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

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on EU Member States preparedness to an effective and timely start of the new Cohesion Policy Programming period.

Parliament emphasised the need to ensure **an effective and timely start to the new Cohesion Policy Programming period**.

It underlined the satisfactory outcome achieved by the adoption of the multiannual financial framework (MFF)for 2014-2020 and the legal framework for cohesion policy with a view to ensuring the swift and effective launch of the new cohesion policy.

In the current economic, financial and social crisis, cohesion policy funding in a number of Member States represents **a key source of public investment**. This is why the Member States and the regions must tackle, as soon as possible, the implementation of the new round of cohesion policy funding at the start of 2014.

The resolution also pointed out that **the backlog of outstanding commitments (or RAL, from the French 'reste à liquider')** amounted to two-thirds of cohesion policy funding by the end of the MFF for 2007-2013; it stressed the need to find a reliable means of reducing the risk of the implementation of EU programmes being blocked owing to a lack of payments.

Progress in Member States:the Parliament highlighted that Member States are **at very different stages** in their preparations. Some Member States are dealing with a significant reduction in their budgets for the next programming period while in others there is ongoing debate on the distribution of budgets within the Member States. Parliament recognised that both of these issues could cause a delay in 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 resolution stressed that active and well informed national and regional administrations that engage with the Commission could have a positive impact on advancing preparations. Parliament 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: Parliament 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. Furthermore, cohesion policy should not serve as a guarantee for other EU policies aimed at macroeconomic reforms in the Member States.

Effectiveness of funds: Parliament welcomed the fact many Member States mentioned their focus on a **results-led approach**. It 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, Parliament 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. It stressed the importance of setting out clear rules for using innovative financial instruments, such as loans, guarantees and equity investments, as complements to grants in order to encourage cooperation between enterprises, public sector organisations and educational institutions.

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: Parliament welcomed the positive steps taken towards simplification and greater transparency in the management of European Structural and Investment (ESI) funds; it noted, however, that in reality simplification could be difficult to achieve due to the differences that remain between the funds introduced by the fund-specific regulations.

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: Parliament emphasised that the decision-making process and the formulation of PAs must involve collaboration at national, regional and local level in the planning, development and implementation of EU cohesion policy funding programmes. 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.

In this context, they welcomed **the increased involvement of all the relevant stakeholders**, local and regional representatives, NGOs, economic and social partners, private businesses and universities.