



## ELISAN recommendations

27<sup>th</sup> October 2009 – Brussels  
 “The social dimension of territorial cohesion”

### Introduction

The outlook for the entry in force of the Treaty of Lisbon is now real. Local and regional authorities from ELISAN network are namely welcoming several interesting provisions:

★ **A reinforced role for Local and regional authorities:** the Lisbon Treaty marks a huge step towards the recognition of the principle of regional and local self-government. The definition of subsidiarity is extended to include the local and regional levels, which means that the EU should not act where action at local or regional level is appropriate and the Committee of the Regions of the EU will have the power to go to the Court of Justice if it believes the subsidiarity principle has been breached

★ **Regarding social cohesion:** the new protocol on public services (or services of general interest) underlines the need for the EU to respect the wide discretion of local and regional authorities in the providing, commissioning and organizing of our public services but also provides for a legal basis to adopt at EU level crossover legislation. It finally introduces a Horizontal Social Clause, which commits the EU Commission with assessing the impact of a EU legislation proposal on well being objectives.

#### 1 Putting the social dimension back at the heart of European Union policies and highlighting the strong links between social aspects and territorial development.

★ **Social cohesion** provides a real added value to the development of territories, as well as economic competitiveness or safeguard of environment.

★ **Social cohesion policies create assets to territories that should be better measured.** They do not resume to compensation measures of side effects resulting from the liberalization process in the globalized economy.

★ The concept of “social cohesion” shall be understood in a large way, **referring to the Council of Europe’s definition:** “the capacity of society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding polarization. Social cohesion must be firmly based on human rights as well as an acceptance of shared responsibility for the welfare of all members of society, especially those who are at risk of poverty or exclusion”.

#### 2 Renew the objective of economic and social cohesion through the principle of territorial cohesion and give European regional policy back its rightful place and legitimacy.

★ Territorial cohesion concept aims at covering both the cohesion **between** but also **inside the regions: appropriate level of intervention, other than regional level**, should be defined in order to counter intra-regional disparities (inside urban / rural units...).

★ Territorial cohesion should lead the Commission and the Member States to **intensify the implication of the appropriate territorial level**, namely local authorities, in the set up and implementation of the EU regional policy.



### 3 Finding a balance between territorial cohesion and the subsidiarity principle bring together as many actors as possible involved in the fight against social exclusion.

★ Territorial cohesion is a cross-disciplinary objective that complements that of economic and social cohesion and should be implemented through the emergence of real European “**multilevel governance**”, such as defined by the European Committee of the Regions<sup>1</sup> : as regarding social cohesion policies, rigid separation of competences between EU and national levels should be broken up with on the one hand, a Union preoccupied with liberalization process, and on the other, member states which guarantee social protection and well-being.

★ **Exchanges and links between different levels should be fostered**, for instance:

- ✓ Inviting councils of local and regional elected representatives to devote special sessions to European policies (namely related to social cohesion) and involve representatives of European institutions on their debates ;
- ✓ Increasing mutual comprehension of the European Union from the local elected, through innovative exchange programs based on “Erasmus” initiative ;
- ✓ Increasing management capacity of small local communities, in order to facilitate access to EU funding opportunities ;
- ✓ Reinforcing the partnership practice horizontally between local and regional authorities and civil society, ensuring that Europeans can participate through the local bodies, which are closest to the people, due to their geographic location ;
- ✓ Developing the collaboration between EU institutions and relevant networks at local and regional level, which help to mobilize these authorities within the European process ;
- ✓ Regarding social policies, where EU has no direct but only coordination competence, encouraging self initiative from local communities to tackle and set up together common challenges and objectives, in reference for instance to the Covenant of EU Mayors committed to local sustainable energy.

★ The objective of territorial cohesion should **support the effective implementation of the EU subsidiarity principle**: it must not entail changing the way competences are distributed and EU intervention must remain complementary to national and locals. It calls for the right and freedom of local and regional authorities, in their capacity as suppliers, administrators and users of services of general economic interest, to make provisions in that area to be maintained.

★ It should be ensured that public and private authorities and other stakeholders could work together on common shared challenges, such as **the conciliation for women between private and professional life**.

<sup>1</sup> “a dynamic process with a horizontal and vertical dimension, which does not in any way dilute political responsibility but on the contrary (...) helps to increase joint ownership and implementation”.



#### 4 Integrate the territorial dimension in the development and implementation of the European Union's overall policy strategies (Lisbon, Gothenburg); test the analysis of the territorial impact of community sectorial policies.

★ Each major Community strategic reform (Lisbon for growth and jobs, Gothenburg for sustainable development) should be accompanied by a **territorial declination action plan**.

★ By analogy with the horizontal social clause in the Lisbon Treaty, the objective of territorial cohesion shall mainstream the use of **territorial impact assessment of different EU sectorial policies**, in order to anticipate their territorial effect.

★ As regarding the territorial impact of development of **services of general economic interest (SGEI)**, namely in the social field, it would consist in ensuring that sectorial policies (competition and public procurement rules, free movement of enterprises and persons inside the internal market) do not attend to the fundamental objective of universal access to these services, notably in regions with relatively low population density.

★ It is important to **better regulate and coordinate observation methodologies and territorial analysis** between different competent levels, in a bottom up approach.

★ The EU Commission should develop **new and alternative indicators to take account of territorial disparities** in public policies, such as accessibility of different social services (health, education...) or composite human development indices.

#### 5 Recall for a strong EU intervention framework and strengthen the complementarities between community and national policies.

★ **The capacity of EU to support social innovation and experimentation on territories should be maintained or even enhanced:** successful experiences of Community initiatives, such as Urban II for urban areas and Leader in rural areas could be reinforced and renewed through the objective of territorial cohesion.

★ **Otherwise, EU capacity for observation, warning, evaluation and coordination but also for support to decision making should be reinforced** in the field of social cohesion, linked to territorial challenges.

★ **The Open method of coordination (OMC) between Member states, in the field of inclusion and social policies should include a territorial dimension**, meaning better implying local and regional authorities, in the respect of their competences, in that transnational benchmarking and evaluation process.

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**2/ Renew the objective of economic and social cohesion through the principle of territorial cohesion and give European regional policy back its rightful place and legitimacy.**

**3/ Finding a balance between territorial cohesion and the subsidiarity principle, bring together as many actors as possible involved in the fight against social exclusion.**

**4/ Integrate the territorial dimension in the development and implementation of the European Union’s overall policy strategies (Lisbon, Gothenburg), test the analysis of the territorial impact of community sectorial policies.**

**5/ Recall for a strong EU intervention framework and strengthen the complementarity between community and national policies.**

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