lack of spatial coherence in some of the existing Interreg IIC programmes.

The ESDP fails to draw the requisite conclusions from its recognition that the EU's diversity is one of its strengths and that this diversity must not be jeopardized. In order to retain diversity, one must recognize the existence of spatial policies at the regional and local level and their irreplaceable role in improving living and working conditions and in the exercise of democracy. The ESDP should have laid greater stress on the application of the subsidiarity principle to spatial planning. Incorporation of the regions' spatial planning policies is the keystone of the ESDP's approach to spatial development.

The COR believes that regional and local players are fundamental to any European approach to spatial development, as they are able to reconcile the aspirations

of their fellow citizens with the need for EU solidarity, inter alia by involving the socio-economic players who contribute to local development.

The COR feels that the ESDP should have called unambiguously for a systematic analysis of the spatial impact of the Community's sectoral policies and for the requisite coordination between them. Public funds must be used effectively and wisely, and the European Commission should set an example here.

### 1.3. *The functions of the ESDP*

Concluding these general comments, the COR would like to see the ESDP fulfil information, proposal and policy functions.

#### 1.3.1. The information function

The ESDP itself acknowledges that this function needs to be improved. The workshops organized by the European Commission and Member States and attended by COR members seek to address the problem<sup>(1)</sup>. Each topic is first presented by experts and then discussed by representatives of the various geographical tiers of authority, using Interreg IIC schemes as examples.

The COR recommends that the lessons learned from these workshops — which enable provisional finalization of the ESDP — should be borne in mind when deciding the tasks of the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON). The COR suggests that special attention be paid as of now to exchanges, studies and research with the central and eastern European countries.

#### 1.3.2. The proposal function

The COR recommends two courses of action in the short term. The first is experimental, the other is institutional.

On the basis of the ESDP work, a few EU spatial action areas should be selected in addition to the Interreg IIC regions. These would provide a testbed for the ESDP

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<sup>(1)</sup> Berlin, 27 and 28 April: presentation of the ESDP; Naples, 25 and 26 May: transport; Lille, 22 and 23 June: urban policy; Thessaloniki, 1 and 2 July: water management; Manchester, 17 and 18 September: access to innovation; Gothenburg, 26 and 27 October: environment; Salamanca, 15 and 16 October: rural areas; Vienna, 25 and 26 November: enlargement.

approach, to coordinating spatial development programmes and injecting a spatial dimension in other Community policies. One of the action areas should include a town-country partnership.

In addition to geographical coordination instruments, the ESDP should propose legal and financial instruments for putting the various forms of transnational cooperation on a more structured footing.

### 1.3.3. The policy function

For the moment, the policy function of the ESDP will be limited to gaining the support of policy makers, at all geographical levels, for its rationale and approach. The credibility of the ESDP depends on the added value of its analyses and proposals. This credibility will be enhanced by the use of the ESDP approach in pilot action areas, by the involvement of the different tiers of geographical authority — notably regional — in all spatial planning, and by consensual decision-taking.

The ESDP must not overlook a further factor which influences policy options, namely the Community's sectoral policies and, in particular, the CAP and the Structural Funds. The Member States will recognize the ESDP as a useful policy tool once they realize that the ESDP approach helps to prevent programmes overlapping, and helps to gain a better return on investments (even over the longer term). The ESDP does not seek to amend the distribution of powers among the various tiers of geographical authority, but to show them how to follow a spatially-oriented path. Each physical area is a resource that is deployed in order to secure a more rational and more integrated use of its facilities and of its development potential.

## 2. Specific comments

### 2.1. *Regarding the proposal for a more balanced and polycentric urban pattern*

The COR is pleased that the ESDP considers towns as vital to the dynamism of regional economies and to the EU's global competitiveness, and as an active custodian of European culture and civilization in all their manifold forms.

### 2.1.1. Regarding the diagnosis

The COR considers that the ESDP has enumerated the problems which handicap the development of the EU's towns and which in some cases are causing their decline. Nevertheless, each town has its own combination of problems and potential. In analysing these, the ESDP could have pointed out that the policy pursued by local authorities is vital, and must be accepted and coordinated with all other national or European measures.

The ESDP notes that relevant, comparable information on Europe's towns is a prerequisite for their proper administration. Here the COR recalls the European Commission's decision to conduct an urban audit of quality of life in 58 cities, eight conurbations and 21 metropolitan regions. The COR also reiterates its call for an evaluation of the applicability, validity and viability of certain yardsticks for living conditions in urban areas of all sizes.

The European urban forum which was held in Vienna in November 1998 scrutinized these surveys and this approach, and recognized the irreplaceable role of local authorities in the framing of an integrated urban policy. If a group of urban development experts is set up and given permanent status, it is important that such a group should include representatives of local authorities.

2.1.1.1. There are a few points to which the authors of the ESDP could have given closer attention. One is the continuing expansion of urban areas, and the other is the changing factors that affect business location and that encourage the emergence of new growth points. Broadly speaking, the ESDP seems to provide a snapshot of the present situation, rather than looking ahead to the next 10 or 20 years:

- What is the role of the gateway cities? Should we try to create more of them, and to protect them against their weaknesses?
- Has the creation of urban clusters and networks helped to determine the optimum population density for development? Is there a structural link between urban network and corridor? In what ways do they complement each other?
- Does the financial cost of the growth of cities and the development of suburbs hide the real cost of the transport system and other infrastructure?

2.1.1.2. The COR has identified a serious shortcoming in the whole development rationale: 80 % of the EU population live in urban areas, but the ESDP does not take any stance vis-à-vis ordinary people; while it rightly denounces social exclusion and its damaging effects, it does not envisage giving a role to those who live among or alongside the victims of exclusion.

## 2.1.2. Regarding strategy

The ESDP puts forward the concept of polycentric cities and of decentralized concentration. It rightly considers that as urban development has a significant impact on the geographical balance of the EU, each development must be planned in coordination with other cities/and or with their catchment areas. Furthermore, any measures to help cities will necessarily involve trans-sectoral spatial planning strategies. All this should lead to a more balanced, polycentric urban system. This system would have the added benefit of encouraging cooperation between cities, rethinking the interface between a city and its hinterland, curbing the unnecessary spread of conurbations, and forging a new relationship between cities and countryside.

