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# Making Sense of the ‘Territorial Agenda of the European Union’<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

European planning has gone through a number of metamorphoses from the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) to an, albeit tentative, policy to achieve territorial cohesion. The first section of this paper discusses developments since the turn of the century. The second section focuses on the renewed Member State initiative to produce an ‘evidence-based’ document, ‘The Territorial State and Perspectives of the European Union’, leading to the ‘Territorial Agenda of the European Union’ presented in May 2007 under the German Presidency. The third section discusses the substantive policies as proposed in the Territorial Agenda. The fourth section focuses on institutional developments, including acceptance on the part of the Member States of the need for an EU territorial cohesion policy, and with it of the role of the Commission in the taking of important initiatives. The conclusions seek to make sense of these developments in the evolving context of European integration. A postscript discusses the prospects for territorial cohesion policy under the ‘Reform Treaty’.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a paper offered at the annual congress of the Association of European Schools of Planning, Planning for the Risk Society: Dealing with Uncertainty, Challenging the Future, held in Naples on 11-15 July 2007. See: [http://www.aesop2007napoli.it/full\\_paper/track2/track2\\_155.pdf](http://www.aesop2007napoli.it/full_paper/track2/track2_155.pdf). Special thanks are due to three anonymous reviewers, one of whom has particularly excelled in giving extensive comments which were much appreciated.

On 25 May 2007 at Leipzig (German Presidency 2007a) the ministers responsible for spatial planning and development of the Member States of the European Union signed up to the ‘Territorial Agenda of the European Union: Towards a More Competitive and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions’ (Territorial Agenda 2007). This agenda must be seen within the context of the Lisbon Strategy which, by 2010, desires the EU to become ‘[...] the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’ (European Council 2000). This may have been an unrealistic goal, but ‘growth and jobs’ remains the overriding EU concern (CEC 2005). The main claim of the Territorial Agenda is that in pursuing this objective, the diversity of Europe’s regions is an asset. Inserting, at the very last moment, sustainability on a par with competitiveness into the subtitle however makes it clear that the Ministers wish also to take sustainable development seriously, as agreed at Gothenburg (CEC 2001a).

Leipzig took place at a time when the fate of the ‘Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe’ hung in the balance. Less than a month after Leipzig though the European Council agreed to work towards a ‘Reform Treaty’ designed to replace the Constitution. This was subsequently agreed upon in October 2007. Its ratification will change the parameters of EU territorial cohesion policy, but the participants at Leipzig had no way of knowing that such developments would ultimately transpire in this manner nor indeed did the author at the time.

The aim of this paper then is to make sense of this Territorial Agenda. Firstly, the fledgling EU territorial cohesion policy is discussed. Secondly, the paper highlights how the Member States attempted to regain control of the process by producing an ‘evidence-based’ document, the ‘Territorial State and Perspectives of the European Union’, which eventually led to the political document subsequently entitled ‘the Territorial Agenda’. Thirdly, the paper discusses the substantive issues raised therein and, fourthly, the institutional developments foreseen by it. A postscript discusses the prospects of territorial cohesion policy under the ‘Reform Treaty’ agreed in October and scheduled to be signed at Lisbon – after which it will be called the ‘Lisbon Treaty’ – in December 2007, after which the ratification process across all 27 Member States will begin.

The remainder of this introduction reflects upon the approach taken and its limitations. Making sense of a policy requires knowing where it comes from, who is behind it, and why, and where, ultimately, it may lead. With this being a matter of interpretation, personal predilections and judgements come into play, and so the reader has the right to know where the author stands.

The author has been a long-term chronicler of European spatial planning, in particular of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) and its various follow-ups. He has also taken on the mantle of a self-appointed one-man pressure group for European planning. However, while keen to understand what drives them, the author identifies neither with the European Commission nor with France, The Netherlands and Germany, countries whose planners have taken many of the initiatives discussed herein. Rather, his commitment is to *European planning* as such, based on the strength of the argument that it could and should contribute to European integration.

The approach adopted has then been a forensic one, trying to find out who in the European planning arena has the motives and opportunities for doing what. The underlying assumptions here are, firstly, that actors can make a difference, which is why their biographies and also their idiosyncrasies are interesting, and that thick case

studies need to sometimes relate to apparently ephemeral circumstances. The second assumption is that the choices made by actors need to be understood against the backdrop of their ‘opportunity structures’, a term culled from Ross (1995). This may be called actor-centred institutionalism (Scharpf 1997; see also Faludi 1999), but the focus thus far has not been on the theoretical framework but on giving informed accounts going back and forth between portraying the actors and their aspirations, including their bureaucratic politics and the context within which they form their preferences.

In studying the ESDP process plentiful archival material was available while the possibility of interviewing the participants also existed. During the period when this paper was written, the Territorial Agenda was still in preparation, while those involved in that process were often unavailable for comment. Moreover, archives in the age of the ‘paper-less office’ are becoming somewhat ephemeral. Official documents are available, but the researcher used to wading through mighty files with notes and handwritten comments in the margins etc., etc., finds that such revealing information is now on laptops and memory sticks, and has thus become exceedingly difficult to access. So, in writing this paper the author had to make do with successive versions of documents on presidential websites which he diligently downloaded as soon as they appeared – a good precaution since such drafts have the disconcerting habit of disappearing once the next version is out. The intelligence thus gained has been augmented through interviews. All this material has been interpreted in the light of past trajectories of European spatial planning, which is why the paper starts with an account of developments since the ESDP.

