

Towards a new European Spatial  
Development Perspective?

04  
Whatever Happened to European Spatial  
Policy? Nico van Ravesteyn, David Evers

11  
Opinions:

Marguerite Camilleri (Malta)  
Emil Jamrich (Slovak Republic)  
Mark Tewdwr-Jones (UK)  
Peter Janssens (Benelux)  
Wendelin Strubelt (Germany)  
Kai Böhme (Nordregio)  
Andreas Faludi (the Netherlands)

32  
Column National spatial policy  
requires international perspective

Wim Derksen

## Editorial

Should or should not the EU head for a new European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)? That is the central question dealt with in this issue of 'Debating space' (Ruimte in debat), the two-monthly periodical published by the Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research (Ruimtelijk Planbureau, RPB).

Recently the RPB published the study 'Unseen Europe: a survey of EU politics and its impact on spatial development in the Netherlands'. This study presents an overview of how EU policies affect spatial developments in the Netherlands. Such an overview is particularly pertinent now (2004) as discussions erupt over the future of regional cohesion policy, the Structural Funds, and the recent addition of ten new EU Member States. 'Unseen Europe' shows that the indirect – and therefore usually unseen – consequences are often more significant than the direct effects, and will become increasingly so in the future.

Since this discussion might be of relevance to other EU Member States as well, the editorial staff of 'Debating space' asked RPB researchers Nico van Ravesteyn and David Evers to write down their view on the need of a European spatial policy, given their findings in 'Unseen Europe'. In addition several specialists present their view, as a reaction to this essay: Dr Wendelin Stubelt (Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung, Germany), dr Marguerite Camilleri (Malta Environment and Planning Authority), dr Kai Böhme (Nordic Centre for Spatial Development, Sweden), dr Emil Jamrich (general director Regional Policy, Slovak Republic), professor Mark Tewdwr-Jones (Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, UK), Peter Janssens (Secretariat General Benelux, Brussels), and professor Andreas Faludi (University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands). By publishing this palette of opinions, held by policymakers and scientists from different European countries regarding this complex subject, we would like to contribute to the debate on European spatial policy.

Please feel welcome to present your view on the theme highlighted here. To do so, send your reaction by e-mail to: [ruimte-in-debat@rpb.nl](mailto:ruimte-in-debat@rpb.nl).

For more information on the Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research, its study programme, its publications and its employees: [www.rpb.nl](http://www.rpb.nl).



Montramito, Italy

Nico van Ravesteyn  
and David Evers  
Ruimtelijk Planbureau

# Whatever Happened to European Spatial Policy?

Although the European Union has no formal authority in the area of spatial policy, its sectoral policies can have a clear spatial impact. In this sense it conducts a *de facto* – and usually uncoordinated – form of spatial policy. An informal policy document produced five years ago sought to remedy this by offering an embryonic form of European spatial policy: the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). So far, no follow-up has been produced. Is this because the current document is sufficient for addressing Europe's spatial issues or because interest in this endeavor has waned? Or are we simply in a period of transition towards a new ESDP?

## Unseen Europe

Officially, the EU does not engage in spatial planning or spatial policy, nor does it have the formal competency to do so. On the other hand, several EU sectoral policies do have clear, albeit indirect and sometimes inadvertent, impacts on spatial development. Because the spatial component of these policies is generally understated, absent or even ignored it is difficult to gain a clear picture of how the EU influences spatial developments. This comprised the main starting point for the survey *Unseen Europe* conducted by the Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research (Ruimtelijk Planbureau). The objective of this study was to identify spatially relevant EU policies and attempt to gauge their effects on spatial developments in the Netherlands. The research concentrated on the following policy areas: regional policy, transport, agriculture, competition policy, environment and nature and water management.

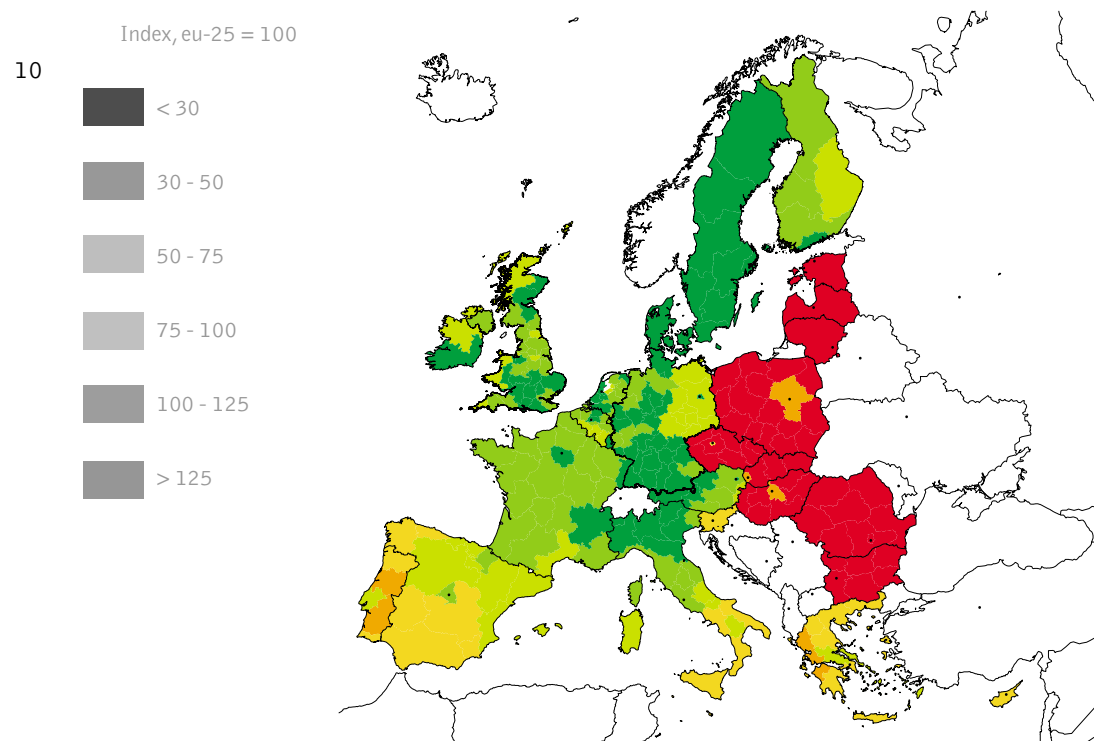
One of the primary conclusions of the survey is that the spatial impact of EU policy is usually indirect, working via policies of the Member State and/or the market, and hence unseen. One noteworthy example is that local and regional authorities have become more conscious about the importance of Europe for their spatial policies, and are stimulated to make cross-border plans. European level concepts such as sustainable development are also increasingly finding their way into local planning practice. This is not limited to the Netherlands, but has been found to be the case in other Member States as well (Tewdwr-Jones & Williams 2001).

Another major finding, although not necessarily new, is the (spatial) incompatibility of the various sectoral policies. Although the European Commission often makes it

seem like sectoral policies are in perfect harmony they often work alongside or even undermine one another. For example, one of the expressed goals of the European Union, articulated at the Lisbon summit in 2000, is to become 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' within ten years. This aspiration seems to imply a strategy of investment in areas with a great deal of promise for meeting the global competition. This does not necessarily correspond to current budgetary allocations. Agriculture rather than high-tech still receives the bulk of the EU budget, while economically disadvantaged regions receive more investments via the structural funds than highly competitive ones.

