

Entry of the University of Trieste in the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013

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The CBC Programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013 and the University of Trieste: correspondence between Programme's objectives for the European territorial cooperation and the institutional University mission

The CBC Programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013 (hereinafter, the Programme) aims at accomplishing the strategic European Union priorities set out by the Lisbon and Göteborg strategy, according to the other European Territorial Cooperation Programmes that are financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The Programme aims at *'promoting knowledge and transfer of know-how, developing cross-border economic activities and the potential in the education, technical training and health sectors, as well as integrating the cross-border labour market and jointly manage both the environment and common risks. Where the grounds of cross-border cooperation have already been laid, the cohesion policy should be aiming mostly at actions that will bring added value to the cross-border activity, like for example the improvement of cross-border competitiveness through innovation, research and development, connecting intangible (services) or tangible networks (transport), ...'*¹

In simple words, the main objective of the CBC Programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013, i.e. "Enforcing the attractiveness and the competitiveness of the Programme area", can only be feasible, if the following specific objectives are pursued: 1) Guaranteeing a sustainable territorial integration; 2) Increasing competitiveness and the development of a knowledge-based society; 3) Improving communication and social, as well as cultural cooperation as to overcome the persistent obstacles. Each objective corresponds to a Priority Axis that is divided into precise operational objectives².

The Priority Axis 2, "Competitiveness and knowledge-based society", includes four operational objectives, among which "Promote research and innovation for the development of knowledge-based economy" and "Improve and qualify employment potentials through coordinated higher-education and training".

Those operational objectives correspond to the most important institutional purposes of the University of Trieste, as stated in its first Social Responsibility Report 2008: The

¹ Operating Programme number CCI: 2007 CB 163 PO 036, page 44 (www.ita-slo.eu/documenti_di_riferimento/documenti_di_programma/).

² Therein, page 63.

University of Trieste is *'the promoter of the economic and social development in the territory. Its role is crucial for the success of the Nation in the knowledge economy. The University of Trieste must be involved in various action areas. Depending on the case, the University is seen as the actor, involved in the technology transfer, or background of intellectual capital ... a true territorial mission, carried out by the University of Trieste: an attractive function and promotion of cross-national scientific mobility that can help contrasting Trieste's population decline and regain a decisive role in the European integration process that has been steadily advancing in its ancient reference area.'*³

Given the common grounds of both the programme's objectives, on one side, and the institutional purposes, on the other side, and the a network of active links with public and private bodies, located in the Programme's Area, the University of Trieste has participated to the selection process of Call n. 1/2008⁴, presenting an Expression of Interest. The Eol contains a project for setting up a "Transregional Network for Innovation and Technology Transfer to Improve Health Care-TRANS2CARE" that includes 13 research organisations, technology transfer bodies and health service organizations. The six partners from Slovenia are the National institute of Chemistry from Ljubljana, the University of Nova Gorica and the Primorska University, the Slovene national Institute of Transfusion medicine, the Orthopaedic hospital Valdoltra and the General Hospital Dr. Franc Derganc from Šempeter pri Novi Gorici. The six partners from Italy are the International School for Advanced Studies of Trieste, the University of Udine, the University Ca' Foscari of Venice and the University of Ferrara, the Scientific Research Institute and Hospital "Burlo Garofalo" of Trieste and Treviso Tecnologia, the Treviso Chamber of Commerce's special agency for innovation.

Objectives of the TRANS2CARE project

The Project proposal aims at implementing the objectives of the Priority Axis 2. With regard to the knowledge economy, the Project would like to map the scientific, technological and industrial expertise of the *Partners*, as well as correlate it to the intangible or unmet needs of healthcare workers (unmet medical needs) by providing thematic group meetings (on neuropathologies, allergic diseases, cardiac diseases, and so forth); by creating and updating a database of innovative technological solutions (*Work package n. 5*); consultations with biomedical companies (*Work package n. 6*); by signing the agreements among the companies as to gain regional, national and European funds (*Work package n. 7*); and lastly by creating a spin off (*Work package n. 7*) that would enable a physiological continuation of the established cooperation and scientific-technological exchange. Such activities were set out mainly to overcome the critical state of the past years due to poor knowledge of research results among healthcare personnel and, viceversa, poor knowledge about healthcare issues among research personnel; weak integration among Public Health services, academic and industrial research and development activities; discontinuous cooperation among research bodies, health institutions and companies, that had as consequence poor

³ Corporate Annual Report 2008, page 18

(www.openstarts.units.it/dspace/bitstream/10077/3560/1/BS_Units_sez_1.pdf).

