

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

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The European Parliament adopted by 572 votes to 79, with 37 abstentions, a resolution on cohesion policy and regional environmental strategies in the fight against climate change.

Cohesion policy and the fight against climate change

Parliament stressed the key role of cohesion policy, in synergy with other policies, in combating climate change and achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and the intermediate target by 2030 and 2040.

The resolution stressed the need to translate the European Green Deal into concrete local actions that take into account the constraints and assets of each territory and to ensure a just transition for all territories and their populations. The ‘do no harm’ principle should guide all investments.

Members called for an increase in the use of green and blue investments in the framework of cohesion policy. They called for greater synergies between different sources of funding at EU, national and regional level and closer links between public and private funding to increase the effectiveness of regional strategies to combat climate change.

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 based on a holistic place-based or area-oriented approach that would provide a long-term vision for climate transition and the better use of financial resources under the cohesion policy.

The resolution 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. Regional strategies should support citizen participation and locally initiated and led projects and should stimulate cooperation between regions, also through cross-border projects.

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

Parliament 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.

Members reaffirmed that the needs of all regions should be fully taken into account in the transition process so that no region is left behind, focusing in particular on rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition and regions suffering from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps.

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.

The reduction of land use, in particular soil sealing, should be taken into account as an important and key criterion for the implementation of the cohesion policy, in addition to regional environment strategies.

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 resolution emphasised the potential of peripheral and outermost regions for renewable energy, due to their geographical and climatic characteristics. It 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 are particularly suffering.