

# ABOUT THE KISS ME PROJECT

**ESPECIALLY AT TIMES IN WHICH VARIOUS CHALLENGES, SUCH AS THE MIGRATION SITUATION, BREXIT AND INCREASING EUROSCEPTICISM, THREATEN THE SOLIDARITY AND UNITY AMONG THE EU MEMBER STATES, IT IS IMPORTANT TO SET EXAMPLES PROVING THAT THEY CAN ACHIEVE MORE, IF THEY WORK TOGETHER AND COOPERATE. HOWEVER, WORKING TOGETHER MUST NOT ONLY STAY A NICE IDEA ON PAPER, BUT HAS TO BE PUT INTO PRACTICE.**

The KISS ME project's main objectives circle around the improvement of SME innovation capacity and competitiveness. Representing around 99% of all enterprises within the EU, SMEs deserve this special attention for a good reason: they are important contributors to European prosperity and motors of our economy, but can only survive on a competitive market, if they continuously keep generating new ideas, products and services.

Especially in European border regions, SMEs have to face a particular situation: on the one hand, border

regions offer great opportunities, because potential markets of two or more countries are in easy reach. On the other hand, although physically invisible, borders still possess some kind of barrier effect. In order to make sure that the border regions' potential can be fully exploited, it is essential for governments and public authorities to provide adequate support for SMEs through tailored policy and suitable instruments.

Although many of these policy instruments have already been set up, it still seems difficult for SMEs to actually

reach these funds. In this context, it is remarkable that different border regions in Europe with the same objectives and comparable policy instruments, such as the INTERREG-Programmes, are applying different strategies to foster SME involvement in practice.

In order to fully harvest the innovative potential in cross-border regions, the KISS ME project partners will attempt to make use of the existing differences by sharing best practices and experience with each other to improve their SME policy instruments. Put differently: Within the framework of the KISS ME project, the project partners want to learn from each other and broaden their "catalogue" of successful approaches by sharing the experiences they gained in their respective border regions.

In doing so, not only the project partners themselves are involved, but also different stakeholders from each region, encompassing public authorities, research and knowledge institutions, as well as incubators, and transfer and development agencies. These regional

stakeholders regularly participate in site visits taking place once in every partner region throughout the project period. By means of these site visits, both project partners, and regional stakeholders can get first-hand insights into the applied strategies in each region.

The envisaged outcome of KISS ME project will be an action plan containing specific measures and recommendations for policy makers on how to improve policy instruments and make them more effective. This action plan will then be implemented in a second project phase. Moreover, the project results will also be disseminated at European level, ideally serving as a "prototype" to provide valuable insights for all European regions, which work on the improvement of SME competitiveness jointly across borders.

With a total duration of 4 years, the project is divided into two project phases with the first one running from 01 January 2017 until 30 June 2019, and the second one from 01 July 2019 until 30 June 2021. Its total budget amounts to around 1.2 Million Euro, of which 0.84

Million Euro are funded by the EU's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); the rest is financed by contributions of the project partners.

If you want to learn more about the project, its progress, news and upcoming events, visit the KISS ME website on [www.interreg-europe.eu/kissme](http://www.interreg-europe.eu/kissme) or follow KISS ME on Twitter (@KISSME\_interreg) and Facebook (@projectkissme). Also a newsletter with updates on the project is sent out regularly. If you are interested in receiving the KISS ME newsletter, you can sign up here: [http://eeur1.com/k\\_g5lr](http://eeur1.com/k_g5lr).

## THE REGIONS INVOLVED



**The Euregio Rhine-Waal**  
Cooperation between Germany and the Netherlands, [www.euregio.org](http://www.euregio.org)



**The Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean**  
Cooperation between France and Spain  
[www.euroregion.eu](http://www.euroregion.eu)



**Hedmark County Council**  
Cooperation between Sweden and Norway, [www.hedmark.org](http://www.hedmark.org)



**Värmland County Administrative Board**  
Cooperation between Sweden and Norway, [www.lansstyrelsen.se/Varmland](http://www.lansstyrelsen.se/Varmland)



**HAMAG-BICRO**  
Cooperation between Hungary and Croatia  
[www.hamagbicro.hr](http://www.hamagbicro.hr)



## ABOUT INTERREG EUROPE

**KISS ME IS A PROJECT RUNNING WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE EU'S REGIONAL POLICY PROGRAMME INTERREG EUROPE.**

Interreg Europe helps regional and local governments across Europe to develop and deliver better policy. By creating an environment and opportunities for sharing solutions, the programme aims to ensure that government investment, innovation and implementation efforts all lead to integrated and sustainable impact for people and place.

