

## Progress report

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SEVEN JOINT COMMUNICATION ACTIONS**

On 25 April 2017, EU Commissioner for regional policy Corina Crețu presented to the General Affairs Council (GAC), on her and Commissioner Marianne Thyssen's behalf, seven proposals to increase the visibility of cohesion policy across Europe. Member States expressed support to those proposed actions and the Presidency of the Council informed Member States that a second debate on the visibility of cohesion policy would be held.

This report aims to provide a first overview of the implementation of the seven proposed actions.

#### Summary

- Following a GAC request of April 2017, Commissioners Crețu and Thyssen presented in May 2017 a range of proposals to increase the visibility of cohesion policy across Europe. At this GAC meeting, Commissioner Crețu will update Member States on progress after one year of implementation.
- The Commission is glad that both Member States' work on the 7 Joint Communication Actions and Commission's campaigns have made steady progress over the past 12 months. We welcome in particular Member States' commitment to actions such as regional / local debates on cohesion policy or photo exhibitions highlighting the achievements for EU citizens.
- Nevertheless, Member States are invited to take the opportunity of both the ongoing 30 years celebration of cohesion policy and the coming presentation of the draft policy framework for post-2020 cohesion policy to strengthen and expand their actions to increase visibility. The Commission will make every effort to support Member States in this endeavour.

#### **Action 1: the Cohesion Alliance**

The idea behind the Cohesion alliance was to have a genuine grassroots movement bringing together anyone who wants to express their support for cohesion policy. As a grassroots movement, it could not be steered by the European Commission, it was therefore agreed to ask the Committee of the Regions to coordinate it. Some 3,500 entities (individual cities and regions, umbrella associations, individual politicians, professional associations, NGOs...) have joined the "Alliance"; it is important to stress that many are umbrella organisations having joined on behalf of their members (national or European associations); therefore, one signature can sometimes represents hundreds of members (CEMR for instance represents over 30 national associations of cities and/or regions from every Member State).

A dedicated website, a hashtag (#CohesionAlliance), a number of events and documents, including a petition, have been achieved in less than one year.

At national level, a variety of national associations (local/regional authorities and professional) have joined the Alliance, as well as individual MPs. However, to this day no Member State has joined it.

## **Action 2: The video competitions**

The idea was to organise at national level a video competition on the achievements of cohesion policy. So far, 33% of the respondents in the survey have either organised such competition or are planning to organise on in 2018.

- Slovakia, the Italian Umbria region and Wielkopolskie Voivodeship in Poland have in place video contests for high-school and university students.
- In 2018, the region of Norte in Portugal will organize a multimedia award, the Polish Digital national programme organizes a video contest together in partnership with the biggest web portal, while Finland will run a regional competition on YouTube channel.
- Saarland in Germany will set up a video competition within the Europe in my Region campaign and several Interreg programme will propose similar contests.
- Hungary is planning a joint contest with the European Commission's Representation in Budapest.

This action needs to be strengthened at national level, and the Commission is happy to assist.

## **Action 3: The "Did you know?" campaign**

Actions under this headline aim to inform citizens that some of their country's/region's most iconic monuments or most popular products have been built, renovated, supported or launched with the support of cohesion policy.

Just over 25% of the respondents to the survey have organised such a campaign, though such campaigns prove popular among the general public. Examples include:

- France and Italy showcased 60 most symbolic projects to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.
- In 2017, Estonia held a special exhibition at Tallinn airport during the Presidency displaying 50 highly representative projects.
- Luxembourg features a selection of best project in a radio magazine.
- Every year Poland opens nearly 900 projects to the citizens during the month of May.
- Wallonia in Belgium, Hautes-de-France and Latvia have a "Did you know?" quiz on social media, Portugal is planning a "guerrilla" initiative on the sugar packets, and Norte region in Portugal had a fully-fledged campaign "*Sabia que ...*"

## **Action 4: Photo exhibitions**

This action aims to show, via photo exhibitions, how cohesion policy has contributed to improving daily life in Europe's regions and cities. Over 40% of managing authorities have

either organised photo exhibitions or are planning to do so. This percentage could be increased with the support of both the Commission and the Member States.

Examples of exhibitions already organised include:

- The theme "yesterday-today-tomorrow" picturing cities or regions before projects supported by cohesion policy, was used in Latvia and in Lithuania.
- The Interreg programme Denmark-Germany's initiative "A picture says more than 100 words'
- The Polish "EU comes closer to you"
- The Belgian campaign to display photos of co-funded projects in metro stations.

