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TECHNICAL PAPER FROM THE CPMR GENERAL SECRETARIAT

“STRENGTHENING THE EUROPEAN CLUSTER POLICY BY DEVELOPING ITS REGIONAL DIMENSION”

As new initiatives are being taken at European level in order to develop further the European policies in support of clusters, the CPMR wishes to stress the importance of the regional dimension in clusters approaches and policies.

The CPMR also specifically invites the European Commission and the new “European Group on Clusters” to give a full dimension to this regional and territorial dimension within the framework of their activities.

Within the CPMR, the issue of clusters has been addressed in the framework of:

- The CPMR Technical Paper “*Boosting EU regional policy support for innovation in the regions*”, issued in September 2008 and presented at the CPMR General Assembly in Bayonne on 3 October 2008;
- The final report, of the CPMR project “Europe of the Sea”, issued in 2006 in which the idea of a maritime cluster observing system has been put forward;
- A meeting with maritime clusters representatives organised within the framework of Aquamarina in Rome on May 19 2009, during the European Maritime Days.

The CPMR will keep on developing its consideration on clusters in the coming months, notably via its links with EU projects specifically dealing with clusters, and will give special attention to maritime clusters in its approach.

As mentioned in the CPMR Technical Paper “*Boosting EU regional policy support for innovation in the regions*”, Regions have recognised the crucial importance of interactions between actors within regional innovation systems. Clusters generally present various points of interest, including the sharing of equipment and infrastructure, the facilitation of match-making between enterprises as well as between employers and employees, improved circulation of information between cluster stakeholders and quicker access to market opportunities.

Clusters also considerably benefit from their insertion in territorial economic and education systems. Development of their interactions at regional level is part of their assets, if not the condition to their success. It is often that even world class clusters considerably benefited, or still greatly benefit, from regional policy support.

Development of EU support to clusters provides considerable opportunities to Regions. The CPMR welcomes this, and suggests improving even further its interest by:

- Adding qualitative criteria in cluster mapping at European level and improving its regional dimension;
- Organising better coherence and synergies between cluster policies in the territorial and regional approach.

I. - ADDING QUALITATIVE CRITERIA IN CLUSTER MAPPING AT EUROPEAN LEVEL AND IMPROVING ITS REGIONAL DIMENSION

The term “clusters” is very popular today, but encompasses very different realities. The approaches developed by academics and by public authorities at local, regional, national and European level are different and sometimes conflict. Some articles have described the evolution of the concept and its ambiguity^{1, 2}. The European Commission also uses different definitions of clusters, and acknowledges the complexity of this issue in specific and accurate documents³.

The following extract from the final report of the CPMR “Europe of the Sea” project (2006) suggests elements for a definition of maritime clusters:

“In the framework of the “Europe of the sea” project, the term of “maritime cluster” means a network of firms, research, development and innovation (RDI) units and training organisations (universities, specialised schools, etc.), sometimes supported by national or local authorities, which cooperate with the aim of technology innovation and of increasing maritime industry’s performance ; (...); the purpose of this note is to focus on clusters working at region scale and having tight connections with RDI entities. Such clusters may be of local, national or international scope, and be parts of larger clusters.”

Against this background, criteria and indicators used to identify clusters vary according to the approach chosen. A distinction can be made between criteria and indicators focusing on quantitative elements, such as economic growth rates and employment rates, and those focusing on more qualitative ones, such as trust, tools and patterns of cooperation between cluster members. Such distinction between qualitative and quantitative criteria was made in the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on clusters and cluster policy⁴. In addition, it also reflects the difference between clusters in the sense of activity grouping and clusters in the sense of initiatives aiming to strengthen the links between certain stakeholders.

Regional authorities and stakeholders in regional innovation systems often retain cluster approaches that encompass quantitative criteria but also qualitative. These criteria can for instance be the existence and characteristics of a governance structure, or the existence of a genuine strategy shared by cluster members. The clusters identified through these criteria do not necessarily include only large companies but only SMEs.

Despite the fact they do not necessarily represent a strong critical mass in terms of employment these clusters and the cooperation patterns they generate have a strong importance in regional economies. In addition, these clusters can also perform very well at international level. In certain areas, world leaders are not only large enterprises.

Until today, employment rates are at the heart of criteria used by the European Observatory of clusters⁵. This approach allows international comparisons to be carried out, but it does not always reflect the approach or the cluster mapping that is developed in numerous Regions, in various economic sectors. In several cases, important discrepancies have been noted between cluster mapping carried out at European level and that carried out in the Regions.