In the Netherlands at least, EU agricultural policy has at times been at odds with EU water and environmental policies. Dutch farmers have over the years taken advantage of both the internal market and agricultural subsidies to greatly expand and intensify their production. The Netherlands now has the highest density of livestock in Europe and, consequently, some of the most acute problems in meeting EU clean water standards. The augmented dynamics in the aviation industry, partly a result of EU competition policy, does not necessarily correspond with efforts in other policy sectors to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and promote high-speed rail transport. Similarly, EU air pollution standards may inadvertently hamper efforts to build on or near motorways in urban areas, discouraging intensive mixed-use schemes as opposed to sprawl: a clear mismatch with the stated goal of sustainable development. These are but a few examples of existing and potential policy conflicts, some of which have already been addressed, but not necessarily solved, at the EU level.

Enlargement of the EU and GDP per capita, 2000 (Source: Eurostat, 2000)



The issues discussed above seemed to strike a chord with representatives from the new Member States during a presentation of the results of *Unseen Europe* at a workshop at the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment in February 2004. In addition to interest in performing similar surveys in their own countries, there seemed to be a consensus that more information was needed about spatial impacts of EU sectoral policies. There seems to be a great need for coordination at the EU level, and doing so according to spatial criteria seems logical for those policies with a clear territorial impact (less needed for, for example, consumer protection). Actually, such a policy already exists – the ESDP – but without a solid legal status.

#### The ESDP

The problems cited above regarding the spatial incompatibility of sectoral EU policies lie at the intellectual heart of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) which, in its own words, 'provides the possibility of widening the horizon beyond purely sectoral policy measures, to focus on the overall situation of the European territory and also take into account the development opportunities which arise for individual regions' (EC 1999:7). This may sound promising, yet there still exists an inherent tension within the ESDP, like EU policy in general, between global competitiveness and regional economic development on the one hand and the preservation of natural and cultural resources on the other. This tension is reflected in the document's main policy goal to achieve more spatially balanced develop-

ment via (1) economic and social cohesion, (2) conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage and (3) more balanced competitiveness of the European territory (ibid.: 10). These criteria seem to become more reconcilable when they are translated into spatial objectives:

- Development of a balanced and polycentric urban system and a new urban-rural relationship;
- Securing parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge; and
- Sustainable development, prudent management and protection of nature and cultural heritage.

These three basic ESDP objectives are worked out further in about sixty specific policy objectives from which regions, Member States and the European Commission can pick and choose for further elaboration and application within their territory. In this manner, the ESDP provides a positive and ostensibly reasonable framework to spatially integrate disparate sectors and goals. Particularly the concept of polycentric development seems to spatially provide a politically acceptable solution to the thorny issue of the preferred locus of economic stimulation (Waterhout 2003). The questions remain however: what effect (if any) has this document had since its adoption five years ago, and does it still apply?

First of all, when considering ESDP impacts, it would be wise to follow Faludi and Waterhout (2002) in focusing on the ESDP as a process rather than narrowly on its content. In a sense, this echoes the conclusion of *Unseen Europe* that indirect effects, such as new administrative relationships and translation into other (i.e. local) policies, are at least as significant as direct impacts. So far, ESDP principles have found their way into local and regional planning in Britain,

Scandinavia, Ireland, Spain and Slovakia, sometimes with surprising levels of thoroughness (Faludi 2003). At the EU level, the ESDP (despite its informal status) has been mentioned in various formal policy documents, most importantly the *Third Report on Economic and Social Cohesion* which deals with the highly sensitive issue of allocating Structural Funds. Although not always made explicit in this document, the resonance of the ESDP is evident in the greatly enhanced status of spatial/territorial coordination from a community initiative (Interreg) to a Structural Funds Objective. Finally, the establishment of ESPON to monitor spatial developments in Europe as an outgrowth of the ESDP process will greatly facilitate a true spatial policy at the European level, if made possible.

At present, however, it is not possible. The application of the ESDP has so far been completely at the discretion of the Member States. Many of the 'founding fathers' of the ESDP, including the Netherlands, have been conspicuously silent in the application phase. The face of Europe has also changed fundamentally since 1999, offering new opportunities and threats. The term 'spatial' has since disappeared from EU policy discourse, being replaced with 'territorial'; this is more than mere semantics as the concept 'territorial cohesion' has found its way into the Draft Constitution as a shared competency. A Europe of 25 Member States presents a further challenge to a document produced by the EU-15. Are the ESDP objectives still relevant in the enlarged Europe? Jensen and Richardson (2004) have pointed out, for example, that the ESDP underestimates the severity of some of the problems facing the new Member States, particularly regarding rural development. Finally, there has been five years of

policy evolution in the various sectors since the publication of the ESDP. New Trans-European Networks have been identified, more environmental legislation passed, new rules on competition and regional policy introduced and a major reform of agricultural policy is being implemented, to just name a few. Is spatial coordination still necessary, and are the solutions proposed in the ESDP still valid?

From our study of the effects of EU sectoral policy in the Netherlands, we believe that spatial/territorial coordination is indeed still necessary and furthermore desirable. Moreover, a renewed ESDP process – using the new terminology of territorial cooperation of course – could have advantageous spin-off effects for European integration in general and the integration of new member states in particular.

#### Which Way Forward?

Three possible political routes could be taken towards the production of an ESDP-2 document: a bottom-up process by the Member States reminiscent of the ESDP process, a more top-down European Commission initiative, and one originating from the European Council.

The option that the Member States produce a second document or update the ESDP themselves seems *prima facie* rather appealing. Actively engaging the new Member States in thinking strategically about the European territory as a whole and the relationships between different geographies would be an excellent exercise in the wider project of European integration. If successful, such a bottom-up process would also provide the legitimacy and necessary political support from the new Member States, in part by incorporating their insights and addressing

their concerns into the new document, while providing them with an acknowledged framework to administer EU policy and hands-on experience with EU territorial cooperation processes, increasingly important in the next Structural Funds period. In view of the hard road traveled by the ESDP-1 pioneers towards a 'mere' non-binding document, however, one must also be wary of the uncertainties and perils lurking on the way if this route is chosen. Most important is the political climate: the Netherlands, for example, was leading visionary in the ESDP process, but now seems more preoccupied with matters such as reducing its net-payer position and cutting red tape from Brussels. Neither of these standpoints is particularly conducive to bottom-up consensus building. Similarly, it is not at all certain what the disposition of new Member States will be; they could be rather skeptical. It seems likely that in a Europe of 25, it will be impossible to achieve the consensus required for a meaningful ESDP-2 and that a greater role by the European Commission seems unavoidable.

