Resolution on acceleration of implementation of cohesion policy

2016/2550(RSP) - 11/05/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 546 votes to 73 with 62 abstentions, a resolution tabled by the Committee on Regional Development on acceleration of implementation of cohesion policy.

Members recalled that, with a budget of over **EUR 350 billion until 202**0, cohesion policy represents the EU's main investment and development policy covering all EU regions, and that in some Member States it forms the principal source of public investment.

Two years have passed since the start of the new programming period, and there have been **delays** in the implementation of cohesion policy. Operational programmes were mostly approved at the end of 2014 and in 2015, and a **significant number of ex-ante conditionalities have not been fulfilled yet.** However, it was important that Member States fulfil the actions on ex-ante conditionalities by the end of 2016 in order to ensure the smooth implementation of programmes and avoid possible suspension of interim payments.

Accelerate the implementation of programmes: Parliament called on the Commission to assess the state of play in the implementation of ESI Funds in the period 2014-2020 and prepare a detailed analysis on the risks of decommitment, with indicated amounts per Member State, and an analysis of payment forecasts submitted by Member States as soon as possible after the 31 January and 31 July deadlines set in the Common Provisions Regulation.

The Commission and Member States were asked to **use the ESI Funds to their full potential** and in line with the Europe 2020 strategy.

Welcoming the establishment of the Task Force for Better Implementation of the 20072013 programmes in eight Member States, Parliament asked the Commission to **continue with this Task Force** to support and accelerate the implementation of the 2014-2020 programmes in all Member States and to present to Parliament an action plan for the Task Force's activities.

Strengthen administrative capacity and ensure simplification: Parliament pointed out that a lack of eligible projects is often associated with the lack of resources, which local and regional authorities need for the preparation of project documentation. It asked the Commission, therefore, to support the strengthening of administrative capacity for the policy implementation and evaluation stages, and to report to Parliament on actions that are planned in this regard.

It called on the Commission, for the 2014-2020 programming period, to provide, on the one hand, **information on the obstacles that Member States are facing** in implementing cohesion policy and, on the other, an assessment of the impact of carrying out the ex-ante conditionalities exercise on the effective implementation of the policy.

Bearing in mind that good governance can help to enhance absorption capacity, Members stressed the need to **encourage relevant structural reforms**, in line with territorial cohesion and sustainable growth and employment objectives, as well as investment-friendly policies and the fight against fraud. In this regard, they invited the Commission also to clarify the concept of performance-based budgeting with a view to increasing the efficiency of spending.

Parliament welcomed the setting-up of a High-Level Group of Independent Experts on Monitoring Simplification for Beneficiaries of ESI Funds by the Commission. It urged the Commission to **speed up activities related to introducing simplified procedures** even during the current programming period and to maintain a high level of transparency in cohesion policy.

Solve financing problems: bearing in mind that in many Member States the economic crisis has caused liquidity shortages and a lack of public funds available for public investments, Parliament asked the Commission to **fully apply and use the existing flexibility under the Stability and Growth Pact.** It asked the Commission to:

- conduct a permanent dialogue with Member States which asked for the application of the **current investment clause**, with a view to maximising the flexibility relating to growth and jobs investments;
- encourage **involvement of the EIB** in the form of increased technical and financial support in the preparation and implementation of projects for any Member State that requires it.

Members considered that financial instruments, if implemented effectively on the basis of proper ex ante assessment and combined strategically with grants, could significantly increase the impact of financing. **Clear, consistent and focused rules** on Financial Instruments would help simplify the preparation and implementation process for fund managers and recipients, which recognise the different development levels of financial markets across the Member States, can help realise this ambition.

The Commission should also help further facilitate exchanges of best practice between Member States and regions on successful examples of **sub delegation**.

Lastly, Parliament highlighted the importance of timely payments to the proper and effective implementation and credibility of cohesion policy. It called on the Commission, therefore, to **inform Parliament** of measures envisaged to ensure full implementation of the Payment Plan in the context of the budget 2016 and also for the coming years.