⁴ Published in the Official Bulletin of the Region n. 42 from 15th Oct 2008.

attractiveness of the Programme area for young researchers (pages 88-89 of the TRANS2CARE Project Application form).

With regard to the employment potentiality, the Project foresees recruiting, training and employing fourteen junior researchers with a doctoral degree that are to carry out *Technology Training* with the *Partners* (TRANS2CARE Project Application form, *Work packages* n. 3 and n. 4). At the end of the training period the Project foresees their employment in biomedical companies (*Work package* n. 7).

After evaluation, the Expression of Interest has scored maximum points (100/100)⁵ and thus, the University of Trieste could present the complete project, qualified as a strategic project according to art. 3 of Call n. 1/2008, for a value of Euro 2,611,188,00 in response to Call n. 1/2009 ("Second phase Call notice")⁶.

Outcome of quality evaluation of the complete project proposal: funding denial

In the classification of the project proposals published in the *Official Bulletin of the Region* n. 17 from 28th April 2010 and related integrations, published on the official web site of the Programme on the 3rd June 2010⁷, the project ranked fifth and first among the projects without funding. The outcome was thoroughly analysed as to understand why the funding was denied to the project. It seemed peculiar that funds were denied to a network of academic and research bodies, institutionally aiming at implementing *ante litteram* the Lisbon and Göteborg Strategies and carefully identified to accomplish the latter in the entire Programme area, as indicated in the Call.

The participants to the project TRANS2CARE have been cooperating for a long time⁸ and were aiming at setting a long-term and financially sustainable institutional cooperation that would outlive the time limit of the Programme⁹. The University of Trieste had invested substantial human and financial resources in preparing the project proposal and did, most of all, feel responsible to provide a rational self-analysis of the evaluation results to its *Partners*.

A request was presented to the Managing Authority, to access the documents, related to the evaluation procedure of the TRANS2CARE proposal and the strategic projects financed in the Priority Axis 2, as recommended by the European commission and granted by the regional, national and European legislation¹⁰.

⁵ Mol classification after the quality evaluation (www.ita-slo.eu/progetti/bandi_pubblici/2009062509164240/).

⁶ Published in the Official Bulletin of the Region n. 26 of 1st July 2009.

⁷ www.ita-slo.eu/progetti/bandi_pubblici/2010060313454214/.

⁸ Explicitly stated in the introduction, preceding the description of the project, under section B3 (State of the Art) of the Project application form (page 87) (www.trans2care.eu).

⁹ Objective, included in one of the project activities, namely the work package 7 of the Project application form (page 115) and the strategic requirement under section C.6 (Sustainability and/or duplicability of the project) (page 143).

¹⁰ Art. 42, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, EUR 21620 — the European Charter for Researchers. The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment. 2005. ISBN 92-894-9311-9. Law n. 241 of 7th Aug 1990 (Legge 7 agosto 1990, n. 241) "New provisions on administrative procedure and right to access to administrative documents." Regional law n. 7 of 20th March 2000 (Legge regionale 20 marzo 2000, n. 7) Single text of the provisions on administrative procedure and right to access.

University of Trieste filing a case at the Regional administration court (T.A.R.) of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region

After thorough analysis of the documents, the University of Trieste filed a complaint at the Regional administrative court of FVG on the 16th Sept 2010 against the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, in the person of the President of the Regional Council, and the Programme's Managing Authorities, in the person of its legal representative, to suspend and cancel:

- a) The final ranking list related to the Public Call n. 1/2009 and regarding the lists of Strategic Projects, which were either granted or denied financing in the Priority Axis 2;
- b). All document and minutes of the comparative evaluation procedure, as well as the evaluation form with the scores assigned by the evaluators during the preliminary phase of 'Quality control';
- c) Actions that lead to the appointment of the evaluators, briefly indicated with the abbreviations FVG ITA, VEN ITA, E-R ITA;
- d) Art. 6 of the Public Call for the presentation of Strategic projects n. 01/2009 published in the Official Bulletin of the FVG region n. 26 of 1st July 2009, more specifically the part that sets the deadlines for presenting expenses and reports of the financed projects on the 30th Oct 2010, 30th Sept 2011 and 30th Sept 2012.

The complaint was withdrawn after the reply of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region.

The reply of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region

The letter dated 10th March 2011, sent by the Central Directorate for culture, sport, international and EU relations of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region to the University of Trieste, stated: 'The Monitoring Committee of the Cross-border Cooperation Programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013 approved on the 8th March 2011 [...] the allocation of additional resources for the above mentioned Call [1/2009]. As a result of such decision, the project [...] TRANS2CARE qualifies for EU funding.'