Interreg Europe knows that better performance leads to better results. By building on its forerunner, INTERREG IVC (2007-2013), Interreg Europe aims to get maximum return from the EUR 359 million financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for 2014-2020. This time round, it is still about doing good, but doing it better!

Solutions exist that can help our regions become the best that they can be. Today, the EU's emphasis is very much on paving the way for regions to realise their full potential – by helping them to capitalise on their innate strengths while tapping into opportunities that offer possibilities for economic, social and environmental progress.

To achieve this goal, Interreg Europe offers opportunities for regional and local public authorities across Europe to share ideas and experience on

public policy in practice, therefore improving strategies for their citizens and communities.

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Les Arcades, Entrée D, 5e étage  
48 rue de Tournai, 59000 Lille, France

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

**WITH THE KISS ME PROJECT, WE NOT ONLY AIM TO IMPROVE POLICY FOSTERING SME COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION CAPACITY, BUT ALSO WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE FUTURE OF COHESION POLICY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF INTERREG.**

In order to be able to achieve this goal, we need your input!

As a local stakeholder for KISS ME in your respective region, you get the opportunity to get involved with the project, its activities and progress. Once a semester, all local stakeholders from each region gather to discuss the KISS ME project's outcomes and next steps. Moreover, some local stakeholders get the opportunity to accompany the partnership to the project's site visits taking place once per semester in every participating border region. By means of these site visits, the local stakeholders can get first hand impressions on strategies, approaches and existing policy instruments in the other regions and exchange ideas and experience with other local stakeholders. Thus, the local stakeholders play a key role in shaping the KISS ME project and its success!

Are you interested in becoming a local stakeholder for the KISS ME project? Do you want to work with us on improving policy to increase SME innovation capacity and competitiveness? Or do you have any ideas,

visions, recommendations, or other comments on the future of territorial cooperation within the framework of INTERREG? Please let us know!

Do not hesitate to contact any of the partners of the KISS ME project if you want to get involved and engage in the project! You can find all necessary contact information in this brochure and on the KISS ME website via [www.interreg-europe.eu/kissme](http://www.interreg-europe.eu/kissme)!

We are looking forward to your input that helps us to fully harvest the KISS ME project's potential!

## IMPRINT

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**Publication**  
Euregio Rijn-Waal  
Emmericher StraÙe 24  
47533 Kleve

T: +49 2821 79300  
E: [info@euregio.org](mailto:info@euregio.org)

**Graphic Design & Illustration**  
Reynhard, Communication Design, Nijmegen  
[www.reynhard.nl](http://www.reynhard.nl)

**Text & Photography**  
Sina Hoch, Kleve

**Print**  
DPN-Rikkenprint, Nijmegen  
[www.dpn.nl](http://www.dpn.nl)



ON 01 JANUARY 2017, THE INTERREG EUROPE PROJECT "KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION STRATEGIES INVOLVING SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERREG", IN SHORT KISS ME, WAS INITIATED. THIS PROJECT NOT ONLY HAS A PROMISING ACRONYM – KISS ME – BUT ALSO A VERY INTERESTING OBJECTIVE: IT AIMS TO IMPROVE THE INNOVATION CAPACITY AND COMPETITIVENESS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMEs) BY COMPARING AND SHARING THE APPROACHES OF FOUR DIFFERENT EUROPEAN REGIONS.

Thus, within the project, partners from the border regions of Germany and the Netherlands (Euregio Rhine-Waal), France and Spain (EGC Pyrenees-Mediterranean), Hungary and Croatia (HAMAG-BICRO), and Sweden and Norway (Värmland County Administrative Board, Hedmark County Council) work together.

# CHECK OUT THE REGIONS INVOLVED

## 1 THE EUREGIO RHINE-WAAL

The Euregio Rhine-Waal is a Dutch-German public body with 55 member organisations including municipalities, regional governments, and chambers of commerce from the border region. Its most important objective is to improve and intensify cross-border collaboration, both economically and socially. Many cross-border initiatives are co-funded by the EU's regional policy programme "INTERREG Germany-Netherlands". Within the programme, numerous regional projects are implemented. In addition, the Euregio Rhine-Waal also represents the interests of its members and the citizens of the Dutch-German border region with Dutch, German and EU institutions in all areas relevant to society, reaching from economy and industry to infrastructure, education and culture. It also functions as a platform for various target groups within the region, supporting initiatives such as the Euregional Forum for cross-border health insurance or the round table initiative for public order and security. The Euregio Rhine-Waals participation in the INTERREG Europe Project "KISS ME", in which it functions as the lead partner, is made possible through the strong support of the Province Gelderland and the state North Rhine-Westphalia.

