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Toward a New Partnership on Cross-Border Cooperation for the Mediterranean Development

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3. BUILDING PARTNERSHIP IN ENPI AND IPA CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Synthesis of the regional reports on the stakeholder and benchmarking analysis¹

3.1 Stakeholder and benchmarking analysis within the framework of the overview of the decentralisation process and cross-border cooperation in the Tuscany Region

Andrea de Guttry in collaboration with Barbara Nicoletti (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Pisa)

Tuscany has traditionally been a region with an extremely high level of interest for the Mediterranean area. This is due to geographical and historical reasons (including its geographic location, the presence of important harbours, traditional economic interests and trade relations with the Southern basin of the Mediterranean). It is also due to the more recent phenomena of the significant presence in Tuscany of migrants coming from Mediterranean countries, the interest and support shown by civil society in Tuscany for specific problems in the Mediterranean basin (the Palestinian issue in particular), the beginning of a phase of potential competition between Tuscany and other Mediterranean regions in specific areas such as tourism and SMEs and incentives offered by specific EU programmes, such as Interreg.

This interest is manifested in the active involvement of more than eighty Tuscan actors (representing the public sector, NGOs, the private sector, civil society, education and research centres, etc.) in cooperation projects with other Mediterranean partners that range from development projects to humanitarian projects and international solidarity initiatives. From a geographical point of view, Palestine, Western Sahara, Morocco, Algeria and Israel are the countries and territories which mainly benefit from the activities of these Tuscan actors.

In recent years, cooperation with Mediterranean partners has been positively affected by the more strategic approach developed by many Tuscan actors towards international cooperation. While in the past most of the initiatives targeting Mediterranean countries were organised on a case-by-case basis and without looking for potentially more structured and coordinated approaches and/or synergies with pre-existing projects, today the "Tuscan system of cooperation" is increasing the quality and consistency of its cooperation projects with Mediterranean partners with a beneficial impact on the quality and long-term sustainability of the projects themselves.

As far as the analysis of the Tuscan stakeholders is concerned, the 21 identified institutions, who were selected on the basis of their current or potential interest in future development in various types of cooperation activities in the Mediterranean area, definitively represent a fair cross-section of Tuscan active involvement in Interreg programmes and of those stakeholders potentially interested in becoming active partners in these or similar programmes.

Of the eleven interviewed public authorities, seven participate in the Interreg programme, one in the Neighbourhood Programme CARDS, one in the Neighbourhood Programme TWINNING PHARE, one in the "City-to-City" decentralised cooperation programme of UNOPS/UNDP and one in the GOLD Maghreb decentralised cooperation programme. Among the seven institutions participating in the Interreg programme, there is only one Province and one Municipality, while the others represent Regional offices or instrumental

¹ The complete regional reports are downloadable by the web site of the Compart project www.compartproject.org.

The complete reports comprehend also the analysis carried out in Western Macedonia region, Tangeri Teotuan region, Andalusia region.

agencies. The two respondents participating in Neighbourhood Programmes are regional agencies and the two participating in decentralised cooperation programmes are a Municipality and a Provincial instrumental agency.

Of the eight respondents representing civil society, three participate in the Interreg programme (two universities and one cultural association), two in the SEENET decentralised cooperation programme (NGOs), one in the Gold Maghreb decentralised cooperation programme (NGO) and two in two different programmes funded at national and regional level (universities).

The two private actors participate in Interreg and the Neighbourhood Programme MEDA respectively.

Interviews were conducted taking into account the nature of the responding stakeholders (public authorities, civil society and private actors) so as to identify converging/diverging attitudes and approaches to the different set of issues presented.

In relation to partnership in decision-making, one of the most interesting points worth highlighting is the difference in views between public authorities (PA) and civil society (CS) actors regarding the openness of the decision-making process. Indeed, CS actors declared that they had good access to official information on the decision-making process coupled with a good level of knowledge of the process. Similarly CS actors maintained that they had been involved in the planning phase and were able to have a significant impact on it. Interestingly, however, PAs presented a totally different picture when describing partnership with CS actors and the private sector. Indeed, PAs declared that the planning process was not open to the participation of all stakeholders, that CS and the PS had not been involved in the planning phase and that, in any case, the partnership with CS and the PS had not been significant in the planning process. This trend was also confirmed by the fact that only two out of eleven PAs mentioned NGOs as being influential actors in programming while four out of seven CS actors indicated CS associations and NGOs as being more influential.

As far as financial resources are concerned, PAs surprisingly did not report particular problems in coordinating within and among public institutions and mild problems with different and complicated procedures. Although the spending for Programmes/projects was perceived as having been results-oriented, unfortunately it seems that the Programmes/projects themselves did not end up mobilising additional resources.

