



European Commission  
DG Regional Policy  
Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion  
CSM2 1/97  
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27 February, 2009

Re: response from the four Randstad provinces to the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion

Dear Sir/Madam,

With thanks for the fact that the European Commission has announced a broad call to contribute ideas to the design of policy for Territorial Cohesion in Europe, the four provinces of the Randstad Region – North Holland, South Holland, Utrecht and Flevoland – hereby wish to respond to this call for consultation.

The Randstad Region as an area stands out as a driving economic force in Europe, located centrally in the economic heart of Europe, in the western part of the Netherlands. For this reason, we have some specific messages:

- Economically-powerful regions play an important role in achieving European objectives: they should therefore be placed in a position to fully utilise their economic power and to move forward on tackling new challenges of Europe, such as climate change and the threatened energy shortage.
- This approach calls for space for tailor-made projects and an area-specific deployment of European investments at regional level. Borders should have no role to play in this respect.
- More than is currently the case, the EU will have to issue support to transnational cooperation between regions with similar area-specific challenges. By linking those regions one could create strong transnational communities in which one could learn from each others policy-approaches and could work closely together. The Randstad provinces have acquired excellent experience with such cooperation in economic matters and in relation to rural areas under urban pressure.

The accompanying document provides a more detailed response to the questions posed in the Green Paper.

With kind regards,

Lenie Dwarshuis  
Member of the Provincial Executive for the Province of South Holland, chair P4 Europe

Andries Greiner  
Member of the Provincial Executive for Flevoland, with responsibility for territorial cohesion P4



**Green Paper on territorial cohesion  
Position paper by 4 Randstad provinces of the  
Netherlands – February 2009-**

The core messages of this position paper are:

- *The Randstad provinces welcome the Green Paper: regions and their territorial characteristics matter, and future (regional) policy of the EU must respond duly.*
- *High-opportunity and economically-powerful regions play an important role in achieving European ambitions. They must therefore be empowered to fully utilise their own economic strength and actively tackle new challenges such as climate change and the threatening energy shortage.*
- *This approach calls for space for a tailor-made approach and area-specific deployment of European investments. The Randstad has a number of examples where this approach has been successfully employed (Randstad Urgent, cluster forming around Green Ports and Markermeer-IJmeer).*
- *Active support from the EU is necessary to facilitate cooperation at all levels (multi-level governance), in particular between areas with similar positions, tasks and policy-challenges (transnational cooperation). By linking those regions one could create strong transnational communities in which one could learn from each others policy-approaches and could work closely together. The Randstad provinces have positive experience with such cooperation in the field of the economy and in rural areas under urban pressure.*
- *The Randstad sees the development of territorial impact assessments for sectoral EU policy and of integrated region-specific strategies as important new instruments for responding better to specific regional challenges.*

**1. The term territorial cohesion**

*(question 1 from the Green Paper: What does the term mean and what does it add?)*

On 6 October, the European Commission published a Green Paper on territorial cohesion.<sup>1</sup> In a response from the VNG/IPO, the 4 Randstad provinces, together with the 8 other provinces and municipalities in the Netherlands issued an outline response.<sup>2</sup>

In this response, the 4 Randstad provinces together with the other decentral partners in the Netherlands support the approach to the term territorial cohesion as sketched out by the European Commission in the Green Paper. A definition of the term is not important in this phase. The development of a combined approach is however vital. In its Green Paper, the European Commission recognises that European regions and their territorial characteristics matter, and that at all levels, policy and resources must be used to respond to the dynamism of regional developments. A *tailor-made approach and a bottom-up approach* must be central features when it comes to future EU policy. Subsidiarity is the

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<sup>1</sup> Notice from the European Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee: *Green Paper on territorial cohesion – Turning territorial diversity into strength* (Brussels, 6 October 2008)

<sup>2</sup> VNG-IPO position paper: *Green Paper on territorial cohesion: area-specific policy development as a basis for economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU*, (February 2009)

starting point: act locally when possible; act centrally where necessary. Cooperation at all levels and over borders (*'multi-level governance'*) must be utilised to the full.