The second possibility is an initiative by the European Commission. The Commission was an ardent supporter of the original ESDP process, but remained largely on the sidelines, allowing Member States to produce their own document. Improved territorial cooperation also fits into and supports the wider project regarding the free flow of goods, capital, information and people in Europe (Buunk 2003). An advantage to this route is that a new ESDP with the stamp of approval by the EC can have more authority than the voluntary agreement made in Potsdam 1999. It could take the form of a White Paper and include concrete points of action and clear links to funding sources. The most formidable obstacle to this approach is of course the subsidiarity principle to which the Commission

is bound: it can act only in cases where lower echelons cannot do so adequately themselves. At present, the Commission is not authorized to produce and ratify an ESDP because spatial planning/policy is simply not one of its competencies. It is therefore vital to first sort out what exactly the term territorial cohesion in the draft constitution means in legal terms, if and when it is adopted, and if this term still exists in the final version. This also explains why the words 'spatial planning' are politically unmentionable for the European Commission, and why any new ESDP would need to include the new terminology of territorial cohesion/cooperation/coordination. The issue of competency could be the least of the problems of this strategy if the lack of coordination between sectors continues to persist. In this sense, the success of territorial cohesion policy may be closely tied to the level of organizational cohesion within the Commission (Faludi 2004). There is another danger of adopting a Commission-led approach. Since this implies a more top-down approach, it could also spark opposition from Member States traditionally wary of centralization. In that case, despite the potential juridical legitimacy of the produced document, it could lack the political support needed for implementation. Another objection could be that DG Regio would obtain too much power if it was given, in addition to the important role of Structural Funds policy, the task of coordinating other sectoral policies with a spatial impact.

Finally one can consider a European Council initiative. If we are to believe the claim on its website that 'Currently, only the European Council can really give the European Union a shot in the arm'<sup>1</sup> this would be an appropriate starting point. Institutionally, it also has some advantages: the European Council represents the Member States under a

revolving presidency and has historically acted as an impetus for European expansion and integration. It has also acted in the past to coordinate EU policy to particular ends, for example, when it adopted the Lisbon strategy in 2000 to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. As the ESDP predates the Lisbon strategy, the Council could conceivably hone an ESDP-update to the task of achieving its global economic objectives or towards smoothing the transition to a EU25. Under a given presidency, the Council could sponsor a process that asks how current sectoral policy conflicts could be spatially redressed, making Europe economically stronger as a whole, and fostering the development of certain regions with special competitive potential in the knowledge economy. Since 1 July 2004, the Netherlands has held the EU presidency. If so desired, the Dutch can use this position to take stock of what kind of follow-up to the ESDP the various Member States, new and old, wish to take.

#### Conclusion

Whatever happened to European Spatial Policy? European spatial planning, insofar that it has ever existed, continues to evolve. The ESDP has influenced planning practice in several Member States, including new entrants, and some policies at the EU level notably regional policy. On the other hand, it seems to have vanished from view because it is no longer called spatial policy or spatial planning but territorial cohesion, territorial cooperation or territorial coordination. This of course has the strategic advantage of correlating with the wording of the draft constitution. The philosophy of the ESDP may have also permeated the sectors, given the greater attention being paid to coordination and apparent synergies. Still, on balance, the

effect of Europe on spatial developments continues to come via the sectors, and coordination problems and non-spatial approaches are more the rule than the exception. The need for an ESDP is as urgent now as it was in 1999, perhaps even more so given the institutional changes currently facing the EU. It is also evident that the current ESDP will no longer suffice and that an update which incorporates new ESPON data, input from the new member states and uses the 'territorial' terminology is needed. If not, Europe will continue to conduct its spatial policy clandestinely through the sectors.

1. <http://ue.eu.int/en/Info/eurocouncil/index.htm>

#### References

- Buunk, W.W. (2003), *Discovering the Locus of European Integration. The contribution of planning to European governance in the cases of Structural Fund programmes, Trans-European Networks, Natura 2000 and Agri-Environmental Measures*, Delft: Eburon.
- European Commission (1999), *European Spatial Development Perspective*, Luxembourg.
- Faludi, A. & B. Waterhout (2002), *The Making of the European Spatial Development Perspective; No Masterplan*, The RTPPI Library Series No.02, London: Routledge.
- Faludi, A. (2003), 'The Application of the European Spatial Development Perspective', *Town Planning Review*, Special Issue, Vol.74, No.1:1-140.
- Faludi, A. (2004), 'Territorial Cohesion: Old (French) Wine in New Bottles?', *Urban Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 7: 1349-1365.
- Jensen, O.B., Richardson, T. (2004), *Making European Space; Mobility, Power and Territorial Identity*, London/New York: Spon Press.
- Ministerie van VROM (2004), *Nota Ruimte: ruimte voor ontwikkeling*, Den Haag.
- Ravesteyn, Nico van and David Evers (2004), *Unseen Europe*, Rotterdam/The Hague: NAI-Publishers/ Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research.
- Tewdwr-Jones, M. & R.H. Williams (2001), *The European Dimension of British Planning*, London: Spon Press.
- Waterhout, Bas (2003), 'Polycentric development: what is behind it?', in: Andreas Faludi (ed.), *European Spatial Planning*, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Cambridge, MA.

Marguerite Camilleri **European Spatial Policy? A View from Europe's Southern Periphery**

Emil Jamrich **Spatial Planning and the Slovak Republic**

Mark Tewdwr-Jones **Concepts or Strategies? Political Contentions over European Spatial Policy**

Peter Janssens **Is European Spatial Planning Still Coherent?**

Wendelin Strubelt **European Spatial Policy Takes a Backseat to Economics: Lessons from Germany**

Kai Böhme **Nice to Know! So, What? Thoughts from the Nordic Periphery**

Andreas Faludi **The King is Dead – Long Live the King?**

## European Spatial Policy? A View from Europe's Southern Periphery

Marguerite Camilleri, Manager Policy Coordination,  
Malta Environment and Planning Authority

The challenge of balanced development set out in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) has not become less significant with enlargement. ESPON reports that the current European economic core – the 'pentagon' between the cities of London, Paris, Milan, Munich and Hamburg – will increase its dominance, accounting for 46 per cent of GDP in EU27, despite containing 32 per cent of the citizens and 14 per cent of the territory (<http://www.espon.lu/>).

In their article drawing on the 2004 study *Unseen Europe*, Van Ravesteyn and Evers argue that, despite the lack of formal EU spatial planning competency, the Union's sectoral policy has a strong influence on spatial development. And although five years have passed since the publication of the ESDP, there has been little significant follow-up. Generally, spatial planners still play a relatively passive role in that while they implement EU sectoral policy in the spatial context, they lack mechanisms for feeding back into EU policy-making processes. Now that the concept of territorial cohesion appears in the Draft EU Constitution, and following enlargement, the authors suggest that it might be time to strengthen EU spatial policy coordination by reviewing the ESDP, and they present three possible routes to achieving this. In this brief reaction to their article I raise five points, two of which relate directly to Malta's island context, while the rest relate to European spatial policy more generally.

1. In Malta as in other EU countries, EU sectoral policy strongly affects spatial planning. It has significant effects on locational choices relating to agricultural, economic, transport and infrastructural development, and industrial and agricultural restructuring are placing particular demands on the planning system. Often, it is at the spatial planning stage that the conflicts between the various sectoral policies emerge and seek resolution, for example between the sectors of environment, agriculture, transport and competitiveness.

