

Commissioner Danuta Hübner meets with Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands and German President Köhler to celebrate cross-border cooperation

10 October 2007, Enschede-Gronau

**"50 years of cross-border cooperation between Germany and the Netherlands"**

Your Majesty, Mr President, Mr Jansen, Mr Mueller, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for having invited me to participate in the visit of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix and German Federal President Mr. Köhler to the EUREGIO to celebrate 50 years of cross-border cooperation between the Netherlands and Germany.

The EUREGIO has a long tradition for cross-border cooperation and I congratulate you for having been among the very first to get involved in this all-important aspect of the European construction for so long. I am very keen to ensure that the European Commission continues to work closely with institutions like the EUREGIO. These Council of Europe-sponsored bodies have been valuable allies in work undertaken by the EU, notably by understanding so early (already in the 1950s...) the importance of cooperation.

As our debate has shown, a lot has already been achieved over the past 50 years mainly through the existence and commitment of cross-border cooperation bodies such as EUREGIO, which have greatly helped to bridge differences.

These are borders with difficult histories. I know these also from my own country.

But our citizens have experienced how cooperation across borders improves our standards of living and daily lives in many different ways. It greatly improves mutual understanding. In particular, through for instance the INTERREG cooperation programmes.

Our businesses have been able to take advantage of each other's markets. Researchers and scientists have learned from each other and shared results of their activities. The culture sector has demonstrated its capacity for openness through highly successful joint activities. All of this is very visible. Even today, we are going to see projects which deliver all this on a daily basis.

We have seen results – but we also still have some way to go. We have to show continued commitment and ambition for cross-border cooperation, if we are to keep Dutch and German citizens on our side, on the side of building a better Europe together.

Long-standing cooperation at the local or regional level needs to step up. We need to think how best to make use of the added-value that Europe, through its regional policy and instruments can bring to the area.

Our policy is for Growth and Sustainability for Europe. The Lisbon agenda pushes us towards more and better jobs and towards competitiveness and better European positioning in the global economy. Goteborg reminds us of the importance of our resources and protecting our environment. If we want

to attain Growth and Sustainability, we have to work together and make the cohesion policy work effectively. This is why the EU, through its cohesion policy, will continue to support the restructuring and re-organisation of our economic activities and the sustainable use of our natural resources.

And here, within the EUREGIO, we have the opportunity to do this together : the EUREGIO by capitalising on the strengths of both sides of the border and tackling jointly the demographic challenge, competitiveness and climate change – the European Commission by supporting you in managing the instruments of cohesion.

Take the future INTERREG programmes in your area for example. From 2007, a total envelope of **close to 300 million EUR** is available for concrete actions on the Dutch-German border. This envelope will provide finance for jointly addressing risk prevention, better and more efficient health care, economic cooperation or culture – as discussed earlier this morning.

In the field of **risk prevention** : this is a specific priority for our new cross-border cooperation programmes. Intervention fields such as responding to industrial accidents, floods or fires not stopping at the border but including support for neighbours are not only fully eligible but they are strongly encouraged.

**Health care** is currently in a fast changing phase, becoming at the same time ever more sophisticated and costly. This is why European Territorial Cooperation also encourages and promotes shared service provisions in the health sector. Why would two hospitals situated within a 50km radius invest in

very expensive equipment of the same type? Why would they not invest in different health sectors and share their facilities? More and more cooperation of this type is developing across Europe – this is part of the tangible benefits of building Europe together.

And how about our **businesses** and companies? Should they not all be able to benefit from services, infrastructure and knowledge regardless of whether they are on one side of the border or the other? Should we not all join forces to increase our competitiveness in a global economy? We should indeed - and INTERREG on the one hand, but also the other objectives of the European Regional Development Fund on the other hand aim at doing exactly that.

Finally, the field of **culture**. There, experience shows us that cross-border activities are numerous and that stakeholders are never short of ideas. Interest in culture goes hand in hand with curiosity for the other. The challenge for the future will indeed be to ensure that culture continues to contribute to mutual understanding and to tolerance. But we can also foresee that culture will increasingly become a genuine economic sector and a source of jobs and wealth.

Whatever sector you are active in, whatever interest you have in cooperating with your neighbours, **governance** is at the heart of what you do. Over the past decades strong and sustainable links have been established – you have been among the first regions in Europe to show citizens that living in a border area can also bring benefits. Surely this should push us to take this cooperation further and to make sure it is at the heart of what we are doing, not on the margin – and the INTERREG programmes are here to help us do just that.

In this context, the legislative developments around the **European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation** provide us with a chance to make a real difference. Think about it – how much easier it is going to become to work together on risk prevention, on environmental protection, on healthcare, on culture and tourism once public bodies get the chance to do this without the administrative burden of working "internationally".

Your cross-border region has already achieved great results; you are amongst the **pioneers** of euro-regional cooperation. The European Commission counts on you to continue to show the way and demonstrate how beneficial it is for all to cooperate and to turn borders into crossing opportunities rather than obstacles. Doing this is making a genuine contribution to European Cohesion.

The Commission is fully committed to supporting these developments. Funding is available for the next 7 years but also political and technical support is at hand. You can count on us to help you. Together, we should aim high and ensure that the local, regional, national and European levels all contribute their share for a better Europe.

I wish you good luck in your co-operation projects! Thank you for your attention!