

# Increasing engagement of partners and visibility in the performance of European Structural and Investment Funds

2016/2304(INI) - 13/06/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 469 votes to 51, with 13 abstentions, a resolution on increasing engagement of partners and visibility in the performance of European Structural and Investment Funds.

These EU funding policies have an impact to all EU citizens. Nevertheless, the results have not always been well communicated as regards the extent to which ESI Funds investments changed the daily life of EU citizens and overall public awareness and perceptions about the effectiveness of the EU's regional policy have been declining over the years.

A Eurobarometer survey of September 2015 showed that just over one third (34 %) of Europeans claim to have heard about EU co-financed projects improving the quality of life in the area in which they live.

**Increased visibility:** Parliament noted that ensuring the visibility of cohesion policy investments should remain a **shared responsibility** of the Commission and the Member States.

The managing authorities and the competent local and regional authorities should be the interface of communication with citizens by providing information *in situ* and bringing Europe closer to them. They are urged to **improve the quality of their communication** not only downstream with regard to the concrete results of ESI Funds, but also upstream in order to make project initiators aware of funding opportunities.

**Challenges to be addressed:** Members called on the Commission and the Council to address the issue of the increase in Euroscepticism and in anti-European populist propaganda which distorts information on Union policies.

They stressed in particular the need to:

- **develop more effective communication strategies** aiming to bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens;
- analyse the impact on the perception of EU policies of the measures aimed at strengthening the link with the European semester and at implementing structural reforms via programmes financed by ESI Funds;
- find a proper balance between the imperative to **simplify** the rules governing the implementation of cohesion policy and the need to preserve sound and transparent financial management and combat fraud while still communicating this properly to the public;
- continue the communication activities for another **four years** after closure of the project if necessary, to call for a more detailed and differentiated evaluation of the long-term impact of cohesion policy on citizens' lives.

Noting the important role played by the media in informing citizens on various EU policies and EU affairs in general, Members regretted the rather limited media coverage of EU cohesion policy investments. They stressed the need to **develop information campaigns and communication strategies that target the media.**

**Improving communication and the engagement of partners during the second half of the 2014-2020 period:** the Commission is called on to provide clear guidance in 2017 on how technical assistance could be used for communication in the current funding period, with a view to ensuring legal certainty for local and regional authorities and other beneficiaries.

Parliament highlighted the importance of the European code of conduct on partnership and the role of the partnership principle in enhancing the collective commitment to and ownership of cohesion policy. It called for the link between public authorities, potential beneficiaries, the private sector, civil society and citizens to be strengthened through open dialogue and ensure the right mix of partners to represent community interests at every stage of the process.

**Fostering post-2020 communication on cohesion policy:** Members called on the Commission and Member States to **boost the attractiveness of EU cohesion policy funding** through further simplification and limitation of gold plating, and to consider reducing the complexity and, where appropriate, the number of regulations and guidelines.

Taking into consideration how EU cohesion policy contributes to positive identification with the European integration project, Members called on the Commission to consider a compulsory communication field in the project application forms, as part of an increased use of technical assistance through an **envelope set aside for communication**, at programme level. They called on the Member States to consider implementing **existing models of participatory governance**, involving stakeholders in a participatory budgeting process in order to determine the resources allocated for national, regional and local co-financing.

Lastly, the Commission and the Member States are asked to strengthen the role and position of pre-existing communication and information networks and to use the **interactive EU e-communication platform** on cohesion policy implementation, so as to collect all relevant data on ESI Fund projects, allowing end-users to give their feedback on the implementation process and the results achieved.

Such a platform would facilitate the evaluation of the effectiveness of cohesion policy communication.