Before giving this account, two limitations should be noted. Firstly, since the initiative for the Territorial Agenda process has come from the Member States, and since the Commission has thus been far less involved than was the case in the ESDP process, the paper, in effect, provides the Member State perspective on the Territorial Agenda process. In reacting to this initiative, the EU officials concerned may have had considerations of their own, but the author has had no access to them. Secondly, the paper deals with the Territorial Agenda as the successor document to the ESDP. At Leipzig, another document was also adopted, entitled the ‘Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities’ (Leipzig Charter 2007). This may indicate that in future urban policy and territorial cohesion will be drawn ever more closely together (Eltges, Hatzfeld, Schön, Selke 2007), and as such, any future comprehensive account of Leipzig may have to include this document in its analysis. Notwithstanding this *caveat* the current paper deals only with the Territorial Agenda.

## **European planning since the turn of the century**

As far as substantive themes are concerned, and although new challenges like climate change, demographic decline and energy policy figure, the next section will show the Territorial Agenda to be rooted in the ESDP (CEC 1999). So what has changed? Terminology, for one, keeps changing. The ESDP invoked the term European spatial development. This represented a synthesis of German- and Dutch-style spatial planning with its connotation – other than in recent UK planning parlance where it signals a proactive, forward-looking approach – of regulatory planning working with comprehensive schemes integrating land uses on the one hand, and French-style *aménagement du territoire* concerned with regional economic development on the other. The latter was in line with the Commission’s thinking (Faludi 2004; 2006; Sykes and Motte 2007).

Importantly, it was decided that spatial development could not be construed to be a Community competence. So, as soon as the ESDP was on the books, the Commission, although interested in the messages of the ESDP, felt obliged to end its support for continuing the intergovernmental work. Listed as an objective and as a competence shared between the Union and the Member States in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe on *a par* with economic and social cohesion, the new concept of territorial cohesion would have given the Commission a key-role in developing relevant policies. However, French and Dutch voters objecting to the Constitution put a spanner into the works.

In addition, 21<sup>st</sup> century priorities have shifted from 'soft' concerns to the pursuit of competitiveness. European planning is embedded in EU cohesion policy originating in the mid-1970s, when it provided a means for Brussels to do what, with the accession of the United Kingdom, had become politically expedient: namely, support Member States in pursuing their regional policies. Under Jacques Delors, Commission President in 1985-1995, this Community policy focused on the new twin objective in the 1986 Single European Act of economic *and* social cohesion. Within the national and regional envelopes that are the outcomes of intergovernmental bargains, regional and local authorities apply for funding, to be used in addition to their own resources, for projects designed to pursue a set number of priorities. This has led to a form of 'multi-level governance' (Hooghe, Marks 2001) giving the Commission access to regional and local stakeholders, and *vice versa*.

Cohesion policy transfers resources to 'least favoured regions', mostly in the periphery. This policy came under fire in the 'Sapir Report' (Sapir *et al.* 2004) on EU economic governance where it claimed that transfers did not promote competitiveness. At this point it emerged that some of the net-contributors to the EU-budget wanted to replace existing cohesion policy with direct transfers to the new members – marking, in fact, a return to the policies of the 1970s. The aim here would be to help newcomers increase their competitiveness and also to demonstrate solidarity. Helping regions in the other countries should be left to the Member States concerned. A presumably (not quite) unintended side effect here would have been the removal of the Commission as a player in this process.

Of even more immediate importance during the budget negotiations however was the overall spending ceiling in terms of a percentage of the EUs GDP. In the end, the total amount was reduced to a level lower than that which the Commission had deemed necessary. At the same time, Cohesion Policy, the Common Agricultural Policy and, outside the UK the equally contentious UK budget rebate, were all allowed to continue, with a commitment to review the setup, starting in 2008. The idea here was to have a new setup in place in time for the rolling out of the next Financial Perspectives for the period after 2013.

The Commission and the Directorate-General for Regional Policy heard the challenge loud and clear and reframed their approach to cohesion policy. Cohesion Policy is one of the few Community policies that can support the Lisbon Strategy. For the rest, achievement of its aims depends on the willingness and ability of Member States to work towards targets for labour market reform, female participation rates, R&D investments, and so forth. All that the Member States are committed to here is to make 'National Reform Plans' and to report on their implementation. The Commission produces overviews, the idea here being that those at the bottom of the league tables will, through peer pressure, seek to attend to their deficiencies.

