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OPPORTUNITIES FOR CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION FOR BUSINESSES IN SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

Cross-border cooperation between private interest groups (organizations that represent commercial, industrial, labor, environmental, or other types of interests and seek to influence political and regulatory decisions at the local, national, or international level, such as companies, unions, consumer associations, environmental groups, among others) is an increasingly important issue today, especially in the context of post-pandemic recovery where European Programs of Cross-Border Regional Interest and the Valencia Treaty on cross-border cooperation between territorial entities and instances of 3 October 2002, provide a legal and financial framework to promote cooperation between these interest groups, which are in a privileged position to contribute to the solution of common problems and the promotion of sustainable development throughout the border region between Spain and Portugal.

PERTE (Strategic Projects for Economic Recovery and Transformation) are a new instrument of public-private collaboration between public administrations, companies, and research centers that allow access to Next Generation funds, a European financing program that seeks to support post-pandemic economic recovery and the transition to a more sustainable and green economy. Next Generation funds are used to finance projects that address common challenges in the areas of environment, economy, and society, and that contribute to the economic recovery of the region. To declare a PERTE, it is required that the project contributes to economic growth and employment, combination of knowledge, experience, resources, and actors that allow to remedy market failures or / and social challenges that could not be addressed otherwise, innovative character and added value in R&D&I. In addition, it is required that the project has quantitative or qualitative importance, involves high technological or financial risk, integration and growth of small and medium-sized companies, projects with disruptive and ambitious research and innovation phases, beyond the state of the art in the sector, followed by a first industrial deployment.

For their realization, private interest groups interested in participating in a cross-border project must comply with a series of requirements according to their internal legislation. First, they must be registered and have a headquarters in one of the regions participating in the project. In addition, they must have a clear and stable organizational structure included in the mandatory cooperation agreement. It is important to note that cross-border cooperation between private interest groups is not always easy to implement and may present some difficulties in administrative procedures and financial requirements or due to lack of coordination between the different actors involved in the project, including private interest groups, local authorities, and funding agencies, public or private. Lack of coordination can lead to delays in project implementation and a decrease in its effectiveness.

In addition to the coverage provided by the Valencia Treaty through cooperation agreements, the EU has established the Interreg Spain-Portugal Program (POCTEP) 2021-2027, the largest cross-border cooperation program in the EU, approved by the European Commission on August 22. In addition, the Interreg Sudoe Program supports the development of regional transnational projects in southwestern Europe (Spain, France, Portugal, and Gibraltar), through the ERDF. INTERREG Atlantic Area promotes transnational cooperation between Atlantic regions of five European countries (Spain, France, Ireland, Portugal, and the United Kingdom) by co-financing cooperation projects in various fields such as innovation and competitiveness, resource efficiency, territorial risk management, biodiversity, and natural and cultural goods.

Today, therefore, there is a broad and flexible legal framework for cooperation that allows development for private interest groups, including SMEs and start-ups, and European financing possibilities that favor cross-border cooperation, especially applicable to Galicia, Castilla y León, Extremadura, and Andalusia in the provinces that make up the raia (Pontevedra, Ourense, Zamora, Salamanca, Cáceres, Badajoz, and Huelva and their municipalities and associations) in Spain; and in Portugal, to the Coordination Commissions of the North, Central, Alentejo, and Algarve regions; to the Associations of

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Municipalities and other structures that integrate municipalities with intervention in the geographic area of NUTS III (Minho-Lima, Cávado, Alto Trás-os Montes, Douro, Beira Interior Norte, Beira Interior Sul, Alto Alentejo, Alentejo Central, Baixo Alentejo, and Algarve), and to the municipalities located in the mentioned NUTS III.

Knowledge of these opportunities will enable entrepreneurs to develop important revitalization projects in the border area that, in the coming years, will help to break down the invisible barrier between our countries.

*By Jesús Oroza Alonso
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