

NETWORKING CITIES, COMMUNITIES, AND REGIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA. OPTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION WITHIN THE EU NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

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As a new field of EU policy, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a part and a result of a reorganization of the Union's political institutions, which had its beginnings in diverse insights: with its enlargement, the EU severed economic and cultural areas that had developed until then, creating new fault lines. The prosperity gap and the resultant conflict and migration potential along the external borders of the Union have increased. The hot spots in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region have moved closer. The demands on an EU foreign policy which needs to be renovated have expanded. And finally – given these developments, the Union's accession policy needs to be revised.

The ENP does not aim to replace existing agreements and forms of cooperation but to complement them. Like its predecessors, the new policy is based on the final declaration and the action plan for 2005–2010 of the Barcelona+10 Summit of 2005. Nevertheless, new instruments were created – the European Neighbourhood Action Plans (ENAPs) and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The ENAPs are binding bilateral documents that define country-related goals, whereas the ENPI serves to finance the ENP and its three areas of investment – moving the neighbouring states closer to the EU domestic market, promoting socioeconomic development, and promoting cross-border cooperation (CBC). A new aspect of the ENPI is the combination of foreign assistance and structural funds in an integrated tool for cooperation between sub-national bodies on both sides of the EU's external borders.

We do not know much about the workings of local politics in the Middle East. For CBC to be successful, it is important to understand how sub-national decisions in the region are made. This article answers this question by pointing out the objectives, instruments, and mechanisms of CBC, and by illuminating the political and institutional framework as well as the problems prevailing in the southern Mediterranean region. Moreover, it shows how to make use of the CBC potential in this area.

One part of the ENP is the involvement of sub-national players in the cooperation between the EU and its neighbouring states. Cooperation among regional corporations could even become a new pillar of European foreign relations. CBC itself is nothing new. It was preceded by, for example, regional and cohesion policy, cooperation with the east and southeast European

transformation states, and cooperation with the Mediterranean littoral states in the south and east. Today, sub-national players are an integral part of international cooperation. In the EU, it has been consisting of three instruments since 2006: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), and the European Cohesion Fund (ECF).

The following three goals have been set: convergence, competitiveness & employment, and territorial cooperation. The key tool is the INTERREG programme which promotes cooperation between border regions as if they were part of one regional unit. At the centre we find a combination of top-down and bottom-up elements in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. It was and still is important to expand the circle of those being promoted by territorial cooperation initiatives. While the fifties primarily concentrated on overcoming war experiences or abolishing enemy bogeymen, the years after 1989 were dominated by a transition to liberal and constitutional thinking or by the democratization of the administration.

The starting points for CBC programmes are the principles of the INTERREG programme which is based on a seven-year plan, divided responsibility of the bodies involved, subsidiarity, and co-financing. A new aspect is the possibility to use internal and external funds for cross-border cooperation in a decentralized and sub-national way, following the principle: 'Two sources of funding, one set of rules'.

Integrating regional corporations in the Mediterranean partnership has its benefits. Sub-national players hold important functions in the polity and have their own jurisdictions. European regional corporations have experience in essential areas, and their involvement in trans-mediterranean cooperation could give a valuable impetus to the southern neighbours. However, there are drawbacks as well, such as differences in the administration and resources of those involved, and the insufficient experience of many sub-national players.

Now, what players decide on sub-national concerns? What resources are available to meet these concerns, and who has access to them? And what are the tasks of sub-national players? Most Arab states have a centralist and hierarchical organisation; there is no scope for sub-national players. And there is another point: Historically, cities were the seat of the sovereign power, not its antagonists. They were allies of the sovereign rulers, not their opponents. City air did not make you 'free', but it made you 'safe'.

This might explain why urban autonomy does not have a real tradition in the region. The situation did not change until independence after the colonial era, when the most important supporting groups and urban elites of the time were destroyed, or at least lost their power. Ethnic or religious expulsion and

political cleansing followed. Since then, the 'periphery' of these countries has been closely linked to the 'centre' in many cases. Those who are in power today do not hold a mandate but an office; they are appointed officials, not elected MPs. In the national context, most of them are subordinate to the supreme decision-maker. In most Middle Eastern countries, cooperation between the centre and the periphery rests upon institutions that are subordinate to the central power and its control. And wherever a regional corporation in the southern Mediterranean region is authorized to make its own decisions, they are very often undermined by national centres refusing to give financial aid. To be sure, the cities, communities, and regions in this area do carry political weight, but they have never taken the step towards sub-national self-administration. As a consequence, the gap between ambition and reality has widened. Remits shrink, and non-governmental players take on public tasks.

Moreover, it must be kept in mind that CBC is limited to the coastal zones of the southern Mediterranean target area, i.e. to territories that are privileged anyway and have so far developed quite well. And there are other important factors that do nothing to ensure a sustainable success of this policy in the southern Mediterranean region. Originally, territorial cooperation developed outside the former European Economic Community (EEC). Its breakthrough does not result from political chance but from the lobbying of sub-national civil-society players on the European plane. And finally, CBC is not a 'brain-child of Brussels' but a plant springing from European diversity. The weak points of the new policy and, therefore, the stumbling blocks on the path to its implementation are that none of the above was taken into consideration while developing CBC, and that the EU itself is pursuing an intransparent course of action.

How can we deal with this situation constructively? What can the Federal Republic of Germany do? Does international engagement yield any benefits for the players involved? What countries of the southern Mediterranean region do currently deserve special attention, and what is it that can be built up there? These and other questions must be asked and answered. And finally, it would be important to take a look at the role of political foundations, such as those in Germany, within this policy. Because of their experience gathered over many years, their contacts, and their know-how, these institutions are predestined to become active. German political foundations do not act on behalf of the state, nor are they profit-oriented consulting firms. They are more highly esteemed than many other players. In their international work, which is based on the pillars of education, consultation, and dialogue, they are addressing a wide field of activity. This includes developing and conducting education measures for office and mandate holders, sending out experts and trainers, establishing and maintaining local partnerships, and compiling strategy papers and feasibility studies. In this context, activities should con-

concentrate on subjects that are important to the southern partners and in which Germany has a special expertise. Lessons should be learned from the conventional mistakes made in the cooperation between local authorities, such as the fragmentation of the player landscape or thinking in charity categories. In brief: it would be an essential step for us if we succeeded in keeping an eye on the problems and needs of our partners without neglecting our own interests and objectives.

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