

Opinion on spatial planning and inter-regional cooperation in the Mediterranean area

(95/C 133/10)

On 20 December 1993 the Economic and Social Committee, acting under the third paragraph of Rule 23 of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an Opinion on spatial planning and inter-regional cooperation in the Mediterranean area.

The Section for Regional Development and Town and Country Planning, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, unanimously adopted its Opinion on 10 March 1995. The Rapporteur was Mr Cal, who replaced Mr Amato.

At its 324th Plenary Session (meeting of 30 March 1995), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion by a majority vote with two abstentions.

CONTENTS

The present Opinion on spatial planning and inter-regional cooperation in the Mediterranean area is divided up as follows:

1. Introduction
2. The Mediterranean: globalization and marginalization
3. Changing the European development model: a prerequisite for repatterning the Mediterranean area
4. Strategy goals of repatterning in the Mediterranean area
5. Spatial planning policies for the Mediterranean region
6. Trans-European and trans-Mediterranean networks
7. Inter-regional cooperation
8. Involvement of the socio-economic partners
9. Conclusions

1. Introduction

1.1. The competitiveness requirements of an economy which has shifted to sustainable development have obvious spatial implications. This is apparent from the overall strategy of the White Paper, which places considerable emphasis on spatial planning. The aim is that Europe's regions should become more competitive and develop in a sustainable manner, while being more mutually supportive in the interests of economic and social cohesion.

1.2. The need for a European spatial planning policy has been repeatedly highlighted, not least by the Economic and Social Committee⁽¹⁾, and is now widely recognized. Spatial planning enables national and regional bodies to agree on a consistent overall framework which facilitates cooperation and helps iron out certain problems which cannot be resolved in isolation.

1.3. Various ministerial and Council meetings held since the adoption of the first Europe 2000 paper in 1991 have provided the requisite political impetus for concrete action.

The ministerial meetings held in Lisbon in May 1992, Liège in November 1993 (the first informal Council) and Corfu in June 1994 all addressed the problem. The process culminated in Leipzig in September 1994 with the examination of the new Europe 2000+ paper and of the policy guidelines for the 'European spatial development perspective'. A paper on the latter subject was drawn up by the Spatial Development Committee set up following the adoption of Europe 2000.

1.4. A number of studies (analyzed in the Appendix to the present Opinion⁽²⁾) were undertaken in the wake of Europe 2000. They highlight the emergence of new spatial disparities which are liable to aggravate the imbalances between, and within, the EU's regions. Hence transnational measures are needed to influence and, where necessary, alter the EU's spatial balance, and internal and external cross-border cooperation will be vitally important.

Alongside these transnational measures within the EU, it is necessary to consider the case for a transnational and inter-regional cooperation with neighbouring non-EU nations, which will promote coherent development of Europe as a whole.

1.5. The present Opinion focuses on spatial planning and inter-regional cooperation in the Mediterranean. The Committee has already considered the Mediterranean on several occasions⁽³⁾. It now seeks to make a further contribution to the integrated development of

⁽²⁾ ESC 629/94 fin, Appendix.

⁽³⁾ ESC 386/89 fin, OJ No C 221, 26. 3. 1990, OJ No C 168, 10. 7. 1990 and OJ No C 40, 17. 2. 1992.

⁽¹⁾ OJ No C 339, 31. 12. 1991 and OJ No C 287, 4. 11. 1992.

the Mediterranean regions with a view to boosting economic and social cohesion and in keeping with the strategy put forward in the White Paper.

2. The Mediterranean: globalization and marginalization

2.1. Earlier ESC Opinions have examined the effect which the globalization of the economy is having on the Mediterranean region. This globalization mainly concerns the most technologically advanced companies, sectors and regions, and is progressively marginalizing the less developed businesses, sectors and regions.

The Mediterranean is an unstable, rapidly changing region which is being weakened as development is increasingly drawn towards Europe's core regions. At the same time, marked disparities in growth and wealth within the Mediterranean area accentuate its fragmentary nature.