2. From the Maltese perspective as a small island state on the southern edge of the Union, 'territorial cohesion', with its undertones

of a geographically just distribution of the benefits (and costs) of development, is an important concept. Our peripherality makes a difference for our development, in terms of access to markets and cultural/technological innovation. Both the centroid of the expanded European Union, which remains geographically in Germany, and the economic core of the EU are a long way from the central Mediterranean. Perhaps paradoxically, Malta's small island context makes it both isolated and open, depending almost completely on foreign imports of key commodities such as food grains. In this context a spatial strategy promoting polycentrism at various scales is extremely important for us; it would serve to strengthen regional economic centres and the transport, knowledge and other links between them and other centres. But while Malta is at the edge of Europe, it is at the centre of the Mediterranean, suggesting that relations with our non-EU neighbours are also important. Thus we welcome cooperation initiatives such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the European Neighbourhood Strategy and the third cohesion report's new objective on cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. Peripherality issues are compounded by small size; the new importance afforded to islands as regions with geographical handicaps in the third cohesion report is therefore considered a firm step forward. There is a need for all these concerns to be reflected in updated European spatial policy.

3. In terms of Maltese spatial planning, the Islands' draft Sustainable Development Strategy recommends that an Integrated Spatial Development Plan be prepared to identify the implementation responsibilities of the various sectors. Such a Plan is an opportunity to coordinate Malta's National Development Plan objectives, its spatial (including environmental) objectives and its sustainability objectives. A clearer, more coordinated spatial strategy at EU scale would facilitate the embedding of such a policy within its wider European and Mediterranean context.

4. The authors argue, correctly in my view, for a review of the ESDP, also noting that it has had little effect in practice. It seems to me that deeper analysis of the reasons for this would be useful as a first step in the ESDP-2 process, to help avoid the pitfalls faced by the ESDP. Given the nervousness with which EU spatial policy is viewed in certain circles, a Council-led political process linked to the Lisbon agenda seems the most promising option for reviewing the ESDP.

5. The prominence given to the new concept of territorial cohesion in EU policy is an excellent opportunity for European spatial plan-



ners, despite their diverse approaches, to show their mettle. Drawing upon the ESPON studies, planners should take up the challenge to give firmer meaning to the term 'territorial cohesion' and to indicate how to operationalise the concept of territorial governance. For example in the drive to develop methodologies for integrated impact assessment, how should territorial cohesion be assessed at various scales? Based on this kind of thinking, a reviewed ESDP could be more action-oriented than conceptual.

#### References

- European Commission (1999), *European Spatial Development Perspective*, Luxembourg.
- European Commission (2004), *A new partnership for cohesion convergence competitiveness cooperation: third report on economic and social cohesion*, Luxembourg.
- Ravesteyn, Nico Van and David Evers (2004), *Unseen Europe. A survey of EU politics and its impact on spatial development in the Netherlands*, Rotterdam/The Hague: NAI-Publishers/Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research.

## Spatial Planning and the Slovak Republic

Emil Jamrich, General Director Regional Policy, Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic

In the Slovak Republic, spatial planning is currently carried out on two different dimensions: that of regional development and territorial planning. Both of these functions are the institutional competence of the Slovak Republic's Ministry of Construction and Regional Development.

The semantics surrounding the term 'spatial planning' is confusing. Different countries frequently use the words 'spatial' and 'planning' for quite different kinds of activities or perform the same kinds of activities under quite different names. In this context, only two terms will be explained.

**Territorial planning** refers to planning activity that forecasts and plans the specific territorial structures of human activity. Most (though not all) of the topics and objectives of territorial planning can be expressed using maps: the place, type and interconnection of settlements, land use, infrastructure and other territorial networks, the

coordination of territorial impacts of sectoral decisions, the impact of some activities on natural and environmental processes. Territorial planning is usually long term planning.

**Regional policy** refers to planning activities that plan economic processes in a given area or region. In fact, it is a type of macro-economic policy-making, albeit at the regional or trans-regional level and not at the national level. In this respect, it is different from national macroeconomic policymaking, since some elements of the latter are irrelevant on a regional level (e.g. monetary policy, tariff policy and some comprehensive nationwide institutional regulations). Other aspects, however, are more important for regional level economic policy such as economic restructuring, employment, environment and housing. Regional economic policy takes into account and allocates some development resources to local, regional, national (and supranational) governments. Its time horizon is therefore, at least partly, restricted by the reasonable maximum horizon of budgetary and financial decisions. Its instruments mainly consist of economic means, while spatial planning (especially on a smaller scale) applies also to administrative instruments. The new regional policy in Slovakia started to be formulated after the year 1990. The Slovak Government adopted principles of regional economic policy that constituted a proposal for system measures for solving regional issues and regulating the development of problematic territorial units. Slovakia also adhered to the basic principles and objectives of regional planning of the European standard of the European Charter of Regional/Territorial Planning.

**Spatial access** refers to taking an integrated and more coordinated approach to the territorial foundation, emphasizing the added value of spatial planning. The substance of integrated spatial planning is to combine selected thematic alternatives to logical and coherent spatial strategies for the further development of specific European areas, in which national frontiers and other administrative constraints are still important barriers. These strategies can be used as a frame of reference for the implementation of multi-sectoral policies in the areas for which they were formulated.

With reference to the article written by Nico van Ravesteyn and David Evers, from the point of view of our experiences with regional policy in the Slovak republic, we wish to add to that spatial planning should connect both regional policy and territorial policy together in order to reach a synergic effect of spatial development.

# Concepts or Strategies? Political Contentions over European Spatial Policy

Mark Tewdwr-Jones, Bartlett School of Planning,  
University College London

## The Politically Looseness of the ESDP

In the period since publication of the European Spatial Development Perspective in 1999, social cohesion, competitiveness and integration have affected the shape and form of regional spatial development across the EU. The scope and influence of these three concepts on the form and trajectory of planning within Member States and – more importantly – at sub-national levels still varies enormously. But in judging the degree to which the ESDP has been ‘taken up’ by Member States, we need to consider whether we should assess the impact of the document as a non-binding strategy, or the concepts contained within the document. It seems pointless to assess the document as a whole. The ESDP was never designed to take on a political mantle, nor could it; with no formal planning powers, neither the European Commission nor the Committee for Spatial Development could insist on Member States implementing the document in all its glory. But there was clearly an expectation that the principles set out in the ESDP could be used as a platform upon which national and regional spatial documents could find a voice.

Expecting the ESDP to be adopted as an ideological force within each Member State was always going to be a politically contentious move. Even accepting for degrees of enthusiasm from middle and northern European countries (the original proponents of an ESDP), there remained practical and political problems translating guiding principles into very different planning processes. There were also problems between nation state governments committing themselves to the ESDP but then being replaced by opposition parties over the last five years that may have possessed very different attitudes towards not only to the ESDP but to Europe generally. The contents of the ESDP – even its three-fold conceptual content of social cohesion, competitiveness and integration – was to some extent a political fudge, allowing degrees of verbal commitment but containing no degrees of absolute political certainty, thereby allowing all Member States with divergent views to feel happy with the final politically-loose document. For these reasons, as was remarked some years ago, it was

a mute point whether one may ever judge the ESDP in practice as a ‘success’ or ‘failure’ (Tewdwr-Jones 2001). The degree of implementation of the ESDP’s concepts would therefore be a matter solely for nation states.