### **Action 5: National versions of the RegioStars awards**

Many respondents like the idea of organising a national version of the RegioStars awards to reward the best projects supported by Cohesion policy, also only 9% have done so; most stress that this is possibly the most challenging of all actions in terms of organisation and investment (both in financial and human resources). However, there are several good examples from across the EU:

- Lithuania has a well-established national contest.
- Slovenia is organizing a very successful contest called "EU project, my Project".
- Portugal is working to establish a first national edition this year.
- Liguria in Italy set up the SmartCup dedicated to the innovative start-ups and liked to smart specialization.

Also, several managing authorities are committed to promote the pan-European RegioStars Awards and to propose more projects for the European prize.

### **Action 6: Activity organised in the framework of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the EU**

At least 30% of the respondents have organised communication activities around the celebration of the 60 years of the Rome treaty. "60 nice stories of 60 projects in France" and "60 projects which changed Italy" proved to be a success, gaining broad media coverage.

### **Action 7: Organising local/regional debates about cohesion policy**

This has proved to be a popular action, one of the few of the seven that can involve together local/regional authorities, representatives of Member States and of EU institutions.

- In Austria, the Strat.at Forum brings together programme implementation partners, economic and social partners, local authorities, NGOs and academia.

- Bozen in Italy organizes a European Week for citizens, school and stakeholders, in Emilia Romagna (Italy) these debates are run together with the European Parliament and EuropeDirect, and Brittany (France) organized public meetings and online consultations.
- Similar dialogues are put in place in collaboration with the association of local authorities in Latvia and Sweden.
- Several French regions organise events called 'Cap sur les fonds européens'.
- Saarland and Baden-Württemberg (Germany) have established dedicated events to discuss about cohesion policy.

## Conclusions

One year after the Council's green light to the seven joint communication actions, the Cohesion Alliance (action 1) has proved to be the strongest action as through its signatories it boasts to represent "80% of the EU population". It is also present in every Member States except one, through mayors and presidents of regions having joined it as well as national associations of local authorities and individual professionals and politicians.

The regional or local and regional debates on cohesion policy (action 7) and the 'Did you know?' campaign (action 2) follow.

The actions that have been slower to take off are also those that require far more efforts and investment for either participants (the video competition – action 4) or organiser (the national version of the RegioStars awards – action 5).

One should also take into account that the seven joint actions are not an end in themselves; they are a means to reach the real end, which is to increase visibility of cohesion policy altogether. One should thus add to the above other actions that have helped raise the profile of cohesion policy.

Those include :

- cohesion policy events or initiatives that were part of the #investEU campaign. Over one third of the #investEU flagship projects are projects funded under ERDF, CF and ESF feature.
- The "EU in my region" campaign. The European Commission, together with 200 national and regional partners, organised the 'EU in my region' campaign to encourage citizens to discover EU-funded projects near them. Over 2,700 projects in 25 countries opened their doors to more than 450,000 visitors and the campaign triggered a significant social media attention: the hashtag #EUinmyRegion was mentioned 154,000 times and the trailer video got over 1 million view on Facebook.
- The 2017 RegioStars awards rewarding the most innovative and inspiring EU funded projects. 20 Member States and one neighbouring country submitted 103 application in 5 categories
- The European Week of Regions and Cities. In 2017, it brought together 6,000 participants from 74 countries. In addition, 235 journalists from 25 countries covered the event.
- The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Social Fund with a string of public events across Europe as well as TV and social media campaigns in Member States.

As agreed at the GAC meeting of 25 April 2017, the seven joint communication actions will be entirely successful only if they genuinely become joint actions. Very few, if any of them, can be implemented by one party alone (Member States, Commission or third parties), each player will have to play its role according to its specific features.

Finally, to ensure a fluid flow of information and foster the cooperation between regional and national stakeholders and the EU level on communication issues, the Directorate-General for

Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) has set up a structure of **'country teams'** for ERDF and CF programmes in 2017. The country teams link the programmes' communication officers closely to relevant communication points at European level. They are organised by Member State<sup>1</sup> and comprise – next to the programmes' communication officers – representatives of DG REGIO's communication unit and geographical units, DG Communication's central member state experts, the Commission Representations in Members States (including Europe Direct Information Centres) as well as relevant contact points in the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions.

The first meeting of all country teams took place in Mons, Belgium, in December 2017. This new cooperation structure was very well perceived by participants and led to a significantly improved exchange and flow of information between the EU and national/regional levels. For 2018, and in addition to weekly exchanges, two more meetings of country teams are planned as part of the INFORM and INIO network meetings.

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<sup>1</sup> For Interreg programmes, and due to their multi-national structure, respective Interreg units in DG REGIO participate and communicate relevant country-specific information to national country teams.

