

## **Annex**

### **to the General Assembly meeting of the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives meeting of 9 May 2024, item 3**

#### **Agenda 3.1: Work Plan 2024**

Dear General Assembly,

The 2024 work plan is presented by type of activity.

#### **1. Frontier research**

Since its foundation, CESCI has been working for laying the scientific basis for cross-border cooperation. We would like to continue our activities in 2024, which is basically targeted research and participation in scientific workshops and events.

In this field, we intend to continue to pay particular attention to the further development and strengthening of the international presence of the Research Group of Cross-Border Cooperation led by our President, Dr. Zsuzsanna Fejes, established jointly by CESCI and the National University of Public Service. From the CESCI team, Melinda Istenes-Benczi, Teodor Gyelník and Gyula Ocskay participate directly in the scientific work of the group.

We will also continue to participate in the implementation of an Erasmus+ Jean Monnet project. The consortium, led by the University of Victoria in Canada, deals with border security functions. In this context, we can develop a database on Central European borders.

The primary benefit of these activities is that our research can provide a scientific background for practical developments, while the research workshop can draw on the practical conclusions of CESCI's activities.

#### **2. Cross-border planning and programming**

One of the main activities of our association has traditionally been the (mainly cross-border) planning and programming tasks.

In recent years, CESCI has played an important role in the evaluation of cross-border and transnational programmes with Hungarian participation related to the 2014-2020 budgeting period. Not all of these works have been completed. At the request of the Managing Authority operated within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the evaluation of the Hungarian-Croatian CBC programme is expected to be completed in 2024 and the impact analysis of the Hungarian-Slovak-Romanian-Ukrainian ENI programme is expected to be started.

Similarly, we expect that, in compliance with the cooperation agreement between the two states, we will continue to ensure a strong professional support and programme planning role in the preparation of the programme to be launched in the Hungarian-Slovenian border region (Common Fund).

We are also involved in EGTC planning works, for example, we assist the Via Carpatia EGTC in the development of a tourism action plan, but it is expected that during the year we will have other planning and project development tasks at other EGTCs.

One of the important dynamic elements of the foreign economic activity in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade is the foundation, compilation and continuous care of urban and regional development plans, decision-supporting status-quo analyses, concepts, project lists, programmes and action plans in the Carpathian Basin. For this task, which is often difficult to plan in advance, CESCI has been providing a form of permanent professional “background institution” support since 2017, according to the Ministry’s current requests. These tasks, typically with short-term, high and special resource requirements, are expected to continue throughout 2024. According to our current knowledge, we must definitely finalise the cross-border development concept prepared last year for the town of Šahy in Slovakia. In addition, after-care of previously prepared documents and analytical work on the cross-border effects of urban areas in Hungary are expected.

### **3. Cross-border institution building**

CESCI is a European-recognised expert in cross-border governance and institution building. In this context, we have been supporting the process of establishing a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation of European national transport authorities for years.

Since its establishment in 2009, CESCI has played an important role in the establishment and professional support of Hungarian-participated EGTCs, and in shaping their policies at national and EU level. This wide-ranging activity will continue in 2024, including regular technical consultation with policy-level authorities, the fulfilment of individual requests from each EGTC (e.g. legal advice, preparation of thematic maps, participation in conferences, etc.) and the creation of new associations. We also provide professional assistance for regular EGTC workshops. In addition, we need to maintain our activities to develop and keep up to date the EGTC monitor (an information platform for European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation of Hungarian interest – in Hungarian and English). The 2024 plans include visiting certain EGTCs with Hungarian participation, assisting their professional activities, supporting them at the level of individual consultants, and providing professional contributions to improving the international visibility of the EGTCs with Hungarian participation.

### **4. Policy support**

The policy layer plays an increasingly prominent role in the organisation’s portfolio of activities. Our association provides comprehensive policy support on cross-border cooperation at national and EU

levels. Since 2021, we have been doing this together with the two most important professional organisations, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the MOT, based on the Joint Declaration signed in Strasbourg on 7 October 2021. In any case, our cooperation with the two other associations is close, we participate in their general assembly meetings and professional events, but we would also like to participate in EU procurements and tenders together. In 2023, the Committee of the Regions initiated the creation of a new organisational framework, the European Cross-Border Cooperation Platform (ECBP), the governing board of which was invited by the head of the Committee of the Regions' Territorial Cooperation Committee, a member of the Committee of the Regions and a representative of those three organisations. The Platform aims to bring together all EU cross-border organisations and represent their interests towards EU decision-makers.

We are active members of the EUREGHA network, in which we participate in the work of the working groups on cross-border cooperation in health and on Digital Transformation, as well as joint application activities in this respect.

