



Brussels, 22 May 2018

Minutes

Meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Structured Dialogue with European Structural  
and Investments Funds' partners group of experts

24 April 2018, Brussels

**I. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND OF THE MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The agenda and the minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

**II. NATURE OF THE MEETING**

The meeting was public, i.e. web-streamed and recorded (available to anyone inside and outside European Commission)

**III. LIST OF POINTS DISCUSSED**

**1. Post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework: overview of initial outcomes from the public consultations on EU funds in the area of cohesion**

Jerzy Pienkowski from DG REGIO, and Marianne Doyen, from DG EMPL, presented the initial outcomes from the public consultations on EU funds in the area of cohesion.

Mr Pienkowski started by enumerating the information sources used for the design of the post-2020 proposal for cohesion policy: the ex-post evaluation of 2007-2013 programmes; 12 studies to assess the uptake and the impact of new elements in 2014-2020 programmes and to prepare policy options; the 7<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report; the public consultation from January to March 2018, and various other bodies and events (the High-level group on simplification, the Structured Dialogue with ESIF experts, the Cohesion Forum in June 2017 ).

On the public consultation itself, he laid out the set of questions (multiple-choice and open): importance of selected main policy challenges; to which extent current programmes address these challenges; added value of EU funds; main obstacles preventing funds from achieving objectives; actions needed to further simplify the delivery of funds; added value of funds;

need to modify the objectives of programmes; synergies between the funds. There was also a possibility to upload documents. In total, close to 4400 questionnaires were completed and nearly 700 position papers were submitted. Of all the respondents, 47% were individuals, nearly 53% were organisations. A vast majority had experience mainly with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund. The countries most represented were Italy, Poland, and France, and the least represented were Estonia, Malta and Cyprus.

Respondents replied that the most important policy challenges were regional disparities, unemployment, poverty and economic growth. On the contrary, dealing with globalisation side effects, improving administrative capacity and promoting sound economic governance appeared to be the least important challenges.

On the question regarding how successfully current programmes have addressed these challenges, research and innovation, territorial cooperation, education, economic growth and reducing regional disparities came out first. The challenges considered as least important were also seen as the least successfully addressed: globalisation side effects, sound economic governance, improving administrative capacity.

On the added value of EU funding, 70% of the respondents were positive, especially in the areas of cross border cooperation, transnational cooperation, innovation and sharing knowledge.

Regarding the need to change the objectives of the programmes, in the field of environment, climate and energy, the respondents called for more emphasis on climate change mitigation and adaptation, energy transition, biodiversity, sustainable use of natural resources. Concerning cross border cooperation, due to the high EU added value, respondents called for higher funding. They also saw a need for a higher share of funding for reducing poverty, integration of migrants and refugees. On education and employment, the timeframe of a single period was perceived as too restrictive. As for the obstacles to achieve these objectives, the respondents pointed out the complexity of the procedures, the heavy burden of audit and control, suggesting shorter and fewer rules.

In his conclusion, Mr Pienkowski presented the next steps: publication of the Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) on 2 May 2018; legislative proposals (for the Common Provision Regulation and for specific fund regulations), accompanied by the Impact Assessment (including summary of consultations) at the end of May 2018. He added that the aim was to proceed as swiftly as possible with the legislative negotiations with the Council and the European Parliament, so as to start the new funding period on 1 January 2021.

Then Ms Doyen from DG EMPL took the floor, reminding first of all the objective of the consultation: to gather input for the legislative proposal and impact assessment from the stakeholders on the European Social Fund (ESF), the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD), the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF), and the EU programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI).

Over 600 position papers, with 120 relevant to ESF and FEAD, were received. Respondents called for: the continuation of cohesion policy; an increase of administrative simplification; the need to prevent financial instruments from replacing grants; the strengthening of ex-ante conditionalities, with a limitation to fewer priorities; the reviewing of allocation mechanism beyond GDP, and the strengthening of the partnership principle.

Ms Doyen gave an overview of the recommendations following the public consultation: ESF, YEI, FEAD and EaSI to become one fund: ESF+; the scope of ESF+ should be broadened and translated into specific objectives aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Semester; ESF+ could earmark funding for youth unemployment, the integration of third country nationals and assistance to the most deprived.

