Cohesion policy and thematic objective ‘promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures’ - Article 9(7) of the Common Provisions Regulation

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted the own-initiative report by Andrey NOVAKOV (EPP, BG) on the implementation of cohesion policy and the thematic objective of ‘promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures’ - Article 9(7) of the Common Provisions Regulation.

The report noted that the EU’s cohesion policy stands as the single most visible instrument of European added value. Transport infrastructure investments under thematic objective ‘promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures’ are among cohesion policy’s most tangible achievements, which contribute to closing different divergence gaps within the EU and to building a strong single market for a competitive Europe.

Central role: Members underlined that the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), the European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund (CF) should remain the core EU sources for transport infrastructure investments under the thematic objective of ‘promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures’ in the next programming period. They proposed that, due to the high European added value and the extensive spill-over effects generated, these funding sources should remain available and provide balanced coverage for all EU Member States and regions in order to contribute to the implementation of EU cohesion policy.

Funding challenges: they stressed, in this context, that the **relevant budgetary envelopes** for the three funding sources need to be strengthened in a balanced manner. Members considered that the role of additional sources such as the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) and financial instruments needs to be defined in view of their complementarity to the ERDF and CF and their additionality to EIB lending operations. They stressed that the EFSI should serve as a **platform** for public-private partnerships (PPPs) in matching financial instruments to private investment and to national/regional financing at project level.

The report called for an adequate and ambitious common European transport policy based on a funding framework that is integrated and coordinated with the EU transport instruments. It considered that thematic concentration should be preserved in order to permit simplification and synergies between different funding sources at project level. Members proposed the creation of a **single set of rules** for all financing sources related to all thematic objectives and considered it necessary to streamline, standardise and accelerate public procurement and state aid compliance procedures.

Moreover, they called on the Commission, in the framework of the new Regulation(s) on post-2020 cohesion policy, to propose a greater earmarking of the funds available for cities to bid jointly for infrastructure or technologies that would contribute to decarbonising urban transport and reducing air pollution from road vehicles. They also stressed the need to improve accessibility to transport for persons with a disability.

Bottlenecks: the Commission is called on, with the aim of promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures, to draw up a **checklist of eligibility criteria**, which better expresses local and regional needs concerning transport infrastructure, in order to help determine the overall transport envelope, the investments needed, and the priorities to be set. This checklist may include issues such as multimodal connectivity, local and regional specifics, the availability of alternative modes of transport, road and rail safety, and environmental impact.

The report noted the need for more integrated investment in basic transport infrastructures in **less developed regions**, as well as in mountainous, remote, depopulated or outermost regions with low accessibility.

It also called for ERDF support to European Territorial Cooperation to be strengthened through **additional resources**, focusing on key sustainable transport infrastructure investments (such as cross-border waterways, ports, bridges, railways, interconnecting transport modes and terminals, etc.). Focus should be on connectivity in cross-border regions, including EU external borders.

Members called for the closing of the transport infrastructure gaps with the Western Balkans in relation to integrated transport projects by focusing on further investment in connectivity and on tackling transport bottlenecks.