### 2.1.2.1. The polycentric urban system and the functional urban region

The polycentric urban system proposed by the ESDP can provide a spatial action framework within which cities and neighbouring areas can voice their needs and establish appropriate responses to them.

The COR acknowledges that EU cities face similar problems, and that a more systematic, coordinated approach is desirable. However, their diverse nature means that it is not possible to impose a one-size-fits-all system. The COR calls for a flexible application of the three main strands of urban policy, namely:

- strengthening the urban structure and economic competitiveness;
- improving access and transport flow, with priority for public transport;
- highlighting cultural identity and combating all forms of exclusion.

In its concern to reduce urban sprawl and anchor cities more firmly to their catchment areas, the ESDP could

have used the concept of 'functional urban regions' <sup>(1)</sup>; this means a network of cities and surrounding areas that are closely interrelated in terms of local and regional economy and the daily mobility of their citizens.

This concept makes it easier to conduct a multisectoral policy and to adopt decisions in consultation with all the tiers of geographical players. It also helps to target action on key issues which will vary from one area to another (economic development, transport, rundown neighbourhoods, pollution, the quality of the landscape, support for cultural activities). The concept of a functional urban region is also relevant for deciding the optimum scale and targeting of measures.

Lastly, the COR points out that in order to enhance the impact of the work of local and national players, the EU must adapt those of its sectoral policies which affect urban areas; new Community measures may also be needed. This is a moral commitment without which an EU urban policy is not feasible.

### 2.1.2.2. Sustainable development of cities

To safeguard the future of urban areas, the ESDP puts forward a series of policy options designed to keep up their economic and service functions, curb urban sprawl, promote prudent management of their eco-systems, and improve the mobility of their inhabitants.

The COR would like to flesh out these theoretical options by proposing some concrete measures; such measures, which are a regular feature in some of Europe's cities, seek to bring out the interplay between the different policy aspects of spatial planning, notably as regards the physical urban area.

For instance, urban sprawl increases transport costs, land-use and energy consumption. Cities may seek to forestall this by planning growth so that it occurs alongside 'established' neighbourhoods, thereby ensuring that new housing has access to good public transport facilities.

Quality of life has become an important factor in company location. Alongside the availability of land, companies and their employees are increasingly paying attention to the presence of transport and R&D facilities and other services. Accordingly, the creation of stable, high quality jobs and a reduction in unemployment must

<sup>(1)</sup> CdR 316/97 fin — OJ C 251, 10.8.1998, p. 11.



be the overriding objective of all policies to promote productive activity and of spatial planning policies geared to this end. Regional planning must stimulate regional productive activity.

Transport is a crucial part of city life. The COR calls for an intermodal transport system with single pricing for journeys within a defined area, dovetailing with a common transport system for small and medium sized towns within the same development area, so as to create complementary cultural and economic links.

For conurbations in industrial regions undergoing change, the main aim of sustainable development should be to devise new urban activities on and around derelict industrial sites.

Lastly, special attention should be paid to historic city centres. Most of Europe's major cities have a historic core which should be renovated and revitalized, so that it is on a par with other parts of the city. World heritage cities such as Florence, Weimar or — a few years from now — Prague and Krakow should not be museums, but cultural centres that are open to all forms of contemporary art.

#### 2.1.2.3. The organization of partnerships

In order to improve urban balance and thus the spatial balance of the EU as a whole, the ESDP advocates partnerships between towns and considers that these will inject added value into local and/or national activity.

The COR points out that such partnerships already exist, and that lessons can be drawn from them. Partnerships between medium sized towns generally embrace several fields; they should have a high profile, and should produce swift, tangible results. This is vital if they are to win the support of local residents and get them to work together.

Partnerships between the largest conurbations (gateway cities, capitals, ports and airport cities) generally cover just one or two main activities and are based on experience-swapping and on the prospect of a satisfactory solution to a major problem in a reasonable timeframe.

Interreg IIC seeks to encourage such partnerships and to apply the guidelines laid down in the ESDP. In the north western metropolitan area, the national and

regional authorities have focused on urban areas and transport. In the former case, the aim has been to boost the competitiveness of border towns and give stronger support to town networks. In the transport sector, the focus has been on improving the accessibility of urban transport, limiting road traffic, and developing intermodal systems.

If all Europe's towns are to be able to take part in partnership schemes, they must be helped along the way by learning from existing partnerships. This is particularly important in the case of the partnerships to be forged with the cities of central and eastern Europe. The relevant COR liaison group could help consider the adjustments that will be needed here.

The COR would have liked the ESDP to give more details about the aims and practical procedures of such partnerships, as they could inject new vigour into existing economic activities or help to foster future development. This last point is particularly important for regions at risk of 'desertification', certain outlying regions and, above all, for the outermost regions. The ESDP should have given more consideration to the special problems of these regions; it should have suggested spatial measures for making the most of their potential, and instilled confidence in the worth of the proposed action.

#### 2.1.3. Implementation

On the subject of the ESDP's urban policy proposals, the COR reiterates the regrets it has repeatedly expressed about the failure of the new Objective 2 to take sufficient account of urban measures and to draw the appropriate conclusions from the Urban initiative. The same is true as regards rural areas; the ESDP should have provided ideas on the use of the Structural Funds in these areas.

2.1.3.1. The COR asks that the eligibility criteria for Objective 2 authorize operations (including ad hoc ones) that fit into the wider planning of cities and functional urban regions. The COR considers that Objective 3 should promote the economic growth of cities and functional urban regions, and help them to fight exclusion. Lastly, it suggests that measures to help cities and functional urban regions be encouraged and extended within Objective 1.

The COR reiterates its call for Community sectoral policies to cater for programmes for cities and functional urban regions. Community aid should also be available for facilitating programmes which are coordinated among the different tiers of geographical authority.