Ms Doyen also referred to an important conference that took place in Sofia in February 2018 (Investing in people: the way forward). Over 350 stakeholders participated and made recommendations to the Commission, among which: more flexibility is needed, notably to address the mismatch between the 7-year programming and the annual country-specific recommendations; broaden approaches beyond skills, activation and labour markets; earmarking for social innovation and trans-nationality.

Before giving the floor to the partners, the Chair of the meeting, Axel Badrichani (DG REGIO) gave a debriefing of the General Affairs Council of 12 April 2018, dedicated to cohesion policy post-2020. He explained that Commissioner Crețu had pointed out that cohesion policy must continue to support innovation through the smart specialisation strategies, social inclusion, as well as climate change mitigation. She also underlined that a more upfront approach was needed towards the migrant and refugee crisis; that the thematic menu of priorities should be more flexible, and that positive ways to incentivise reforms through the policy should be found.

Concerning the geographical coverage of cohesion policy, Commissioner Crețu emphasised a policy for all regions but with an allocation of funds that would better reflect the economic and social disparities in Europe. Other stable indicators besides GDP per capita may be introduced to mirror the specific situation of each region. Finally, she also underlined the importance of simplification, notably of the management and control systems. A lighter and differentiated method, based on a more risk-orientated approach, coupled with the reintroduction of the N+ 2 rule, would allow a swifter implementation.

In their reactions, many Member States supported a cohesion policy for all regions. Regarding indicators, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Portugal, Slovenia, Hungary, Latvia highlighted that GDP per capita should remain the main indicator, while Germany, Belgium, Italy, France and Greece considered that indicators other than the GDP per capita should be introduced (e.g. indicators related to immigration).

Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Austria supported the increase of national co-financing rates, while Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Greece, Slovakia, Cyprus and Croatia considered that EU co-financing rates should be maintained.

Germany, Belgium, Italy, Finland, France, Sweden and Denmark underlined that cohesion policy should also contribute to the EU values and therefore the respect of the rule of law should be a prerequisite for an investment-friendly environment.

Mr Badrichani said that overall, the discussions were constructive. He added that with the Parliament's position, for who the full geographical coverage of cohesion policy is a prerequisite, the Commission had good hopes of securing a strong cohesion policy for all regions.

Then the floor was given to the partners. Comments were made by MEDCITIES (expressing their disappointment regarding the fact that the consultation said nothing on the metropolitan dimension, and more generally on the functioning of the group and timing of the meeting, arguing that the quality of information was rather poor – referring to what ? are they the ones who wanted to have more detailed information on the content of the legislative proposal?), ATLANTIC CITIES (enquiring about how could the urban dimension be enforced in the next programming period, and referring to its studies on how to improve European Territorial Cooperation), BUSINESS EUROPE (asking for more details regarding the future developments of ERDF), CPMR (expressing their disappointment about the incompleteness of the consultation and the low level of participation; asking to what extent would ESF drift away from the ESI Funds family, if a Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) would still exist, if shared management would continue, and more generally if cohesion policy would remain, inquiring about what impact assessments entailed).

DG REGIO replied by underlining that they had received many contributions (several position papers every day) and that it had been difficult to aggregate all the information. Regarding impact assessments, DG REGIO replied that there would be an impact assessment for each ESI Fund, and that the whole exercise was coordinated by the Secretariat General of the Commission, and reviewed by the Regulatory Scrutiny Board. More generally, DG REGIO said that the new proposal would not be a revolution, rather a continuation of the policy with simpler rules. DG EMPL added that ESF would probably become ESF+, and that EaSI and FEAD would probably have their own rules.

Partners were given the floor for a second round of comments: ETUC (expressing their concern about the increased focus on security issues, about rumours according to which the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP), in the next MFF proposal, would not be kept as such; requesting that the respect of the same code become an ex ante conditionality, in order to improve the poor implementation of the partnership principle), EDF (voicing the same concern about the possible disappearance of the partnership principle, but acknowledging that it has enabled social partners to be better involved), EAPN (asking if social exclusion would continue to get the same level of support in the next programming period); EURADA (voicing their concern about SMEs struggling with all the requirements imposed upon them when they ask for funding), UEAPME (deploring that they had not been sufficiently involved but only consulted in the reflection on the future of the policy; regretting that there was no specific information in DG REGIO's presentation regarding thematic priorities; suggesting more frequent meetings in the two years to come instead of the current bi-annual format; also requesting that the ECCP, along with the partnership principle,

become an ex-ante conditionality; acknowledging DG REGIO's decisive push to impose the ECCP upon the reticent Member States and Parliament), ELARD (suggesting that the use territorial tools such as LEADER or community-led local development (CLLD) become compulsory as they already bear a strong partnership culture), COPA (calling for simpler mechanisms to implement ESI Funds), Eurocities (wondering if the Commission would take on board the work done by the Partnerships under the Urban Agenda for the EU).