## Impacts of European Spatial Policy within the UK

Within the UK, the period since 1999 has been one of the most frenetic for planning. Up until this time, the UK was, to some extent, not particularly disposed towards notions of European spatial planning. Although the EU influenced domestic planning policies and practices at regional and local levels, there was a general reluctance – inspired purely from a political and narrow land use perspective – to acknowledge this influence (Tewdwr-Jones and Williams 2001). Since that time, by contrast, the UK government has become much more pro-European and has been a staunch vocal supporter of European spatial planning.

The publication of the national planning policy statement PPG11 on Regional Planning in October 2000 had recognised the importance of the ESDP. This, in turn, has had an impact upon the contents of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, recently passed by the UK Government that radically amends UK planning. Polycentric development of the EU territory, a principle of the ESDP, had started to be a required principle of English Regional Planning Guidance Notes; these documents are now to be replaced with ‘Regional Spatial Strategies’ but, as their new name implies, the same expectations on working within the concept of polycentric development remains in place. All this is challenging for planning professionals, of course, and there remains a need for more concrete conceptual and research bases before the adoption of polycentric development could be considered further in a practical way (Hague and Kirk 2003). But that has not prohibited a commitment to the concept from commencing.

In relation to other core features of the ESDP, such as improving accessibility and information and communication technology, this was starting to be addressed through transportation plans for Regional Spatial Strategies and similar plans and strategies have been prepared in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. One transportation issue that is considered important in this respect is the development of high-speed train services and, although being addressed, is subject to separate planning and financial commitments on the part of the UK Government rather than as an aspect of sub-national planning arrangements. The sustainable management of natural resources was another key ESDP principle being addressed by the UK Government,

through the need for the sustainable appraisal of policies now being developed at the local level through new local development strategies.

At face value, then, the UK is taking a proactive approach to spatial planning policy, partly to achieve better integration and provide a stronger framework for the purpose of sustainable development. The introduction of 'Sub-Regional Spatial Strategies' will address economic growth and contribute towards the improved economic performance of all regions. At the local level, the Government is committed to introducing a more flexible spatial planning process with strong community involvement and the new Local Development Frameworks will be able to address social inclusion, economic and environmental issues and their inter-relationships. Alongside these new strategies and planning frameworks, the key drivers of change will remain the infrastructure providers, but it is intended for the infrastructure issues to be integrated eventually within the new documents.

Within Scotland, the Scottish Executive is in the process of developing a National Spatial Planning Framework while in Wales the Welsh Assembly Government has already issued the draft national Wales Spatial Plan for consultation. Finally, in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive has commenced work on a draft Regional Strategy 2025.

How so much has changed in just five years. Devolution and regionalisation have permitted different approaches to planning across different parts of the UK but all are working, broadly, according to the form and concepts of the ESDP. But the UK Government has also had a proactive attitude to the concepts of spatial planning. Yes, forces within the UK remain nervous about growing EU influences over domestic agendas; but the change in ethos has occurred partly because of economic reasons and concern about the potential relationship between spatial policy and Structural Funds on the one hand, and the possibility of the UK losing out economically to Eastern Europe following Enlargement. The change, although providing planning with a welcome and much needed tonic, has occurred for mainly political and economic reasons.

#### Future European Spatial Planning Prospects

Turning to future agendas, Enlargement is bound to have great impacts on aspects of European spatial development and to the form and framework of planning, right across Europe. The key question is: is this sufficient justification to comment another ESDP process? Given the gestation period of the first document, I doubt whether

anyone would want a repeat of the long-winded preparation process. The important issues appear to be to find ways to strengthen communication and research across the European territory in relation to planning, and to find ways to consider how other community initiatives can be considered within the existing – gradually adapting – spatial planning framework, and how other nations can work together on shared planning problems. The ESDP provided a platform within the EU, and through Interreg programmes, Community databases established as part of ESPON, and enhanced networks and links between countries, new challenges will start to be addressed. The key task is how to address issues of connectivity.

If the question is whether Europe wants a second ESDP, the answer appears to be both yes and no. But if it is going to happen, there needs to be greater consensus on what form, shape and purpose such a new commitment would have. And that also means addressing political issues. But a new commitment might not be towards a new strategy or document; the new commitment might be to guiding principles. There are substantial issues relating to city regionalism and intra-urban issues, and social and economic tensions, which must be addressed. There is a continuous and uphill struggle to improve existing initiatives and measures before considering new ones. Another focus should be on scalar relationships and at which level is it most appropriate to take development decisions. Enlargement will have a profound effect on Europe but there will not only be heightened expectation on the accession countries to embrace European spatial planning, there will also be expectations from the accession countries that a common pan-European approach to the concept of planning will be of use to them. This relates to fundamental questions about the future status of planning, at various spatial scales, right across the EU.

The relationship between the ESDP, ESPON, Structural Funds and Territorial Cohesion is questionable and complex. This needs addressing if the proactive possibilities of planning are going to be sold politically. A great deal of the degree to which European spatial planning will be bought will be dependent on interests external to planning. Therein lies possibly the biggest challenge ahead.

#### References

- Hague, C. and Kirk, C. (2003), *Polycentric Scoping Study*, London: ODPM.  
 Tewdwr-Jones, M. (2001), 'Complexity and interdependency in a kaleidoscopic spatial planning landscape in Europe', in L. Albrechts, J. Alden and A.R. de Pires,

(eds.), *The Changing Institutional Framework of European Spatial Planning*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Tewdwr-Jones, M. and Williams, R.H. (2001), *The European Dimension of British Planning*, London: Spon Press.

## Is European Spatial Planning Still Coherent?

Peter Janssens, Deputy Departmental Manager,  
Secretariat General, Benelux

Do we need a successor to the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)? The most likely response would seem to be 'what for'? There seems to be very little enthusiasm for starting work on a new ESDP. This was demonstrated by the Dutch chairman's comments on the proposed Strategic Policy Document, in which he stressed that the quest for greater coherence between the various elements of European sectoral policy and European structure policy did not involve a new ESDP process.

So what are the objections to a new ESDP process? I see three explanations for the current lack of interest.

1. People regard the first version of the ESDP as too general and see little actual influence on their own policy. They may ask themselves whether the ESDP of 1999 really did present any new insight or direction, or whether it was merely the 'common denominator' (albeit a good one) of current planning practice in the various European member states. Given the high level of consensus sought, we need hardly be surprised if this was indeed the result.

2. There is some general disdain for the long, labour-intensive consultation process and its uncertain results. It seems that in today's 'businesslike' climate, in which policy processes are increasingly judged according to immediate and measurable results, people prefer to see quick results.

3. The 'sense of urgency' for a new ESDP is not immediately apparent. The very title of the forthcoming **Unseen Europe** belies the fact that public opinion is not (yet) fully attuned to the potential conflicts, contradictions and spatial incoherence between the various

elements of European sectoral policy and structural policy. Why seek a remedy if the problem has not yet been acknowledged?

With regard to this third point, I have high hopes for ESPON and ESPON II. After all, the results returned by this network are intended to present spatial evolutions in a clear and incontrovertible manner, demonstrating the likely effects of incoherence and hence serving to heighten the sense of urgency.

The current status of the ESDP remains somewhat ambiguous. For one thing, it is not yet known whether the new member states will endorse the 1999 Potsdam agreement at all. For another, the current version is still in need of further elaboration to address the needs of the 'old' Member States if the ESDP is to retain its relevance.

