

European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) gather in Athens to discuss the Future of Europe

The EGTCs, as the first European cooperation structure defined by EU law, play a key role in strengthening cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation within the European Union and beyond. They often serve as laboratories of the European Union, testing new and innovative ways of cooperating across borders and work on practical projects aimed at improving the lives of EU citizens. As such, the EGTCs that together make up the CoR's EGTC Platform, gathered in Athens on 4 May to discuss their views on Europe's common future.

The representatives of the EGTCs had an opportunity to discuss their vision of Europe with the EU Commissioner **Dimitris Avramopoulos** who underlined the importance of this cross-border cooperation and the role of the EGTCs in the future of Europe. He underlined that *"What unites European citizens, today and tomorrow, is a common vision and perspective. Local and regional authorities have a key role to play in bringing the EU closer to the citizen and EGTCs make an important contribution towards achieving this"*.

The chair of the CoR's COTER commission **Petr Osvald** underlined the fact that *"The EGTCs are unique entities, both supranational, truly European constructions, but at the same time sub-national. This uniqueness gives them a special perspective that is important to take into account when re-thinking Europe"*.

First vice chair of the COTER commission, **Spyridon Spyros** said, *"The European Union is at a key moment in its history, with decisions being taken over the coming months shaping its long-term direction. In charting this future, we must remember the remarkable achievements of our Union which can be exemplified from the broad peace our once divided continent enjoys, down to the daily, practical work of EGTCs"*.

MEPs **Eliza Voseberg** (EPP) and **Eva Kaili** (S&D), as well as CoR member **Michel Delebarre**, also gave their views on the European Union and highlighted the important role EGTCs can have in the European project. EGTCs look beyond national borders; and they rethink how we work in Europe as they are no longer bound by purely national interests, but by the interests of their cross-border regions, or even wider, by transnational interests.

The participants had the opportunity to hear about innovative approaches to this cross-border cooperation from **Pablo M. Rivera Búa**, Executive Director, EGTC Eurocity Chavez-Verin (PT-ES), **Loïc Delhuvette**, Director of EGTC Eurometropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai (FR-BE), **Gyula Ockay**, Director of CESCO (HU EGTCs) and **Xavier Bernard-Sans**, Director of EGTC Eurorégion Pyrénées-Méditerranée (ES-FR). The presented projects have a high level of transferability, and through the EGTC Platform, EGTCs can find information

about tried and tested practices that have made border regions more attractive and helped them work better for their inhabitants.

During the event, three Greek EGTCs presented their work; they were represented by **Vassilis Xenos Gavrielis**, Director EGTC AMPHICTYONY, **Giorgos Pappous**, Director EGTC EFXINI POLI, and **Giannis Anastasiadis**, Director EGTC HELICAS.

The debates and viewpoints on the Future of Europe will feed into a declaration that will be shared with all the EGTCs and put forward for adoption at the next EGTC Platform meeting in October.