DG REGIO confirmed that simplification was one of the main priorities of the Commission for the next programming period. Several measures were mentioned, such as simplified cost options, lighter audit and control measures. Regarding the partnership principle, DG REGIO added that, although it was strongly supported by the Commission, it would probably not be amongst ex-ante conditionalities, as their number was going to be reduced. Lastly, regarding the request to have more frequent meetings of the expert group, the Chair replied DG REGIO would discuss internally and come back to the group with some suggestions.

## **2. Implementation of the partnership principle**

Ms Leda Stott, expert for DG EMPL from the Thematic Network on Partnership, presented the initial findings and recommendations from the ECCP review. She explained that the purpose of the review was to identify ways to better embed the partnership principle in the regulation, and improve its added value. Ms Stott then gave details on the main findings of the review: the partnership principle is perceived as a useful tool to work collaboratively, but suffers a lack of awareness across the ESI Funds. And when it is implemented, it seems to focus too much on compliance, rendering the principle a box-ticking exercise.

The expert also mentioned the challenge of representativeness, pointing out the lack of diversity in the selection of partners. She stressed the need for more non-traditional actors who could bring new perspectives to projects and programmes, such as youth or people with a migrant background, microenterprises or environmental organisations. The review also highlights the lack of transparency: accessible information channels and options for stakeholder engagement are still limited, and connections and information flow between managing authorities and monitoring committee members are perceived as weak. This has consequences on the quality of the partners' involvement: many partners feel they lack information and skills needed to maintain sound partnership connections.

To mitigate these weaknesses, Ms Stott recommended that the involvement of partners go beyond mere consultation, for example by ensuring that the participation of relevant partners are foreseen in design of specific strategies required to fulfil ex-ante conditionalities. The quality of involvement is also linked to the administrative capacity of partners: managing authorities, partners and stakeholders should be provided with partnership skills trainings, and technical assistance should be used to ensure participation of those who are limited by the lack of resources and skills. Moreover, partners should engage in more proactive information exchanges across multiple levels to deepen awareness and capacity.

Ms Stott also touched upon the challenges of review and reporting: managing authorities should report systematically on concrete use of the partnership principle; the European Commission should be included in the monitoring committees; reviews should be circulated widely and in a more systematic way, so that learning is fed back into practice instead of being shelved.

In her conclusions, Ms Stott underlined that the ECCP should be strengthened in the next programming period with specific provisions in the new Common Provisions Regulation. She added that a reinvigorated ECCP was needed, with a better depiction of the added value of working in partnership. She also underlined the need to improve the balance between compliance with rules and procedures and flexibility to generate more tailored partnership solutions.

Ms Stott's presentation was followed by a discussion with the members: CEMR (asking if the results of the review would be used to draft the next ECCP), MOT (underlining the importance of the partnership principle in the cross border context and the need to take it into account when drafting programmes), UEAPME (welcoming the review and wondering if it would be disseminated to Member States, Parliament, the consultative committees, and be used as a base for the Commission to work on in order to draft, with the help of the partners, specific guidance on how the partnership principle should be implemented and how monitoring committees should be organised; emphasising the need for a more consistent approach to good practice exchanges; underlining also the need to develop monitoring committees at local level, which has taken place in some Member States), EDF (asking for NGOs to be involved in monitoring committees), the EESC (underlining that the power of the Commission was limited in the area of partnership, call upon civil society to work more on convincing Member States about the added value of the principle).

The expert replied that the ECCP review had been transmitted to the Commission and that it was up to them to use it, and that it was available online. On the suggestion to have territorial monitoring committees, she said it was indeed an option but that there were no concrete development for the moment. Lastly, regarding concrete guidance on the partnership principle, Ms Stott said the input already existed, and that they might consider reissuing it.

DG EMPL added that the ECCP review would be duly transmitted internally and across managing authorities, in order to raise stronger awareness on the partnership principle in preparation of the negotiations with Parliament and Council.