As specified in a press release of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Regional council dated 9th March 2011¹¹, the agreement achieved in the Monitoring Committee'... shall bring EU funding (for a total of almost 10 million Euros) to three additional strategic projects, presented in the Public Call n. 01/2009 (the projects that ranked first among those denied funding for each Priority Axis)". The entire Programme funding amounts at about 136 million euros, meaning that the reprogramming reallocated the budget for a total of 7.35%.

The later press release of the Regional council¹² published some details of that considerable financial operation: the funding for strategic projects increased from 40 to

¹¹ Regional Council news, 09.03.2011 11:35, Cross-border cooperation: Programme Italy-Slovenia unblocked (www.regione.fvg.it/rafvfg/comunicati/comunicato.act?dir=/rafvfg/cms/RAFGV/notiziedallagiunta/&nm=20110309113521001).

¹² News from the Regional Council, 28.03.2011 19:29, FVG/SLO: De Anna-Pelikan, Additional 10 Millions of Euro for strategic projects (www.regione.fvg.it/rafvfg/comunicati/comunicato.act?dir=/rafvfg/cms/RAFGV/notiziedallagiunta/&nm=20110328192903010).

50 million euros (+25%), the funding for standard projects (Call n. 2/2009) stayed at 60 million euros, whereas the available funding for 'cross-border' projects (Call n. 3/2011 for partnerships between the Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia and Slovenia, considered as land border areas) and 'small projects' (Call to be issued) was reduced. Since the Call n. 3/2011 was granted funding of 17.5 million euros¹³, rather than 22 million (-20%)¹⁴ and 8.2 million euros have already been allocated to the Priority Axis 4-technical assistance, the residual funding for small projects is calculated at 0.3 million Euros together with any contingent 'funds from the 3 projects - assured the councillor De Anna'¹⁵, justifying thus the deferment of the Call for small projects¹⁶.

From crisis to successes in the Programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013

The CBC Programme Italy-Slovenia had been going through a tough period due to the disagreements among the Programme *Partners*.

By appointing Elio De Anna on the 15th October 2010 as Regional councillor for culture, sport, community and international relation¹⁷ and relaunching the Mixed Commission between the Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia and Slovenia, approved by the President Renzo Tondo¹⁸, the bilateral relations were restored after three years of disengagement: this European Community organ met in Trieste on the 26th January 2011 under the presidency of the Regional councillor Elio De Anna and the State Secretary Dr Boris Jesih of the Office for Slovenes Abroad¹⁹. The Mixed Commission met again in Brdo pri Kranju (Slovenia) on the 9th February 2011. During that occasion various Working Tables were started. One of them was dedicated to the 'scientific research and technology [...] sector where four strategic actions were identified. The first action concerns the mobility of qualified human capital through professional formation scholarships for graduates and young researchers that would involve research institutions [...] At the end of the meeting both the State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dragoljuba Benčina, and the Regional councillor, Elio De Anna, expressed their satisfaction'²⁰.

¹³ Regional Council news, 09.03.2011 11:35, Cross-border cooperation: Programme Italy-Slovenia unblocked.

¹⁴ Regional Council news, 03.12.2010 15:37, International relations: De Anna in Ljubljana with Slovene Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs (www.regione.fvg.it/rafvfg/comunicati/comunicato.act?dir=/rafvfg/cms/RAFGV/notiziedallagiunta/&nm=20101203153746005).

¹⁵ Regional Council news, 28.03.2011 19:29, FVG/SLO: De Anna-Pelikan, Additional 10 Millions of Euro for strategic projects.

¹⁶ Cross-border Cooperation Programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013. News-09.03.2011 Official implementation of the agreement among Programme partners (www.ita-slo.eu/notizie_ed_informazioni/notizie/2011030916472457/).

¹⁷ Regional Council news, 15.10.2010 16:53, the Region: new mandates for regional councillors (www.regione.fvg.it/rafvfg/comunicati/comunicato.act?dir=/rafvfg/cms/RAFGV/notiziedallagiunta/&nm=20101015165310013).

¹⁸ Regional Council news, 26.11.2010 15:30, International relations: Tondo with the new Slovene ambassador in Italy (www.regione.fvg.it/rafvfg/comunicati/comunicato.act?dir=/rafvfg/cms/RAFGV/notiziedallagiunta/&nm=20101126153025007).

¹⁹ Regional Council news, 21.01.2011 17:34, International relations: De Anna, minorities useful for EU competitiveness (www.regione.fvg.it/rafvfg/comunicati/comunicato.act?dir=/rafvfg/cms/RAFGV/notiziedallagiunta/&nm=20110121173434006).