In terms of cohesion policy the Commission takes the lead. It proposed, and the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament eventually accepted, Community Strategic Guidelines (Council of the European Union 2006) requiring the Member States, as a precondition of obtaining cohesion funding, to formulate 'National Strategic Reference Frameworks,' followed by 'Operational Programmes'. At the current time of writing, most have been approved while some are still under review in the light of the relevant Council Regulation (Official Journal of the European Union 2006). Now, even without the Constitution being ratified, the Community Strategic Guidelines consider territories and their makeup as relevant. Accordingly, one

...of the features of cohesion policy – in contrast to sectoral policies – lies in its capacity to adapt to the particular needs and characteristics of specific geographical challenges and opportunities. Under cohesion policy, geography matters. Accordingly, when developing their programmes and concentrating resources on key priorities, member states and regions should pay particular attention to these specific geographical circumstances (Council of the European Union 2006, 40).

The Community Strategic Guidelines require National Strategic Reference Frameworks and Operational Programmes to pay regard to territorial cohesion. Technical documentation regarding programme evaluation notes that they must focus on 'Community added value' defined on the basis of a range of criteria (Directorate-General Regional Policy 2006, 5). Territorial cohesion crops up in Annex 4 where, after recalling the relevant Articles 158 (on economic and social cohesion and the harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of the Community by the reduction of disparities between regions) and 16 of the EC Treaty (on the place occupied by services of general economic interest in the shared values of the Union as well as their role in promoting social and territorial cohesion, being the only mention of territorial cohesion in the existing treaties), it invokes the structural funds regulation. From this it concludes that a 'territorial cohesion' heading should be inserted into National Strategic Reference Frameworks and Operational Programmes. This implies the need to identify the specific characteristics and the territorial needs of the region or area concerned; check the consistency of the strategy regarding these needs and characteristics, and discuss the relevant implementation system. To all intents and purposes this amounts to a form of spatial planning. These far-reaching requirements are further specified, including the indicators to be used, drawing among other things on the work of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON).

Evaluating the National Strategic Reference Frameworks, Polverari, McMaster, Gross, Bachtler, Ferry and Yuill (2006, 78) conclude, however, that territorial aspects have not played as strategic a role as might have been expected. Their study, alongside that of Bachtler, Ferry, Ménez and McMaster (2007) on the Operational Programmes shows that, with the exception of France, only a few new Member States (for instance Hungary and Poland) invoke the concept of territorial cohesion. History is thus repeating itself. After the ESDP, the requirements for the structural funds in 2000-2006 included, among other things, that the programmes pay regard to the ESDP. Rooney and Polverari (2002a, 2002b) concluded however that relevant references were few and far between. Territorial cohesion is not a headline issue, but on the occasion of the Leipzig meeting, the services of the Directorate-General Regional Policy gave a rather more upbeat assessment of the 'urban and territorial dimension' of the documents available at the time (Directorate General 2007).

## **An ‘evidence-based’ document**

Those in the Member States responsible for the National Strategic Reference Frameworks and Operational Programmes are rarely planners but come rather from ministries of economic affairs and/or finance. As such, their preparation saw planners in a relatively junior role. This was the first challenge which planners in the Member States faced.

The second challenges came from a notoriously proactive Commission. As previously indicated, the latter had withdrawn support from intergovernmental planning, reckoning that the Constitution would give it the initiative in matters of territorial cohesion. In May 2005 the Commission even announced the publication of a White Paper on Territorial Cohesion, obviously with a view to the Constitution coming into effect on, or soon after, 1 November 2006. It is against this backdrop that national planners resumed the initiative, with the ‘usual suspects’ France and The Netherlands joined by Luxembourg in the lead (Faludi, Waterhout 2005).

Note that the EU presidencies at the time excluded southern Member States that at one time had been reluctant partners in the ESDP process, like Spain and Italy. No information is however available in respect of their attitudes during the Territorial Agenda process. Rather, the fact that the new Member States were becoming active was often mentioned. Holding the presidency in the second half of 2007, Portugal, about whose role more below, was of course involved.

The motive behind the resumption, after a hiatus of several years, of ministerial meetings – the last one in Namur in the Walloon Region of Belgium (Maréchal 2002) had little resonance – was to retain a foothold in whatever policy the Commission would come up with. So at this stage the Directorate-General Regional Policy was lukewarm about this initiative. The intention was, however, to also address the first challenge by articulating a common position *vis-à-vis* the sectors – which is where the interests of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy and the ministers coincided.

This is not the occasion to discuss the details of the various meetings. What is important is that, unlike the ESDP preparation period, a plethora of ESPON results were available: tens of thousands of pages of text with hundreds of maps. This promised ample opportunity to demonstrate with hard facts that spatial or territorial planning and/or development – terminology is notoriously fuzzy – mattered. So the idea was to produce an ‘evidence-based’ document, one that would speak for itself. In some Member States ‘evidence-based’ policy (as with ‘evidence-based medicine’; see Davoudi 2006) had come into fashion. Preferably, quantitative evidence should be used to help convince hard-nosed sector specialists that territory really mattered. Moreover, it is well known that invoking indicators is the way – maybe the only way – in which the Commission, notoriously understaffed as it is, can manage in the EU27.

Faludi and Waterhout (2006) discuss the methodological issues involved. Other authors highlight the problems involved in ESPON providing intentionally objective grounds for action (Bengs 2002; 2006; Hague 2006; Böhme, Schön 2006; Van Gestel, Faludi 2005; Prezioso 2007). Such problems notwithstanding, the evidence-based document was elaborated in a series of ministerial meetings, preceded as they were by meetings of directors-general, and they in turn by various types of meetings of national experts in often shifting combinations, with the Coming Presidencies Group

(as in the ESDP Process where it was called the *Troika*) the coordinator. As usual in such situations initiatives from the shop-floor level were important.