### **3. The main findings of the Strategic report 2017 on the implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds**

The Strategic report 2017 was presented by Mathieu Fichter from DG REGIO, who underlined that it was the first comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the 5 ESI Funds under the current programming period. One of the main messages is that implementation is broadly on track, although there are differences between Member States and areas of investment. At the end of 2017, 51% of the available funding was committed to projects, comparable to the previous period at the same moment.

Mr Fichter added that a strong increase of project selections took place in 2016 and 2017, and that investments were now catching up. He also underlined that ESI Funds investments represented in many Member States over 50% of total public investment. Mr Fichter also talked about the different project selection and financial execution rates across Member States, deploring that financial execution overall was lagging behind.

On the impact of ESI funds, Mr Fichter provided a few figures: for example, almost 800 000 businesses have been supported so far, which is expected to have led to the direct creation of 154 000 new jobs; 29 000 researchers were supported, 150 000 households were helped in the field of energy efficiency; 8 million people were helped to find a job or develop new skills.

On the use of territorial tools, Mr Fichter alluded to the slow start at the beginning of the programming period, mainly because strategy frameworks were still being implemented. He underlined the need, in the future, to have these strategies and governance in place as quickly as possible, so that projects can be swiftly implemented.

Regarding the implementation of the partnership principle, an overall progress was noted, but with room for improvement in many Member States. He explained that one of the main difficulties was showing the benefits of the partnership principle, as it is a lengthy process.

Lastly, Mr Fichter mentioned some of the positive effects of ESI funds on the investment environment: they helped mobilise close to EUR 9 billion of private capital by the end of 2016; they have helped Member States implement country-specific recommendations; ex-ante conditionalities were also considered helpful to improve the investment environment. Besides, Mr Fichter noted good progress regarding the implementation of simplification measures (such as e-cohesion and single entry points).

The presentation was followed by a small number of interventions: BAE (asking how were financial instruments received by managing authorities, given the overall objective to increase their use, and what was the forecast in this area for the next programming period); EUROMA (expressing the feeling that the reality on the ground can differ from the figures presented, taking for example the very low number of good projects implemented in the field of Roma inclusion; deploring the delays in addressing fundamental rights); ETUC (enquiring about the use of ESI Funds towards the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI)).

Mr Fichter replied that the report provided a detailed description of the use of financial instruments, and that the objective to double their use was well on track. On the link with EFSI, Mr Fichter underlined that work was still in progress. The situation, there again, varied from one Member States, depending on the readiness of project pipelines (the use of EFSI is higher in Northwest Europe).

#### **4. Modernising the Common agricultural policy: a follow-up to the Communication on the future of food and farming**

Mr Mihail Dumitru, Deputy Director-General at DG AGRI, was invited to present the latest developments regarding the future of the Common agricultural policy (CAP), more specifically the main features of the Communication on the future of food and farming.

Mr Dumitru started by saying that CAP was often perceived as an old-fashioned policy, but that it actually had the capacity to evolve and adapt over time. Generally speaking, it has helped Europe's agriculture become more performant. Agriculture in Europe is indeed an important employer (40 million jobs). It guarantees food security for over 500 million European citizens and contributes to world food security. It is also one of the world's leading producers of food (in 2016, agro-food exports were worth over EUR 130 billion) and is recognised for providing quality food.

CAP has also helped farming become more sustainable. Mr Dumitru described the strengths of European Agriculture in the field of climate and energy. It already contributes a lot to the mitigation of climate change effects, notably by working increasingly in the bio and circular economy sectors. He added that the Commission wanted farmers and foresters not to be suppliers only, but also actors and providers of innovative solutions. Mr Dumitru also underlined the important role of CAP in the support to rural development - the second pillar of the CAP – and the functioning of the Single Market.

Then the Deputy Director-General talked about the Communication itself, which sets out clear general objectives for the future CAP: to foster a smart and resilient agricultural sector; to bolster environmental care and climate action, to contribute to the environmental and climate objectives of the EU, and to strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, notably by focusing on the next generation of EU farmers; to enhance the knowledge basis, ensure more subsidiarity and enhance synergies with other policies; to strengthen the environmental ambition of EU agriculture.

