

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICYEuropean Territorial Cooperation, Macro-regions, Interreg and Programme Implementation I
DirectorBrussels,
REGIO.DDG.D/LAP**Subject: Interreg V-A Euregio Maas-Rhine 2014-2020
2014TC16RFCB001
State of play of implementation**


Ref.: Your letter of 15 June 2018 (2018/40519)

Dear 

Thank you for your reply to my letter of 13 February 2018 (Ares(2018)831292). It clarifies a number of issues and I would like to provide you with our feedback on each of the points made. This letter follows the structure of my original letter.

- ***“Double role of some of the partners who are at the same time assessing projects and approving them at the MC meetings”***: We welcome your new rule that the persons who have been involved in the preparation of the projects (e.g. through the Regional Antennas) or who represent a programme partner cannot take part in the assessment of the project in question. However, this does not solve the fact that there is still an imperfect segregation of duties between the preparation of the projects (done with the support of the Regional Antennas who also work for their regional authority) and the decision on the projects (in the Monitoring Committee, where the same regional authorities are represented). The issue remains that the persons in the Regional Antennas have a ‘double hat’ (working both for the Joint Secretariat and for the regional authorities who are also members of the Monitoring Committee).

We are of the opinion that this system cannot be carried over into the next programming period (2021-2027). If Regional Antennas are necessary (which would really have to be demonstrated given the size of the programme and the many possibilities offered by digital tools), they would have to report directly and solely to the Joint Secretariat, which has to remain at the heart of day-to-day implementation of the programme. Regional Antennas or Info Points should only be seen as exceptions established in case of long or inaccessible border regions. In all cases, the role of these antennas is primarily to provide information and advice and to carry out some on-the-


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spot monitoring activities. They should in no way be directly involved in project assessment and selection.

For the current programme, as (a) this has not been considered as an issue by the Audit Authority, as (b) there is no factual evidence that it has biased the decisions by the Monitoring Committee (which would have been the case if projects would have been selected on other grounds than their own merits) and as (c) most of the budget (two third) is already programmed, we can accept the *status quo* on the condition that the representatives of the Regional Antennas do not take part (a) to the advisory group, nor (b) to the Monitoring Committee (it should be someone else than the person working in the Regional Antennas).

- ***“Inefficient use of the programme's Technical Assistance resources, resulting in an understaffed capacity of the Joint Secretariat (JS) as well as the Managing Authority (MA) compared to the substantial resources attributed to the Regional Antennas”***: We welcome your initiative to mandate an internal audit on the capacity and efficiency of the Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat and that if deemed necessary, an additional budget of € 900.000 (coming from the IVA surplus) could be made available (e.g. for extra staff). We also welcome the € 1.6 million additional means provided by the Province of Limburg.
- ***“Long and cumbersome decision-making process during MC meetings and preparatory meetings”***: We welcome your initiative to allow projects to submit a first preliminary application that is assessed by the advisory group before submitting the final project. This should indeed improve the quality of the applications and facilitate the decision on their selection. We also welcome the creation of a ‘preparatory’ meeting of the Monitoring Committee so that the latter focuses its discussion on more strategic issues.
- ***“We notice the resistance of some of the partners to implement structural reforms and to follow the new intervention logic for the implementation of European Territorial Cooperation programmes that was set in the 2014-2020 period with the focus on results, impact, performance, quality of projects and good governance”***: We take note that you participated to a training and organised expert-meetings. We underline once more that the intervention logic is a key feature of the 2014-2020 programming period: we count on the Managing Authority and the Monitoring Committee to manage the programme in such a way that the objectives set are met at the end of the period. All programme implementation steps and activities have to be geared towards this aim.
- ***“The Commission also expresses its concerns that local political considerations seem to dominate above the general cooperation logic in the programme”***: Whilst your reply does not explicitly cover this issue, we consider that all the improvements mentioned above will contribute to a better situation. We also consider that it is one of the key roles of the Managing Authority to remind all the partners sitting at the table that the programme is designed to improve living and working conditions of the programme area as a whole and not of isolated parts of it. Trust and consensus are key words in this context.

Overall, as you see, I consider your reply satisfactory. However, I draw your attention to the still imperfect segregation of duties between the preparation of the projects (done with the support of the Regional Antennas who also work for their regional authority)

and the decision on the projects (in the Monitoring Committee, where the same regional authorities are represented). We will remain very vigilant on this point until the end of the current programme (2014-2020).

I fully support your proposal to organise another high-level meeting (or an *ad-hoc* Monitoring Committee). This would be a very good opportunity to discuss the preparation of the new programme (2021-2027). You can count on the Commission's participation.

Finally, I would like to reassure you that we value very much the many efforts done by the Managing Authority, the Province of Limburg, to improve the situation and to deliver good results for the Euregio Maas-Rhine.

Yours sincerely

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