We therefore face a choice: to extend the geographic scope of the programme, or to enhance its content to represent greater depth. Or perhaps it would be appropriate to both broaden and deepen the ESDP.

This process of deepening will raise two significant considerations. Firstly, the incorporation of the principals of Territorial Cohesion into the draft European Constitution. I regard this as a sort of 'light' version of what transnational planning should actually entail, concentrating as it does on the effects of European sectoral and structural policy. As a result, many of the actual planning intentions will fail to be considered properly, although a number of determinant elements of transnational spatial structure are now available for use.

In fact, as in practically all sectoral policy areas which are in some way relevant to spatial design, the responsibilities under this approach are divided between the Commission and the member states. Any joint framework, such as a new ESDP or a Strategic Document, must therefore also be a shared product of the Commission and the member states: a combination of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processes.

The second important consideration is the belief that European cooperation can be undertaken at different speeds. I believe that the cooperation in terms of spatial development must be intensified by means of 'sub-European clusters', with a view to elaborating and applying the principles of the ESDP itself.

The general principles of the ESDP require an area-specific interpretation, otherwise the 'generality' of the ESDP will render it

irrelevant. The cluster approach can serve to bridge the gulf between the pan-European scale level (with its high degree of abstraction and generalization) and the more direct scale level of spatial planning in individual countries and regions. Moreover, it is possible that amendments and improvements to the ESDP will emerge from within the clusters, whereupon any misgivings on the part of the new Member States can be assuaged.

The exact extent, delineation and individuality of the sub-European clusters can be defined flexibly and in various ways. The areas presented by the Interreg IIIb programme may form a useful point of departure. For many regions, such as north-western Europe, the first steps in devising a spatial vision have already been taken. However, there is as yet insufficient political support and little attempt to allow this vision to permeate practice 'on the ground'.

I regard the Benelux itself as a potential sub-European cluster. The Second Benelux Structural Outline, which has now been approved by the Ministerial Working Group on the Spatial Development of the Benelux, offers a source of inspiration and justification for trans-national, cross-border cooperation in spatial planning activities. The content of this document is fully compatible with that of the ESDP, although the Structural Outline is somewhat more closely aligned with the policy of the individual partners.

I would like to see the results of cooperation within the sub-European clusters taken into account during the discussion of, and decision-making for, pan-European planning documents. Here too coherence can be greatly enhanced.

## European Spatial Policy takes a backseat to Economics: Lessons from Germany

Wendelin Strubelt, Director Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung, Bonn

The paper 'Whatever happened to European Spatial Policy?' reminds me in three important points of the discussions we have in Germany regarding spatial planning. If we neglect the special case of Germany

for a moment – i.e. the implementation of a new governmental and planning structure in the territories of the new Länder (the former GDR), which required quite a change of political and planning culture in these areas – we can also observe similar discussions in Germany on:

- the gap between the aspirations and intentions of spatial policy and the effect it finally has in relation to other powerful policy areas
- a lack of penetration of aspects on sustainable development as an overall orientation which has led to a continuing struggle between economic and ecological reasoning
- the need for and the use of general schemes for spatial planning in regard to regional and local problems and policies including an ongoing discussion about the reality of the so-called co-operative federalism.

This is the experience of a country which, like many other Western European countries, is challenged by the process of globalisation. This often means that, on account of the need to compete with less expensive locations all over the world, many arguments for an ecological or sustainable solution of a spatial or territorial problem have to be withdrawn or cannot compete with those stemming from the realm of jobs or BNP on a national or a regional level. In other words, sometimes we have the impression that ideas deduced from spatial aspects guided by the overall framework of sustainable development will only work in times of affluence but not in times of economic crisis or economic restructuring, in which we are at the moment. This process of restructuring does not only touch the old industrialised areas but it has already had a heavy impact on other industries or even on the service sector as regards rationalisation and all its consequences for the labour market. In addition, if we take into account that for most of the member states their own interests are still far more important than the intentions of a general European framework like the ESDP, then we can easily conclude that any general or benevolent perspectives of spatial planning will continue to have hard times, now and in the foreseeable future.

However, the German situation is not only characterised by the process of globalisation – for the sake of clarity I oversimplified – but also by the process of transformation in the territories of the new Länder. Their economic, social or even demographic problems are not comparable to those of the former FRG but rather resemble the situation of the new member states, also being heirs of former communist-ruled countries. In the process of reconstructing governmental and planning practices comparable to the Western parts, many adjustments have

to be made. In addition, many investments or projects were designed and implemented which in many cases did not follow the pure principles of sustainability. Not to forget the special problems of restructuring agriculture and the abolition of whole sectors of industries which were not able to compete anymore on a national and an international level. All these combined processes have resulted in problematic de-industrialised areas and peripheral rural areas unknown to West Germany for a long time while on the other hand they have improved the ecology of nature and landscape. In order to adjust such problem areas to the European standard, many ideas stemming from 'affluent' times had to be modified or adjusted in a way which could not easily be deduced from the ESDP for instance. This also required strategies to maintain the internal territorial cohesion in Germany taking into account that in the future it would not be possible to maintain an equal level of quality of life or infrastructure in every part of the country. New policies taken from, for instance, the situation of the problem areas described above have to be developed.

What does this mean for the future European Spatial Policy? From the German experience we know that frameworks like the ESDP are useful as general schemes but that it is unrealistic to think that they will be real blue prints. This rather creates stress than hope. On the other hand, without such frameworks many projects or processes will certainly continue in the wrong direction. They are especially needed in the case of co-operative federalism like we have on a national level in Germany or on a similar level in Europe. The question of who should take the initiative to further develop such frameworks on the European level, is secondary to the question if an initiative will be taken at all.

Taking for granted that the overall target of territorial cohesion will be maintained in the European constitution, the idea to develop a new European framework for spatial policies will be a more difficult task than the last one has been. However, to hope that it will be a panacea for solving the spatial or territorial problems of Europe overestimates the role of spatial policy in general. It is part of every societal or political structure on a high level of development but it fails as a master plan or master policy. It is part of a very complicated governmental process. However, it is indispensable.

## Nice to Know! So, What?

### Thoughts from the Nordic Periphery

Kai Böhme, Senior Research Fellow, Nordregio,  
Nordic Centre for Spatial Development

The article by Van Ravesteyn and Evers provides a valuable introduction to the current dilemma of European spatial policies. From a Nordic perspective, it needs to be said that the ESDP presented a challenge to the traditional understanding of planning and development in the Nordic Countries, i.e. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Thus the point of departure differed from the one in the Netherlands, and there is not necessarily the shared desire for an ESDP+.

When elaborating the present ESDP, the Nordic countries were rather reluctant towards it. However, they became interested in applying it later on. Indeed, already before the ESDP was adopted, it had been used in the Nordic countries. Although in Finland and Sweden the ESDP influenced both planning and regional policies, probably Denmark can be said to be the first applying the ESDP. Even in Norway, which is not member of the EU, policy documents refer to the it (Böhme 2002).

The application of the ESDP also revealed a number of contradictions and challenges inherent in its aims. The conflict between various sector policies which Van Ravesteyn and Evers mention, was certainly perceived both as regards EU and as regards national sector policies.