The series of ministerial meetings began in Rotterdam in November 2004 (Dutch Presidency 2004a, 2004b). With a brief to elaborate on the results of Rotterdam, a handful of experts from various countries undertook the ground work for the next meeting scheduled in Luxembourg. They availed themselves of the advice of trusted sources from ESPON. The people holding the pen for the document can be said to be prototypes of a new generation of 'boundary spanners' operating in European planning, which is perhaps indicative of a broader trend in European integration. This Drafting Group worked under the auspices of the Coming Presidencies Group. After discussing and amending it at their meeting in Luxembourg, the directors-general of the Member States decided in March 2005 to submit the draft to their ministers.

The ministers met in May (Luxembourg Presidency 2005a) endorsing a scoping document, 'The Territorial State and Perspectives of the European Union: Towards a Stronger European Territorial Cohesion in the Light of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Ambitions' (Luxembourg Presidency 2005b). It argued for territorial development policies to help areas to develop their 'territorial capital', a concept drawn from the influential 'Territorial Outlook' of the OECD (2001), as part of the effort to increase Europe's competitiveness. The substantive priorities were to strengthen polycentric development and urban-rural partnership, promote clusters of competitive and innovative activities, strengthen trans-European networks, promote trans-European risk management and strengthen trans-European ecological structures and cultural resources. These priorities were to be worked out between then and the German Presidency in 2007. Germany had already indicated a willingness to once again, as at Potsdam with the ESDP, bring the ship into port. The venue eventually became Leipzig where, before becoming minister, Wolfgang Tiefensee, chairing the meeting on behalf of the German EU Presidency had been the mayor and his junior minister the chief planner.

Before it came to this, there were three more EU Presidencies intervening, the UK being the first. The UK government is not wildly enthusiastic about cohesion policy. Indeed, the UK is one of the net-contributors to the EU budget wishing for cohesion policy to be restricted to providing direct support to the new Member States. So it is reasonable to assume that the UK Presidency felt disinclined to take major initiatives. However, it did call an informal ministerial meeting on 'Sustainable Communities' (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2006). This related to the urban dimension in European policy (Berg, van den, Braun, Van der Meer 2007, 39-61). At Leipzig, this would form the topic of the first day of the meeting, when the ministers agreed on a 'Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities' (Leipzig Charter 2007). As indicated, the document will not be discussed further.

Official scepticism notwithstanding, the UK organised a 'working level meeting' – somewhat short of a meeting of directors-general proper. This is where the decision was taken to produce, not only the 'Territorial State and Perspectives' as agreed at Luxembourg, but also a shorter 'Territorial Agenda of the European Union', and for this document rather than the Territorial State and Perspectives to be put before the ministers. The consideration was that such a lengthy document – the definite English version has 83 pages with many maps – could not be submitted to the ministers. Maps had caused particular trouble in the ESDP process, and nobody wanted this experience to be repeated. However, in so doing the original intention of relying on the strength



of evidence receded into the background. The Territorial Agenda document thus became a rather more political animal, addressing its audience as “We, as ministers responsible for spatial planning and development...” on matters of territorial cohesion. Responding to public concerns in respect of climate change and energy prices, the Territorial Agenda delves deeper into these issues than did the ESDP.

The change of tack towards a political document may not have been immediately clear to all who participated. Participants may have taken ‘agenda’ to mean a schedule of work. In Dutch at least, agenda is the word for diary. The Germans who made the proposal, and who in view of their upcoming presidency pulled much weight, must have had something like the political ‘Agenda 2010’ for reforming welfare and promoting economic growth put forward by the government of the day in mind.

The working-level meeting in London also provided the first occasion for a German planning expert who was eventually to work on the Territorial Agenda full-time to make his appearance. From then onwards, the processes of compiling the Territorial Agenda and of the Territorial State and Perspectives ran in parallel, with attention increasingly shifting to the former.

Before Leipzig another two presidencies intervened. The Austrian Presidency refrained from becoming too deeply involved. An expert meeting – not a meeting of ministers nor of directors general – held in June 2006 considered the ‘Governance of Territorial Strategies: Going Beyond Strategy Documents’ instead (Austrian Federal Chancellery 2006). It provided an opportunity to sound out opinions and to work towards consensus.

The Finnish Presidency set itself the task of completing the process. It held a directors-general meeting in November 2006 discussing the first draft of the Territorial Agenda. This document had been prepared by a small drafting group, with the Finnish Presidency chairing. Coordination continued to be in the hands of the Coming Presidencies Group which was, however, not highly formalised, meeting as often as not in the margins of other meetings. It also encouraged representatives of other Member States to join in. The drafting group in particular was augmented on an *ad-hoc* basis by experts from countries holding future presidencies: Portugal, Slovenia and France, and also by representatives from Poland and Hungary. As will become evident, Hungary would eventually undertake to revise the Territorial Agenda in 2011, and this may have helped, ultimately, in getting its commitment.