2.1.3.2. As was noted in the COR opinion on urban issues<sup>(1)</sup>, the implementation of an EU urban policy also requires some changes at institutional level. Progress has been made regarding the establishment of an interdisciplinary team, assisted by a group of experts, within the European Commission. The COR points out that local authority representatives should also take part. Their involvement will not only bring the benefit of their expertise, it will also enable local authorities in general to give new thought to urban issues.

Action to help cities and functional urban regions generally calls for long-term, costly programmes. Support should be enlisted from private and sometimes foreign investors; the globalization of the economy can and should be exploited in order to inject new vitality into EU towns and functional urban regions.

2.1.3.3. The COR stresses the need to involve the local authorities because it is through them that the public can play a part in boosting social cohesion and economic development. At present, the public is largely unfamiliar with the ESDP; yet the ESDP could provide a useful opportunity for them to reconsider their role in the planning and development of their region.

## 2.2. *A new form of relations between urban and rural areas*

### 2.2.1. Partnership between towns and countryside

The COR feels that metropolitan rather than rural regions pose the main problems in this context, and that their problems often upset the balance of rural areas. For instance, some big cities 'encroach' on rural areas to meet their need for land on which to build transport infrastructure and housing. At the same time, certain factors complicate relations between the big cities and their catchment areas.

Despite steady urbanization, businesses and people continue to relocate from city centres to the suburbs.

People are becoming increasingly demanding about the size and cost of accommodation and quality of the environment. All too often, these aspirations can only be met outside city centres. This also leads to social segregation. Companies which are no longer obliged to set up inside cities seek larger, cheaper sites near road and motorway networks, where they can operate and expand more easily.

Cities are obliged to maintain their infrastructure, especially social and cultural facilities, despite falling revenue. They also have to extend the public transport network to surrounding areas, and this is very expensive. Commuter journeys become longer and longer, causing rush-hour congestion on the main access roads.

City development has to involve the suburbs too, as in conurbations administrative responsibilities give way to political imperatives. In order to overcome the ensuing administrative constraints and financial problems, the COR considers that there is an urgent need to improve joint city/hinterland planning and regional cooperation by providing for forms of spatial planning coordination between local and regional authorities.

The EU population will continue to live mainly in the large urban regions which are the motor of Europe's economic development. In order to achieve the ESDP's prime aim of sustainable, balanced development, it is vital to establish special policy strategies for these regions.

Finally, the COR would stress two points:

- the problems faced by major conurbations and by smaller towns in relation to their catchment areas differ, and call for different solutions;
- the ESDP should limit itself to offering guidelines which best respect the activity of local operators.

### 2.2.2. Diversification of activity in rural areas

The ESDP makes a short but discerning analysis of the development of the role of rural areas. However, the policy options which it proposes for rural areas suggest that their main purpose is to safeguard the viability of conurbations. For instance, it states that energy

<sup>(1)</sup> CdR 316/97 fin — OJ C 251, 10.8.1998, p. 11.

production close to large cities, from biomass and urban waste, could help economic diversification in rural areas. Under no circumstances is this the right path for sustainable rural development.

Similarly, the COR cannot endorse the unqualified statement that intensive farming does not aggravate matters. Intensive farming could eliminate the attractions of the countryside as a place for tourism and relaxation; it also poses a threat to ground water and may speed up soil erosion. Neither can traditional agriculture be left to meet the challenges of international competition unaided; this type of farming is much better geared to sustainability and helps to preserve man-made landscapes.

Rural areas account for almost 80 % of the EU. They play a key role in the production of foodstuffs and in wider ecological terms, but these are not their only functions. Rural areas must not be considered as a repository of biodiversity, natural assets, landscapes and environment solely at the service of city dwellers. The importance of rural areas as independent areas of habitation and economic activity is beyond dispute. The COR thinks that the ESDP guidelines and considerations should pay them greater attention.

Each rural area should be considered in terms of its structural strengths and weaknesses. After obtaining a snapshot of the different areas and pinpointing the disparities between them, guidelines should be drawn up for securing autonomous development while also ensuring an equal quality of life. Rural areas should not be viewed as 'poor relations' of urban areas, but as equal partners who can be involved in joint projects.

The Council of Europe's European convention on rural areas (1998) stresses the need to treat urban and rural areas equally, and to tailor rural development first and foremost to the interests and needs of the rural population. The COR supports the Council of Europe's recommendations on the development of rural areas, and proposes that the ESDP take account of the abovementioned European convention.

The often high levels of unemployment in rural areas near large towns reflect the economic difficulties of these areas. Inadequate education and training facilities in rural areas force young people to move away, as well as creating social disparities and aggravating the ageing of the population.

In peripheral, thinly populated rural areas, small towns act as important economic and cultural centres. The ESDP's policy objectives should therefore include sustainable growth of such towns, for example upgrading their roads, public transport networks, and linkages with their catchment areas.

The Nature 2000 programme of protected regions will be applied almost exclusively in the EU's rural areas. While the programme may affect the potential for developing economic activity in some areas, it will nevertheless offer opportunities for diversification. The COR calls for local populations to be involved in the implementation of Nature 2000. The economic, social and cultural function of these areas should be preserved, so that they do not become 'nature museums'.

Eastward enlargement of the EU will also increase the need to strengthen rural areas, as most of EU's internal border regions are rural. The COR considers that the development of these regions should also be promoted by cross-border cooperation between national, regional and local authorities.

### 2.3. Access to communications infrastructure

EU infrastructure and transport policies should aim for a more coherent and environment-friendly transport and communications system. Advances in communications technologies will also bring major changes in the siting and nature of economic activity.

2.3.1. The COR suggests the following ways of improving access to transport and communications infrastructure:

- improve infrastructure, including ground and air transport services and shipping services, in land-locked, peripheral, ultraperipheral and other remote regions;
- promote more balanced intercontinental mobility to and from the major ports and airports;
- improve accessibility in areas without direct access to the main networks, by means of regional public transport;
- improve access to telecom facilities and adjust tariffs to make them compatible with the provision of 'universal services' in sparsely populated areas and in economically less favoured regions.



