



## Innovation: research policy needs a regional dimension

"The success of the innovation-research facet of the Europe 2020 strategy will depend on how well the relevant policies, with regional policy and research policy at the forefront, are coordinated and linked together. There would be so much to lose by building walls between these policies." It was this message that CoR first vice-president Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso had for Research Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, on Thursday 14 July. On the eve of the publication of a new call for research project proposals, the prime objective of this meeting was to raise regional authorities' awareness of the opportunities offered by the current framework programme.

It is precisely because the European Commission believes that regions and cities are catalysts for innovation that Commissioner **Máire Geoghegan-Quinn** wished to address their Brussels representatives in person. In her own words: "We need the active involvement of all regions to boost Europe's research and innovation performance, bridging the innovation divide between the strongest performers and those regions that are catching up. This can only be achieved with political buy-in from European governments and from regional and local authorities across Europe".

Recognising that "the EU can fill in gaps in national decision-making processes by addressing cross-border challenges, in terms both of research support and of territorial cohesion", **Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso** seized this opportunity to raise the concerns of those responsible for implementing these policies at local and regional level.

"We need regional policy to be open to innovation and research and in line with both local and regional needs and European policy guidelines. In order to achieve that, we need effective regional innovation strategies" he stated. "We therefore welcome the European Commission's general stance regarding "intelligent specialisation". This approach follows on from years of considerable effort by the regions with regional policy support."

Nevertheless, he insisted "on the need to stick to an approach based on regional responsibility and expertise. Our proposal is therefore that the conditionality of regional policy should take account of the development of these regional innovation strategies, which must be based on partnership with the regions."

With regard to European research policy instruments, Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso believes that "there is more European value added in supporting up and coming players that are progressing towards excellence, than in supporting players that are already very powerful. This is particularly key for rural areas and areas with permanent handicaps".

It is also essential in his opinion that future Commission calls for proposals "should not concentrate on a limited number of regions, but should systematically involve regional authorities either directly or indirectly". On this point, for instance, he found it worrying that "a significant number of projects with the "regions of knowledge" label no longer have any direct association with regional authorities".

The speakers at this working day, which involved regional networks such as ERRIN, EURADA and the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, included a number of Committee of the Regions members, who came to share proposals that they had made as rapporteurs for the institution, illustrating them with their own personal local experiences. **Roger Knox**, Depute Provost of East Lothian (UK/AE), shared the results of his work as rapporteur on the opinion on the "[Europe 2020](#)".

flagship initiative: Innovation Union while **Fiona O'Loughlin**, Member of County Kildare County Council (IE/ADLE) spoke about "Simplifying the implementation of the research framework programmes." **Jean-François Istasse** (BE/PSE), Member of Parliament of the French Community of Belgium, presented his analysis of "Transforming the digital dividend into social benefits and economic growth."

To enable as many local and regional authorities as possible to share their experiences, in order to boost the European innovation effort, the Committee of the Regions will be hosting a Forum on EU research and innovation, and the role that regions and cities can play.

Visit the CoR's website at [www.cor.europa.eu](http://www.cor.europa.eu).

### **The Committee of the Regions**

The Committee of the Regions is the EU's assembly of regional and local representatives. The mission of its 344 members from all 27 EU Member States is to involve regional and local authorities and the communities they represent in the EU's decision-making process and to inform them about EU policies. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council are obliged to consult the Committee in policy areas affecting regions and cities. It can appeal to the EU Court of Justice if its rights are infringed or it believes that an EU law violates the subsidiarity principle or fails to respect regional or local powers.

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