

INTERREG 35**Declaration on the future of Interreg**

Adopted at the Art of Cooperation conference
in Budapest on 14 November 2024

Cooperation is the heart and essence of solidarity, promoting common understanding and sustainable economic growth. This is especially true for collaborations across borders where European values are acknowledged and applied together with regional and national stakeholders within and beyond the EU. Joint initiatives along the internal and external borders of the EU, together with candidate and neighbouring partner countries, as well as with transnational and interregional programmes, clearly demonstrate that Interreg is an utmost driving force in economic, social and territorial cohesion. Interreg programmes have proven to be a catalyst for, on one side, building solidarity and trust across Europe, and on the other side for reconciliation between countries, nations, and minorities. As numerous studies demonstrate, without Interreg, the quality of cooperation beyond national borders would be much weaker or even absent. **Therefore we, the participants of the second edition of the Art of Cooperation conference**

STRESS that Interreg, as the only initiative that has been sharing unchanged values for 35 years, with an implementation system that has evolved and crystallized through these decades, has proven its relevance by its high added value for Europe. By empowering various actors that are not otherwise engaged to cooperate across national borders, learn from each other and develop joint solutions to tackle common challenges, Interreg builds trust and solidarity even in times of crises and fosters people to people relations within and beyond EU borders;

RECALL the adaptability and flexibility of Interreg programmes when facing crises, proven during the COVID-19 pandemic - when the programmes managed to provide flexibility within the rules to the partnerships in order to update and finalise their projects successfully; but also after Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine when, programmes responded to the immediate needs of Ukraine with proactivity and flexibility;

REMIND that environmental, technological and social matters do not stop at the borders. Interreg programmes have been effectively contributing to the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU, furthermore, without these interventions, the European cohesion would not have been achieved the current level;

CALL THE ATTENTION that despite their limited budget, the Interreg programmes have used the available funds very effectively making the most of limited resources, public budgets, capacities and skills supporting the development of joint transport and business infrastructure, B2B cooperation, across-border service provision (including in fields like health care and education where the Member States retain their competences), and the use of the spatial potential of functional urban centres, meaning also those located along a border;

HIGHLIGHT that Interreg scales up cooperation to respond to shared transnational needs and challenges Europe currently faces, including economic competitiveness, demographic decline and climate change already impacting our lives, makes European cooperation more crucial than ever. Through Interreg, projects are able to address such global challenges beyond borders, this way contributing to regional resilience. The wide variety of cooperation project formats, including small projects and strategic operations, or peer reviews ensure that Interreg can respond flexibly to evolving needs;

APPRECIATE the diversity of European regions and **HIGHLIGHT** the need to preserve their unique characteristics in the future including their ability to develop shared regional visions through continuous negotiations, consensus-building, and conflict resolution as well as the use of territorial assets like human and relational capitals;

EMPHASISE the strong role Interreg plays in EU enlargement by building the capacities of the accession and candidate countries to work with and transpose the EU aquis communautaire and EU procedures at national level;

ARE OF THE OPINION that cooperation across national borders provides EU regions with the opportunity to exchange best practices and build long-term connections, networks and partnerships, and **UNDERLINE** the importance of Interreg programmes in the building of institutions and capacities in order to lay the foundations for more effective public policies;

EMPHASISE the need for eliminating the persisting legal and administrative obstacles hampering the completion of the Single Market and the free use of services across national boundaries which can be accomplished through Interreg programmes;

RECALL the initiative of the Cohesion Alliance and **AGREE** that Cohesion Policy is the glue that keeps Europe together, strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion across the European Union; and Interreg is the crucial pipeline to foster cohesion that facilitates cooperation within and beyond the borders of the EU serving as a tool that disseminates shared values and turns them into tangible actions to guide regions toward a shared vision. Art of Cooperation provides a platform for shaping how Interreg continues to strengthen these bonds, ensuring its relevance and adaptability in the future.

In consequence, we

REMIND everyone of the importance of the permeability of the borders, being one of the outstanding European values, which is strongly supported by the implementation of joint projects across borders – something that would be difficult to imagine without Interreg;

CALL THE ATTENTION to consider the needs and specificities in territorial and geographic characteristics of European regions particularly in border regions and transnational areas, when drafting regulations for the new programming period of post-2027, and **EMPHASISE** that Interreg shall keep its independent regulatory framework and its own mechanism, which have evolved and crystallized over the last 35 years;

HIGHLIGHT the need for a participatory process involving all relevant stakeholders, particularly the Interreg experts/practitioners to ensure the transparent development of the regulative framework for which we **OFFER** our first-hand expertise gained for decades and high-level professional commitment to uphold European values through Interreg enhancing cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation.