Common statement on cohesion policy post 2013

For a stronger EU regional policy for the future

The cohesion policy is one of the EU clearest commitments to improving the lives of European citizens. Over the years, the EU has brought a substantial contribution to regional and local development, especially in the most deprived areas.

With the new orientations given to the cohesion policy for the 2007-2013 period and the particular focus on the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategy, the EU clearly acknowledges that regional and local authorities play a key role in EU competitiveness.

The future success of cohesion policy requires a full involvement of regional and local authorities closest to the EU citizens. We therefore welcome the open debate launched with the 4th Cohesion Report and the European Commission’s effort to involve all stakeholders.

We have identified 8 core principles to be underlined by the future economic, social and territorial cohesion policy:

1) **A Lisbon focused and EU driven regional policy.** A strong EU cohesion policy is a vital instrument to respond to the challenges European regions face in the context of globalization and pressures on competitiveness. By implementing the Lisbon strategy and thereby strengthening the regions competitiveness, EU cohesion policy will demonstrate a clear added value at Community level. As it is already the case for 2007-2013, the future regional policy must continue to strengthen the capacities of regions to achieve the objectives of the Lisbon strategy including the Gothenburg objectives to respond to present needs without compromising those of the next generations.

2) **A regional policy for all based on solidarity.** The EU regional policy will have to encompass all EU regions and must offer substantial support to the lagging regions of the EU as well as to growth regions, for the benefit of the competitiveness of the EU as a whole.
3) **A cohesion budget in line with the objectives of the new regional policy.** A substantial financial envelope should be granted to respond to the new challenges, including climate change and demographic imbalances, that the EU will face and to enhance a leverage effect.

4) **Full recognition of the urban dimension.** Significant progress has been made with the integration of the urban dimension in the general regulations for 2007 - 2013 but there is a continued need to strengthen this element. While playing a key role in economic development, urban areas also face profound disparities. This is obvious in several fields such as environment, unemployment and social matters. An EU committed to economic, social and territorial cohesion must address the existing inequalities within urban areas under special recognition of socio-economic criteria.

5) **A strong integrated approach to regional economic development.** It is important to consider the economic development of European regions with an integrated rather than a sectorial policy approach. This has to be linked with the setting-up of a regional strategy. Consultation and coordination with the other Commission General Directorates should be reinforced to guarantee that they are committed to cohesion as well.

6) **Continued efforts for simplification.** The management of funds should continue to be simplified. There is a need to strengthen the communication on the required auditing procedures of structural funds to enhance clarity and compliance. Clearly, the experiences of the current funding period have to be evaluated and taken into account.

7) **An effective partnership to ensure the efficiency and the flexibility of cohesion policy.** Such a partnership would enable regions to focus on their main concerns. Regions must identify their needs and their assets with the guidance of other local and regional stakeholders. The future legislation should recognize the expertise of those who work in close proximity with EU citizens.

8) **Strengthening territorial co-operation.** Territorial co-operation, which represents an essential pillar of the cohesion policy, must be amplified and its financial means have to be strengthened. Its external dimension, linked with the EU neighbourhood policy, where regional and local authorities will play a role, has to be developed especially in order to respond to global issues.

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