Resolution on delays in the start-up of cohesion policy for 2014-2020

2014/2946(RSP) - 27/11/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 608 votes to 31, with 27 abstentions, a resolution on delays in the start-up of cohesion policy for 2014-2020.

The resolution adopted in plenary was tabled on behalf of the EPP, S&D, ECR, ALDE, GUE/NGL, Greens /EFA and EFDD groups.

Parliament recalled that cohesion policy represents the **main EU-wide investment policy in the real economy** and is an established catalyst for growth and jobs in the EU, with a budget of over **EUR 350 billion until 2020**, targeted at a limited number of strategic goals with growth-enhancing potential, such as innovation and research, the digital agenda, support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the low-carbon economy, training, education and infrastructure.

In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Partnership Agreements should have been adopted by the end of August 2014 and Operational Programmes by the end of January 2015 at the latest.

However, there is a **clear delay in the programming process**, with only a limited number of Operational Programmes (just over 100) expected to be adopted by the end of 2014.

Two scenarios are envisaged for the adoption of Operational Programmes, both implying further delays as regards the start of implementation, namely:

(i) **the carry-over procedure** for those programmes considered ‘ready for adoption’ by 31 December 2014, and

(ii) **the rebudgeting** of the unused 2014 allocation for the European Structural and Investment Funds – entailing a technical revision of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) – for those considered ’not ready for adoption’ by the end of 2014.

According to the timeline presented by the Commission, Operational Programmes could be adopted between 15 February and 31 March 2015 under the carry-over procedure, and after 1 May 2015 under the rebudgeting procedure.

In this context, Parliament expressed its serious concern as regards the significant delay in the implementation of cohesion policy for the 2014-2020 period, while stressing that the current delays are challenging national, regional and local authorities’ capacity to plan effectively and implement the European Structural and Investment Funds for the 2014-2020 period.

Implementation of the 2014-2020 programming period: Parliament urged the Commission and the Member States to show responsibility and do their utmost to **speed up the adoption of a maximum number of Operational Programmes in 2014**, and to ensure that as many programmes as possible are ‘ready for adoption’ by 31 December 2014 so that they can benefit from the carry-over procedure.

As regards the second scenario, applicable to those Operational Programmes not ready for adoption by the end of 2014, Parliament invited the Commission to engage as soon as possible in discussions with Parliament and the Council in order to lay out a credible roadmap that ensures the adoption of the MFF revision as early as possible in 2015.

The Commission is asked to present to Parliament the **measures it envisages taking** to facilitate, as soon as possible, the implementation of the Operational Programmes, together with the timeline it envisages.

Backlog in payments: in addition to the delay in implementation for the 2014-2020 programming period, cohesion policy also faces a backlog in payments amounting to some **EUR 23 billion for the 2007-2013 programming period**.

Parliament stresses the importance and the urgency of **reaching an agreement** on the subject, on the basis of new proposals from the Commission, by the end of 2014.

The Commission is called upon to explain the impact of this delay in payments on the start of implementation of the new Operational Programmes, and to put forward solutions for limiting the damage as far as possible.

Lastly, Parliament requested that the **EUR 315 billion** investment package to be announced by the Commission be fully complementary with the 2014-2020 cohesion policy.