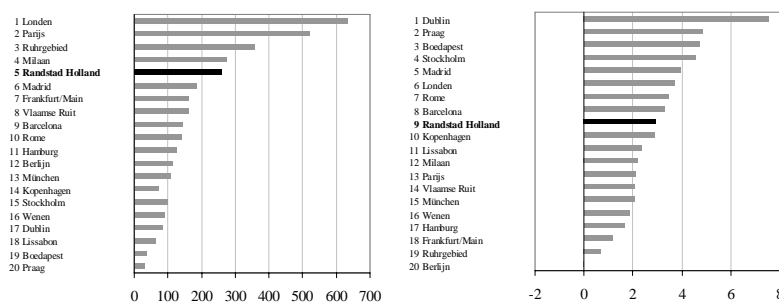
The application of these general points of departure will differ from region to region. In this response, we elaborate what application means for the specific tasks facing the 4 Randstad provinces. In this form, this response is an elaboration of the response of the VNG/IPO.

## 2. The Randstad as a metropolitan area: integrated cooperation at all levels

The Randstad is located in a Delta, at a point where large European rivers meet the sea. The proximity of the sea and the rivers has traditionally lent the area an outward looking focus and a key position in the rise of international trade and logistics. It has made the region an important European area, that can compete with the twenty largest regions of Europe (see figures 1 and 2). Characteristic for the (economic) structure of the Randstad is:

1. The presence of water, both within its boundaries and at the outer boundaries of the area (on a higher plane than the land).
2. The unique layout of the multicore (= polycentric) urban area and the surrounding countryside (peri-urban structure). The large cities (G4): Utrecht, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague are linked together via a ring of various medium-sized traditional Dutch cities (Haarlem, Gouda, Leiden, the cities on the Drecht and Delft), with around them an agricultural and green centre area (Green Heart). This structure makes cooperation essential between cities and between the city and the surrounding countryside.
3. A large number of vital clusters and economic sectors, that can compete strongly on an international scale: market gardening under glass, bulb growing and tree nurseries in the Greenports and in the Noordoostpolder, logistics in the Rotterdam and Amsterdam regions, the Law and Peace cluster in The Hague, the knowledge cluster in the Rotterdam - Delft - Leiden axis, the financial and business services in Amsterdam and Utrecht, culture, knowledge and innovation in Utrecht-Hilversum and Almere, and the Immuno Valley in Lelystad.
4. A number of key mainports, such as the port of Rotterdam and Schiphol airport. Via these mainports, the Randstad forms an essential link to the European continent.

**Figure 1 and figure 2: Ranking EU regions according to Gross Regional Product (level + growth)**



Source: TNO-Randstadmonitor 2008, January 2009

Just like many other European regions, new challenges in the field of climate change, globalisation and ageing present the Randstad with a number of specific regional tasks:

1. Responding to climate change: the threat of rising sea levels calls for continuous alertness when it comes to protection against the sea and rising water (from the sea, from the soil and from the air). In addition, the use of energy from alternative energy sources is essential in order to reduce the massive emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> throughout the area.
2. Strengthening the economic development of cities, economic centres and clusters. The increased international competition makes it necessary to introduce greater selectivity and

harmonisation in order to excel in a number of top locations in a selected number of outstanding economic clusters.

3. Retaining and strengthening the residential, working and living climate of the area: finding a sound balance between accommodation, working and recreation in the densely-populated Randstad places severe pressure on the relationship between city and surrounding countryside, making a reduction of air pollution essential and demanding permanent investments in access by water, rail and road.

Central, provincial and municipal authorities have presented a vision in a strategic document in September 2008 on a joint approach to these three challenges.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Scale and scope of territorial actions

*(question 2 from the Green Paper)*

Focus on territorial cohesion in Europe above all means learning from one another's approaches and experiences. Regions have a great deal to offer in that respect. In the Randstad, we have a long tradition of intensive and coordinated cooperation between various layers of administration, businesses and implementation partners, on differing scales (in districts, between towns and cities, between urban and rural areas and between regions). Integrated, area-specific development is a commonly-used term in that respect, and has been often successfully implemented in the Randstad. The actual form of cooperation differs continuously, and depends on the object and goal of the cooperation. Several of these forms of cooperation have seen European investments deployed in an area-specific manner. For our part, these developments can be used as an example for the way in which we in Europe can together strengthen territorial cohesion:

#### In respect of strengthening economic development

- With a view to strengthening innovation, there is cooperation in the Randstad on a regional level, in forming, strengthening and in selling economic clusters, internationally. Within the **water and delta technology cluster**, for example, the strength of the region is combined: global businesses based in the Randstad are combined with knowledge from leading institutes and universities, such as the KNMI (Meteorological Institute), TNO (Organisation for Applied Scientific Research) and Deltares. Through cooperation, knowledge is for example utilised to respond to challenges from climate change for our coastal defences, such as in the construction of the Tweede Maasvlakte (expansion project for the Port of Rotterdam) and the Zandmotor (new technology focused on extending the coast through sand suppletion). Using ERDF funds, innovative techniques and production processes are being developed and applied within the **Operational Programme West 2007-2013**.

#### In respect of improving access

- Over the past few decades, investments have been made in a number of ways in increasing accessibility. The Cabinet issued a new impulse in 2007 via the **Cabinet-wide programme Randstad Urgent**. In the programme, the Cabinet is collaborating with the provinces, city regions and municipalities on improving accessibility in 30 specific projects. This is a process of 'biting the bullet' when it comes to taking decisions. For each project, administrative duos have been established, with administrators from central, provincial or municipal government. Together, they are responsible for the results. Examples of specific projects are:
  - **Development Vision North Wing Utrecht**: The Development Vision includes the construction of 65,500 homes, of which 15,000 in Almere. By improving the links between Almere, Amersfoort and Utrecht, it must be made possible to reduce the pressure on the housing market in Utrecht, to improve the accessibility of the area. In elaborating this vision, central, provincial and municipal authorities are joining forces.

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<sup>3</sup> See also the *Structural Vision Randstad 2040* (<http://doemee.vrom.nl/randstad2040>), Ministry of Public Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, September 2009. In the structural vision, the Cabinet has made choices for safety from flooding. For upscaling the Green Heart to the Green-blue Delta. For utilisation and strengthening of international forces and for bustling cities in an attractive environment.

- **‘Amsterdam Connecting Trade’ (ACT)**. ACT is the name for the sustainable, multimodal logistic hub south of Schiphol. An important agreement within the Randstad Urgent Contract is active cooperation between **Airport, Seaport** and **Greenport** with a view to improving accessibility of the region and thus improving the competitive position of the Netherlands as a logistic hub.

In respect of strengthening the living environment:

- In the field of nature, climate and sustainability, work is continuously underway in the heavily-populated Randstad on finding a sound balance between living, working and recreation. Two examples whereby intensive cooperation has taken place at various scale levels are:
  - area development for the **Markermeer-IJmeer**: 13 government bodies and social organisations started on the integrated development of the Markermeer-IJmeer area in 2007. The starting point is improvement of the ecological quality of the area, such that self-sustaining nature is established, while at the same time responding to new demands in terms of living and working environment. In the development of the area, the striving is to strengthen the range of recreational facilities while retaining the spatial quality, such as the view of the historical Zuiderzee towns from the water.
  - **The Green Heart**: The National Landscape Green Heart is located in three provinces: South Holland, North Holland and Utrecht. The provinces are jointly responsible for developing an attractive, ecologically valuable and economically-viable landscape in the Green Heart, in which life is good for local residents and recreational users from the surrounding towns and cities. The area has a high level of facilities to offer in the towns and landscapes, that provide recreational opportunities for the wide variety of needs of urban residents. Public parties involved are together responsible with private partners for establishing implementing bodies.

#### **4. EU approach : support for territorial cooperation**

*(question 3 from the Green Paper)*

Future EU policy (whether or not implemented via central government policy) will have to be supportive for this approach. Regional policy from the EU must thereby not only be focused on removing disadvantages and guaranteeing access to basic facilities. A modern regional policy must at the same time also keep in mind high opportunity regions and their potential. EU policy must empower regions to fully utilise their own economic strength and actively tackle new challenges such as climate change, worldwide competition and reduction of CO2 emissions. Specifically in economically-developed regions, a great deal can be achieved in these fields. Support for strong regions in the form of funding, policy or administrative transparency will make a major contribution to the EU-wide achievement of European targets in terms of a more sustainable economic development.