Under the German Presidency, the directors general met once more in March; while a number of so-called working-level meetings which did not necessarily involve the DGs also took place before the Final Draft appeared on the website shortly before the main event.

The final Territorial Agenda insists that, in promoting competitiveness, account needs to be taken of the particular needs and characteristics of specific geographical challenges and opportunities, the message here is also that of the Community Strategic Guidelines, namely, that *geography matters*.

Altogether five versions of the Territorial Agenda have appeared on the German Presidency website. These include the ‘Final Draft’ adopted at Leipzig without amendments. Background papers can also be found here in German, English and French. They included the Territorial State and Perspectives completed already in March, but now with a foreword written by Minister Tiefensee. So, somewhat to the *chagrin*, not only of Luxembourg feeling possessive about it, but of other Member

States as well, the evidence-based ‘Territorial State and Perspectives’ did not receive political backing.

The Germans also published a collection of their own maps, in addition to those coming from ESPON (Schmidt-Seiwert, Porsche 2007) – for the English version see German Presidency (2007b). The reason for this was that the evidence generated by ESPON, reflecting as it does concerns of the early 2000s, does not now match all of the priorities set in the Territorial Agenda – which casts an interesting light on the whole idea of ‘evidence-based planning’. Surely, in reality the relation between evidence and political choice is much more two-way than the term ‘evidence based’ suggests. There was also an element of pride involved. Already in the 1990s, Germany had made major contributions, for instance in the form of the ‘Leipzig Principles’ (Bundesministerium für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau 1994) that have laid the foundations for the ESDP (Böhme, Schön 2006). In addition to the maps, there is also a synthesis, apparently – since it is only in German – for a German public (German Presidency 2007c).

The German Presidency also put great store in stakeholder involvement, starting with the Amsterdam Stakeholder Conference of June 2006. An invitation was sent out asking for submissions to be made in respect of the Territorial Agenda while a series of events were also held in Germany (Schön, Selke 2007, 438-439).

## **Substantive propositions**

The Territorial Agenda document runs to eight pages and comes in four sections. Section I defines the task as strengthening territorial cohesion, but in relation to the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies. Section II is about strengthening regional identities and making better use of territorial diversity. Section III outlines new territorial priorities for the EU. Section IV, to be discussed separately further below, identifies actions to be taken by the European institutions, the EU Member States and the ministers responsible for spatial planning and development themselves.

As indicated, Section I states that the main focus is on how territorial cohesion policy can contribute to the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies. For this purpose it describes territorial cohesion as a permanent and cooperative process involving various actors and stakeholders. Section II begins by identifying six challenges, starting with climate change, followed by rising energy prices and the accelerating integration of regions in the context of global economic competition. The list continues with the impact of enlargement, the overexploitation of ecological and cultural resources and the loss of biodiversity, “[...] particularly through increasing development sprawl while remote areas are facing depopulation,” followed by the effects of demographic change and migration on the labour market, the supply of public services and on the housing market. The geographic concentration of activities caused by market forces and its dislocating effects listed as the third challenge in the early March version has however disappeared from the list.

Given these challenges, Section II states – with a sideways glance at the European social model, itself a topic of a continuing debate (Giddens, Diamond, Little 2006; Giddens 2007) – that territorial cohesion is a prerequisite of sustainable economic growth and job creation. The emphasis here is on making use of the regionally diversified territorial potential and paying due regard to the increasing territorial influence of Community policies. There is also a reference here to the Leipzig Charter adopted on day one of the meeting as complementing the Territorial Agenda.

After recounting the three policy guidelines for the spatial development of the EU according to the ESDP – a polycentric urban system and urban-rural partnership, access to infrastructure and knowledge and the prudent management of the natural and cultural environment, Section III lists the priorities for developing the EU territory. Whereas the first version, dating from October 2006, began with the evergreen notion of strengthening polycentric development and urban-rural partnership, the January and early March 2007 versions brought forward the strengthening of innovative and cooperative urban development in metropolitan regions, urban areas and regional centres as the first priority. Since late March the first priority has become strengthening polycentric development *and* innovation through networking of city regions and cities, followed by new forms of territorial governance between rural and urban areas. The third priority relates to the promotion of regional clusters of competition and innovation, specifically across borders, followed by the support and extension of Trans-European Networks (TENs), the promotion of trans-European risk management and the strengthening of ecological structures and cultural resources for a new approach to development. Perhaps however one should not read too much into such changes in the order of priorities as no suggestion exists that the order is necessarily hierarchical in nature.

The October 2006 draft remained rather close to the ESDP (Faludi 2006b). Having already been mentioned in the ESDP, risk management, including the impacts of climate change, a topic which has received ever-increasing levels of emphasis, due among other things to the volume of media attention given to the topic, with the Al Gore film *'An Inconvenient Truth'* discussed during at least one of the meetings, is now a priority. It is only fair however to add that, while figuring at the top of the list of challenges, climate change and energy occupy a less prominent position on the list of priorities. At the same time, much remains to be done in relation to competitiveness, but this is not new. Even before Lisbon, the ESDP had already highlighted the potential relationship between European competitiveness and the creation of a polycentric urban system. Promoting polycentric territorial development with a view to making better use of the available resources in Europe's regions is also the main plank of the Territorial Agenda.

