



"1st Congress on Smart Cooperation" in A Coruña

## Fernández Currás highlights the need to join forces to help reverse the trend in Europe and turn challenges into opportunities

- The new regulation on the funds emphasises the territorial approach of the Cohesion Policy
- For the 2014-2020 period, the European Commission will increase the funds for territorial cooperation by 35%, an additional 11 million euros.

25 June 2012. The State Secretary for Budgets and Expenditure, Marta Fernández Currás, today defended the success of the European Union in improving living standards and development in member states, despite the continuous examination of the European growth model in recent months. During the opening of the "1st Congress on Smart Cooperation" in A Coruña, she added however that some of the guiding principles of the EU would have to be rethought and that there were some aspects that "might have to be started again". This desire is demonstrated by the Europe 2020 Strategy, which is designed to help Europe overcome the crisis and turn the European Union into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy.

The Conference of European Cross-Border and Interregional City Networks (CECICN) has been the driving force behind the 1st Congress on Smart Cooperation, which featured experts and top level representatives from all European institutions to discuss and reinforce the message of the importance of territorial cooperation.

In her opening speech, Fernández Currás, whose State Secretariat reports directly to the Directorate-General of Community Funds, declared that Europe is facing one of the most critical moments in its recent economic history, and that the path of European and Spanish convergence and growth which we had previously enjoyed had drastically reversed after 2008. In the case of Spain, being out of step with the cycles of the eurozone's central economies, together with production specialisation in labour-intensive sectors, has led to the appearance of more pronounced structural imbalances than in other countries in the EU.

"We are tackling these imbalances with every instrument available to us, through an economic strategy aimed to fiscal discipline and a return to a more flexible and competitive economy," the State Secretary said.

She went on to say that the strategy designed by the Spanish government was fully aligned with the Europe 2020 Strategy, seeking budgetary consolidation and a concerted action to stimulate growth and employment.

In this context, she underlined the need to join forces to change the trend and turn challenges into opportunities, exploiting the endogenous potential of every territory. And this will be feasible only "if we reorientate strategies and policies at the different levels towards the goals of "smart, sustainable and inclusive" growth.

Referring to the Cohesion Policy, she pointed out that it originally centred on the idea of solidarity, promoting the transfer of resources from more developed member states to those with lower incomes, while it has now evolved into an instrument giving the European Union visibility in its territories.

The Cohesion Policy today is therefore an inclusive policy directed at its nearly 500 million citizens, reducing economic, social and territorial disparities. At present, member states and the European Parliament are already immersed in negotiating the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework and regulation of the future Cohesion Policy.

The new regulation on the funds will place more emphasis on the territorial approach of the Cohesion Policy, in response to the new objective in the Lisbon Treaty. This is also supported by the fact that many of the problems the territories are facing affect diverse sectors, and to solve them a deeper integration of the parties is needed, with elements

such as the “integrated approach” required for the implementation of the funds, the concept of “local community-led development” or “integrated territorial investment”.

At the same time, she explained that for the 2014-2020 period the Commission has proposed increasing the available funds for territorial cooperation to more than 11 million euros (35% more) and more concrete initiatives are expected in areas such as support for SMEs, research and innovation, renewable energy and infrastructure.

### Smart territorial cooperation

Marta Fernández Currás also indicated that the regions that invested most heavily in research and innovation are those which have suffered least from the effects of the crisis and are showing a greater capacity for recovery. “This can apply to the regions with a more traditional productive structure, to contribute to their transformation and restructuring of production and services towards an offer with greater added value”.

The goal of territorial cohesion must be taken into account in future programmes, with special emphasis on the role of cities, areas with specific geographical or demographic problems, and macro-regional strategies.

In the current programming period, Spain is participating in eight programmes: three cross-border cooperation programmes, four transnational cooperation programmes and one interregional cooperation programme. It is also participating in the Mediterranean Neighbourhood Policy Instrument. These programmes have a total budget of around 1.9 billion euros, of which nearly 1.48 billion euros correspond to ERDF aid.

The Director General of Community Funds, José María Piñero, explained that a policy of solidarity among regions has been developed since the EU's creation which has sought to reduce economic, social and territorial disparities. However, after the Lisbon Treaty and the new 2020 strategy, a new dimension has been introduced: Territorial Cohesion, which has a significant influence on growth and employment in the EU, reducing social and territorial disparities.

He added that economic recovery must be the starting point for a new social economy which would be more sustainable, more environmentally friendly and more innovative, in which knowledge will be the main driver.



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