In general terms, as far as Tuscan stakeholder respondent suggestions and proposals were concerned, there was an almost general consensus on the fact that external territorial cooperation has a great potential for boosting economic, cultural and social development especially at the local level and offers great opportunities for integration and dialogue, as well as providing a useful tool to diminish local conflict potential. However, external territorial cooperation was perceived as often being too dispersed and too heavily fragmented. In addition, overly complex bureaucratic procedures along with problems relating to different cultural, economic and social contexts such as language barriers and know-how and expertise differences were generally reported as negatively affecting the functioning of cooperation activities.

In terms of the necessary conditions for making partnership in territorial cooperation effective, it is interesting to highlight that besides the need for strategy and objective sharing, information flows and a results-oriented approach, both PAs and CS actors reported the need for ensuring that external partners have access to the management of financial resources in order to carry out project-related activities within their territory.

It is interesting to note that, almost without exception, Tuscan civil society actors shared a common view on what their successful experiences in cooperation planning had been. These corresponded to instances of progressive and systematic involvement of both sides' actors, the use of a planned and shared working methodology, the establishment of a long-term

cooperation relationship and, more broadly, NGOs' methodology in establishing partnerships and cooperation planning that involves civil society actors.

On possible ways of improving the various aspects of planning, interviewed stakeholders highlighted the importance of training for both decision-makers and administrative personnel on the project proponents' side as well as of development of external partners' expertise and commitment on the "non-EU" side. The simplification of procedures and the reduction of administrative burdens was identified as equally significant, as was the necessity of increasing the involvement of representatives from civil society and ensuring a proper role for each partner within the partnership together with the opportunity for autonomous management of financial resources.

Suggestions by interviewed Tuscan stakeholders on the improvement of future cross-border and transnational cooperation in ENPI and IPA planning methodologies were few and varied. Respondents insisted mainly on the need for making planning methodologies easier, enhancing information and training, developing communication skills of staff and expertise within public institutions. CS actors specifically suggested improvements in dialogue with potential partners in order to better identify their needs and priorities. From a strategic point of view, respondents proposed developing intercultural projects around a possible shared Mediterranean identity as well as focussing more significantly on institution building activities in order to provide local and regional authorities with the needed instruments to effectively participate in cooperation programmes.

On the resources and co-financing side, there was a shared belief that complementary funds should be directly managed by non-EU partners for activities within their country and directly linked to cooperation projects. This was, in fact, perceived as stimulating partners' sense of ownership of local development activities as well as enhancing their reliability.

The benchmarking analysis for the Tuscany Region was carried out on the basis of interviews conducted with fifteen institutions selected in close cooperation with the Tuscany Region.

The responding institutions were grouped into the same three categories used for the stakeholder analysis, namely, public authorities (6), civil society actors (7 including 5 non-governmental organisations and 2 universities) and private institutions (2).

All responding public authorities participated in Interreg III B MEDOCC programme projects; three out of the four responding NGOs participated in decentralised cooperation projects and one in an Interreg III B MEDOCC programme project. Both of the responding universities and the two responding private institutions participated in Interreg III B MEDOCC programme projects. In particular, four main projects were identified in which responding institutions participated and upon which the analysis mainly focussed. The projects were: EUROMEDSYS - Systèmes économiques locaux de coopération transnationale; MEROPE - Telematic instruments for innovative services for mobility and logistics in urban and metropolitan areas; SEENET - South East Europe Net; MAEM - Master en affaires euro-méditerranéennes; and RURALMED II - Forum permanent et réseau de centres pour le développement rural en Méditerranée.

For each of the abovementioned projects, three areas were investigated, namely Political Commitment and Partnership Process; Democracy, Participation and Decentralisation; and Ownership. The outcomes were as follows.

As far as the political framework of the analysed projects is concerned, no distinct trend in connections between specific projects and general cooperation agreements could be identified. This is to say that the analysed projects were in some but not all cases connected to a general cooperation agreement. However, where such an agreement existed, it was generally recognised as having been highly significant in facilitating project identification and implementation.

For all the analysed projects, the impetus given by political representatives of Regions and/or Local Authorities was identified as high, with the exception of only one respondent participating in the RURALMED II project. All respondents also indicated that political representatives of Regions and/or Local Authorities participated in project activities and that their political involvement had been medium to high, with the exception of only one respondent participating in the RURALMED II project who indicated it as having been low. In almost all cases, the relevant project was judged as having contributed quite significantly to the continuation of political/institutional contacts after its completion and having led to the planning/implementation of new kinds of projects with the external partners (with the exception of the EUROMEDSYS project). Similarly, in almost all cases, the projects were reported as having created relationships with additional external partners with whom there had been no previous involvement and as having greatly improved partnership dialogue with external partners.

