Report 2010 on the implementation of the cohesion policy programmes for 2007-2013

2010/2139(INI) - 31/03/2010 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to present the report Communication on the implementation of the cohesion policy programmes 2007-2013.

CONTENT: this Communication provides, for the first time, a complete overview of the implementation of the cohesion policy programmes 2007-2013. It is primarily based on the 27 national strategic reports, which are a new feature of cohesion policy for this period. The paper notes that Member States have fulfilled their responsibility and produced a significant effort to report on progress. Through the experience gained in this first exercise it should be possible for the 2012 national reports to be more concise and more focussed on outputs, results and strategic developments. Yet, while the national reports were prepared in close cooperation with the relevant managing authorities it would have been useful to use more systematically public presentation and debate.

Due to the specific legal basis and strategic objectives set, the scope of the strategic reports was limited to the 2007-2013 programmes. This provides only a partial picture of the impact of the policy. Now that the 2000-2006 programmes have ended and spending is clearly accelerating in the 2007-2013 programmes data on the outputs and results on the ground is expected to show acceleration.

The common system of reporting on projects selected has proved its worth in providing “real time” data on the project pipeline. Member States should ensure that the annual programme reports are accompanied by accurate and complete data allowing a rolling monitoring of progress and a better understanding of programme content. It is encouraging that many Member States provided information on EU defined core indicators for ERDF and Cohesion Fund interventions, even though this was not obligatory. Reporting on common indicators should be reinforced. The specific programme reports due in mid 2010 and the next round of national strategic reports in 2012 must analyse the progress of programmes in achieving objectives and signal a clear move from reporting on inputs to discussing outputs, results and early impacts.

The national reports have emphasised the fundamental relevance of the strategies agreed in 2007 and the value of cohesion policy as a policy aiming at long-term economic development. In general, the measures to deliver the agreed strategies and objectives are implemented at a good pace while adapting to the sharp change in the economic climate. After an average of 18 months of effective implementation on the ground 27.1% of projects are selected and progress is evidenced by accelerating expenditure. The reported financial volume of projects selected is EUR 93.4 billion. . The average rate of project selection is closely respected in the three objectives – Convergence, RCE and European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) – and equally applies to the rate of selection of the Lisbon Earmarking categories. A total of EUR 63 billion is reported as allocated to Lisbon earmarking projects. The projects to deliver the agreed EU earmarked priorities are selected as quickly as non-earmarked priorities. These EU priorities include smart, clean and socially inclusive investments in infrastructures (energy efficiency, broadband, social infrastructures) business support (eco-innovation, financial engineering) and flexible labour markets.

This positive progress can be partly explained because the Member States are using flexibility within programmes to address changing needs under the agreed priorities. The cohesion policy recovery package of late 2008, involving increased pre-financing, rule changes to improve the speed of reimbursement and simplifications has been widely taken up, while Member States have also simplified their own rules.

However, no one can be complacent. Using the information exchanged through this exercise Member States can benchmark their rate of progress in different priority themes with the EU average, identifying areas of good and slow progress.

The Commission therefore calls on the Member States:

- to implement quickly the already selected projects;
- to accelerate the selection of quality projects to contribute to the agreed programme objectives, to facilitate the exit strategy from the current economic crisis;
- to ensure that, in a climate of growing pressure on national budgets, the national co-financing needed to fund the agreed investments is made available so that the EU budget resources are fully mobilised.

For its part, the Commission will bring forward in 2010 communications outlining how it believes cohesion policy 2007-2013 can foster support to the objectives set for the Europe 2020 strategy. In particular, these documents will address how the current programmes can reinforce employment policies and social recovery and inclusion; support for sustainable development and support to innovation at national and regional level. The Commission is committed to continue working with the Member States on improving delivery of the programmes and addressing bottlenecks in different thematic areas.

Delays in selecting projects in important investment fields are clearly evident from the national reports. The Commission calls on Member States to target these priority areas – if necessary by putting in place action plans to correct the delays while there is still time. The Commission has identified the following priority areas facing delays generally or a lack of homogenous progress across the Member States:

- in the rail sector there are difficulties in preparing important investment in a core group of Member States based both on reported progress and results from evaluations;
- certain energy and environmental investments are not progressing as expected. This must be redressed by Member States and regions for them to fully contribute to the EU's sustainable developments goals;
- investment in the area of the digital economy - rolling out broadband and exploiting ICT use in the public and business sectors - is slower than average with uneven performance, even if some good practices are identified;
- progress on delivering the priority of social inclusion is relatively slow and not spread evenly across the funds and programmes. Action is needed to mobilise EU resources to contribute to the achievement of the proposed poverty reduction target fixed in the Europe 2020 strategy;
- there are delays in implementation of governance and capacity building measures which need to be addressed to improve public sector performance, especially in view of the crisis.

By pressing ahead now with the good progress already made in many priority areas and addressing the delays, Member States, regions and programme stakeholders can take ownership and achieve the objectives of the 2007-2013 programmes. The Commission calls on Member States to improve implementation of programmes with increased transparency, networking and good practice exchange and policy learning on cohesion policy priorities to make a very important early contribution to achievement of the Europe 2020 strategy, its flagship initiatives and its quantified targets.