

Reaction of the Lisbon Regions Network on the vision document EU 2020 Strategy

The Lisbon Regions Network is a Brussels-based network, launched in 2004, of currently fifteen European regions with a shared interest in the delivery of the Lisbon Strategy at regional and local level. The core purposes of the network are to underline the regional and local dimensions of the Lisbon Strategy within the national context and the European institutional debate, to contribute actively to the wider policy debate at national and European levels through member regions' track records in delivery at regional and local level and to be a platform to improve communication of the opportunities and challenges for regional policies in the implementation of the Lisbon goals.

Main messages of the Lisbon Regions Network concerning the EU 2020 Strategy:

- The Lisbon Regions Network fully agrees with the three target areas, towards a greener, smarter and more socially inclusive economy.
- The Lisbon Regions Network asks for an explicit role for the regions in the delivery of the objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy; regions should be recognized as major actors within all the phases of the Strategy, not only linked to the execution of the measures.
- A crucial instrument to perform this task is the European cohesion policy. Therefore the EU structure funds must be available in all European regions after 2013.
- The regional administration of the funds has to be maintained to place local and regional partnerships at the heart of delivering the new EU 2020 goals.
- With regard to the three target areas the Lisbon Regions Network pleads for a clear commitment to strengthen the European industrial sectors along the line of the Commissions Communication on Key Enabling Technologies.
- The Lisbon Regions Network proposes that the Commission requests Member States explicitly to involve regional and local administrations, as being "the closest level to the shop floor", in the national target setting.
- The Lisbon Regions Network has committed itself to make a contribution to the delivery of the strategy by monitoring progress, bringing about partnerships and creating platforms at European level to share best practices.

Europe can count today on a new and stronger institutional architecture. The Lisbon Treaty has come into force and the EU has chosen its first President, a new Parliament has been elected and a new Commission will be set at the beginning of 2010. Although the contrary is contended, it will be very tempting for Europe to go back to business as usual, developing policy on a high level, more or less forgetting the people that this policy is meant for, more or less forgetting to explain to people why European policy is important and how they benefit from it.

The EU 2020 vision document the European Commission launched on 24 November argues for a greener, smarter, more socially cohesive economy. The Lisbon Regions Network fully agrees with these 3 target areas. The network applauds that there is more focus on people in the EU 2020 Strategy than there was in the Lisbon Strategy. This being an important issue in the vision document, it is an omission that the document does not indicate how the gap between policy and people can be closed. The document highlights the degrees of interdependencies that exist in Europe, for instance interdependence between the Member

States and between different levels of government. These interdependencies, according to the Commission, will require “increased policy co-ordination, better synergies through effective subsidiarity and strengthened partnership between the European Union and Member States in the design and delivery of public policies”. The European Commission recognises that governance and the lack of ownership were the weak side of the Lisbon Strategy. The Lisbon Regions Network therefore believes that an effective EU 2020 Strategy should focus not only on content, but also on governance, proposing a concrete structure which will enable Europe to reach the political objectives proposed.

The awareness that European policy should be brought nearer to European citizens and the knowledge that regional authorities have played an important role in the delivery of the Lisbon Strategy makes the Lisbon Regions Network asking for an explicit role for the regions in the delivery, implementation and execution of the EU 2020 Strategy. Regions and their administrations are the most adequate instruments for the delivery of European policy. They operate on a level that is much more visible for the people than “Brussels”. They can “translate” European policy to appropriate measures at local level by integrating European and regional development strategies. Moreover, they can guarantee an appropriate territorial dimension of the cohesion policy.

To meet the goals of the EU 2020 strategy local and regional authorities should be involved. An EU-wide cohesion policy should support flexible and targeted actions and should provide the adequate governance structures that place local and regional partnerships at the heart of delivering funds. This is a very practical way in which the European Union has been able to connect with and add value at the local and regional level. Cohesion policy should contribute to European solidarity; therefore it has to be available for all European regions. This solidarity is absolutely necessary to provide a basis for a visibly successful delivery of the EU 2020 Strategy.

Europe needs a greener economy with the right balance between services and industry. If there is no commitment for a strong, competitive industry, Europe will have no fundament for its economy. Therefore the Lisbon Regions Network pleads for a clear commitment to strengthen the European industrial sectors along the line of the Commissions Communication on Key Enabling Technologies.

Regions operate on a level that makes a tailor-made approach possible, which is also important for the delivery of a greener economy. Since fighting climate change will become more and more complex while we come closer to the 20/20/20 objective, more and more tailor-made solutions will have to be found.

As labour markets are mostly local and regionally organised, regional authorities should be brought in the position to boost strong, knowledge based, innovative labour markets.

The vision document on EU 2020 is short on details concerning the innovation policy. The Lisbon Regions Network therefore seizes the opportunity to put forward that regions need innovation and innovation policy needs regions. Regions are big enough to be able to engage in the key debates at European level, but can also bring local and regional experience to the table. Moreover, only regions have experience in developing regional innovation strategies at

the appropriate scale, that can reflect their own economic and geographic context and have the resources to communicate these strategies both downwards to local stakeholders and upwards to the national and European levels. Therefore regions need access to funding to promote and sustain innovation. An increase of investment in research and development should be an effort to stimulate initiatives that foster talent, cultural integration and entrepreneurship in vulnerable groups, creating conditions to promote creativity of European citizens, one of the leitmotifs of European productivity and competitiveness.

The Lisbon Regions Network holds the opinion that – as every Member State has its own economic strengths and weaknesses – the national governments should set the specific targets for the EU 2020 Strategy in their own country. The Commission should request Member States explicitly to involve regional and local administrations, as being “the closest level to the shop floor”, in these national targets setting and to integrate regional and local inputs into the national strategies.

It is clear from the vision document that the European Commission advocates a shared responsibility for the EU 2020 Strategy. The Lisbon Regions Network holds the opinion that the Member States should implement the strategy, calling on the knowledge and innovation capacities of the regions. Moreover, the European Union and its Member States should insist on the need to count on a strong political leadership, *conditio sine qua non* for the success of the EU2020 Strategy.

The Lisbon Regions Network has committed itself to make a contribution to the delivery of the strategy by monitoring progress, bringing about partnerships and creating platforms to share best practices.

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