2.2. The trans-regional studies drawn up by the Commission under the Europe 2000 project confirm this marginalization of the Mediterranean.

There has always been a considerable gap between the EU's Mediterranean regions and the 'centre capitals' ⁽¹⁾. The gap between the Mediterranean and Alpine regions is even more striking; per capita GDP in the Alpine Arc ⁽²⁾ has now outstripped that of the 'centre capitals'.

In the case of the Mediterranean regions, the gap is not only apparent from macroeconomic indicators (per capita GDP, unemployment, etc.) but also from structural factors which are of vital importance to spatial organization. These include:

- structural unemployment (especially among young people) and the lay-offs caused by the recession;
- serious under-industrialization and poor industrial services;

(1) According to Europe 2000+, the 'centre capitals' region includes South East England, the southern Netherlands, Belgium, North and North East France (including the Paris basin), Luxembourg, and Central Western and South West Germany.

(2) According to the Commission study, the Alpine Arc comprises:

- in Germany: Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria
- in France: Alsace, Franche-Comté, Rhône-Alpes and the Alpine departments of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
- in Italy: Piedmont, Val d'Aosta, Lombardy, Veneto, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Emilia Romagna, Marche
- Austria
- Switzerland
- Liechtenstein.

- development of the informal economy;
- incipient crisis and loss of competitiveness in the tourist sector;
- inadequacy of infrastructure networks;
- a perverse transport policy which puts the emphasis on road transport; congested communications systems;
- weak farm structures that are disadvantaged by the CAP, reliant on support, and becoming increasingly uncompetitive;
- serious ecological problems: soil erosion, sea and air pollution, urban pollution, drift away from upland and inland areas, speculative building on the coast which is affected both by deindustrialization and by mass tourism, and emerging serious problems with regard to drinking water;
- crisis of the welfare and public assistance systems (considerable in the Italian Mezzogiorno and Liguria, Greece, Andalusia, and Provence/Côte d'Azur);
- inefficient public authorities and substantial lack of local planning schemes (with a few exceptions).

2.3. The widening development disparities within the EU give concern about an overall loss of external competitiveness. The two processes have been inter-linked in the past, but the whole EU is now experiencing a problem well-known in Italy, i.e. the backwardness of some of its regions is hamstringing its ability to compete in the global market place. Economic and social cohesion is not just a question of solidarity; it is also important for Europe's overall competitiveness.

2.4. The pull towards the centre is bringing significant changes in development corridors: the centre is changing. Lorraine is no longer a heartland of heavy industry, and parts of this large central region are now derelict. The decline of heavy industry has sidelined entire regions, and new development axes are emerging. However, the centre no longer even lies along the banana-shaped arc linking London, Brussels, Frankfurt and Milan which came to the fore in the 1980s and which has now broken up with the emergence of the 'centre capitals'. It is the Alpine Arc which is now making the running, and which is bringing the centre closer to the Mediterranean. As well as helping neighbouring regions to catch up, this is also boosting the commercial and economic momentum of the whole Mediterranean region.

2.5. The polarization/marginalization process has two main implications for the EU's relations with its

Mediterranean neighbours, notably those of the South and East Mediterranean (SEM) ⁽¹⁾.

Firstly, imbalances are worsening because resources are being drained by the skewed pattern of trade and by the deterioration in terms of trade and financial flows resulting from the high level of debt servicing.

Secondly, the dependent status of the SEM also reflects the polarization within Europe which leads the SEM to trade more with central and northern Europe than with southern Europe. This is underscored by the fact that European investment in the SEM also comes mainly from central and northern Europe, since trade follows investment.

2.6. The development scenarios outlined in the trans-regional studies demonstrate the need for a radical change in economic and social trends. If they persist, they will sideline the Latin Rim, fragment and marginalize the Italian Mezzogiorno and Greece, and lead to economic, social and political disintegration of the South and East Mediterranean, on top of that already occurring in the Balkans.

