

Cohesion policy and the review of the Europe 2020 strategy

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted an own-initiative report by Fernando RUAS (EPP, PT) on cohesion policy and the review of the Europe 2020 strategy.

Members recalled that cohesion policy is the EU's main investment growth and development policy aligned with the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and aimed at reducing disparities between regions and promoting convergence, with a budget of EUR 351.8 billion until the end of 2020. Moreover, preconditions linked directly to these thematic objectives have been established in order to ensure that investments are made in such a way as to maximise their effectiveness. Members underlined its full support for this new approach, which will contribute to increasing the effectiveness of spending.

In parallel, underlining the fact that cohesion policy is developing synergies with other EU policies such as the digital single market, the energy union, the single capital market and social policy, the report called on national and regional authorities across Europe to design **smart specialisation strategies and exploit synergies between different EU, national and regional instruments**, both public and private.

Review momentum and related challenges: Members recalled that the Commission launched the strategy review process in 2014 but considered it regrettable that insufficient reference was made to cohesion policy. They noted that the publication of the Commission's proposal on the review of the Europe 2020 strategy is due before the end of 2015 and regretted this delay, given that it was initially scheduled for early 2015.

The report called for the scope of the **mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy to be smart and balanced and to be focused on better interlinking the strategy's five objectives** and its flagship initiatives and on identifying methods as to how they could be better carried forward and evaluated without creating additional layers of complexity and excessive administrative burden.

It stressed the importance of:

- taking into account: (i) the strengths and weaknesses of the EU economy, the growing inequalities (such as in wealth), high unemployment and high public debts; (ii) increased societal and environmental sustainability; (iii) greater social inclusion; (iv) gender equality; (v) the importance of continued support from the Commission services for Member State authorities in improving administrative capacity;
- enhance the responsibility, ownership, transparency and participation dimensions of the strategy by involving **Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs)** and all relevant civil society stakeholders and interested parties from the target-setting and development of objectives to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy;
- a strengthened governance structure based on **multi-level governance**. The commitment by LRAs and stakeholders in the Europe 2020 strategy project should be renewed in the form of a pact between those partners, the Member States and the Commission;
- the need for a **truly territorial approach** to the Europe 2020 strategy with a view to adjusting public interventions and investments to different territorial characteristics and specific needs;
- acknowledging the significant role of **cities and urban areas** as drivers for growth and jobs;

- taking into consideration the characteristics and constraints of **specific territories**, such as those of rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, regions suffering from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, island, cross-border and mountain regions and the EU's outermost regions;
- establish a **coherent ongoing evaluation process** in order to regularly assess the progress of Europe 2020 strategy targets whilst emphasising Parliament's role to supervise the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy and cohesion policy in a coordinated manner, not only within Parliament, but also with all relevant institutions.

The report noted the importance of the new EU investment instrument, the [European Fund for Strategic Investments](#) (EFSI), which will support the mobilisation of up to EUR 315 billion in investments.

The EFSI should be complementary and additional to the ESI Funds. Whilst regretting that it is not clearly linked to the Europe 2020 strategy, Members considered that, through its objectives and the selection of viable, sustainable projects, it should contribute to the implementation of the strategy in specific areas.

Future cohesion policy: the report stressed that both future cohesion policy and the future EU long-term strategy should be drafted before the end of the Commission's current term, bearing in mind that there will be elections to the European Parliament in 2019, and that this **imposes significant specific time constraints on the co-legislators** as regards the negotiation calendar, and on the new Commission and the Member States as regards the preparation and adoption of the new partnership agreements and operational programmes before the start of the next MFF.

The Commission is therefore called upon to take into consideration all the specific constraints and to develop a **coherent approach** as regards the EU's future long-term sustainable growth and jobs strategy, the EU budget, cohesion policy in particular, and other instruments under the MFF.