In terms of coherence, coordination and complementarity within the partnership, sectors and departments of participating institutions were judged as highly involved in the projects, with only a few cases where they were judged not to be (one respondent in MEROPE, one in MAEM and one in RURALMED II).

In all cases, the degree to which a project was truly consistent with the local territorial development strategy was judged as medium to high. The influence exerted by projects on the local territorial development strategy was indicated as intermediate.

In the EUROMEDSYS and MEROPE projects, institution/capacity building activities in the project were judged as being implemented to a low to medium degree by local and public authorities, civil society organisations and private actors and as medium to high by universities and research centres. On the contrary, in the SEENET, MAEM and RURALMED II projects, local and public authorities were judged as having implemented institution/capacity building activities to a medium to high degree. Within the same projects, universities and research centres were given scores ranging from very low to very high while civil society organisations and private actors from very low to medium.

All categories of stakeholders were almost universally judged as having satisfactorily or even highly participated in the projects, with the exception of civil society organisations and private actors whose participation was judged on some occasions as having been unsatisfactory.

In all the projects but RURALMED II, the participation of local and public authorities in all phases of the project was judged as satisfactory to significant. In all projects, other actors' performance was rated as poor to satisfactory in all phases of the project with the exception of universities and research centres, whose participation in planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation was judged in some cases as significant.

Almost all respondents indicated that the cross-border/trans-national networks, which had been envisaged as an expected result of the project, had been created and that the project had stimulated the creation of networks with mainly local and public authorities after its completion.

All respondents highlighted a low level of involvement by national government in project activities and a medium level of information on the part of the national government in relation to the project's results. Similarly, all respondents reported that the project had not improved the relationship with central government.

Respondents perceived their ownership of the project as high in all the three phases of identification of objectives, implementation and monitoring and evaluation, with the exception of two respondents in SEENET and one in RURALMED II, who indicated their ownership in the implementation and monitoring (SEENET) and in the identification of objectives (RURALMED II) phases as low.

All respondents reported that the projects had satisfactorily enhanced their capacities, especially in project management and network coordination. Different opinions were expressed on the degree to which the projects had enhanced the resources of the territory.

3.2 Summary of stakeholder and benchmarking analysis in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region

Benoît Hamende and Paolo Panjek (ISDEE Trieste)

In comparison with other Italian regions involved in the ComPart project, in Friuli-Venezia Giulia (hereafter referred to as FVG) the community of public institutions and private entities participating in EU programmes, though diversified, is less numerous. Bearing in mind this limitation, the selection of regional stakeholders was based as far as possible on the methodological criteria set out in the two stages of the ComPart project. In the first stage (Stakeholder Analysis), this led to the identification of 10 public institutions (of which 7 participate in the Interreg III strands A-B programme and 3 in decentralised cooperation) and 20 private entities (of which 14 participate in the Interreg strands A-B and 6 in decentralised cooperation). The public institutions interviewed consisted of several bodies of the regional administration, provincial and municipal entities, while private entities chosen included: chambers of commerce and industry associations (local entrepreneurship), banks and finance companies (finance), cultural and educational institutions (civil society), universities and research centres (education and research).

Generally, with rare exceptions, the interviewed stakeholders highlighted their scarce or non-participation in the different phases of project planning. Consequently, most of the stakeholders declared that they were not interested in participating in Focus Group activities as they believed themselves to be inadequately prepared for further in-depth analysis. As regards the level of participation of different stakeholders in the planning phase, it seems useful to point out that the FVG Region's administration plays an almost sole-actor role in planning and managing Interreg projects. This results in one of the main characteristics of the stakeholder community: a clear-cut differentiation in planning participation between entities that are directly linked or are part of the regional administration and those outside that "system".

As far as the geographical aspect is concerned, most of the experience of FVG stakeholders in Interreg international collaboration was acquired within cross-border projects with Slovenia, while projects developed with partners from South-eastern European countries, mostly Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina, were few in number and, as well as Interreg projects, included some decentralised cooperation programmes. Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are considered countries of special interest both for their geographical proximity and for the longstanding relations of these countries with the Region's administration and other actors (both institutional and private) from FVG. Decentralised cooperation with these countries is mainly aimed at sharing the experience that the Region has gained in the management of territorial policies such as in the areas of welfare, training, economic development, institution building and good governance.

There have been no projects developed by FVG stakeholders within the Maghreb area. Two different reasons may explain this fact: firstly, the geographical distance from that area and the absence of a cross-border dimension that led other southern and western Italian regions to develop specific relations with North-African countries; and secondly, the proximity to countries (SEE) with a substantial development gap and reconstruction needs (social and economic reconstruction) which constitute fertile soil for cooperation plans. Another differentiating factor within the stakeholder community is that only a few actors have