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Leadership in Regional Cooperation

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1 Introduction

Regional Cooperation is an ongoing process. Its more recent developments have altered the very fabric of cooperation. This is described in the first part of this essay. The second part deals with the consequences of regional cooperation and new forms of governance for leadership. Different features and problems of leadership are discussed. This discussion is summarized in a short conclusion.

2 The Venue for Leadership: Regional Cooperation and Regional Governance

2.1 “Classical” Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation is not new, as not all public services can be delivered by one local government. Many forms of regional cooperation have been developed: mergers of local governments as extreme form on the one side, different forms of cooperation on the other side with a specific contract between two local governments as mildest form. In between one will find consortia or regional authorities for specific policy sectors, but also transfers of specific competences to another community. Many of these cooperations were found to be necessary by the municipalities themselves and were negotiated and agreed upon, whereas others were mandated by higher levels. These two aspects, agreement and mandate, can also be regarded as ends on a continuum. Then carrots in form of extra money from higher levels of government after contractual cooperation or sticks in form of deadlines for cooperation (later they will be mandated) would be located in between. In case no basis for regional cooperation exists at all, higher levels may take away the competences from the local level and provide the services themselves or create new authorities, be it a metropolitan transport authority or a regional water or sewerage board or a regional school district. Actually the presence of counties or provinces in many countries is an expression of this competence-transfer to a higher level.

Since any regional cooperation requires ‘joint actions’ by different actors, and negotiation plus (contractual) agreement is not always adequate for cooperation, at least some kind of