This approach will first and foremost call for space for a tailor-made and bottom-up approach. Any approach is most effective when focused at the level at which problems occur. This is often regional level. In densely-populated and economically highly developed regions, a great deal of experience has been acquired over the past few years for example in setting and enforcing environmental standards. Based on this practical experience, in drawing up new and/or altering existing EU regulations, full account must be taken of this practical experience. Only then will any new legislation truly be effective. On the basis of the region’s own strengths and weaknesses, the regions themselves must be able to make their own choices. After all, tackling the problems in the Randstad region will demand a different approach from tackling problems in other parts of the Netherlands and/or Europe.

#### **5. Coordination, new transnational partnerships and greater insight**

*(questions 4,5 and 6 from the Green Paper)*

At the same time, at EU level, it is of course essential that the level playing field be upheld and maintained. Uniformity in legislation and implementation is a great good, in that respect. Space for a tailored approach is possible by working as much as possible with framework directives (as opposed to fully-elaborated directives) and by enforcing target regulations rather than means regulations. The Randstad provinces support the response from the Dutch Cabinet to the Green Paper in this respect.

In order to encourage comparable and dynamic implementation of (framework) legislation, in various policy sectors there is already intensive cooperation in networks between regional parties, not only within the country but also between regions facing comparable tasks over the borders (transnational partnerships). In these networks, the primary goal is learning from one another, in particular when it comes to establishing a scale that ties in with the specific, comparable (regional and local) problems. This exchange of ideas and policy practices is valuable, not only for the regional administrators and policy makers, but most certainly also for players at a European level. Effectiveness of EU policy will be increased if the territorial effects of sectoral policy are thoroughly considered.

In a number of policy fields, the Randstad has already acquired positive experience with forms of transnational cooperation:

- In the Purple network, the Randstad provinces are active with fourteen other large urban regions that are dealing with areas placed under urban pressure. These parties are working together on strategies aimed at increasing the quality of life of rural areas. Via intensive cooperation, input is being delivered to the Directorate General for Agriculture and the Directorate General for Regional Policy, in reforms of the common agricultural policy. Via this network, territorial cohesion is already being successfully put into practice. For more information, refer to the separate response submitted by the network to the Green Paper.<sup>4</sup>
- Since 2005, the Randstad as a region has been an active participant in the Lisbon Regions Network. Within this network, fifteen strong economic regions are learning from one another in implementing the European Lisbon strategy. Within the network, attention is focused on the contribution of regions in achieving the Lisbon objectives. In many areas, this contribution is considerable. For more information, refer to the response from the Lisbon Regions Network to the Green Paper.<sup>5</sup>

The European Commission has an important role in supporting the formation of such transnational networks. They fulfil a useful role in charting out the territorial effects of (new) or existing policy. Early involvement in the preparation of any new legislation prevents problems occurring later in implementation at regional or local level. Early identification can be further implemented within the Commission through a more systematic approach to *territorial impact assessments*. The Commission has already taken the first steps in this direction with its Territorial Impact Assessment tool at European Commission level. The study of these assessments in specific networks can assist in further improving evaluation of the regional effects (territorial impacts).

Finally, the European Commission could play a role in facilitating special programmes for specific transnational regions, for example in respect of the Baltic Sea programme (publication intended in May 2009). The themes energy, transport and maritime policy are ideally suited for these forms of cooperation within the EU framework. The Randstad Provinces will certainly demonstrate an interest in any such region-specific approach, for example in relation to the development of the North Sea area and/or the North West European continent (strengthening the so-called Pentagon). These regional strategies are also an excellent means of ensuring long-term involvement by other non-EU members in European cooperation, in a number of specific policy themes.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information about the Purple network: <http://www.purple-eu.org/>

<sup>5</sup> For more information about the Lisbon Regions Network: <http://www.lisbonregionsnetwork.eu/>