The EU's Mediterranean interface can be highly beneficial for relations between the SEM and the regions of central and northern Europe, and can help to counteract the marginalization of the Mediterranean region as a whole.

3. Changing the European development model: a prerequisite for repatterning the Mediterranean area

3.1. It is clear from the above that the marginalization of the Mediterranean, as an area for the location of industry and the expansion of employment in tradeable services (other than tourism), is closely tied to the type of economic development which has prevailed in Europe, and especially to the way in which it has been shaped

by the more negative trends of the economic globalization process. For instance, there are the additional costs of congestion which affect the competitiveness of many of Europe's stronger regions, while inadequate infrastructure aggravates regional development differentials and drains resources from the weaker to the wealthier regions.

It is now generally recognized that spatial planning, linked to appropriate environmental, economic and social policies, can help to overcome the spatial problems affecting the European economy, although it cannot solve them on its own.

3.2. The need to change the European development model is also recognized in the White Paper. Competitiveness and employment objectives must be revised, and thought must be given to ensuring a harmonious development of the regions which will overcome the marginalization which is holding the Mediterranean regions back. The emphasis should be on a multicentred development pattern, in which the Mediterranean becomes an area of renewed balance and regional cooperation.

3.3. Although the Mediterranean regions share a common history and a common destiny, they differ greatly in economic, social and ecological terms. The Committee has long recommended the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean strategic area (which should also include Eastern Europe). The Commission's recent Communication on strengthening the EU's Mediterranean policy and establishing a Euro-Mediterranean partnership ⁽²⁾ has finally accepted the Committee's suggestion, by proposing a Euro-Mediterranean partnership designed to establish a zone of political stability and security and a Euro-Mediterranean economic area.

The long-term aim of this process must be a close association between the EU and the Mediterranean third countries.

3.3.1. The three strategic areas at world level — in America, Europe and Asia — are all currently forging closer relations with their immediate neighbours.

Over the last decade, this process has taken on a completely different nature to that of the preceding twenty years. Visible trade between the EU, Japan and the United States has grown less rapidly than the United States' trade with Canada and Mexico (now NAFTA) and Japan's with the rest of South East Asia. EU trade has not risen as fast as that of the United States or Japan.

⁽¹⁾ The South and East Mediterranean nations include Israel, Turkey and the countries of the Maghreb and Mashreq. The present analysis does not consider the Balkans, since geopolitical problems and the present conflict have taken precedence over economic relations with the EU.

⁽²⁾ COM (94) 427 final.

Unlike them, the EU has been unable to boost its economic relations with its Mediterranean and Eastern European neighbours.

3.4. As the White Paper notes, we are witnessing dramatic changes in technology and in work organization, as well as the emergence of new sectors, services and products. The development of the Mediterranean region must take account of these changes, in order to give it a firmer footing within the world economy and eschew too heavy a reliance on traditional forms of industrial investment, the limitations of which are now clear.

3.5. At the same time, the EU must promote policies which allow the SEM to develop by creating an internal and regional market, improving living standards, and eliminating structural imbalances (deficits in food, health, training, balance of payments, and so on). This process, far from competing with that of the EU's Mediterranean areas, can be cooperative in nature, and should not be limited (as it has so far) to the clothing industry but should extend to the production of a wider range of consumer goods. Complementary links could be forged between the two sides of the Mediterranean, buttressed by trade in goods, knowhow, consumption patterns and an increasingly competitive workforce.

3.6. Compatible development on both sides of the Mediterranean is clearly the main prerequisite for establishing new cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean area. However, there are at least four other intervention areas that have significant implications for Mediterranean spatial planning and bring a need for radical revision of Community policies and for new joint development policies.

- a) The problems of arid agriculture and of regions with water shortages; it is vitally important to focus biotechnology and agronomic research on these problems, in the interests of reliability of food supplies, desertification control, and expansion of science parks. The Committee would again draw attention to the impact which agricultural policy measures may have on the environment and the rural economy. Dramatic changes in Mediterranean farming regions could also further aggravate the flight from the land and the desertification of rural areas.
- b) Stemming of environmental decay, and improvement of land: the specific nature of the Mediterranean

region and the growing costs of land degradation, bring a need for work on sustainable development. In all countries, water treatment policy is important for effectively combating the pollution of the Mediterranean. Research and training bodies must adopt a new approach to the problem.

