Impact of cohesion policy on the integration of vulnerable communities and groups

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The European Parliament adopted by 348 votes to 75, with 236 abstentions, a resolution on the impact of cohesion policy on the integration of vulnerable communities and groups.

The own initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Gábor **HARANGOZO** (PES, HU) on behalf of the Committee on Regional Development.

The resolution recalls that most of the least favoured micro-regional territories are facing complex multi-dimensional problems relating to their peripheral location, reduced accessibility, lack of basic infrastructure, socio-economic under-development, tendency to de-industrialisation, low levels of education and training, lack of administrative capacity, high levels of unemployment, deteriorating housing and living conditions, difficult access to services of general interest, lack of conditions for technological development and progress and large populations of segregated minorities and vulnerable groups.

Based on these considerations, the Parliament stresses that the territorial concentration of vulnerable communities and groups and the social exclusion affecting the most underdeveloped regions is an increasing challenge to cohesion in the EU. It notes, in this regard, that vulnerable groups may exist in all regions, even the more prosperous ones, and that an integrated approach should take such groups into account.

MEPs consider that the territorial dimension of social exclusion should be dealt with in the context of territorial cohesion policy. Member States are called upon to determine the criteria defining vulnerable communities and groups in order to better identify the problems they face and to facilitate targeted and systematic measures. MEPs also emphasise the importance of involving regional and local authorities as well as the economic and social partners and relevant NGOs in the planning and implementation of integrated development strategies and the importance of supporting bottom-up initiatives.

The resolution points out that impoverishment and exclusion are not unique to urban areas but also affect rural areas and therefore calls for the continuance of income-generating activities in rural areas. The Commission and the Member States are called upon to allocate resources between developed cities and isolated territories, including rural areas, in a way that is adapted to their specific needs and to establish tailor-made long-term programmes for specific vulnerable communities and groups.

MEPs urge the Commission and the Member States to make greater use of the synergies and complementarities of the various financial instruments available, such as the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Integration Fund, the programme of Community action on public health and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, in order to increase their added value.

Furthermore, the resolution emphasises the need to address the demographic trends of further urban concentration and rural exodus and their territorial impact. It calls therefore on the Member States to draw up strategies to revitalise vulnerable areas by developing infrastructure, maintaining services of general interest, offering appropriate training and employment opportunities, improving housing and increasing the attractiveness of those areas to investors.

The Commission is called upon to:

- examine the extent to which new quantifiable development indicators in addition to GDP per capita, such as social indicators, should also be used in order to identify the most vulnerable communities and groups;
- present, in the framework of the forthcoming Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, an objective for and a clear definition of territorial cohesion, the criteria determining it, its instruments and the means available for achieving territorial targets;
- present a specific proposal addressing in a realistic and specific manner the problems faced by vulnerable communities and groups, including social exclusion.