### **Institutional proposals**

Section IV deals with questions relating to the implementation of the Territorial Agenda. European institutions should pay more regard to the territorial dimension of policies. Interestingly, in earlier versions the Ministers supported the inclusion of territorial cohesion policy in the 'Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe'. An introductory note to the January 2007 draft stated that, since its inclusion in the Constitutional Treaty, "[...] territorial cohesion has become a politically accepted objective of the EU". Unlike the period during which the ESDP was prepared, the Member States seemed now to have accepted the idea of a competence in matters of territorial cohesion policy for the Union, and thus an increased role for the Commission. The final document, however, eschews any mention of the Constitution. At the time of Leipzig, the constitutional debate was about to become more heated. Some Member States, including the Federal Republic which was then holding the EU Presidency, were for ratifying it more or less as is, while others, like The Netherlands and France, joined by the UK, Poland and the Czech Republic, were all for playing it down. So it must have seemed unwise to maintain a stance that may have looked like taking sides in this debate. The strategy seems rather to have been to immunise

territorial cohesion policy from the uncertain outcome of this contest. Thus, in Section I the Ministers confirm their commitment to working together and with EU institutions, whatever the outcome of the treaty negotiations. As indicated above, the mist has since cleared, and the postscript explores this new scenario.

There is also the demand for more focus in the 'ESPON 2013' programme on in-depth analyses of the effects of EU policies on territorial cohesion and for the production of operational indicators. This is based on chapter 3 of the Territorial State and Perspectives with its astute analysis of the power situation. There it notes that for effective management of the territorial impact of EU policies, Ministers

[...] appear to be dependent on the commitment of the formal EU institutions, especially the European Commission, as the initiator of EU Policies. In other words, leadership in managing the territorial impact of EU policies appears only possible if the European Commission and the EU Ministers for Spatial Development cooperate closely as a driving force for other stakeholders (Territorial State 2007, 56).

The Territorial State and Perspectives document refers to the White Paper on European Governance (CEC 2001b) where it complements the ESDP for taking steps towards more policy coherence. It then points out that the Commission is making “[...] initial attempts to address the politically sensitive issue of a coherent approach to the territorial impact of EU policies [...]” but that this “[...] remains a rather premature and fragile matter on the EU agenda” (Territorial State 2007, 56). In plain English: what is called Territorial Impact Assessment is controversial, and so the proposal, which has figured on the agenda since the days of the ESDP, to introduce it did not make it into the final document.

Other recommendations concern cooperation between the Commission and the Member States. Talk here concerns the need for an in-depth dialogue while the opportunities for this should already be provided for by what are termed the ‘existing committees.’ Previous drafts requested the establishment of a territorial cohesion contact point in the Commission. Hard pressed to fulfil ever more tasks, the Commission apparently retorted at Espoo, in November 2006, that it was unable to comply. Nevertheless, the January 2007 draft persisted in asking for improvements. The final version however merely commits the Ministers themselves to set up a network of territorial cohesion related contact points “[...] to strengthen cooperation among ourselves and with the European Commission (Territorial Agenda 2007, 10).

The November 2006 draft had also invited the Commission to publish a Communication on territorial cohesion, as indicated previously an idea the Commission itself had launched at Luxembourg, but had shelved in the wake of the referenda. The January 2007 draft no longer did so, apparently because a high-ranking Commission official present at the November meeting had cold-shouldered the idea of doing so in the absence of the Constitution being ratified. However, the Leipzig Presidency Conclusions at least requested the Commission to publish a report on territorial cohesion by 2008 (German Presidency 2007, 4). It is not clear however whether the idea was that of a Communication proper, or rather of something like the less committal ‘Interim Territorial Cohesion Report’ of the Directorate General Regional Policy (2004) which simply regurgitated some ESPON results available at that time.

As far as the Member States themselves are concerned, the Territorial Agenda asks them to integrate priorities set out therein, as well as the territorial aspects of the

Community Strategic Guidelines in national, regional and local development policies, but without attending to the general lack of capacity for so doing, as documented by Schout and Jordan (2007). Earlier versions were even more outspoken, noting that territorial issues should play a role in the implementation of the National Strategic Reference Frameworks. Up to and including the January draft, Ministers also mentioned the mid-term evaluation of the structural funds programmes 2007-2013 as well as the National Reform Plans under the Lisbon strategy in this context.

The longest list of follow-up actions relates to what the Ministers themselves will do. Potentially the most important issue here is the request, reiterated in the conclusions of the German Presidency (2007a), for the Slovene Presidency of early 2008 to take the Territorial Agenda into account in preparing the 2008 spring European Council traditionally devoted to assessing the progress of the Lisbon Strategy. This would not have been mentioned, had the Slovene delegation not committed itself to doing precisely this. Of course one may wonder what precisely will come of this. The wording does not necessarily imply that the Territorial Agenda itself, nor indeed territorial cohesion, will be discussed by the European Council. Such events tend to be about grander issues. However, if only one relevant sentence were to be included in the conclusions of the Slovene Presidency or in some other document resulting from the meeting, this would mean territorial cohesion policy receiving some form of political backing.