- c) Tourism. The countries on the southern flank of the Mediterranean are finding new fields in which they can compete with the north. Cooperation in this sector, which requires efficient agencies (such as those found in Austria, Germany and other northern European countries) would help the Mediterranean regions to compete more effectively with the new holiday formulas being offered elsewhere. Another aim here should be to remove the environmental risks caused by the presence of too many tourists in ecologically delicate areas.
- d) Training. Close two-way cooperation is needed at all levels. Basic literacy campaigns, technical institutes, universities, refresher and further training courses in the south; training and integration schemes for immigrant workers and new university courses in the north.

3.6.1. The key to Mediterranean development lies in making the best possible use of human resources. Drawing on its own experience, the Community can assist in the reinforcement of R& D capacity, training for new technologies, and further training for workers faced with industrial change, in order to foster the emergence of a forward-looking workforce able to adapt to changing circumstances.

4. Strategic goals of repatterning in the Mediterranean area

4.1. To ensure that the new development scenario and economic policies are consistent with a more balanced thrust of spatial planning, an effective European spatial planning policy is needed. This should lay down precise, binding guidelines, accepted by all parties, for the economic and spatial planning policies of the EU, the Member States, and the regional and local authorities.

In this context the Committee welcomes the work being done by the Commission and Member States, within the Committee on Spatial Development, to define a 'European spatial development perspective'.

4.2. The main strategic goal for the Mediterranean area should be to alter development and communications axes, starting with those in southern Europe. It is a well known fact that such axes are generally geared towards the north and that sizable isolated pockets remain (the 'missing links').

New operational links must be developed along east-west axes, and north-south links must be completed so as to end the spatial fragmentation of the Italian Mezzogiorno and Greece and the isolation of the most outlying regions and islands.

The main east-west axis should link the Algarve to Thrace, passing through Seville, Murcia, Valencia, Barcelona, Marseille, Genoa, Livorno, Rome, Naples, Brindisi, Igumenitza, Patras, Athens and Salonika.

4.3. Euro-Mediterranean integration also requires development axes that enhance the role of the Mediterranean interface.

This mainly involves links between the north and south shores of the Mediterranean: southern Spain and Portugal with Morocco, the regions and main ports of the Latin Arc (which have always looked mainly to the north) and Sicily with the Maghreb and with Malta; the Italian Adriatic regions with Greece, the Balkans and Turkey; and mainland Greece and the Greek islands with the SEM.

Special and considered attention has to be paid to Malta and Cyprus as island communities both with individual and special needs. Consideration must also be given to the emerging needs of Israel and neighbouring areas where the development of trade and economic growth is crucial to developing stable and continuing relationships.

4.4. *A second strategic goal concerns the decongestion of urban areas.*

The sprawl and deterioration of major built-up areas, the unhealthy expansion of urban monsters such as Athens and Cairo, is causing huge environmental, economic, social and civil problems.

The only solution is to decentralize urban functions and create a balanced polycentric urban network. The aim should be to boost the role of medium-sized towns by promoting 'decentralized concentration' rather than excessive fragmentation. The policy must be backed by coordinated urban renovation and environmental measures, as well as measures to combat social exclusion in the big cities.

4.5. A further strategic goal will be integrated management of Mediterranean coastal areas. Global integrated measures must be taken to tackle the problems

caused by congestion, overbuilding, excessive tourism and the increasing undermining of the environment which so often leads to fullscale decay. All this requires a coordinated reassessment of all the productive, service, housing, tourism and leisure activities which take place along coastlines, in their hinterlands, and offshore.

