

Joint Declaration of the International Lake Constance Conference on the future of the Interreg programme 2027+

The international Lake Constance Conference (IBK) is the political umbrella for the cross-border cooperation in the Lake Constance region. Since its creation in 1972, it has advocated for the preservation and promotion of the Lake Constance region as attractive place to live, and natural, cultural, scientific and economic area. It has ten members from Germany, the Principality of Liechtenstein, Austria and Switzerland and promotes regional cooperation and social cohesion through regional integration.

With approx. 4.3 million inhabitants and a gross domestic product of 330 billion euros in 2023, the international Lake Constance region is among the most dynamic economic and innovation areas in Europe - comparable with the national economies of Romania or Finland. Its strengths lie in the diversity of its subregions and the close cooperation between companies, universities and research institutes beyond national borders. This cross-border cooperation is particularly important for overcoming shared challenges and ensuring the region's long-term competitiveness.

A key instrument for this cross-border cooperation is the Alpine Rhine-Lake Constance-High Rhine (ABH) Interreg programme. Since 1990, over 450 projects have been promoted with a view to driving innovation, improving sustainable development and connecting regional structures. Interreg has proven to be a decisive promotional instrument in order to address shared cross-border challenges such as skilled labour shortages, transport connections or climate protection. Strong Interreg funding guarantees the region's future viability and increases its attractiveness for citizens, businesses and tourists alike.

The IBK is closely involved in the design and implementation of the programme. The IBK's governing bodies regularly receive reports regarding the programme, and the IBK office is active in the programme's advisory bodies.

A strong cohesion policy 2027+

After 2027, a strong cohesion policy is required for all regions and this with adequate resources, implemented in partnership between the EU, the Member States and the regions. The proven structure of shared management must be maintained as it promotes strong identification with local projects and supports the bottom-up approach. Centralisation of the fund management at national level, as proposed in the current discussion on cohesion policy, is to be rejected. Such a restructuring would make the funding of cross-border projects much more difficult and prevent them in the worst cases. Experience with recovery and resilience facilities shows that this structure makes the implementation of cross-border projects between regions almost impossible

as national plans are often incompatible with one another. To avoid delays such as those affecting the current funding period, legal documents for the cohesion policy must be presented at an early stage. Overall, more flexibility, transparency and proportionality are required in the programming, implementation and control of the programme.

For a future-proof INTERREG 2027+

1. Independent Interreg regulation

The specific requirements for European territorial cooperation should continue to be taken into account by way of a separate Interreg regulation. References to other regulations should be avoided as far as possible in order to not unnecessarily complicate the rules.

2. Ensuring adequate resources

In the 2028-2034 funding period, Interreg is offered adequate resources. Although Interreg only accounts for 2.5% of the cohesion policy budget, it has a considerable effect on economic, social and territorial cohesion in the European Union. Through the funding of cross-border transport and economic infrastructures, Interreg creates a base for the European domestic market. However, the potential is not yet exhausted. The GDP of the European border regions could increase by around 9% if all cross-border administrative and legal obstacles were removed.¹ In order to make the most of this potential, a budget of at least the current level plus adjustment for inflation is required. The criterion of population size must continue to play a central role in the domestic distribution of funds among programmes. Economically strong and densely populated regions notably need adequate financial resources to be able to cope with transformation challenges.

3. Continuation of the proven Alpine Rhine-Lake Constance-High Rhine programme area

The current Alpine Rhine-Lake Constance-High Rhine programme area must be continued in its current form. For decades, cross-border structures and networks have been successfully established in the programme area. A change would threaten this success and could lead to the loss of important programme partners and funding bodies for national co-financing. The participation of partners outside the programme areas should also be facilitated.

4. Guarantee cooperation from third countries in the Interreg programmes

The cooperation from third countries such as Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein must also continue to be maintained for the Interreg programmes. Therefore, reliable framework conditions are needed at European level as well as a uniform, practical interpretation of these requirements in practice. To avoid financial disadvantages such as exchange rate fluctuations, in future the exchange rate should be recognised at the time of actual expenditure for an Interreg project and not only at the time of the expenditure audit.

5. Simplification of programme creation and implementation

The creation of Interreg programmes must be simplified. Many secondary aspects and objectives that had to be considered in the last programming period did not provide any added value and lead to unnecessary delays in the approval and review process. Therefore, new fundamental requirements or other framework conditions are refused. In addition, the existing administrative requirements should be further simplified for the implementation of Interreg projects. It is particularly important to streamline approval processes and reduce the administrative burden for project sponsors. Efficient and transparent processes are essential for increasing the attractiveness of the programme and facilitating broad participation.

¹ See Caragliu, A., Capello, R. & Camagni, R. (2017). *Quantification of the effects of legal and administrative border obstacles in land border regions*.

6. Increase in funding for technical assistance

The current limit of 7% of the programme funds for technical assistance is inadequate in order to meet increasing requirements in the areas of digitisation, communication and project consultation. Therefore, an increase is urgently required. In addition, technical assistance should be separate from programme success and paid out as a lump sum, independent of the calls for funds by individual projects, in order to avoid liquidity problems, particularly at the beginning of the funding period.

7. Strengthening citizen and small projects

Citizen and small projects provide significant European added value and must remain an integral part of Interreg A. They allow new groups of stakeholders to access funding, strengthen social cohesion and often pave the way for larger projects. Non-bureaucratic management is required so that these projects can reach their full potential. For the new funding period, further simplifications to the administration of small projects should be introduced. In addition, the financial risk for sponsors of small projects should be reduced, for example through flat-rate ERDF contributions to cover administrative costs regardless of the final exhaustion of the small projects fund.

8. Needs-based solutions instead of performance-based approaches

Cross-border projects target mutual exchange, joint strategies, and only occasionally actual investments. A performance-based approach for Interreg A is rejected since there is no reliable assessment of its effects. The specific requirements of territorial cooperation call for flexible and customised solutions. However, should this approach be introduced, it should only be applied where it makes sense and takes into account the specific needs of the Interreg programmes.

9. Maintenance and further development of the JEMS

The Joint Electronic Monitoring System (JEMS) was developed with considerable financial and administrative resources and adapted to the needs of the programme. A new development would be inefficient and costly. Instead, the JEMS should be further optimised to allow for more effective and user-friendly use. The mandatory application of a standardised monitoring system for all Interreg A programmes is refused since individual adaptation to specific programmes are also necessary, notably regarding cooperation with Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

10. State aid for the Interreg A-programme

General State aid is required for the Interreg A-programme in order to avoid distortion of competition and help with project implementation. Cross-border projects are not, due to their nature and scope, likely to cause massive distortions of competition. Therefore, the principle of State aid, which already applies to certain SME-cooperations within the AGVO, should be applied to Interreg A.



Land Baden-Württemberg



Freistaat Bayern



Fürstentum Liechtenstein



Land Vorarlberg



Kanton Appenzell Ausserrhoden



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