Otherwise, the Ministers intend to facilitate the debate from a territorial point of view on a long list of EU dossiers. For the purpose of preparing these inputs, the Portuguese Presidency is organising an Informal Meeting of Ministers on Territorial Cohesion and Regional Development – the designations of such meetings have the disconcerting habit of changing – on 23 and 24 November 2007 in the Azores to discuss the first ‘Action Programme’ under the Territorial Agenda. At the current time of writing, the website of the Portuguese Presidency notes that it will also “promote the launch of the debate on the future of the cohesion policy, based on the presentation of the Commission’s Fourth Cohesion Report (Portuguese Presidency 2007).

Up to and including the early-March version, the list of dossiers to be discussed included the important review of the EU budget scheduled to start in 2008, though there is no reference to this in the final version. However, it does state – in pursuance of what may have been a last-minute decision – that the Territorial Agenda will come up for review under the Hungarian Presidency in the first half of 2011.

What transpires then is, firstly, that the Ministers have come to finally accept that the EU – and thus the Commission – needs to have a territorial cohesion policy, irrespective of whether or not the Constitution in its present or amended form will be ratified. Secondly, the Territorial Agenda being discussed at the Spring Council in 2008 would be the first occasion for territorial issues receiving attention from this elevated body. This is hopeful. Slovenia as the only one of the new Member States to have introduced the common currency commands much good will and has taken planning initiatives already before becoming an EU member in the framework of the Council of Europe.

## Conclusions

The Territorial Agenda will no doubt be discussed critically, but this paper is about positioning it and not about taking it apart. The introduction has detailed what this amounts to: telling the reader where the Territorial Agenda comes from, who is behind it and why, and lastly where the policy may lead.

In this spirit the paper has demonstrated that the Territorial Agenda relates to the ESDP and to the Commission's thinking in terms of an EU territorial cohesion policy. More specifically, it has been shown that the Territorial Agenda process started out as a reaction from the Member States, led by the 'usual suspects', to the prospect of the emergence of an EU territorial cohesion policy after ratification of the Constitution. When that prospect receded, a common concern held by planners both from the Member States and the Commission crystallized around the notion of giving a territorial dimension to sector policies, if necessary even without a formal competence under a new treaty, which is why adducing convincing evidence to the effect of proving that attention for the territorial dimension would create 'added value' became even more important. Had the Constitution not been rejected, the confluence of interests between the Commission and the Member States could have been less, with both jockeying for position in a new-style EU territorial cohesion policy as a 'shared competence' – a situation under which the Commission would have had the right of initiative. Elsewhere, the current author has argued that, even with a full mandate, the Commission would be well advised to involve the Member States from the start (Faludi 2007). The situation may of course still arise in future if and when the new Reform Treaty comes into force.

Differences however also existed between the successive Presidencies. The Dutch and the Luxembourg positions were imbued with an awareness of Commission concerns and also with an appreciation of its way of thinking and its operational procedures. UK officials may have been similarly informed, but kept their distance. The Austrians were pretty neutral, and the Finns helped the Germans, whose attitude was crucial. Having been through an exercise of their own in terms of reframing the spatial planning guidelines for the Federal Republic (for a source in English see: BBR/BMVBS 2006), the Germans were in a frame of mind to guide the process of completing the Territorial Agenda. However, German planners distinguish between spatial planning and regional economic development, the latter being the domain of another Ministry. Moreover, the geo-political position of Germany at the heart of Europe is different from that of the initiators of this latest round of deliberations on European planning issues. Thus the Germans pay more attention to Central and Eastern Europe, including the EU's neighbours, many of whom were present among the no less than 47 delegations at Leipzig.

Now the ball is in the court of the Portuguese and soon the Slovenes, to be followed by the French, the Czechs, the Swedes, the Spanish, the Belgians and the Hungarians who, as indicated, have promised to revise the Territorial Agenda. As explained previously, a modest level of optimism seems in order here, but the effects will be long-term, subtle and initially in any case only apparent to insiders. Practicing regional and local planners may find little in the Territorial Agenda that seems of immediate influence to their day-to-day work. So, at best, the Territorial Agenda will mean that, somewhat against the odds, European spatial planning gets a new lease of life.

This is no mean achievement. Strictly speaking, the EU does not have a territory because the EU is not a state, not even a federal one. Needless to say, some people would like the EU to become a federal state, but more and more shudder at the prospect. So trying to make sense of the Territorial Agenda one needs to appreciate that European spatial planning is a 'contested' field – which is why in studying it one learns, not only about Europe, its territory, its peoples and their cultures, but also about what the European Union is, and in particular about what it is not: a finished product. European spatial planning, too, had better be seen as a *process*, a learning machine (Faludi forthcoming) focusing on European space and the institutions involved in its management.

