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#### 'I/A' ITEM NOTE

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 2)/Council  
No. prev. doc.: 10819/21

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Subject: Draft Council conclusions on the report from the Commission on "EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration"  
- Approval

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1. On 14 July 2021, the Commission published the report "EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration"<sup>1</sup>.
2. The Commission presented the report at the meeting of the Working Party on Structural Measures and Outermost Regions of 15 July 2021. Draft Presidency conclusions were examined at the meetings of the Working Party on Structural Measures and Outermost Regions of 6<sup>2</sup> and 16 September 2021<sup>3</sup>. A silence procedure was launched on 20 September 2021 with a revised set of Council conclusions<sup>4</sup> that took into account the comments received from delegations during the final discussion at working party level on 16 September 2021. Delegations agreed to the draft Council conclusions as set out in the Annex<sup>5</sup> to this note.

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1 ST 10819/21.  
2 WK 10201/21.  
3 WK 10201/1/21 REV1.  
4 WK 10201/2/21 REV2.  
5 WK 10201/3/21 REV3.

3. The Permanent Representatives Committee is therefore invited to recommend to the Council to approve, as an "A" item at a forthcoming meeting, these Council conclusions as set out in the Annex to this note.
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**DRAFT**

**Council conclusions on the Commission's report on "EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration"**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- (1) WELCOMES the report on "EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration";
- (2) TAKES NOTE of the fact that this Report is a follow-up of the European Commission Communication "Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions"<sup>1</sup>;
- (3) ACKNOWLEDGES that the COVID-19 pandemic showed how interdependent EU Member States and regions are and RECOGNISES that border regions were more than average affected by it;
- (4) SHARES the Commission's views that border regions, both land and maritime border regions, bring a significant Union added value and can be considered as a testing ground for innovative solutions;
- (5) WELCOMES the focus of the Report: first, on the COVID-19 crisis impact on EU border regions; second, on the review of the progress made in implementing the actions announced in the 2017 Communication's action plan and, third, on the revisiting of the 2017 action plan to increase its effectiveness and adjust it to new realities;

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament 'Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions' - COM(2017) 534 final, 20.9.2017.

- (6) WELCOMES the achievements of the 2017 10-point action plan, in particular:
- The *b-solutions* put in place by the Commission to provide legal support to public authorities in border regions, where needed;
  - The setting-up of the « Border Focal Point Network », an online platform to share good practices;
  - The developments made in cross-border healthcare, especially in terms of understanding the capacity of border regions, the EU border regions added value and the recurring common challenges they face;
  - The progress made in building up new cross-border public transport links;
- (7) SUPPORTS the Commission's proposals to refocus the 2017 action plan along the following four clusters:
- Resilience through deeper institutional cooperation;
  - More and better cross-border public services;
  - Vibrant cross-border labour markets;
  - Border regions for the European Green Deal;
- (8) POINTS OUT, in particular, that:
- Specific innovative solutions are already being deployed in several policy areas;
  - Several EU multilateral and bilateral tools for cross-border cooperation are already available, for example the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC);
  - Most of the Commission's proposals can be supported financially along all EU internal and external borders by the new generation of Interreg Cooperation Programmes, including IPA Cross-Border Cooperation, and some of them also by the NDICI cross-border cooperation programmes;
  - The new Interreg-specific objective on *Better Cooperation Governance* enhances the potential for Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes to actively address specific border obstacles;

- (9) SHARES the views that the European Green Deal is yet another opportunity to improve and test innovative solutions at EU border regions;
- (10) CONSIDERS that territorial cooperation, in all its strands, has a key role in strengthening the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the European Union;
- (11) STRESSES that territorial cooperation is not the sole responsibility of Interreg programmes, as it can benefit, among others, from political commitment within relevant macro-regional and sea-basin strategies and from cooperation actions activated by mainstream cohesion programmes of cross-border regions;
- (12) INVITES the Commission to:
- continue exploring ways to boost the potential of EU border regions, both land and maritime border regions, in close collaboration with Member States;
  - keep Member States informed about the use and implementation by Interreg programmes of the new Interreg-specific objective on *Better Cooperation Governance*, paying particular attention to the capacity of cross-border stakeholders to build closer cooperation.