The more interesting dilemma appeared when applying the policy aims proclaimed at various geographical levels. Indeed, ESDP policy aims such as polycentricity can be applied at various geographical levels, but with contradicting results. Developments towards more polycentricity at one level may imply certain concentration tendencies, which lead to more monocentric developments at the lower level. For improving a European polycentric urban system and the number of globally important functional urban areas it seems reasonable to strengthen existing functional urban areas of European importance, so that they can improve their competitiveness. In the case of Finland this would imply concentrating development towards the capital city of Helsinki. At the same time, in order to improve the national polycentric urban systems it seems more plausible to overcome the national dominance of Helsinki and to concentrate on strengthening

functional urban areas of regional importance. This is just one example of the ambiguities the Nordic countries discovered when applying the ESDP.

Despite – or maybe because of – those challenges the ESDP poses to everyone trying to apply its aims, the Nordic countries became rather active. They took an active role in the drafting of the so called Mermaid Paper calling for a debate on future European spatial policies; a debate which is not directly related to national interests and Structural Funds debates but rather wishes to bring forward EU spatial policy. This, as well as the strong Nordic presence in European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON)<sup>1</sup>, may suggest the Nordic Countries as suitable allies for pushing for an ESDP+.

Before, however, answering the big question posed in the contribution by Van Ravesteyn and Evers, 'which way forward?', there is probably some more reasoning needed for convincing potential Nordic allies. Once again the Nordic countries are no 'natural spatial planners', and therefore questions emerge such as: What would be the aim of a new ESDP, what would be new in it and can a new ESDP solve the challenge of sector co-ordination? For improving spatial co-ordination of sector policies and, I would like to add, increasing clarity about the geographical level addressed by the spatial development aims, more might be needed than just another ESDP-like document. Indeed, a new ESDP process – in either of the three ways outlined by Van Ravesteyn and Evers – would again face the challenge of serving too many kings and queens. The process would again run the 'risk of creating a sort of mythological monster, with several heads', to use the words with which a member of the then Italian delegation illustrated the last ESDP process (Rusca 1998:37). Thus, the new ESDP might be as ambiguous and weak as the present one.

Furthermore during the ESDP debate, a lack of knowledge on European spatial development was felt. This in turn led to the establishment of the Study Programme for European Spatial Policies (Nordregio 2000) and later on to ESPON. Thus, instead of asking for an update of a policy document, more considerations might be given to the question what to do with the knowledge and competences on European spatial policy the ESPON project is about to produce. It seems that the idea of the ESDP, of European spatial policies, is alive, is continuing, is taking new forms and meeting new challenges. The only question is: What do we want to do and what can we achieve with the emerging policy field?

A convincing answer might help interesting the Nordic allies, who certainly will want to know how to make best use of the changed circumstances: Which new insights do we have through ESPON results? What do we do with those insights? What do we do with the aim of territorial cohesion in the EU constitution?

These are the questions to be answered if European spatial planning or policy-making shall be more than the 'paper tiger' Klaus Kunzmann (1998) fears it to be; if European spatial planning or policy-making shall provoke more reactions than 'Nice to know! So, what?'

1. The Nordic countries are rather active in the ESPON context, both as regards participation in projects as well as support to the ESPON CU – with a Nordic secondment – and in particular Sweden with an active role in the ESPON Monitoring Committee.

#### References

- Böhme, K. (2002), *Nordic Echoes of European Spatial Planning*. Stockholm: Nordregio.
- Faludi, A. & B. Waterhout (2002), *The Making of the European Spatial Development Perspective; No Masterplan*, The RTPPI Library Series No.02, London: Routledge.
- Kunzmann, K. (1998), 'Spatial Development Perspectives for Europe 1972-97', pp 49-60 in: C. Bengs & K. Böhme, *The Progress of European Spatial Planning*. Stockholm: Nordregio.
- Nordregio (2000), *Study Programme on European Spatial Planning*, Stockholm: Nordregio.
- Rusca, R. (1998), 'The Development of a European Spatial Planning Policy', pp 35-48 in: C. Bengs & K. Böhme, *The Progress of European Spatial Planning*, Stockholm: Nordregio.

## The King is Dead – Long Live the King?

Andreas Faludi, Professor of Spatial Policy Systems in Europe, University of Nijmegen

How the ESDP process has come to a halt holds lessons for the time when, under the Constitution, territorial cohesion will be a shared competence of the Union and the Member States. This makes the Community Method possible, giving the Commission the initiative.

Nevertheless, the preference is for the Open Method of Coordination involving Member States in territorial cohesion policy.

### Two Ideal Types

At the entrance of some New England townships there are signs saying 'This is a zoned community', obviously a matter of civic pride. When Jean-Baptiste Colbert sent out inspectors to survey the French provinces, he had something else in mind than regulating land use: to optimise the use of resources. Spatial planning as either land-use planning or as developmental strategy are ideal types. The European Union has neither the competence nor the ambition to engage in the former, but the suspicion that it might has been the pretext to block the European Commission formulating spatial strategy. Instead, admittedly with Commission support, the EU Member States themselves formulated the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP).

The process has been fascinating. Van Ravesteyn and Evers refer to this and to the remarkable, if only equally complex story of the uneven, but by no means inconsequential application of the ESDP. In their piece they outline three options for the future.

To assess these options, it is necessary to be clear about what the Constitution says. It identifies 'territorial cohesion' as a goal of the Union on par with economic and social cohesion and lists it a shared competence between the Union and the Member States. Most competences are shared though, so this really means territorial cohesion is becoming a field of policy like others where the 'Community Method', shorthand for the procedures of formulating and passing EU legislation, applies. So the Commission will have the exclusive right of initiative, but its proposals will be subject to approval by the Council of Ministers, with the European Parliament getting its say under 'co-decision making'.

So the 'competence issue' around the ESDP has been resolved in favour of the Commission, always of the opinion that spatial planning was implied in the notion of economic and social cohesion. Commissioner Monika Wulf-Mathies said so in 1995. Having been rebuffed, and as soon as the ESDP was on the books, the Commission ceased supporting intergovernmental spatial development. Under Commissioner Michel Barnier, the talk was about territorial cohesion – a concept drawn from French planning discourse – instead. Apparently to good effect, because it is now in the Constitution. We can surmise from the third Cohesion Report that the Commission

will take requisite initiatives. Admittedly, it is less than explicit about this, merely announcing the publication before the end of the Programming Period (December 2006) of a strategic document on cohesion policy. However, by that time – hopefully – the Constitution will be on the books, and we may assume that the document will make proposals relating to territorial cohesion. Note that the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON), whose work is already phrased in terms of territorial cohesion, will have come up with conclusions, giving the Commission plenty of ammunition.

Thus, Member States have lost the initiative. They might decide to resuscitate the ESDP process without the Commission, but the effort would be unprecedented, making the first of Van Ravesteyn and Evers' options unlikely. The same is true for the third, involving the European Council. Spatial planning is not an issue for such a grand assembly. Anyway, what could it do? Inviting the Commission to prepare a requisite policy would be relevant in areas not covered by the treaties, but as regards territorial cohesion the Commission will need no prompting. So the second option remains.