2.3.1.1. With a view to more effective, sustainable use of infrastructure, the COR recommends the following:

- encourage location policies which reduce dependence on private cars and encourage multi-modal transport;
- contain road transport on congested axes, for instance by road pricing and inclusion of environmental costs in transport and by encouraging a shift in freight transport from road to rail.
- promote multi-modal and combined transport on Euro-corridors, including exploitation of opportunities offered by European ports for coastal and short sea shipping;
- share and coordinate management of infrastructure where competition is resulting in over-supply;
- improve links between national and regional-level transport services, particularly in sparsely populated areas.

The regions have an important part to play here, alongside the Member States, in drawing attention to their particular circumstances and exploring the potential for including some of their development projects in cross-border cooperation schemes.

The COR deems it essential to classify EU sub-regions on the basis of criteria applicable to different countries (or regions). This will enable local and regional authorities to compare their typologies, policies and tools in place, to launch new joint activities and to establish a 'clearing-house' for these.

2.3.1.2. The COR considers that the structure, form and use made of infrastructure determine the organization of the EU area. Account must also be taken of technological advances in the transport, mobility and communications field (telecoms, high-speed rail links), the tightening-up of environmental standards, and the opening-up of business links with central and eastern Europe which will bring new transport flows.

The COR notes that national policies regarding major infrastructure have often led to inconsistencies. The remaining regional gaps must be filled.

Any plans must also bear in mind that while road transport is undoubtedly the most important mode, other modes become more competitive as distance increases. Intermodal policies, inter alia for cross-border

areas, must therefore receive priority attention. The development of public transport fits in with this approach and must be supported.

This development is vital for a number of reasons. It helps to relieve urban congestion, breathe new life into residential areas, and boost economic and cultural vitality. It improves links between rural areas and nearby 'magnet areas'. It means that high-speed train links can be used over medium distances, and that train and air services can complement each other.

2.3.1.3. We are now seeing the emergence of development corridors with heavy traffic flows and a highly dynamic siting of economic activities.

A 'Eurocorridor' links EU-level metropolitan areas and is characterized by significant supraregional and international traffic and trade which can buttress local development processes.

Eurocorridors should thus be an important tool for coordinating spatial planning at national and regional level, provided that national and regional authorities reconcile economic growth with environmental improvements; in other words, that they apply the principle of sustainable development.

Cross-border networking is of great importance for exploiting the synergies offered by the larger European market, establishing closer links between regions and — in the case of more peripheral regions — keeping up with new developments in the core regions of Europe. Cooperation with third countries such as the countries of Eastern Europe also benefits considerably from the further development of Eurocorridors.

In conclusion, an integrated EU approach to spatial planning must embrace infrastructure, transport modes and distribution, and accommodate the rapid growth of telecommunication technologies.

### 2.3.2. Access to new information and communications technologies (ICT)

The COR feels that the establishment of an EU information policy is essential, given the continuing development of the telecommunications sector.

Without a coherent strategy on this, there is a serious danger that certain regions and towns will become less attractive.

The ESDP rightly sees ICT as a means of overcoming the adverse impact of geographical remoteness on

business start-ups. The expansion and spread of communication networks throughout the EU must therefore be stepped up.

2.3.2.1. The COR thinks that geographically balanced development of ICT is a precondition for achieving the broad aims of the ESDP. Concentration of ICT in the most developed regions and cities can only increase disparities, and will encourage migration. The COR therefore strongly urges that account be taken of the close relation between regional disparities and the development of ICT access.

2.3.2.2. The COR wishes to draw attention to two points:

- the whole population must have access to ICT. The information society is a user-friendly educational instrument; it concerns everyone, young and old;
- the national and regional authorities should address the effects of deregulation, especially the danger that services will deteriorate or become more expensive.

The COR notes that public monopolies failed to establish the requisite infrastructure, and that the most developed networks are to be found in regions where there has been deregulation.

Regional and local authorities must take steps to ensure that their communities are not excluded from the information society. This problem is felt in most of the outlying regions, and will also arise in the candidate countries.

### 2.3.3. Diffusion of knowledge and innovation capacity

The COR approves the manner in which the ESDP considers this issue. In order for innovation to help the economy cope with global competition, the EU's handling of research must be improved, and a constructive dialogue must be established between scientists, industry and the political and administrative authorities. The regions must be involved in the framing and implementation of knowledge and innovation policy, as this will make the policy more effective. Lastly, the benefits of innovation must no longer be the preserve of just a few countries, and of a few regions within those countries.

### 2.3.3.1. Access to knowledge and innovation

While some areas of the EU enjoy intense scientific activity and high levels of investment, others have traditional, sometimes obsolete, unprofitable economic structures based on artisanal techniques. In these (often outlying or upland) regions, firms tend to be small and to lack knowledge and innovation capacity. These regions and their populations raise issues of social cohesion and solidarity for the whole EU.

The ESDP proposes improving general education levels and skills in these regions, and including research and development and innovation in a development strategy.

The COR recommends measures more closely geared to the specific needs of the local economic fabric, and to improving the skills of participants in existing or potential business networks and familiarizing them with new production methods and technologies.

The ESDP might have pointed out that a significant contribution from the Structural Funds is vital for launching such a policy. The percentage allocated so far has been woefully inadequate, at an overall 1 % <sup>(1)</sup>. In order to meet their social cohesion and development goals, the Structural Funds must support knowledge and innovation and encourage regional programmes which devote serious attention to them. Successful examples are not lacking <sup>(2)</sup>.

### 2.3.3.2. Action to support small businesses

Measures for disseminating knowledge and innovation must be directed first and foremost at small businesses since their access to innovation is only half that of large firms. A balanced, polycentric urban system will mean a more even spread of knowledge throughout the EU. This will help both SMEs and lagging regions.

