

Cohesion Policy and regional environment strategies in the fight against climate change

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted an own-initiative report by Tonino PICULA (S&D, HR) on cohesion policy and regional environmental strategies in the fight against climate change.

Cohesion policy and the fight against climate change

Members recalled that the economic, social and territorial disparities that cohesion policy is primarily designed to address can also be affected by climate change and its long-term consequences, and that EU climate policy measures should also support the objectives of EU cohesion policy.

While welcoming the Commission's proposal on the European climate law that includes the objective of climate neutrality by 2050, the report stressed the importance of tackling climate change in line with the EU's commitments under the European Green Deal, taking into account social, economic and territorial aspects to ensure a just transition for all territories and their people. All investments should respect the

'do no significant harm' principle of the Taxonomy Regulation for all investments.

The report called for greater coherence and coordination between cohesion policy and other EU policies in order to improve policy integration of climate aspects, to design more effective policies, to provide targeted EU funding and thus to improve the implementation of climate policies on the ground.

The key role of local and regional authorities

Members called on all local and regional authorities to adopt local and regional climate strategies translating EU-level targets into concrete local targets. They stressed the need to intensify the multi-level dialogue between national, regional and local authorities on the planning and implementation of national climate measures, direct access to funding for local authorities and monitoring the progress of adopted measures.

Local and regional authorities are key actors in the implementation of cohesion policy as they are responsible for one third of public spending and two thirds of public investment. Members therefore called for the creation of mechanisms such as the 'Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy', aimed at bringing together local and regional authorities responsible for implementing the EU's climate and energy objectives.

Sustainable growth and green jobs

Members called for economic cohesion with sustainable growth and green and blue jobs, respecting the needs of different sectors. In this context, Member States should prioritise the fight against climate change along with the fight for inclusive and sustainable development and social justice and the fight against poverty, energy poverty and policies that burden vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Regional environmental strategies should also support renewable energy production and resource efficiency in the agricultural, food and forestry sectors while taking into account the competitiveness of these sectors.

Members insisted that Member States should include the ‘smart villages’ approach in their programmes for implementing EU cohesion policy at national and regional level, as well as in their national strategic plans for the CAP. In addition, environmental and social criteria and preservation of the natural heritage to be given the same consideration as economic criteria when calculating project eligibility in the case of projects involving cultural and natural heritage.

Taking account of the specificities of all regions

Members reaffirmed that the specificities of all regions, as defined in Article 174 TFEU, should be fully reflected in the transition process so that no region is left behind, in particular by focusing on rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps.

The report called for the necessary financial resources to be allocated to the outermost regions so that they can achieve an ecological transition and adapt to the effects of climate change, from which they particularly suffer.