4.6. Decongestion of urban and coastal areas should help to revitalize inland and upland areas. While in central and northern Europe it is rural areas that need to be preserved, in the Mediterranean it is inland and upland areas — defined as 'inland' because they are located between the coasts of the peninsulas and islands, and 'upland' (using the term in the broad sense explained in earlier ESC Opinions) as they are mainly hilly or mountainous. Such areas are generally sparsely populated, losing what few inhabitants they have, and are plagued by environmental decay and sometimes desertification.

Action to revitalize their productive role in agriculture and other economic activities, and attract incomers, would improve the Mediterranean spatial balance.

4.7. Another strategic goal for the Mediterranean region must be the integration of maritime transport. This is particularly important, given the increasingly vigorous growth of trade in this region over recent years. It is necessary to address the issues posed by links between on-shore and maritime activities (fisheries and aquaculture, extractive industries, transport, leisure activities, and so on) and interactions between land and sea, notably those affecting the balance of the environment. Account will also have to be taken of the problems posed by the fragmentation and isolation of the Mediterranean islands, particularly the smaller and more outlying ones.

4.8. The Mediterranean region possesses a huge wealth of natural, environmental, historical, artistic and cultural treasures. These are assets to be conserved, but also resources to be exploited. A farsighted spatial planning policy must address itself to their protection, conservation and exploitation.

4.9. The Committee asks the Committee on Spatial Development to include these strategic goals for restructuring the Mediterranean region in its 'European spatial development perspective'.

5. Spatial planning policies for the Mediterranean region

5.1. The Community does not yet have a full-scale spatial planning policy. Even the 'European spatial development perspective' is limited to cooperation

between the Commission and the Member States. While this might be technically convenient when drawing up the perspective, the Committee feels that what is needed is a Community reference framework that lays down priorities and objectives and is accepted by all the parties concerned. This will foster more effective interregional cooperation and the involvement of interested parties, including the socio-economic partners, at all levels (national, regional and local).

5.2. This is the only way in which the Commission's review and regular updating of Community policies with major spatial implications (e.g. networks, environment, research, agriculture) and its monitoring of the spatial impact of Structural Fund support can develop from mere aspiration or a bureaucratic exercise into a major new Community strategy.

5.3. The Community's Mediterranean policy will form the benchmark for integration with the non-member Mediterranean countries. The recent Commission Communication proposing a strengthened and revamped Mediterranean policy does not specifically mention Euro-Mediterranean spatial planning. However, the proposal to establish a Euro-Mediterranean economic area has major implications for spatial planning, involving as it does free trade, support for regional cooperation (chiefly in the environmental protection sphere), and an increase in decentralized cooperation together with technical and economic cooperation in various sectors. Here too a mechanism must be devised for shaping and monitoring a Mediterranean policy based on a set of strategic restructuring goals.

5.4. For the moment, given the time needed to put such a mechanism in place at both EU and Mediterranean level, the most promising spatial planning targets will be the trans-European networks and inter-regional cooperation.

6. Trans-European and trans-Mediterranean networks

6.1. The Appendix to the present Opinion provides a detailed analysis of the trans-European and trans-Mediterranean networks and puts forward systematic recommendations for the different types of network. Here the Committee simply offers a few general considerations.

6.2. The role of trans-European transport, telecommunications and energy networks in eliminating regional imbalances has assumed strategic importance with the publication of the White Paper, which states that they should be the focus of Community action (including

short-term measures) to boost competitiveness and employment. This is a matter of crucial importance as the choice of networks will clearly have medium and long-term economic, political and social implications, and will affect the EU for the next thirty to fifty years.

6.3. Hence the question of networks has implications for growth, restoration of balance and strategic planning. From this viewpoint, it is regrettable that the problems and individual proposals set out in the White Paper are completely divorced from any analysis of the spatial (regional) dimension of Community problems.

6.4. The 14 projects presented at the Essen European Council (all of which concern transport) take no account of spatial imbalances or the problem of 'missing links' and intermodal transport.

