**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

DIRECTORATE GENERAL

REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY

European Territorial Cooperation, macro-regions, Interreg and programme implementation I

Director

Brussels,

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CCI n° 2014TC16RFCB001 - State of play of implementation.

Dear ,


The Commission welcomes the efforts made by the cooperation programme to make up for the delays that affected the first phase of implementation. We congratulate you in particular for the recent designation of authorities, which will help speed up the financial absorption of the programme.

Nevertheless, we would like to alert you to **persisting difficulties** which could lead to concrete risks of the de-commitment in the future.

When attending meetings of the Monitoring Committee (MC) and exchanging views with the programme partners, the Commission has noticed that the difficulties of cooperation which emerged during the programming phase are not entirely resolved and a certain lack of trust between the different partners can still be perceived. The systemic weaknesses related to the management structures and procedures of the programme are partly the source for this lack of trust.

One of the key weaknesses we notice is the **double role of some of the partners** who are at the same time assessing projects and approving them at the MC meetings. Another weakness is the 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. The limited resources at MA/JS level have led to serious delays in project assessment and monitoring.

We are of the opinion that the current set-up is neither appropriate (regional partners are both judge and party) nor efficient (resources not allocated to core programme management tasks). We strongly recommend that the MA and the **MC members** **consider adapting the management set up** in light of the comments above.


Managing Authority Interreg V-A Euregio Maas Rhine
Postbus 5700
NL – 6220 MA Maastricht

Commission européenne/Europese Commissie, 1049 Bruxelles/Brussel, BELGIQUE/BELGIË - Tel. +32 22991111

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/

In addition, the Commission also expresses its concerns that local political considerations seem to dominate above the general cooperation logic in the programme. An example of this can be found in the selection criteria of the programme which are partly ignored by some MC delegations when selecting projects for funding. Another issue of concern is the long and cumbersome decision-making process during MC meetings and preparatory meetings.

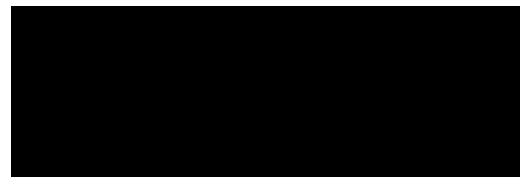
Finally, we notice the resistance of some of the partners to implement structural reforms and to follow the new intervention logic for the implementation of European Territorial Cooperation programmes that was set in the 2014-2020 period with the focus on results, impact, performance, quality of projects and good governance.

We welcome the efforts of the Province of Limburg to try and address some of these issues, for instance through the high level political meeting that took place on 16 October 2017 in Maastricht. We also support the organisation of a new meeting around April 2018 to reflect on the future cooperation within the EMR area. We would like to ask you to keep us informed about the date and agenda of this meeting in the following weeks, and we will ensure that the Commission is represented.

We realise that it is not always easy to come to decisions between thirteen partners from three different countries and five partner regions. However, we encourage the MA to take all possible steps to restore trust between programme partners and to ensure that the EMR is again an example for other cross-border regions of what good cooperation can achieve.

We hope that you can share this assessment with all the partners in the programme so that a constructive dialogue can be established as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



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(DG REGIO)