

Common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund; general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund

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The Council agreed on a **fourth partial general approach** on the cohesion policy legislative package for the 2014-2020 period.

The partial general approach complements the **three partial general approaches** agreed on:

- **24 April 2012** (ex ante conditions, management and control, monitoring and evaluation, eligibility and major projects);
- **26 June 2012** (thematic concentration, financial instruments, net revenue generating operations and public-private partnerships, performance framework);
- and **16 October 2012** (territorial development, European territorial cooperation, financial questions not covered in the negotiations on the MFF for the 2014-2020 period, management and control, country-specific recommendations, information, communication and technical assistance, indicators).

The partial general approach covers **the following two elements**:

1. Financial management: this part of the partial general approach is aimed at ensuring that EU support under the cohesion policy respects the principle of sound financial management and safeguards the European Union's financial interest. The provisions cover inter alia areas such as:

1. the annual pre-financing and the interim payments of programmes by the Commission,
2. the application of financial corrections in case of irregularities and
3. rules for the closure of operational programmes.

The compromise text agreed by the Council stipulates that in order to safeguard the Union's financial interests, there should be measures limited in time that allow the authorising officer by delegation to interrupt payments where there is clear evidence to suggest a significant deficiency in the functioning of the management and control system, evidence of irregularities linked to a payment application, or a failure to submit documents for the purpose of examination and acceptance of accounts.

The duration of the interruption period should be up to nine months- if a Member State so wishes - to give sufficient time to resolve the situation which gave rise to the interruption with a view to avoid having to resort to suspensions.

2. Common strategic framework (CSF): this part of the partial general approach is about setting up a framework that provides strategic orientation to the programming and the coordination of EU support under the five following funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

The compromise text agreed by the Council specifies, in particular, how the CSF Funds will contribute to the objectives of Union's strategy for **smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**, the means to address **key territorial challenges**, the integrated use of CSF Funds, horizontal principles and cross-cutting policy objectives, the means for coordination with other relevant Union policies and cooperation activities.

These partial general approaches do not prejudge the outcome of negotiations on other elements of cohesion policy or on the MFF for 2014-2020. Since all four partial general approaches were agreed on the principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed they may be subject to change as a result of these other negotiations.

The Presidency intends to **step up the informal trilogues with the European Parliament and the Commission achieving a preliminary agreement among the three institutions on programming** before the end of the year, thus facilitating the preparatory work of Member States and regions for the new programmes.