²⁰ Regional Council news, 09.02.2011 18:21, International relations: Meeting at Brdo pri Kranju - Mixed Commission for the development of FVG-Slovenia (www.regione.fvg.it/rafvfg/comunicati/comunicato.act?dir=/rafvfg/cms/RAFGV/notiziedallagiunta/&nm=20110209182136010).

The renewed cohesion inspired the Monitoring Committee to achieve an overall agreement via a written procedure (without the college meeting) on various issues and thus decided to finance the Call n. 1/2009 with additional 10 million euros. By doing so the Programme implementation process was restarted, consisting of the passage to the quality evaluation phase of the standard projects (Call n. 2/2009) and issuing of the cross-border projects Call (Call n. 3/2010)²¹. The European Union expressed its satisfaction, since these actions have prevented the automatic disengagement of European funds due to the inability to meet the expenditure requirements²².

Uncertain truce or long-lasting peace?

The call for the strategic projects with beneficiaries spread over the entire Programme Area benefited enormously from the above mentioned cuts, but the funds cut hit the call for small projects, thus leaving out the small initiatives near the state border. However, that Programme's agreement aimed at ensuring a uniform and wide-spread economic and social development at the cross-border level.

Some parameters show that the border still exists in a virtual form and is far from being abolished: according to the Eurostat data from 2010, 19.8% of the Italian population aged between 30-34 has a University degree in comparison to the 34.8% of the Slovene population²³. Slovenia is ranked better than Italy in seven out of eight indicators taken into consideration for the 2010 Innovation score, placing thus Slovenia in the Innovation followers group, after the Innovation leaders group. Italy, on the other hand, is ranked in the Moderate Innovators group, just before the group, ranked as last - the Modest Innovators .

The Commission's Report "State of the Innovation Union 2011" states that Slovenia is believed to improve its innovation performance, due to the fact that it has saved large part of its structural fund for research and development, in line with the political guidelines of the European Commission's Programme "Innovation Union", whereas Italy keeps decreasing its investments in this sector. "There is clearly a risk of widening the innovation divide between the Member States": is the alarming message of the Report.

The University of Trieste racing for innovation and development

The financing granted to the TRANS2CARE project diminishes the risk for the 2007-2013 period and lays the grounds for limiting it in the future programming period, when the Universities will be called to give their vital contribution to the economic and social development, well argued in the document "Connecting universities to the regional growth" published by the DGRegio in September 2011 with the Universities to

²¹ Regional Council news, 9.03.2011 11:35, Cross-border cooperation: Programme Italy-Slovenia and the Cross-border Cooperation Programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013 unblocked. News- 09.03.2011 Official implementation of the agreement among Programme partners (www.ita-slo.eu/notizie_ed_informazioni/notizie/2011030916472457/).

²² Regional Council news, 12.03.2011 11:23, International relations: EU plaudit for unblocking Interreg Italy-Slovenia funds (www.regione.fvg.it/rafgv/comunicati/comunicato.act?dir=/rafgv/cms/RAFGV/notiziedallagiunta/nm=20110312112311003).

²³ epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=t2020_41.

be held responsible for the creation of synergies among various financial instruments , such as those of Horizon 2020 and those of the future Cohesion Policies.

It is more than obvious that without funding for the TRANS2CARE project, the distance between the university system of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region and the Slovene system would have become even greater: with the Italian system on one side, not sufficiently expert for attracting and managing wide range innovation and technology transfer, and the Slovene system on the other side, projected in realizing these challenging operations, carrying forward constant communication with the public authorities and enterprises and ready to face the accession of Croatia to the European Union in terms of constant attraction of new European Structural and Research funds. In this race towards Innovation and development the University of Trieste has nevertheless discovered the power of deep internal innovation – the power of a radical change of mentality.

Change of mentality: from spectators to actors

Usually those responsible for the project proposals take unconditionally note of the assigned evaluation. The lack of understanding why a specific score was assigned to a project breaks the virtuous circle of criticism (and self-criticism), crucial for any innovative cultural activity (*learning by lessons*).

Through the analysis of the documents, related to the comparative evaluation procedure for strategic projects, it was possible to discover not only procedure faults, but also fault in the TRANS2CARE application form: the quality of the text, put in in the project application form, can be improved and provide a better way of bringing up the proposals, as well as better compliance with the objectives of the Operational Programme and the European Policy Documents.

By exercising its right to access the procedure documents, the University has shown its intention to compete for EU funds, based only on technical and meritocratic principles and refusing to opt for abnormal forms of two-sided interactions such as confidentiality, indiscretion, undeserved pressure (*lobbying*). Consistently with its orientation, the University of Trieste is a member in the EU Register that consists of a list of organisations and freelancers committed to processing and implementing EU policies, and openly express their opinions by participating to Public consultations.

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