

Growth and jobs: cohesion policy in support, Community Strategic Guidelines 2007-2013

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Constanze **KREHL (PES, Germany)** on preparing for the assent procedure for the Community's strategic guidelines for the period 2007-2013 (Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs). Parliament felt that future cohesion policy must help to meet the challenges posed by the most recent enlargement of the EU by helping to reduce regional disparities and fostering a society based on full employment, equal opportunities, inclusion, and social cohesion. The strategic guidelines should not restrict the scope of the regulations on the individual funds, but only clarify the EU's strategic priorities. Parliament pointed to the need to ensure that the regions have sufficient flexibility to be able to react specifically to regional requirements. It referred in this connection to the differing needs of industrial regions, rural areas, cities and urban areas, sparsely populated areas and the very outermost regions and island, mountain and border regions. Aid should be channelled towards areas suffering structural disadvantages such as depopulation, population ageing, or inaccessibility and for the economic and social development of those areas to be boosted.

Parliament stressed, however, that the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy was primarily a matter for the Member States and that cohesion policy has to form a unified whole with the Lisbon and Göteborg objectives and become a key factor in their attainment through national and regional development programmes. It called on the Commission proactively to support public-private partnerships (PPPs) as a funding instrument and not to treat the Member States differently, and supported the possibilities offered by JESSICA, JEREMIE and JASPERS in this connection.

Parliament welcomed the fact that the guidelines focus on three priorities and requested that active attention be given to equality of opportunities between men and women in all three priorities.

Making Europe and its regions more attractive to investors and workers:Parliament supported the decision to establish a durable transport infrastructure and asked for support measures to optimise traffic management, taking into account road safety. It was essential to complete the trans-European transport network so as to enable the advantages of the internal market to be fully exploited. Parliament made the following points:

- it called for an express requirement for and recognition of the principle and practice of accessibility for disabled persons in the strategic guidelines and in the evaluation process required by the strategic guidelines;
- transport infrastructures should be developed, particularly at the EU's former external borders with the new Member States and between Member States where they are not yet adequately developed;
- it called for a specific reference to the secondary road networks to be included in the Community strategic guidelines, given that support for the construction of regional roads can be of importance in increasing the mobility of workers and thereby in improving access to employment opportunities;
- there must be a sustainable use of natural resources, in particular water. Parliament called also for specific support for the implementation of environmental priorities such as Natura 2000, the Water Framework Directive and the sustainable prevention of natural disasters;

- Parliament specifically supported the possibility of the funds intervening in the sphere of sustainable energy policy and welcomed the use of all renewable energy in electricity, heating, cooling and transport;
- there must be an integrated approach to urban development and to the development of urban areas in order to achieve greater energy efficiency. Parliament referred to the effort required in the housing sector to attain the Kyoto objectives.

Promoting knowledge and innovation for growth: Parliament welcomed the specific focus on research and development (R&D), in particular support for the formation of high technology clusters, innovative industrial regions and SMEs in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector. It pointed, however, to the need to reduce the technology divide within and between regions and Member States by strengthening technological cooperation networks. Parliament asked for the following:

- measures and investments to promote innovation should not be confined to technological innovation but should apply to all types of innovation enabling businesses to carry out economic and social modernisation. Furthermore, efforts should be made to develop the innovation potential of small and micro-businesses, particularly in traditional sectors;
- the Commission should accord special importance to programmes to promote ICT and make provision for simple means of joint financing through the funds in the case of integrated projects, for instance by making joint financing more attractive to private investments by fostering cooperation between universities and businesses;
- all regions should be able to carry out PPP projects under the same conditions in the R&D, innovation and ICT fields, since this would help to reduce the technology divide;
- information, advice and assistance activities carried out by intermediary organisations, particularly for small and micro-businesses and craft businesses, were essential if these businesses are to achieve the objectives of the cohesion policy, and Parliament asked that support to such activities to be treated as a priority at regional level.

More and better jobs: Parliament stressed the importance of investing in human capital, and demanded that the European Social Fund support those Member State policies which are in line with the integrated guidelines and recommendations within the framework of the European employment strategy and with the relevant Community objectives as regards social inclusion, anti-discrimination, the promotion of equality and general and professional training. Parliament welcomed the three action priorities of the employment policy guidelines and stressed that they must not under any circumstances be accompanied by a deterioration in the situation of workers. It called for the following:

- accompanying and support measures seeking to prevent the social exclusion of disadvantaged groups to be incorporated in support measures, with a view to enhancing their employability;
- greater support for "lifelong learning" projects involving support both for improvements in educational infrastructures and staff qualifications, and support for new options starting as early as the school and preschool stage;
- Commission support for the cooperation of Member States and notifying cohesion policy players of the most innovative projects in an appropriate manner;
- in the event of a general failure to meet the criteria of: sustainable development, gender mainstreaming the rights set out in Article 13 of the EC Treaty (prohibition of discrimination based on sex, racial or

ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation), environmental law,

the Commission must demand improvements or the repayment of monies already disbursed.

The territorial aspect of cohesion policy:Parliament reiterated its demand for an increase in aid for urban areas and called on Member States to foster multi-level governance by including cities, their functional urban areas and rural peripheral areas in both the development and the implementation of national strategic reference frameworks and operational programmes.

It was essential that measures for urban areas should extend beyond traditional metropolises and also allow for the role of the cities, satellite towns, and urban marketplaces linked to the leading urban centres. In the area of cross-border cooperation, due attention should be paid, within the framework of this instrument, to the following sectors: culture, the environment, R&D, ICT, exchanges between administrative authorities, disaster prevention and health. Member States were asked to specify a priority for innovative measures and transnational cooperation in their operational programmes. Parliament called for clear rules on both resource allocation and spending controls and for Member States to take full responsibility for expenditure of cohesion policy funding.