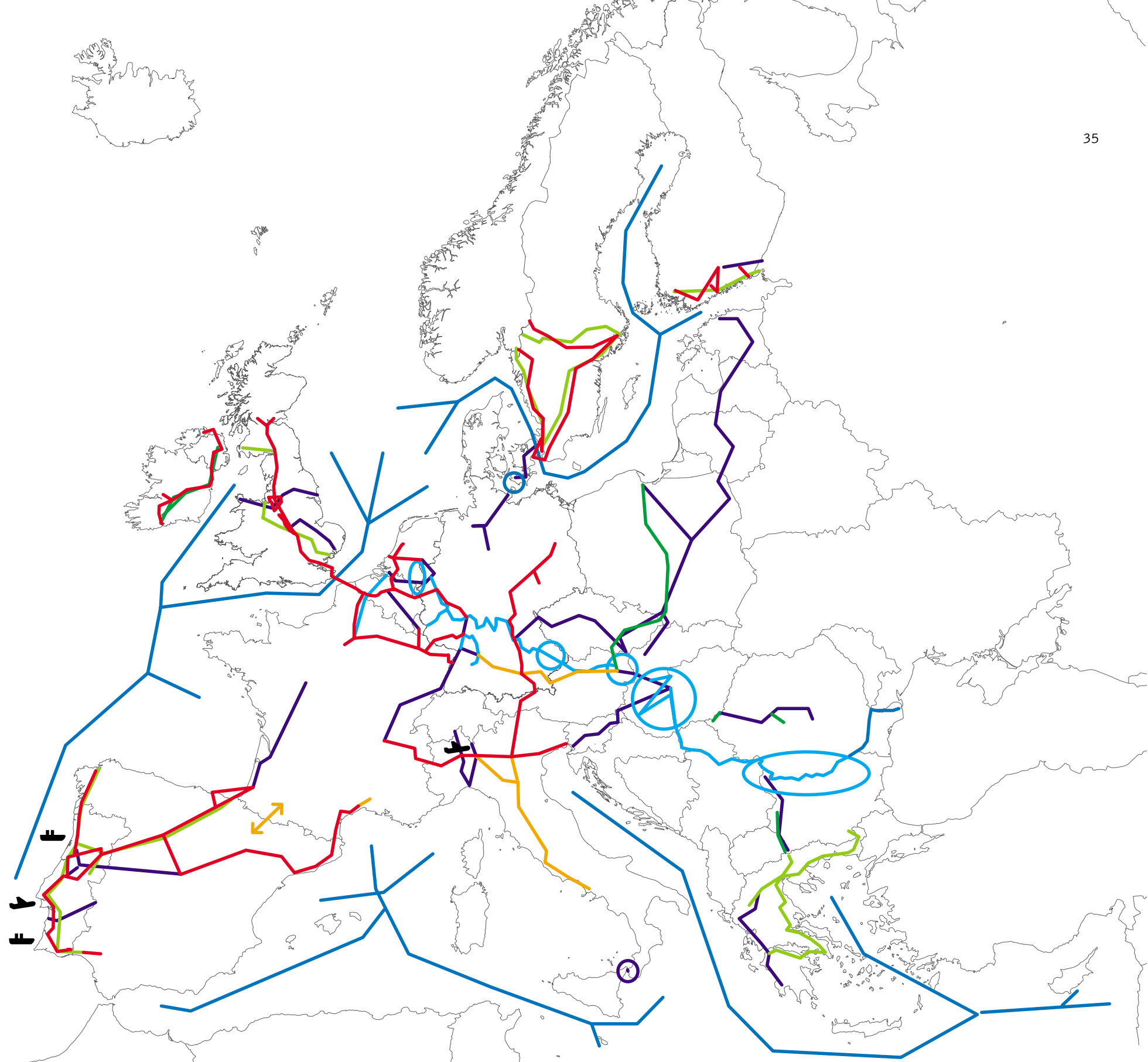
Is Commission-led territorial cohesion policy a welcome prospect? Brussels has no planning staff, so consultants would need to be called in to prepare a document. However, planning is a process and, anyway, to gain acceptance, EU territorial cohesion policy needs to be interactive. So one can only hope that the Commission will swallow its pride and, their recalcitrance in the past notwithstanding, involve the Member States.

Indeed, there is a hopeful line in the third Cohesion Report about annual progress reports drawing on Member State input. This has overtones of the Open Method of Coordination. Touted in the White Paper on European Governance for areas in which the Community Method does not apply but where joint policy is nevertheless needed, this should also be applied in EU territorial cohesion policy. This way, Member States (and other actors) would acquire stakes in it. Their participation would be essential anyway because of their know-how of the varied circumstances in which it would apply.



Overview of past, present and future TENs  
(Source: European Commission, 2003b)

- Essen Rail Project (1996)
- Rail Project (2001)
- Rail Project (2003)
- Essen Road Project (1996)
- Road Project (2003)
- Inland Waterway Project (2001)
- Inland Waterway Project (2003)
- Motorway of the Sea
- ✈ Airport Projects
- ⚓ Port Projects



## National spatial policy requires international perspective

Formally, the European Union does not pursue spatial policy. Nevertheless many of the EU's sectoral policies have major spatial consequences. For instance, the Dutch landscape has changed radically due to the increase in scale of production stimulated by EU agricultural policy. The present scaling back of the common agricultural policy looks set to have an even greater impact. The EU's Habitats Directive and Birds Directive also impose limits on spatial development. It is therefore quite conceivable that European measures will eventually reduce agriculture in the Netherlands by half.

What would be an appropriate response? Should we reject the decisions made in Brussels? Does this call for Euroscepticism? For it cannot be denied that there is a widely shared feeling that Brussels is still inadequate when it comes to democratic government. However much I sympathize with this feeling, I do not share it for reasons of principle. After all, doesn't Europe offer marvellous opportunities? The Union joins cultures that have been associated for centuries and, more importantly, it symbolizes the end of warlike inclinations.

However, we must also be careful not to lapse into docile Euro-obedience. Just like Euroscepticism, this is symptomatic of a lack of interest in Europe. Instead, we should start thinking from a truly international perspective and seize the chances Europe offers, while at the same time adopting a more critical attitude towards Brussels. Criticism is fine. But it should not be

motivated by scepticism, but by interest. That is what I think Europe deserves.

In this respect it is important that we start viewing European policy from the perspective of subsidiarity: where no supra-national interests are at stake, Member States should take their own decisions. Why should Europe make demands of local air quality by means of the Air Quality Decree? Isn't this an outstanding example of an issue on which Member States should decide for themselves? Similarly, we should be far more ready to protest against the excessive uniformity of EU policy. In a country as densely populated as the Netherlands, a blanket European policy is bound to have a totally different effect than in the deserted countryside of France and Spain.

Above all, interest in Europe means focusing on the international context. Isn't it about time that the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam joined forces instead of engaging in fierce competition? And shouldn't the discussion about Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport be focusing on the European perspective, in terms of the Open Sky Treaties? Such issues have been absent from the public debate up to now.

I am not arguing in favour of Antwerp or against the ammonia directive. But I am arguing in favour of politics that takes an interest in Europe and uses that interest as the basis for a critical attitude while focusing much more strongly on the European policy context. This will require a new way of thinking in spatial policy: an approach that no longer decries the restrictions Europe poses, but that takes the European context as a starting point.

Professor Wim Derksen  
Director Netherlands Institute for  
Spatial Research