

Possibilities for simplification of cohesion funds

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The European Parliament adopted by 513 votes to 111, with 40 abstentions, a resolution on the possibilities for the simplification of cohesion funds.

Parliament highlighted the crucial role that cohesion policy has played in addressing the multidimensional emergencies and socio-economic challenges of the past five years, demonstrating flexibility and strengthening solidarity among Member States. However, it believes that constant changes to the regulatory framework have weakened its strategic focus. Members warned against the systematic misuse of cohesion funds to respond to crises and suggested instead the development of a **permanent, strengthened and dedicated emergency instrument** within the EU budget, which would ensure a rapid and coordinated response to future crises without compromising the structural integrity of cohesion policy.

Members stressed that any future reform must **uphold shared management, multi-level governance and a place-based approach**. They called for a modern, decentralised and strengthened cohesion policy that puts people at the centre and is supported by strong partnerships at all levels.

Simplification

Members argued that simplification should be a guiding principle of cohesion policy. Simplification efforts should primarily aim to **reduce the burden on beneficiaries**, facilitate their access to funds and reduce administrative work. In this regard, they called on Member States to avoid gold-plating.

The Commission is urged to make timely proposals for the 2028-2034 funding period, so that the regional programmes can be approved promptly after the start of the next multiannual financial framework (MFF). Members recommended the examination of whether certain technical regulations and requirements could be removed from the Common Provisions Regulation and incorporated into a set of guidelines or handbook, in order to create certainty.

Lack of complementarities in Union funding

Parliament is concerned both by the lack of complementarities in EU funding, with the 2021-2027 period comprising more than 50 multiannual programmes, and by the growing share – currently 40% – of funds managed centrally under the current MFF. Members believe that **the total budget for cohesion policy should be maintained or even increased**, but they stressed the need for effective coordination of EU and national funding.

Better coordination between funds and management using a clearer, more coherent, coordinated and harmonised framework for the different cohesion funds could pave the way for a more effective and flexible cohesion policy, including a single set of rules and a single audit trail for implementation, monitoring and control.

Single European Platform

Parliament is aware that the creation, during the next revision after 2027, of a single European platform integrated with national platforms could enable beneficiaries, particularly smaller ones, to quickly access the various EU funds. It considered that the Commission and the Member States should provide beneficiaries with all the information they need to access EU funds through this platform, also ensuring real-time data exchange on final recipients of funds.

Opposition to centralisation

Parliament opposed any type of top-down reform aimed at centralising or renationalising cohesion policy programming and reaffirmed that multi-level governance, subsidiarity, shared management and a place-based approach must remain the fundamental guiding principles of this policy.

Stressing that the centralised model has shown several weaknesses, Members opposed **the idea of a single national programme**, as it does not guarantee adequate participation of local and regional authorities and is far removed from the realities on the ground. They insisted that the use of territorial programmes managed at the NUTS 2 regional level should remain the pillar of cohesion policy in the future.

Compliance with financial rules

Parliament reiterated the importance of rigorously applying EU financial rules to all programmes and beneficiaries, in order to avoid any form of fraud, conflict of interest, corruption, double funding or money laundering. It called on the Commission and the Member States to propose **additional measures to prevent and address double funding**, to provide more opportunities for integrated projects, to ensure the interoperability of data mining tools and to minimise data retention obligations for managing authorities. It called on the Commission to make the use of IT tools such as the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) and Arachne mandatory for all EU funds.

Parliament called for **more direct access to EU funds** for regional and local authorities, as well as cities and urban authorities. It stressed the urgent need to increase investment in building effective and adequate administrative capacity and called for the strengthening of technical assistance instruments within the framework of cohesion policy.

The Commission is invited to propose further simplification of the application of **State aid** rules in the case of cohesion-related cross-sectoral funding that combines EU and national funds, and to further promote collective bargaining and the use of the **social clause** in the upcoming revision of the European Public Procurement Directive.

Lastly, Parliament considered that the **single audit** principle should be strengthened and called for a more risk-based audit strategy to avoid unnecessary duplication, while ensuring effective financial oversight and fraud prevention.