EU Member States' preparedness to an effective and timely start of the new cohesion policy programming period

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted an own-initiative report by Derek VAUGHAN (S&D, UK) on EU Member States preparedness to an effective and timely start of the new Cohesion Policy Programming period.

The report stressed the necessity of ensuring **an effective and timely start to the new Cohesion Policy Programming period**. Members welcomed the adoption of both the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2014-2020 and the legal framework for cohesion policy

Progress in Member States: the report highlighted that Member States are **at very different stages** in their preparations.

According to Members, **the Commission should increase its support** to ensure that these Member States' partnership agreements (PAs) and operational programmes (OPs) are agreed as soon as possible. Therefore, reviewing Member States' progress during the preparation stages would help reduce delays. Furthermore, during the implementation phase the Commission could **come to the rescue of those Member States that are lagging behind**.

The report stressed that active and well informed national and regional administrations that engage with the Commission could have a positive impact on advancing preparations. It strongly recommends, therefore, that **the Commission and the national and regional authorities have a steady flow of information**, such as details of upcoming implementing acts.

Common Provisions Regulation: the report welcomed the improvements made to the regulation that will introduce a stronger and more integrated approach to cohesion policy funding through the Common Strategic Framework. It called on the Member States to introduce **even more measures simplifying the bureaucracy and administration of the programmes**.

Members underlined the importance of the **Smart Specialisation Strategy**, considering that the next programming period will be aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of funding by making funding conditional on compliance with certain criteria.

Effectiveness of funds: Members welcomed the fact many Member States mentioned their focus on a **results-led approach**. They considered that national operational programmes should take into account development objectives at local and regional level and pointed out that **generating synergies between the various sources of available EU funding** and the budgets of the Member States and of regional and local authorities should be encouraged.

On the basis of successful experiences from the 2007-2013 round, the Committee welcomed the fact that Member States are seeking to **enhance the leveraging of private sector funding** in order to open up alternative sources of funding to complement traditional financing methods.

Synergies with other policies and instruments: Members were encouraged by the fact that some Member States are looking at developing the use of new instruments such as **Community-Led Local**

Development (CLLD), an excellent way of encouraging bottom-up participation from a cross-section of community actors.

Simplification: Members called on Member States and regional and local authorities to **exchange best practice geared to simplifying procedures**, and, while acknowledging that stringent rules on controls and auditing are necessary, to ensure that they are proportionate so as not to add an unnecessary burden.

Partnership agreements (PAs): the report underlined the Commission's call for Member States and regions to strive to ensure that the PAs and OPs prepared are of the highest possible quality. According to the Members, this would help to generate quality project proposals, targeted at specific objectives, ensuring that EU funding has the greatest possible impact.

Underlining that the principle of **multi-level governance** is essential to effective management of the cohesion policy, Members stressed the need to involve regional and local authorities and stakeholders fully in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the programmes.