To this end, the COR wishes to recommend measures calculated to help businesses make the most of innovation. Innovative businesses create twice as many jobs as traditional ones, and any costs should be offset

<sup>(1)</sup> 1994-1999 figures for Objective 1: 5 %; Objective 2: 17 %; Objective 5b: 2 %; Objective 6: 8 %.

<sup>(2)</sup> North Jutland (Objective 2), Wales: regional technology plan.

against the economic, social and human costs of lay-offs or closures. The COR recommends:

- training schemes to help the local workforce learn innovative techniques;
- support for research institutes which establish partnerships and exchanges with other institutes, and offer researchers business placements either to familiarize them with management techniques or to facilitate the transfer of technology. Partnerships with large companies should also be encouraged;
- the introduction of technologies for disseminating knowledge, and logistical back-up for job creation;
- establishment of a legal and financial framework assisting SMEs with long-term loans, pension funds, venture capital, and tax breaks for the launch of new products or the adoption of new production methods.

The COR considers that the ESDP should adopt the above measures to help Europe's small business sector.

#### 2.3.3.3. The role of the regions

The ESDP policy options mention the role of the regions.

The COR points out that the EU's regional and local authorities have total or partial responsibility for education and training. They would therefore appear ideally placed to spread ICT use not only in schools but also among the population in general.

The regions can also draw up an integrated R&D and innovation strategy that is tailored to their economic structure and fleshes out the regional development plans for the next programming period of the Structural Funds. Drawing on past experience, it should be possible to make an *ex ante* evaluation of the consistency of the R&D and innovation strategy set out in the regional development plans. A set of indicators should be devised for monitoring and assessing how effectively knowledge and innovation are being disseminated.

The COR points out that the concept of the 'learning region', combined with those of business 'clusters' and industrial districts, has already shown its potential. These formulas all promote the role of local players and the active support of the regional authority, recognizing

that this is the best level at which to identify mismatches between supply and demand for knowledge and innovation, effectively organize dialogue between businesses and the education/research system, see that no exclusion or fragmentation of employment ensues, and propose appropriate financial aid.

#### 2.4. *Management and development of the natural and cultural heritage*

The COR regrets that the policy options recommended in the ESDP do not pay more attention to protection of the natural environment and EU environmental protection policy. This is also true of the policy statements on air pollution, climate, soil conservation, land use, and exploitation of the natural environment. Sustainable spatial planning must take account of all aspects of environmental protection.

The sections on the natural and cultural heritage must be revised. It is illogical to consider the natural heritage only in relation to rural areas, and the cultural heritage only in relation to urban ones. Natural and man-made landscapes are all part of the same Europe, and one can hardly describe the châteaux of the Loire or the castles of the Rhine as part of the 'urban' cultural heritage. Urban areas too have natural landscapes which it is particularly important to preserve. At the same time, and as an essential complement to the network of natural areas (Nature 2000 network), thought must be given to the establishment of a network of open spaces around towns and cities, to interlink the network of natural landscapes and provide areas for recreation.

Tourism is a vital economic activity for protecting and making the most of the natural and cultural heritage. However, it must not be confined to the most well-known natural and cultural attractions. The promotion of a regional 'green' tourism in man-made landscapes is an essential stage towards protecting them and for the economic survival of rural communities. It is also important that the public be made aware of the ecological importance of these landscapes.

The COR thinks that this chapter of the ESDP needs to be expanded.

##### 2.4.1. *Protection and development of the natural heritage*

The COR considers that this requires more than simply identifying individual protected areas. It therefore supports the establishment of a network of protected areas as provided for in the Habitats directive. When the Habitats directive has been fully implemented, the Community will have a basic European conservation network to safeguard its natural heritage. This will

provide a springboard for the ESDP and for EU spatial planning, dovetailing with the other policy strands.

The COR considers that forests have a strategic role in the future EU area. It therefore thinks that the proposals on the various ecological and economic functions of forests should be expanded, as should indications for encouraging rational technical management of them.

Natural disasters — when not caused entirely or in part by man — are part of the ecosystem. The serious damage they cause is in many cases the result of the way the area has been used. A long-term prevention policy is needed in order to save human life and physical assets.

#### 2.4.2. Conservation and creative management of the man-made landscapes of Europe

The COR stresses the importance for regional identity of the EU's man-made landscapes, which are also essential for the economy and for tourism.

Cultural landscapes are those which have been fashioned by human activity. The interest of man-made landscapes originates in the use of traditional farming practices, and conserving them often necessitates extensive farming methods which will not damage them. Their upkeep must thus be encouraged, especially in upland and mountain regions. In cases where activities have to be prohibited in order to protect the landscape, compensation should be provided.

The COR feels that, in present circumstances, it is not generally possible to 'develop these landscapes creatively'; programmes must nevertheless be drawn up which take account of the great importance of maintaining them.

#### 2.4.3. Conservation and creative management of the urban cultural heritage

Aside from the special importance of historic buildings in determining city identity and character, the COR thinks that this chapter should cover the main man-made assets whose upkeep is too costly to be shouldered by local and regional authorities.

Europe also has a significant scientific and industrial heritage which is as just as much a part of its culture as its historic monuments. Mention should also be made of archaeological remains that have yet to be discovered, and which must not be allowed to disappear for ever under the concrete of new buildings. These remains must also be protected against some of the effects of intensive farming and the construction of road and rail infrastructure.

The COR points out that the EU's cultural heritage does not just involve physical assets. Regional traditions, communication culture and popular art are integral parts of the European spirit and of regional identity.

#### 2.4.4. Management of water resources

Universal access to a sufficient supply of high-quality water is a prerequisite for sustainable economic development.

The ESDP rightly notes the importance of water as a natural resource and proposes that water management be included in spatial planning, stressing the need for a transnational approach. However, the ESDP's analysis focuses on two main problems, namely flood prevention and the fight against drought. These are not the only possible water management policies, nor indeed does the ESDP appear to cover all aspects of these two.

##### 2.4.4.1. Prevention of flood risk

Traditional flood prevention methods need to be improved. Disasters caused by floods are becoming more and more frequent and carry increasing socio-economic costs. Further scientific research is needed on water issues, notably as regards the impact of abstraction, dams and public works (e.g. roads, deforestation), world and local climate change, changes in land use, study of flooding patterns, and the maximum extent of rivers during high-water periods.