Without attempting to define the right and only criteria that should be used to identify clusters, the CPMR wishes to stress:

- The diversity of cluster approaches, reflecting diversity of territories. The analysis developed at European level should not only focus on clusters developing innovation and R&D activities. In this perspective, initiatives such as the forthcoming publication of a document from the services of the

¹ See (2006) “*Deconstructing Clusters: Chaotic Concept or Policy Panacea?*” Ron Martin, Department of Geography University of Cambridge, UK and Peter Sunley, Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh, UK, *Journal of Economic Geography*, 3,1

² See (2007) “*Is There Evidence to Support Porter-type Cluster Policies?*”, Frank McDonald, Qihai Huang, Dimitrios Tsagdis and Heinz Josef Tuselmann, *Regional Studies*, Vol. 41.1

³ See COM (2008) 652 “*The concept of clusters and clusters policies and their role for competitiveness and innovation : Towards world-class clusters in the European Union: Implementing the broad-based innovation strategy*” and SEC (2008) 2637 “*The concept of clusters and cluster policies and their role for competitiveness and innovation : main statistical results and lessons learned*”

⁴ See Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on clusters and cluster policy, June 2008, Rapporteur : Antonio GONZÁLEZ TEROL

⁵ www.clusterobservatory.eu

European Commission on service innovation, which will include elements on clusters in the services, are welcome;

- The importance of qualitative criteria in the identification of clusters, in consistency with quantitative criteria such as employment rates. Internal collaborative patterns at local, regional, national and international levels within and between clusters are specifically important. These qualitative elements, just as the data reflecting the political approaches chosen by Regions in their support to clusters should be considerably strengthened in the next steps developed by the European Observatory of Clusters;
- The added value that a specific analysis of clusters supported by Regions through the European Regional policy could have. This provides very interesting elements in addition to data collected through European projects involving clusters.

II. - USING THE TERRITORIAL APPROACH FOR BETTER COHERENCE AND SYNERGIES BETWEEN CLUSTER POLICIES

Over the past few years, clusters were given increased attention at all governance levels. At EU level, several initiatives were taken by different Directorates of the European Commission. Currently, several EU policies providing support to clusters contribute all together to the European approach to clusters. For instance:

- DG Regio for instance addressed the issue in 2002, when a guide for clusters in peripheral Regions had been developed⁶. Today, the EU Regional policy represents the main EU funding source for them. Recently, some case studies about clusters funding through the ERDF were identified by Technopolis in a report on ERDF co-financed innovative projects⁷.
- DG Enterprise provides support to the development of collaborations between clusters at EU level through the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme, in addition to networking and policy activities that drive development of the European cluster policy and competitiveness.
- DG Research implements a cluster approach specifically addressing the regional dimension, through the Regions of knowledge scheme of the 7th Framework Programme of the European Union.
- DG Mare addressed the issue of maritime clusters in the past years, and issued specific analysis and publication about them⁸.

Regional and national authorities also develop cluster approaches aiming at bridging stakeholders in regional innovation systems. In the support they provide to clusters, Regions obviously tend to foster a complementary territorial approach, with a strong attention to issues such as clusters governance or international openness. Through this territorial approach, Regions often give priority to actions strongly linked to the regional economy, and having a positive impact on location of employments at regional level. In addition, their policies often do not provide support purely to clusters which are already competitive, but also target emerging clusters.

Of course, the multiplicity of approaches and funding sources does not facilitate the understanding of their characteristics and the synergies between them. As regards synergies between European policies, initiatives such as the "Practical Guide to EU Funding Opportunities for Research, Development and Innovation" are particularly welcome, and should be developed further.

Beyond coordination of EU policies, the CPMR wishes to stress the importance of the territorial dimension as a key of coherence for cluster policies implemented at all levels of governance. Especially in the context of the economic crisis, which is effecting all Regions, it is also by putting the issue of economic development of each of the European Regions at the heart of thinking about these policies that policy makers can also contribute to better coordination of their policies.

From the CPMR's perspective, the European approach would increase its impact by fully integrating the regional perspective. This could for example be carried out by:

⁶ See for instance (2002) "Creating Smart Systems - A guide to cluster strategies in less favoured Regions - European Union-Regional Innovation Strategies April 2002", Stuart ROSENFELD, Regional Technology Strategies

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/innovative_projects_fin.pdf

⁸ See SEC(2007) 1406 - Commission staff working document "Maritime clusters"

- Avoiding focusing on approaches that would restrictively and solely be based on global excellence, and clusters with a worldwide dimension. Local and regional clusters, including those not necessarily being world leaders in their field, should not be left to the side as nevertheless they often have a significant positive impact on their economic environment. Indeed, the key challenge is not just to give extra support to the already most competitive and internationalised clusters, which furthermore are mostly located in territories benefiting from a high intensity of technology.
- Increasing its coherence and synergies with cluster policies on development strategies defined at regional level. The definition of a common direction to the approaches developed by the European Commission could be improved through stronger regional dimension support. The establishment of improved synergies with policies implemented by the Regions, as well as with use of structural funds at regional level, could for example be obtained by:
 - Stressing on the impact of the Operational Programmes as criteria for selection of cooperation projects involving clusters and funded under the various EU programmes;
 - Promoting development of links between clusters and stakeholders in regional innovation systems, including public authorities. In this regard, the Regions of knowledge scheme, which funds projects involving regional public authorities, businesses and research organisations is a positive example.