The Committee realizes that it is necessary to start with projects for which funds are immediately available, but asks that further projects calculated to improve spatial balance and integrate the two sides of the Mediterranean be added to the priority list as soon as possible.

6.5. As regards the relation between 'infrastructure networks' and 'development and integration between Mediterranean nations', the Section would merely note that networks must be decided and implemented in the light of their suitability for the declared economic and social objectives, and not in simple financial terms. In other words, the case for building a road or laying an energy pipeline should be assessed first and foremost in terms of its structural impact, of its impact on the development and integration of user regions, and only secondarily in terms of its impact on employment, regional income, etc.

6.6. The time factor is crucial when deciding which schemes are to be given priority. If for financial reasons priority goes to projects which reinforce existing trends, when in fact it would be better to reverse them, spatial imbalances will increase and the scope for subsequent corrective measures will be constrained for some time to come.

7. Inter-regional cooperation

7.1. Alongside trans-European and trans-Mediterranean networks, inter-regional cooperation is the most concrete and practical way of launching a Mediterranean spatial planning policy.

To this end, a significant portion of EU resources earmarked for inter-regional cooperation should be assigned to the Mediterranean with a view to securing the requisite spatial balance. The bulk of these resources currently goes to the EU's central and northern regions.

7.2. Community support for inter-regional cooperation in the Mediterranean should give priority to programmes and projects which:

— focus on:

- a) the various aspects of economic integration and joint development: sectoral (industry, agriculture, tourism), factors (R& D, training) and infrastructure (transport, telecommunications, energy, water resources);
- b) sustainable development and environmental and spatial rehabilitation;

— pursue the strategic goals set out in point 4 for repatterning the Mediterranean area: new development guidelines, decongestion of urban areas, integrated management of coastal areas, revitalization of inland and upland areas, integration of maritime transport, conservation and upgrading of the countryside and cultural treasures.

7.3. The inter-regional cooperation promoted by the Community can be defined according to:

- a) type of target area: regions, big cities, local sub-regional units;
- b) spatial categories: adjacent or non-adjacent areas (cross-border or transnational cooperation);
- c) geographical areas: cooperation within the EU or between EU regions and neighbouring regions (EFTA, CEEC, and potentially also SEM);
- d) levels of cooperation:
 - pooling of experience, knowhow transfer networks;
 - spatial planning (new priority for 1994-1999);
 - projects involving investment in infrastructure and other facilities.

Linkage between the various categories has hitherto been rather selective: for example, cooperation has only functioned at some of the levels mentioned and has been confined to certain spatial categories and geographical areas. In the Committee's view, there should be no limits to the mix of target areas, spatial categories, geographical areas and cooperation levels in the Mediterranean. The proposals which follow are divided up according to cooperation levels, but on the understanding that each level may cover a variety of target areas, that cooperation may be crossborder or otherwise, and that inter-regional cooperation may be confined to the EU or may extend to the SEM.

7.4. Although the pooling of experience and knowhow transfer networks are the most basic form of inter-regional cooperation, they are not the least important.

For the period 1994-99, the Commission has proposed continuing the Pacte and Recite programmes which the Committee agrees have produced good results. A larger number of local/regional authorities in southern Europe should be encouraged to participate in projects pursuing the aims described in 7.2 above.

The Commission also intends to strengthen the Ouverture/Ecos programmes (cooperation between EU local/regional authorities and those of the Phare and Tacis nations). Pursuant to the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean area, appropriate support should be granted to cooperation schemes between local/regional authorities in the southern EU and the Balkan and Black Sea countries. In particular, the Committee calls for the extension of the Ouverture/Ecos programmes to all SEM as of 1995.

To this end, Community resources will have to be reallocated to offset the cofinancing difficulties faced by the authorities in the partner countries (a problem which has already arisen with the CEEC).

7.5. Under Europe 2000+, the Commission envisages co-financing the following over the next five years:

- a) spatial development projects and feasibility studies which help to promote spatial planning, which have a transnational dimension and which are of Community interest;
- b) transnational, spatial-planning demonstration projects with a strong transnational aspect (water catchment areas, upland areas, coastlines, etc.), together with schemes which reflect innovative spatial-planning models.