**Policy Instrument:**  
INTERREG VA Germany-Netherlands

### How does Your organisation benefit from the KISS ME project?

*"The European Cooperation in the KISS ME project does not only provide us with ideas and best practices from other regions – it also forces us to reflect on our own way of working. With the experiences from the KISS ME-project, we will improve our SME-policy and the way to approach SMEs across borders in our region."*

## 2 HAMAG-BICRO

HAMAG-BICRO is the Croatian Agency for SMEs, Innovations and Investments, established by the Government of the Republic of Croatia with the purpose to enhance SME development, to catalyse the innovation process and to promote investment. It is an independent institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts. The main objective is to support the development of SMEs improving the innovation process and encouraging investments, and to create a unique system that provides support to entrepreneurs through all development stages of operation – from research and development of an idea, to its commercialization and placement on the market. This is done through promoting investment, issuing guarantees for bank credits to SMEs, implementing grant schemes, providing micro-loans and supporting the innovation process.

**Policy Instrument:** INTERREG VA Hungary-Croatia

### How does Your organisation benefit from the KISS ME project?

*"The KISS ME project will expose HAMAG-BICRO to new perspectives, ideas and approaches from other international cross-border cooperation and organisations dealing with SMEs. This will open up opportunities for future successful cooperation. The project also enables the hiring of new staff offering them the opportunity to learn about INTERREG policy instruments and European cooperation. This will ultimately lead to the dissemination of new knowledge for entrepreneurs within Croatia."*



## 3 HEDMARK COUNTY COUNCIL

Hedmark County Council is the regional authority of Hedmark with the County Council as the supreme political body. Hedmark County Council's main task is to act as regional developer in the areas of public transport, road systems, business development, climate, environment and culture. It is also responsible for education and welfare services, which are inter-municipal or too large to handle for individual municipalities. Hedmark County Council is the Norwegian Managing Authority and Secretariat for the Interreg Sweden-Norway Inner Scandinavia program.

**Policy Instrument:** INTERREG VA Sweden-Norway

### How does Your organisation benefit from the KISS ME project?

*"The KISS ME project provides an arena for working operationally and strategically with SME involvement and innovation focusing on cross-border cooperation. We have seen different kinds of models and project types for SME participation. Together with the KISS ME partners' experiences, we will keep these models in mind for the planning of the INTERREG Sweden-Norway programme post 2020."*

## 3 VÄRMLAND COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD

is an important link between the people and the municipal authorities on the one hand, and the government, parliament and central authorities on the other. VCAB forms a regional part in the EU with the responsibility to support and implement the EU Cohesion Policy. Through international cooperation, VCAB helps to foster economic, environmental and social sustainable development in the county and contributes to the development of ideas, people and organisations. In doing so, VCAB works successfully with international partners and long-term strategic alliances in Europe.

**Policy Instrument:** INTERREG VA Sweden-Norway

### How does Your organisation benefit from the KISS ME project?

*"VCAB will use the exchange of experiences and knowledge from the KISS ME project to influence the Sweden-Norway programme to become more attractive for SMEs and more efficient in stimulating innovation through project level improvements. The aim is to benefit businesses in Värmland and to improve the conditions for growth and competitiveness for SMEs in Sweden and Norway."*

## 4 THE EUROREGION PYRENEES MEDITERRANEAN

The Euroregion Pyrenees Mediterranean, founded in 2004, is a cooperative political project involving the regions of Catalonia, Balearic Islands, and Occitanie. The aim of the Euroregion is to create a sustainable development cluster in the North-Western Mediterranean region based on innovation and the territory's social and economic integration. As such, the Euroregion contributes to the construction of a united, solidarity-based Europe attuned to the concerns of its citizens.

The Euroregion wants to confirm its position as a territory committed to fostering and defending projects essential to achieving balanced, sustainable development on the European scale. It strives to improve its international competitiveness while putting people at the core of its actions and priorities. By fostering links between its technological, scientific and cultural centers, the Euroregion Pyrenees Mediterranean intends to become a hub of innovation and sustainable growth.

**Policy Instrument:** Euroregional Innovation Strategy

### How does Your organisation benefit from the KISS ME project?

*"We learn and share the best practices on neighbourhood cooperation at European level for the benefit of the SMEs."*