## **Post face: Looking forward: activities planned for 2018**

In 2018, as part of a corporate effort to communicate EU results to broad audiences, the Commission is deploying a range of activities, in particular to promote cohesion policy:

### ***1. EU delivers in the regions' campaign***

This public information campaign, extending and complementing existing actions by showcasing and branding EU delivery on the ground in a personalised way, using proximity communications. The main objective is to provide an opportunity for regional populations to reach a more informed view of the EU through the results of cohesion policy and their direct impact on their lives. Another important objective is to raise the awareness of decision-makers and influencers on the win-win impact of Cohesion policy in their country and territories. This fully-fledged campaign is due to run as from early 2018 in 40 different regions.

### ***2. Regional citizens dialogues on cohesion policy***

A series of 60 local debates are being organised in partnership with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and their local associations in the member states covered: Austria, Germany, Belgium, France, Denmark, Italy, Netherlands and Sweden. Two events, one in the Netherlands and one in Austria have already taken place. At the end of January, it has been decided to label them as Citizen's Dialogues in order to ensure a higher visibility and local reinforcements in terms of organisation by involving the local Representations of the European Commission more.

### ***3. Focus on youth***

In 2018, two actions with a specific focus on young people are being implemented:

- *The Road Trip Project*: This initiative intends to engage with young audiences (18-24 years) through a series of road trip experiences on four European routes (Baltic, Danube, Mediterranean and Atlantic). During spring and summer 2018, participants (2 per route) will experience first-hand what the EU is about and what's in it for them, and they will share their adventures with their peers on social media. Around 40 visits to inspiring EU co-funded projects are part of the journey.
- *The Massive Online Open Course (MOOC)*: This year's edition, targeting young people aged 17 to 30 was a clear success with 11,896 registered participants (9,050 in EN; 1,827 in FR; 1,019 in DE). The online-course was co-organised between the Commission and the Committee of the Regions and included a special chapter on cohesion policy. The course has included a number of other novelties this year. For instance, for the first time it is available in German and French, as well as in English. And a social media account has been created, which every week is run by one of the different services involved, depending on the weekly topics.

### ***4. Support for information measures relating to the EU Cohesion policy***

In September 2017, the Commission launched a call for proposals targeted at national, regional and local media to improve information and journalistic reporting about cohesion policy. The objectives are to promote and foster a better understanding of the role of Cohesion policy in

supporting all EU's regions, and to increase awareness of projects funded by the EU and of their impact on people's lives. Out of 79 proposals, the winning applicants will start implementing their projects (mainly journalistic ones) from April 2018.

### **5. *COHESION30 campaign***

A set of targeted activities to celebrate 30 years of cohesion policy towards stakeholders, notably in the form of a high-event event that was held in Brussels on 21 March, video campaigns for social media, a new dedicated TV magazine on EuroNews, targeted communication action for cohesion policy decision-makers. National events complement these actions, using a unique branding<sup>2</sup>.

### **6. *EU in my Region 2018***

All these actions will build on the yearly campaign 'EU in my region' in May 2018, combining local events, blogging/photo competitions and games organised all over Europe in close partnership with managing authorities. The goal is to amplify and expand the good results of the 2017 edition.

### **7. *RegioStars 2018***

After 10 successful years, the concept of the 2018 RegioStars has been revamped. While keeping the four main award categories (smart, sustainable, inclusive growth; urban development), an additional, and annually adjusted category has been introduced (in 2018: Investing in cultural heritage). In addition, special mentions will be given to projects which promote gender equality, incentivise volunteering or use innovative form of communication. Overall, the communication aspect has been strengthened throughout the application and selection procedure.

### **8. *European Week of Regions and Cities 2018***

The 16th edition will take place during the week of the 8 to 11 October 2018. The EU Regions' Week 2018 will be anchored to the key political moments of the EU. Under the main headline of 'For a strong EU Cohesion Policy beyond 2020', the EU Regions' Week will be the main platform to share the views of the regions and cities on both the EU's multi-annual budget and the subsequent legislative proposals, namely with regard to Cohesion Policy and rural development, and the future of Europe in a regional and local perspective. The inter-institutional nature of the event (Commission and Committee of the Regions, in cooperation with other EU institutions) is its key added value, together with its working sessions' interactive and participative nature. The event's official programme is structured together with the organisers and event partners around the thematic priorities identified through a public online survey carried out from 15 December 2017 to 14 January 2018. The results of the survey show a clear interest in participating and organising sessions during the EU Regions' Week, especially on the three first clusters: (1) Territorial development (regional, urban, rural), (2) Future of cohesion policy, EU budget; (3) Education, culture and youth.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/communication/cohesion\\_30/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/communication/cohesion_30/)