The usual tasks of CESCI include general professional and policy-making support (at EU and national levels) of domestic ministries and cross-border actors involved in cooperation (local and local authorities, institutions, EGTCs, etc.). These tasks will also be present in 2024, in particular with regard to our role in the Territorial Operational Programme Monitoring Committee, the negotiation process of the EU mechanism to help remove legal and administrative barriers, as well as the definition of cross-border functional urban areas and the cross-border aspects of their planned activities, in cooperation with the Hungarian Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development.

Our association is also consciously involved in the development policy related to the Danube Basin. Within priority area 10 of the Danube Strategy, we play an active role in cross-border capacity development and cooperation, through the work of the working group in the priority area. We regularly prepare professional background materials and participate in professional and policy events concerning the development policy of the Danube region.

We are also actively engaged in the work of the Cross-Border Governance Network in the Western Balkans.

The b-solutions, launched by DG REGIO and managed by the AEBR, will continue in 2024 to remove legal and administrative obstacles in border regions. We promote the new b-solutions call based on AEBR's request; in addition, during the year we will be involved in the exploration of a number of cases and in the development of accessibility proposals.

Within the framework of the Slovak-Hungarian cross-border programme, we were able to start in 2023, together with CESCI Carpathia, the implementation of the six-year strategic project (#ACCESS), which aims to identify and systematically eliminate legal and administrative barriers between the two countries. This task, in addition to being an integral part of CESCI's strategic goals, will present a significant professional challenge and demand for resources for the working organ during 2024.

Last year, as a member of a consortium of 9 members, led by the Land Government of Saxony, we (successfully) submitted a proposal for the call of the Central Europe Transnational Programme as part of the fourth priority axis supporting better cooperation governance. In the framework of the BorderLabs CE project, partners working together along the Italian-Slovene, Austria-German-Czech, Hungarian-Slovak, Czech-Polish-German, and the German-Polish borders will implement PILOT

activities in the field of integrated cross-border planning, participatory governance and the removal of legal obstacles based on a uniform methodology. The PILOTs provide lessons for the development of a guide and knowledge-sharing platform for the whole Central European region and the signing of a charter supporting the region's internal integration across borders. Within the project implemented between 2024 and 2026, our association performs the tasks of professional coordination and project communication. CESCI will also be responsible for developing and maintaining the knowledge sharing platform.

In addition to the above, activities are planned for the preparation of the new cohesion policy after 2027, in particular with regard to the European Territorial Cooperation objective (this means participation in opinion and policy-making processes and working groups involving a number of travel needs).

## **5. Knowledge sharing**

Sensitisation, constant dissemination of our professional achievements, mediation between local, regional, national and community-level actors involved in cross-border cooperation are an important goal of our organisation. As part of this, we intend to maintain the initiative of the Szentgotthárd/Monošter Forum (which has served the Slovenian-Hungarian dialogue since 2015), which is intrinsically linked to the launch of the Hungarian-Slovenian Common Fund. We also provide regular professional support for the training of students aiming to develop the Hungarian border regions. These activities (e.g.: Member services, events targeting local actors, publications, etc.) will also commit resources during 2024.

At the same time, our association is increasingly involved in the professional discourse at EU level, we are regular speakers of EU professional events related to border issues, we provide opinions on policy documents, and together with the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the French Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT), we have created a professional alliance representing the interests of European citizens living along the border. Our priority goal in 2024 is to develop existing relations with the accession neighbourhood and to generate new collaborations. In this context, we actively contribute to supporting the EU accession process of Ukraine (Carpathian Focus) and Serbia (and through them the entire Balkan region). These tasks include launching joint initiatives, advising and transferring EU experience.

It is now regular that our colleagues give professional lectures to the students at the Hungarian universities, and we also help the Pálfi István Foundation fellows with mentoring.

Other platforms for knowledge transfer are our quarterly newsletters and the members' newsletter. The study visits organised for our members also serve to share knowledge, which we intend to continue in 2024. Furthermore, our general knowledge sharing opportunities are significantly enhanced by the dissemination tasks to be carried out in the framework of the #ACCESS and BorderLabs CE international projects.

## **6. Organisational Development and Social Responsibility**

In 2024, we continuously and consciously strive to professionalise the operational functioning of the work organisation. In order to achieve the above objectives, it is essential that CESCI staff be professionals with deep and up-to-date expertise and can demonstrate this knowledge to international standards. To this end, we place great emphasis on the retention and further training of our experienced and well-trained staff, both professionally and linguistically. It is also a prerequisite for the successful care of our mission that the organisation be an active member of the relevant international organisations, with properly maintained equipment and software fleets and databases for efficient and high-quality work. To maintain these conditions, we plan to allocate human and material resources in 2024.

In the area of social responsibility, we have taken significant steps in the area of social responsibility beyond our public benefit activities in recent years. Our activities in this area will continue in 2024, according to the potential and needs that CESCI can meet.