The Committee endorses these proposals as meeting the needs of the Mediterranean area. The Commission

should pay special attention to pilot projects and feasibility studies designed to integrate sub-areas within the Mediterranean (Latin Rim — southern Mediterranean — Adriatic — south-west Mediterranean) and integrated development planning for EU and SEM Mediterranean regions.

7.6. At present, the only EU co-financing option for inter-regional cooperation projects involving investment in infrastructure and other facilities is Interreg II. This severely limits interregional cooperation, as the Committee pointed out in its recent Opinions on the Community initiatives. In particular, these Opinions recommended an extension of the scope of the Interreg Programme⁽¹⁾.

The first problem is the requirement that projects must cover an uninterrupted (i.e. cross-border) area. The rationale here is that inter-regional cooperation should focus mainly on infrastructure, thus excluding joint economic or production-related projects designed to promote complementary relations and integration in certain sectors or regions (which need not be geographically adjacent).

Secondly, only two Mediterranean maritime frontiers within the EU are eligible (Corsica-Sardinia and Italy-Greece). Given the need to build east-west axes embracing intermodal and therefore maritime links, the maritime frontiers separating the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy from the French and Spanish Mediterranean coasts should also be made eligible.

Thirdly, Interreg II only extends to two cases of inter-regional cooperation with the SEM: Andalusia/Morocco and Apulia/Albania. It does not cover obvious maritime neighbours such as Sicily/Tunisia, Crete/Egypt and the Aegean islands/Turkey.

These limitations on Interreg II are particularly untenable when we consider that the Interreg/Phare combination has already built up solid cooperation with neighbouring areas. It is not clear why this cannot be extended to all the SEM. Moreover, although the 1994

budget allocated the SEM significant resources for inter-regional cooperation with the EU (which will receive a further boost under the new Mediterranean policy proposals), these resources paradoxically remain untapped because corresponding funding is not available on the Community side.

The mid-term review of Interreg II must rectify these limitations. Interreg should be extended to all types of transnational spatial planning cooperation (and not just cross-border cooperation), both between EU regions and between them and all the SEM. This will inevitably require an increase in the funds allotted to Interreg II.

Pending this, the Commission should allocate priority financing to spatial-planning pilot projects and feasibility studies which pave the way for investment projects not currently eligible for Interreg II funding, both within the EU (integration projects for non-adjacent areas) and between EU regions and SEM; this should start with the most obvious maritime frontiers excluded hitherto, such as Sicily/Tunisia.

In a similar context, the European Parliament has introduced a new provision into the Community budget covering the possible financing, under Interreg II, of a new Community initiative on inter-regional cooperation between Mediterranean regions. The Committee urges the Commission to act on this forthwith.

7.7. If a significant number of inter-regional cooperation projects (at the three cooperation levels described) is to be funded, it is important that they be mutually consistent. Hence the need to establish a general framework setting out the objectives for the repatterning of the Mediterranean region which can be used to assess the orientation and impact of projects for which Community funding is proposed, and their consistency with funding from other sources such as EIB loans.

8. Involvement of the socio-economic partners

8.1. It is clear from the general approach and practical recommendations propounded here that the Committee intends the democratic institutions — first and foremost, local/regional authorities — to play a key role in the spatial planning of the Mediterranean. The affinities, shared interests and common external policies put forward by the regions will play a crucial part in the

⁽¹⁾ ESC Opinions in OJ No C 304, 10. 11. 1993, OJ No C 295, 22. 10. 1994.

establishment of a coherent Mediterranean socio-economic area, as will their ability to propose, participate in and monitor the implementation of Community and national economic measures.

However, the role of the local and regional authorities will only be truly democratic if it is buttressed by consultation of the socio-economic partners⁽¹⁾.