The ESDP could have laid more stress on the impact of certain sectoral policies (whether EU, national or regional), such as urbanization and housing, transport infrastructure and the CAP. It should be stressed that the best way of protecting cities and plains from flooding is to take greater care over upland settlements, continue to practise farming and forestry, and keep anti-flood defences in good order.

The COR supports the preventive measures promoted by Interreg IIC with the aim of combating river flooding and flood damage. This programme should be extended to other river basins (mainly those straddling borders), and Interreg IIC's financial resources should be increased.

#### 2.4.4.2. The fight against drought

Some of the above comments and suggestions also apply to drought-threatened areas. However, account must also be taken of other, more complex factors at play in these areas.

Technical advances in irrigation and heavy demand for agricultural produce have led to an increase in cultivated area, which has aggravated water shortages. The building of new dams and reservoirs has not sufficed, and ground water has had to be pumped out, bringing the risks of over-exploitation and use of polluted water.

In such regions, the problem is not only one of water shortages, but also of competition between users. This raises the question of whether the cost of water should be increased in response to the shortages caused by drought. The COR rejects this idea. It is up to the EU, national and local authorities to ensure a minimum constant supply to affected regions.

The COR offers the following suggestions:

- develop techniques for reusing urban waste water and irrigation water;
- conduct further research on desalination, both of water for urban areas and for irrigation;
- explore the possibility of building large-scale water storage facilities, as is done in the case of gas, using northern Europe's water.

### 3. The implementation of the ESDP and its implications

The ESDP seeks to provide a spatial planning framework for constructively integrating policies and action programmes. In so doing, the ESDP should help to further the EU's economic and social cohesion, sustainable development, balanced competitiveness, and environmental conservation; this latter point has received insufficient priority hitherto.

The application of the ESDP's concept of spatial planning also depends on its espousal by all the relevant EU, national, regional and local players, who must cooperate and coordinate their respective action programmes.

To facilitate this, the ESDP proposes:

- systematic inclusion of spatial-planning considerations in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of Community policies, inter alia regarding the candidate countries;
- swifter development of transnational, interregional and crossborder cooperation between States and regions, for instance via the Interreg IIC pilot measures;
- information campaigns to make the relevant players and the EU public more familiar with the ESDP approach.

The COR broadly supports these proposals, but wishes to add some further comments on the following points:

- Community sectoral policies;
- Agenda 2000 — reform of the Structural Funds and enlargement;
- Extension of the Interreg initiative;
- Regulatory bases and tasks of the ESPON.

#### 3.1. Community sectoral policies

Spatial planning demands a cross-functional approach that ensures consistency between sectoral policies at EU, national and regional level. The aim should be to achieve greater equity between regions and their populations, countering the sometimes adverse effects of unchecked market forces which are not offset by public intervention. Those responsible for spatial planning often opt for a different approach: it is not a matter of securing more even growth in a particular region, country or part of Europe, but of concentrating development instruments on particular appropriate areas. The aim is to build on an analysis of needs in order to garner the support of all the relevant local and other players, with a view to meeting these needs as effectively as possible.

In the COR's view, this does not mean amending or supplementing Community sectoral policies, but



reviewing their implementing arrangements in the light, firstly, of their impact on particular regions and, secondly, of the requisite dialogue with local players.

The interdepartmental group which the European Commission has appointed to look into the relations between Community policies and spatial planning is a step in the right direction, but does not go far enough as it does not affect the actual framing of sectoral policies. The group should produce a Commission agreement to alter the procedure for framing sectoral policies and their content 'from within'. It is reasonable to suppose that if, for instance, the Essen European Council's programme for EU transport infrastructure had been buttressed by other Community sectoral policies or national or regional programmes that lent weight to it, a larger proportion of this infrastructure might have been built — or might be being built — by now.

### 3.1.1. The Common Agricultural Policy

The new CAP reduces support for farm prices, and places greater emphasis on rural development and environmental measures. The CAP thus has new tasks that have spatial planning implications: diversified agriculture, the promotion of related activities in rural areas, assistance for young farmers and to stem the rural exodus, creation of jobs in the forestry sector and in environmental protection, upkeep of the landscape, tourism and the processing of agricultural products.

The COR has endorsed these objectives before<sup>(1)</sup>. In the light of the ESDP, it recommends that the CAP pay even greater attention to rural development, and invest the requisite resources in the diversification of the rural economy, quality production, the processing of agricultural products, the organization of recreational and tourist areas, and the safeguarding of rural society on the basis of viable, family farms that can compete on world markets.

A spatial analysis of the CAP's impact on land use and on natural resource management should help with the framing of an environmental policy for the agriculture sector. If the ESDP is to succeed in promoting prudent management of the natural and man-made heritage, account must be taken of the CAP's impact on local and regional efforts to safeguard natural areas and biodiversity.

With a view to EU enlargement, and given the importance of agriculture in the candidate countries, the resources freed under the new CAP should be used to help reform farm structures in these countries, drawing on experience with certain problem sectors in the EU in order to strike a balance between structural improvement of agricultural systems, appropriate price levels and health standards for foodstuffs, and diversification of the rural economy.

### 3.1.2. Environment policy

The ESDP should help to provide a clearer definition of the areas covered by the relevant directives (Habitats directive, environmental impact directive, etc.) and by conservation measures (Nature 2000). Description of the environmental protection measures to be taken within the EU will help local and regional authorities in their activity. Such measures include waste management and monitoring plans that take account of techniques for emission abatement, discharge monitoring, and separation of waste at the point of origin. Community environment policy must get in step with the ESDP, so that decision-taking can benefit from the grassroots knowledge of the local and regional authorities.

