

## Fostering cross-border cooperation

*Adopted at the Council of Presidents in Rome, 19.02.2022*

### Recognising that:

1. The supranational nature of the European Union (EU) increases the necessity for it to “earn” the trust of its citizens in order to gain and uphold legitimacy as a political institution. Hence, the strength and credibility of the EU depends on the degree to which Europeans perceive the work of the EU to be improving the conditions of their lives. The free movement of goods, capital, services and persons are hailed to be among the EU’s greatest achievements. Yet, not everyone is convinced of their benefit.
2. The rapid and transformative technological as well as societal developments during the past decades have also increasingly divided populations within national communities. In popular culture, such groups are often referred to as globalization “winners” and “losers”; Ivan Krastev, however, a Bulgarian political scientist and one of the most respected commentators of our day, labels these groups as “Globalists” and “Nativists”<sup>i</sup>. This divide, often preceded and accompanied by unemployment and followed by emigration and rural exodus, is nowhere felt more strongly than in rural, sparsely populated regions.
3. The pandemic has put relations between bordering regions to the test. Sudden yet sometimes long-running border closures and controls, deficits in coordination among countries as well as between member states and the EU are just a few examples of the problems that have emerged. In many cases, mistrust and regional disintegration have been the consequence.
4. Exchange programs have been crucial for countries, for instance France and Germany, to shake off the burdens of the past, overcome prejudices, and foster intercultural understanding.

### Acknowledging that:

1. Border regions represent 40% of the EU's territory and make up to 30% of the EU population<sup>ii</sup>.
2. In times when the world is facing challenges not experienced for a century, cohesion within the EU can only be sustained if the Western, Central, and Eastern European countries develop a more understanding approach towards each other’s history, culture, and traditions.

3. Cohesion in the EU and recuperation from the Covid-crisis can only be sustainable when such emerging gaps between internal community border regions can be bridged and additional value and credibility for the local population can be achieved.
4. In those regions where the demographic structures are most challenged by emigration and low birth rates, quality health care and education are particularly and increasingly difficult to provide.

**YEPP calls on:**

1. The EU and its member-states to foster cross-border–understanding and cooperation by emphasizing the common history of different regions. Best-practice examples are, for instance, the Common Austrian-Czech history book<sup>iii</sup> or the German-French text book<sup>iv</sup>, which are already used in some regions’ schools in these countries.
2. Border regions to provide quality health care through more intensive sectoral cooperation and joint medical facilities. Further, bilingual, or in some cases even multilingual, treatment should be improved where already existent and should be introduced where it is not. For this purpose, appropriate bilateral contracts need to be drawn up.
3. Furthermore, clear procedures regarding medical emergencies in border regions should be imposed. In medical emergencies, every second counts.
4. The EU to further promote established exchange programs, such as INTERREG and Erasmus+, for cross border regional cooperation. Those efforts should be complemented by new approaches and perspectives for rural areas. One such initiative for rural Europe is “on-the-land-semester”, or “Rurasmus”. Other promising programs foresee further development of language skills from kindergarten or elementary school onwards on both sides of the border.

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<sup>i</sup> Krastev, Ivan (2017): After Europe. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia. 128 Pages. ISBN: 9780812249439.

<sup>ii</sup> Communication from the European Commission to the Council and the European Parliament “Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions”. See: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/communications/2017/boosting-growth-and-cohesion-in-eu-border-regions](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/communications/2017/boosting-growth-and-cohesion-in-eu-border-regions)

<sup>iii</sup> Austrian Academy of Sciences: Common Austrian-Czech History book. Historians from both countries developed the connecting and separating history, followed by public discussions. See: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/detail/news/gemeinsames-oesterreichisch-tschechisches-geschichtsbuch/>



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<sup>iv</sup> Online state portal of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. See: <https://www.land.nrw/de/deutsch-franzoesisches-geschichtsbuch>