

S&D GROUP TASK FORCE ON THE FUTURE OF COHESION POLICY

Consolidated draft

Introduction

The Future Cohesion Policy, with its revision planned for the next programming period 2013-2020, should continue to follow a strategy based in Solidarity. It should also be a long term, responsive, adaptive, flexible, modern, European wide inclusive development policy in line with the actual "Lisbon" objectives and the for coming 2020 strategy. In order to achieve its objectives, the financial instruments and resources should be lifted on the level of needs and aspirations within a set of clearly defined objectives.

Cohesion with its territorial dimension is a common European Policy with integrated synergies with other policies and multilevel governance. By adapting this policy to the numerous challenges, a new set of guidelines and new concepts we should establish a framework with new indicators and adjusted criteria for eligibility, implementation and evaluation.

All this will be possible with a better regulation, further simplification, transparency and flexibility while targeting the advantages and disadvantages of specific regions to create EU added value.

Our project for the future

- 1. The Cohesion policy is a central issue for the EU. It is directly linked to a balanced, sustainable, harmonious and fair development. It is a policy with an integrated approach for Europe. As explicitly mentioned in the EU Treaties, it brings the EU closer to the citizens and ensures long term development and stability. In the same time it is a policy able to respond or to contribute promptly to local, regional or global challenges or crisis.*
- 2. The revision of cohesion policy after 2013 is suitable and necessary: not only as a simple replacement of one of the most successful EU policies but also as a further development and an adaptation of it. This revision should be based on past successes and best practices in order to be able to meet the upcoming challenges.*
- 3. Regional policy has to remain the principal instrument for a homogenous growth. The S&D Group proposal for the new EU cohesion policy is based on a clear set of priorities, on strategic guidance and on the process of a simplified and flexible framework to be implemented.*
- 4. Indeed, the EU Cohesion Policy is the visible expression of European solidarity, helps to create a sense of European citizenship and fosters regional development within a common economic and social framework.*
- 5. EU Cohesion policy should remain an EU-wide policy giving access to resources, experiences and assistance to all EU regions in a framework of a single and flexible Community policy, capable to intervene at the most appropriate scale. Renationalisation of Cohesion policy is neither an option nor a perspective.*
- 6. The regional policy has to bring about in a determinant way the actualisation of the "Lisbon strategy" focusing on areas that historically are the poorest from the point of view of geography or economy, as well as on those who have undergone the profound changes linked to globalisation and "structural" modifications which intervened in the local production systems. This approach has to sustain an economic and employment revival in the poorest regions as well as in the regions that other restructuring problems.*

7. *The “EU-2020” strategy should become an important axis for the Cohesion Policy. This means an effective coordination of Cohesion objectives with policies that endorse research and development, innovation and creativity, entrepreneurship, job creation, especially “green” jobs and those related with social and health services, education and training, climate change, renewable energies, etc.*
8. *Cohesion policy is a development policy responding both to actual needs and future or emerging challenges. One needs to take into account upcoming thematic priorities and in particular the social-economic imbalances between regions, the impact of financial and economic crisis, globalisation processes, climate change, demographic change, technological progress, etc. All these aspects will have to be included in the future programmes.*
9. *Achieving the EU Cohesion policy objectives for the next period depends on substantial and sufficient financial resources. The Union's budget has to take into account new challenges such as climate change, globalisation, and demographic issues. Consequently, the appropriations have at least be at the current levels in absolute and relative terms. Effective and fair distribution of those resources has to take into account the specific needs of all regions as well as sufficient transitional periods for regions which will no longer be eligible under new objectives.*
10. *The main objectives of Cohesion policy should be clearly defined and few in number. At the programming and implementation level, sectoral or horizontal priorities could be applied, either at EU level or in specific programming areas. Environmental aspects: climate change, "green" economy, as well as education with stress on vocational training, life-long-learning, research, development, innovation, urban and rural development and quality of life should be taken into account.*
11. *Future regional policy framework should be based on designing and implementing an even more effective common European cohesion policy. This approach includes a consideration of closer relations between EU institutions and national, regional and local authorities, and an enhanced synergy with other policies. Condition is that regional development objectives prevail and not embrace objectives from different sectoral policies without connection to social, economic and territorial cohesion.*
12. *To achieve the objectives and meet the priorities of the future Cohesion Policy, it is of utmost importance to further improve multi-level governance: this is so to have a coherent and coordinated action between the European Union and all other levels of governance. Local, regional authorities and NGO's play a decisive role in achieving cohesion of all territories in the European Union. An EU-wide level of administrative capacity is therefore a key factor to succeed in its mission.*
13. *Territorial dimension of cohesion (explicitly mentioned in the EU Treaties) should be reflected in the future Cohesion policy and seriously considered in the framework of all EU sectoral policies. This concept, in form of territorial "solidarity", is about making the best out of regional potential, exploiting the territorial opportunities in favour of the entire EU.*
14. *The territorial cohesion is based on the principle of equal opportunities and is focused on three key concepts: concentration, connection and cooperation. Although a proper definition has not been given yet, it means ensuring the polycentric development of the EU as a whole, as well as the balanced and sustainable development of territories with different characteristics and specificities while also preserving their diversity.*
15. *The strong link between regional development and social cohesion with coordinated measures to tackle unemployment, social exclusion and provide vocational training should be kept and reinforced especially in view of globalisation and demographic challenges (ageing, migration, depopulation and urban concentration).*
16. *Importance of gender mainstreaming; equal opportunities, as well as special needs of disabled and senior persons should be borne in mind at every stage of the implementation and assessment of Cohesion policy.*

17. *Infrastructural measures, which need substantial financial support, should be limited to the poorest Member States or to those regions lagging behind, for which such an investment will have a European added value.*
18. *Rural development programs would be rather better designed and coordinated under a common management under Cohesion policy (together with other structural policy instruments) than in a separated budget of the EAFRD.*
19. *Cross-border cooperation gives European added value and should be a form of cooperation to be supported and strengthened.*
20. *New concepts, such as the "Macro-regional" approach, aiming at developing specific comparative advantages or facing particular local-level obstacles, should be considered. Integrated strategies like those of the Baltic Sea, the Alpine area or the Danube Region should be supported but integrated into the Cohesion policy objectives.*
21. *It is necessary to elaborate additional indicators that complement the GDP, such as the relative prosperity, the unemployment or the technological gap. These indicators should reflect the actual reality of the regions as well as their future perspectives.*
22. *The n+2 rule should be reconsidered as it is essential for a maximum absorption of funds.*
23. *In order to make the cohesion policy fit for the European Union of the future, existing obstacles regarding the use of the EU structural means have to be removed. Better regulation, further simplification, transparency and flexibility are indispensable in order to improve the outcome of this policy for the beneficiaries and for the Union as a whole.*
24. *The future delivery mechanism could be based on greater conditionality to deliver certain results while using the EU assistance. These results could include e.g. increase in access to public services, delivery of structural reforms, social inclusion measures, etc.*
25. *There is an arsenal of measures to address the specific needs of regions with natural and geographical handicaps (such as islands, mountains, sparsely populated regions, regions experiencing depopulation, border regions, peripheral regions, coastal regions and outermost regions including the remote border towns). Special consideration should be given to offset their handicaps, which would enable them to convert regional potential into assets and real opportunities, and stimulate their development.*