### 3.1.3. Trans-European networks

The COR notes that although the ESDP stresses the need to consider transport systems from a wider perspective, it does not devote sufficient attention to short and long distance sea transport. The COR considers that the development of sea transport, whether in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic or the Baltic, could help to secure a more even and effective distribution of trade over a wider area. The interface between sea and land transport represents a major spatial planning issue for the EU, and will test its ability to meet the challenge of globalization. The COR also stresses the importance of developing inter- and intra-regional links that encourage economic activity and economic relations between the regions concerned.

### 3.2. Agenda 2000 — Reform of the Structural Funds and enlargement

The COR considers that greater coordination is needed between the ESDP and Agenda 2000, not least because they both seek to use the EU budget more effectively in the light of past experience and world economic developments and in preparation for the accession of new member states.

<sup>(1)</sup> CdR 239/96 fin — OJ C 116, 14.4.1997, p. 39.

Certain considerations common to both documents need to be further developed:

### 3.2.1. The reform of the Structural Funds

The Agenda 2000 proposals for reforming the Structural Funds have been shaped by three main factors: experience with these Funds since the 1992 reform, Member States' reluctance to increase their contributions, and, above all, the prospect of EU enlargement to those candidate countries which fulfil the political and economic criteria for opening the pre-accession process.

3.2.1.1. The ESDP provides vital new input for this reform because:

- it seeks to make existing instruments more effective, so that the same amount of EU resources will provide more efficient support; this in turn should bolster Agenda 2000's objectives for prospective member states and offset possible limitations on public spending in existing Member States;
- it accommodates the proposal (made by both the Commission and the COR) for operational coordination of the various Structural Funds and for harmonization of administrative procedures so as to avoid overlaps and excessive costs.

In its Opinion<sup>(1)</sup> on arrangements for structural policy after 1999, the COR stated that 'EU structural policy needs a new approach making it possible to establish more ambitious development strategies based on partnership and on territorial development projects....'.

3.2.1.2. The COR notes that all too often, projects are 'divided up' so as to receive financial assistance according to the specific rules of each fund. The COR favours systematic provision for global programmes eligible for support from several funds (ERDF + ESF + EAGGF-Guidance and Guarantee). This would provide an unequivocal demonstration of EU added value. The COR recommends that programmes in Objective 1 regions adopt the ESDP's spatial planning approach. The ESDP approach is more difficult to apply in Objective 2 areas, which are more complex and receive less funding, but the ESDP is even more vital here, especially for urban areas and the relation between urban and rural areas.

The COR emphasizes the usefulness of the global approach and of identifying the relevant geographical

area when drawing up an Objective 2 programme. The areas selected should tap a wide range of measures spanning research and development, innovation, transport and communications infrastructure, aid for small businesses and the setting-up of service companies, training for young people in deprived neighbourhoods, specific local measures and local public/private partnerships. Such measures should trigger a real regeneration of the urban fabric and economy.

Once the ESDP approach has been tested, fine-tuned and developed, it could provide the basis for the next reform of the Structural Funds in the year 2006.

### 3.2.2. Enlargement

EU enlargement represents a unique opportunity and challenge, and could also provide the opportunity to try out the ESDP's spatial approach.

There are three preconditions for this:

- the local and regional authorities of the candidate countries must be given the capacity and resources to become major players in spatial planning;
- the administrative authorities in the candidate countries must be equipped with instruments enabling them to draw up global programmes, with their local and regional authorities, qualifying for EU financial aid;
- EU aid must be coordinated (ECOS/Ouverture, Phare, Tacis, and aid from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development).

The COR's liaison group could give the various authorities the benefit of their experience here and provide practical information on the EU's sectoral policies and on use of the Structural Funds.

This approach could be extended to the regions of neighbouring countries such as Switzerland and Norway. The COR recommends that environmental, R&D, culture and transport infrastructure policies be incorporated in regionally based development programmes geared to the different local and regional situations. This would illustrate the soundness of the ESDP approach, and the added value which it injects. It would give local and regional decision-makers in these countries a say in the development of their regions, and could speed up their accession to the EU. A similar approach could also underpin action in the Mediterranean area. The

<sup>(1)</sup> CdR 131/97 fin — OJ C 64, 27.2.1998, p. 5.

COR thinks that using the Interreg cooperation procedure, in all its forms, will also improve the chances of success.

### 3.3. *Extension of the Interreg initiative*

The ESDP rightly stresses the lessons to be learned from the Interreg IIC pilot actions, deeming these a vital instrument for promoting transnational, interregional and crossborder implementation of the ESDP, and for developing a spatial approach based on 'relevant action areas'; this should make it possible to deal with different configurations and prevent the action areas from becoming too unwieldy.

In order to achieve this objective of extending and 'standardizing' cooperation, the COR considers that four conditions must be met:

- the national, regional and local authorities concerned must have 'credible' machinery for discussing, devising and administering spatial planning schemes;
- these authorities, and the EU, must be sure of having sufficient funding to carry out their joint programmes;
- there must be spatial coherence across the areas concerned in terms of common strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats;
- the management body must have a clear legal status, in order to put crossborder and/or transnational cooperation on a firm footing.

The COR feels that this last condition is essential. If the crossborder body does not have a recognized legal status it will not have the stature needed to influence the relevant authorities and to receive and administer the funds needed for the programme for which it is responsible. The COR would also stress that although the cooperation bodies should give priority consideration to the action areas proposed by the ESDP, they should be free to add other more specific topics geared to their local circumstances, and to decide the geographical area which the programme will cover.

The COR does not feel it appropriate to enter into the detailed implementing arrangements for the various strands of interregional, crossborder and transnational cooperation. It would nevertheless recommend that interregional cooperation (i.e. cooperation which only

covers a few regions, whether adjacent or not) be treated on the same footing as cooperation between several countries and generally covering larger areas.

Lastly, the COR suggests that the Commission organizes specific follow-up to all the cooperation projects, in order to swap information and fuel discussions within the ESPON, make provision for the financial resources to be drawn from the Structural Funds, and take stock of the widening of Interreg IIC with a view to launching an Interreg III which is more broadly based in terms of action and legal and financial back-up, paying particular attention to the development of city networks.