8.2. Without such consultation, measures cannot be effective. It is no coincidence that the instruments being proposed here (networks and inter-regional cooperation) imply a greater concern for internally generated development; and the success of such development hinges to a large extent on involvement of the socio-economic partners. A recent OECD study⁽²⁾ showed that unemployment is lower in areas where trade unions, employers and local authorities work in partnership.

8.3. Involvement of the socio-economic partners can also help to improve openness at all tiers of authority.

8.4. A socio-economic partnership is also vital to the creation of an EU-SEM joint development area if we wish to couple the economic area with a Euro-Mediterranean social area, this being the sole way of avoiding attempts to achieve competitiveness by cutting social protection.

8.5. Involvement of the socio-economic partners, at all levels, in all stages of inter-regional cooperation could boost the effectiveness and transparency of the programmes and projects submitted for funding.

9. Conclusions

9.1. The Mediterranean region faces serious spatial imbalances (geographical fragmentation, isolation of the outermost areas, etc.). These imbalances are linked to the European development mode (globalization/polarization/marginalization), and the only way to remove them is by adopting a multicentred development pattern. The Mediterranean must become a centre of development within a wider Euro-Mediterranean strategic area. To this end, it must strengthen its internal cohesion, integrate its sub-areas, and pursue Euro-Mediterranean joint development.

9.2. The EU must adopt a spatial planning policy. The 'European spatial development perspective' is only a first step. It must be followed by the drafting of a Community reference framework, with input from all the relevant authorities, which lays down priorities and objectives and is accepted by all the parties concerned. This will foster more effective inter-regional cooperation and the involvement of interested parties, including the socio-economic partners, at all levels (national, regional and local).

9.3. The strategic aims of this blueprint will be as follows:

- new east-west and north-south axes of production and service development (notably industry, agriculture, tourism, R&D and training) and infrastructure development (transport, telecommunications, energy, water resources);
- sustainable development and environmental and spatial rehabilitation;
- decongestion of urban areas;
- integrated management of coastal areas;
- revitalization of inland and upland areas;
- integration of maritime transport;
- conservation and exploitation of the environmental and local heritage.

9.4. For the immediate future, the scope for a Mediterranean spatial planning policy lies mainly in:

- the trans-European and trans-Mediterranean networks;
- inter-regional cooperation.

9.5. Detailed proposals for the various trans-European and trans-Mediterranean networks are set out in the Appendix to this Opinion.

The Committee also asks that the list of White Paper priority projects approved in Essen be extended as soon as possible to take in other projects calculated to restore spatial balance and integrate the two sides of the Mediterranean.

9.6. The Committee calls for the deployment of all existing inter-regional cooperation instruments, and asks:

- that all projects which affect the Mediterranean area, and for which Community funding is sought, be checked against common spatial planning guidelines;

⁽¹⁾ Opinion in OJ No C 393, 31. 12. 1994.

⁽²⁾ OECD employment study, Paris 1994.

- that the mid-term review of Interreg II extend the programme to all types of transnational (rather than solely cross-border) spatial planning cooperation, both between EU regions and between them and all SEM countries;
 - for greater involvement of the Mediterranean region in the Pacte and Recite programmes;
 - for extension of the Ouverture/Ecos programmes to all SEM;
 - that the Commission give priority to financing pilot projects and feasibility studies which:
 - a) help to integrate sub-areas within the Mediterranean (Latin Rim — southern Mediterranean — Adriatic — south-west Mediterranean);
 - b) promote integrated development plans between EU and SEM Mediterranean regions, and between SEMs;
 - c) pave the way for investment projects not currently eligible for Interreg II funding, both within the EU (integration projects for non-adjacent areas) and between EU regions and SEM; this should start with the most obvious maritime frontiers excluded hitherto, such as Sicily/Tunisia.
- 9.7. Involvement of the socio-economic partners, at all levels, in all stages of inter-regional cooperation could boost the effectiveness and transparency of the programmes and projects submitted for funding.

Done at Brussels, 30 March 1995.

*The President
of the Economic and Social Committee*

Carlos FERRER