To return to the crucial question, which is where the Territorial Agenda may take us, the answer depends on whether it can keep the players in the game and maintain their playing field. In this respect it is hopeful to note that the Territorial Agenda exhibits a sense of where it is heading. In particular, the invitation to the Slovene Presidency to put territorial issues before the European Council is positive – but it is unfortunate that the reference to the budget debate has disappeared. Perhaps however the idea, to be taken forward under the Portuguese Presidency, to focus in a more concrete manner on individual EU dossiers is more realistic.

Optimism needs to be qualified, though. It is the Ministers responsible for spatial planning and development and their expert advisers who have come round to taking a somewhat more positive view of EU territorial cohesion policy. There are two reasons for their conversion to viewing EU territorial cohesion policy more positively:

1. Experts have gone through an intensive learning experience, forming a supranational community, described as a 'roving band of planners' (Faludi 1997) in the process. After the ESDP came a multitude of projects under the Community initiative INTERREG. These collaborative, hands-on exercises were co-financed by the EU, with, according to Müller *et al.* (2005, 1), saw more than ten thousand people involved. This must have had a diffuse effect in terms of the Europeanization of state, regional and urban planning asked for in the ESDP (CEC 1999, 45).
2. Ministers responsible for spatial planning are not in a strong position to co-ordinate sector policies (Doucet 2007) backed by relevant directorates-general. Environmental policy makers draw strength from relevant EU policies; transport planners have the Trans-European Networks, or TENs, to refer to; and, although with the Territorial Agenda planners are doing their best to relate to it, economic policy makers are closer to the 'growth and jobs' agenda. So it would be attractive for planners if they, too, could draw on the EU to legitimize their role and aspirations.

This being their motive, it remains to be seen whether they will succeed. It is also clear from the above that, as with the ESDP, the story of the Territorial Agenda is one of experts engaging in bureaucratic politics, taking their Ministers along to defend their case. With the possible exception of some French circles (Faludi 2006; Bovar and Peyrony 2006), there is no groundswell of support for territorial cohesion policy, at least not from the powers that matter, the various formations of the Council of Ministers respectively the sector interests represented on its various formations. Even within the Directorate-General for Regional Policy, support for territorial cohesion policy may be waning with the retirement in February 2007 of the Deputy Director

General reported to have been the brains behind much of the Commission's efforts in this field.

To be sure, the Committee of the Regions supports the idea, and there is a well-argued favourable opinion from the European Economic and Social Committee (Official Journal of the European Union 2007). In addition, the European Parliament has been consistently in favour of spatial planning and more recently of the need for territorial cohesion policy to be taken seriously. However, these are not the decision makers that matter, nor is there, with the notable exceptions of the Association of European Regions, the Committee of the Regions and the Council of Peripheral and Maritime Regions in Europe, a lobby for territorial cohesion. The object of the Territorial Agenda is to give more prominence to territorial cohesion. It should then be judged by whether it succeeds in so doing.

## **Postscript**

As indicated, at the time of Leipzig, the future of the Constitution hung in the balance. Less than a month later, the European Council agreed to scuttle the Constitution and to instead amend the existing treaties. It was immediately clear that this 'Reform Treaty' would reinstate territorial cohesion as an EU objective. After all, according to the Conclusions of the Presidency Article 3 (replacing the existing Article 2) of the EU Treaty will say, among other things, that the Union "shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States." (European Council 2007, Annex 1: Amendments of the EU Treaty, Title 1 – Common Provisions). Indeed, the Draft Reform Treaty, the French version of which came out on 23 July 2007 (Conférence des Représentantes des Gouvernements des États Membres 2007), confirmed this, and territorial cohesion has been retained throughout the various permutations of the text until the European Council in late-October 2007 packaged the 'Reform Treaty' for signing it ceremoniously at Lisbon in December. So the situation after its ratification, foreseen to be concluded before the elections to the European Parliament of 2009, begins to loom large. As far as territorial cohesion policy is concerned, what will soon be known as the Lisbon Treaty – officially the 'Treaty modifying the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community' – as indicated re-affirms it as an objective of the Union and also as a competence shared between the Union and the Member States. Importantly, this means that the European Commission will have the right of initiative. So, subject to approval by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament under co-decision making, the EU could issue relevant regulations. If and when the Commission decides to pursue this further, what could this mean, and where would this leave the Territorial Agenda and its makers, the Ministers responsible for spatial planning and development?

The Commission has an overloaded agenda and a chronic capacity problem. It may decide to stick with the implicit territorial cohesion policy under the Community Strategic Guidelines. Possibly, it might tighten the requirements as specified in the Working Document on *ex-ante* evaluation of the National Strategic Reference Frameworks and Operational Programmes to attend to territorial issues, and to even have chapters on territorial cohesion. In this respect, it is highly pertinent to look at what actually happens on the ground, i.e. to establish the extent to which these documents actually pay regard to territorial matters.



The Commission could also use the mid-term review of Cohesion Policy to take its territorial cohesion policy one step further. Whether the Commission will actually do this depends among other things on the internal constellation, i.e. on the relative position of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy respectively of the Commissioner responsible. It will also depend on the level of priority given to territorial matters within the Directorate General itself. A high priority for territorial cohesion is no longer however a foregone conclusion, especially since the architect of territorial cohesion policy and deputy Director General Jean-Charles Leagues has now left the Commission's services.

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