### 3.4. *Regulatory bases and tasks of the ESPON*

The COR hopes that the ESPON will be finalized as soon as possible. The COR wishes to be involved in its operation, by participating in its administrative board and in its various activities.

The COR stresses the importance of the legal bases of the ESPON, with a view to ensuring that it receives the appropriations needed to carry out its duties. It is not feasible for the ESPON to receive ERDF Article 10 funding indefinitely. Under the current EC Treaty, it would be up to the Member States to provide financial contributions and to decide which member(s) of their information and discussion network will participate. The COR recommends that an effort be made to use Treaty Article 235 as the regulatory base, and that the ESPON be allocated a special line in the European Union budget, which will be approved by the European Parliament, thereby ensuring that ESPON activities are supported by the European Commission.

The Spatial Development Committee (SDC) will entrust the ESPON with a certain number of duties that should help to spread the ESDP rationale among all spatial planning players. Here it should draw on the proceedings and the conclusions of the thematic seminars.

The COR stresses the importance of assessing the effectiveness of the territorial partnership and of the regions' involvement therein. The COR thinks that the regions should have direct access to the information gathered by the ESPON, as well as access to its scientific and technical documents. The COR supports the idea of a link between the ESPON and the bodies responsible for Interreg IIC activities. It recommends that this link be extended to all the interregional partners. Lastly, the COR asks that the regional and local authorities be consulted on the selection of the network(s) that will be responsible for coordination within the Member States.

#### 4. Conclusions

The ESDP is an ongoing process for discussing and adjusting Community policies in the light of their spatial impact. It represents Member States' chief instrument for appreciating the common factors which underpin their spatial development and hence for taking the necessary account of the ESDP when administering their respective areas.

The ESDP seeks to reach a consensus on the coordination and adaptation of Community sectoral policies and on the framing and implementation of the resultant programmes carried out by local, regional and national authorities. This involvement should also include the socio-economic players who contribute to local development.

The ESDP forms part of a democratic strategy based on the subsidiarity principle and on interregional, crossborder and transnational cooperation.

The COR supports the ESDP approach and spatial development concept, and will work for their success. To this end, the COR asks that local authorities — who play a significant practical and financial role in spatial planning policies — be fully consulted on and involved in the framing and implementation of the ESDP. The COR also asks to sit as an observer on the Spatial Development Committee.

4.1. The present opinion seeks to enhance the first draft of the ESDP which offered too limited a choice of policy options and guidelines. These relate to the spatial aspects of economic globalization and of EU enlargement, the emergence of some of these territories, the crucial importance of access to innovation and new communication technologies for SMEs and for the general public, the importance of surface transport, the scant attention paid to rural areas and to the role they play, the need to guarantee them a real partnership with urban areas, the lessons to be learned from all forms of intra- and interregional cooperation, and the attention that must be devoted to culture, the environment and the EU's man-made and natural heritage.

The COR has endeavoured to flesh out the policy options put forward in the ESDP by suggesting practical initiatives, many of which have already been tried out by local and regional players. These schemes help to meet the economic and cultural challenges facing Europe's urban areas and their hinterlands, and relate to the daily lives of their populations. Whether people live in urban, suburban or rural areas, they share the same concerns — their job (most often in a small

company), the time they spend travelling, the need to update their skills, the state of their environment, and their cultural identity.

Here the COR points out that it is up to the ESDP to help the lagging, peripheral and ultraperipheral and upland regions to analyse their needs and potential, so that EU policies can help enhance their competitiveness within the EU spatial area.

The COR thinks that the ESPON should give local and regional authorities a bigger input into its activities.

The COR urges that proper Community legal basis be established for both the ESDP and ESPON, recognizing the need for both the Commission and the Spatial Development Committee to have ownership of them.

4.2. In addition to these comments and recommendations, the COR reiterates the principles which must guide the future development of the ESDP.

The ESDP was not set up as a new tier of planning, or to alter the powers and responsibilities of national, regional and local authorities.

Instead, it seeks to promote institutionalized cooperation on spatial planning policy at EU level:

- firstly, by encouraging a change in the framing and implementation of Community sectoral policies, so as to take account of their impact on spatial planning and make them more effective;
- secondly, by developing the concept of 'relevant planning and action areas', which may be regional, interregional or transnational, so that all programmes promoted by the geographical authorities are implemented in a coordinated manner.

The ESDP should build on Interreg IIC and ensure that Interreg III has a clear legal basis and makes provision for specific pilot measures on the topics included in the final draft of the ESDP; these topics should be supplemented by the conclusions of the current series of seminars and by suggestions from the EU institutions, notably the COR.

These programmes could be conducted in 'European cooperation areas'. They would provide a testbed for increasing the effectiveness of the Structural Funds and for new CAP tasks, first and foremost as regards the environment and the countryside. They should also help further economic development and create new jobs.

The ESDP should help with EU enlargement, by proposing specific measures to help the border areas of the candidate countries meet the economic, demographic and logistical challenges facing them. These measures could also be extended to other countries bordering the EU.

4.3. The COR points out that the ESDP must provide an opportunity for regional and local authorities to develop their diversity while showing their ability to ground their spatial planning programmes in a European approach. To do this, it must insist on adherence to the 'bottom-up' approach and the vital nature of the partnership with regional and local authorities.

Throughout this opinion, the COR has shown that local and regional authorities are key players in spatial

planning, and that their participation is essential for achieving most of the objectives of the ESDP. This participation must henceforth be guaranteed at both national and European level.

Lastly, given that the role of the ESDP is to offer a new spatial perspective to national, regional and local decision-makers, it must also provide them — via the ESPON — with information and arguments to convince them of its worth. Its analysis and recommendations must be presented in clear terms, backed by appropriate maps, and must be accessible to local development players and to the public.

The success of the ESDP's spatial approach depends on its espousal by the public and by the authorities closest to them. This represents a challenge for democracy and subsidiarity and for the sustainable development of the European economy.

Brussels, 14 January 1999.

*The President  
of the Committee of the Regions*

Manfred DAMMEYER

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