Mr Dumitru moved on to the implementation of CAP, which shows good results, with overall low error rates and good corrective capacity. On the negative side of things, he described the hugely rule-based and compliance-driven dimension of the policy, the complex legal framework, the administrative burden, and the “Brussels-driven” perception of the policy. Against this background, he listed the main objectives for improving CAP delivery: streamline the CAP policy design (currently, the two pillars of CAP have separate rules); reduce the administrative burden; promote result orientation and leave compliance to the Member States in the frame of subsidiarity. This entails new delimitations within the shared management model, whereby the EU would define the basic policy framework (objectives, requirements) and Member States would set out the configuration of the policy (compliance framework for beneficiaries, objectives and targets, delivery instruments).

Then the Deputy Director-General focused on the future of rural areas, underlining the necessity to ensure better coordination with other EU policies, such as cohesion policy, and



national policies. He believed specific emphasis should be put on bio-economy, and that the development of smart villages was very promising in this regard. He also talked about the LEADER initiative, which he believed was a very good approach for the development of rural communities and should be continued in the next period. He also mentioned the challenging need to attract new farmers, stating that encouraging generational renewal was to be seen as a collaborative effort between the EU and the Member States. He added that Member States were in the best position to use instruments such as taxation, inheritance law and land regulations, while the EU could provide an EU-wide system of support for first installation.

To conclude, Mr Dumitru mentioned the roadmap for the weeks to come. He was confident that CAP and cohesion policy would remain key EU policies and continue to represent a significant part of the EU budget.

Mr Dumitru's presentation was followed by a series of questions from CEMR (asking about the role of CLLD and LEADER in the future policy, and how would the programmes be impacted by the new architecture), EURAF (welcoming the new approach of CAP but missing more reference to land use and ways to improve land resilience, such as agroforestry; asking if there could be in the future an indicator on agroforestry), COPA (wondering whether DG AGRI had convinced other DGs to opt for common rules, notably on compliance) and ELARD (asking if making CLLD compulsory could be an option, as only 200 local action groups so far were using this tool).

Mr Dumitru confirmed that territorial tools such as CLLD would be maintained, hoping they would be used more widely in the next programming period. Concerning the architecture of CAP, he explained that pillars I and II would fit in one single strategic plan and that the scope of programmes would have to evolve. On land use and agroforestry, Mr Dumitru said that although it was not spelled out in the Communication, agroforestry was considered to be one of the means to address climate change. As regards indicators, he explained that the overall goal was to reduce them, adding that it was too premature to set out any definitive list. On common rules, Mr Dumitru argued that agricultural policy would continue to follow common rules but was "special" regarding delivery rules. He explained that their suggestion to leave aside the compliance approach for a much stronger result-oriented approach mirrored the specific nature of agricultural policy, and he felt that the Court of Auditors and the other ESI DGs seemed to be understanding. DG REGIO added that DG AGRI was indeed very and rightly ambitious about delivery rules, and in comparison, that the cohesion policy delivery model had to rely more on compliance.

## **5. The European Pillar of Social Rights: a first assessment**

Mr Krzysztof Nowaczek from DG EMPL gave a feedback on the first results regarding the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. He started by explaining that the aim of the Commission was to foster ownership regarding the European Pillar. He welcomed the fact that the European institutions and the Member States had proclaimed their attachment to

it. Based on 20 principles and rights (3 chapters: equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working conditions; adequate and sustainable social protection), it is meant to be a compass for Member States when launching reforms of their labour market and welfare system. Mr Nowaczek then explained that several legislative proposals were put forward through the Pillar, focusing notably on work-life balance, working conditions, and access to social protection. A European Labour Authority was also proposed in March, notably to facilitate access to information and services for individuals and employers (incl. on rights), strengthen cooperation between national authorities and mediate cross border disputes.

Mr Nowaczek then explained that in the frame of the European Semester, the Commission had analysed in its Joint Employment Report (at the EU level) and Country Reports (country by country), to what extent the Pillar was reflected in reform progress and the progress in social indicators, following which country-specific recommendations would be issued. He also mentioned a high-level conference in Bulgaria at the end of June 2018 that would be dedicated to the Pillar.

Several members took the floor: EDF (commenting about the fact that the indicators in the social scoreboard of the Pillar were not disaggregated by disability and asking if new data would come in soon), ESF Transnational Platform (asking if Member States, when implementing ESF programmes, would be requested to apply the principles of the Social Pillar), ENIL (asking how the freedom of movement of people with disabilities would be addressed through the Pillar).

On the social scoreboard and indicators on disability, DG EMPL agreed with EDF, and explained that besides the scoreboard, there were other assessment tools that took disability into consideration. On the implementation of the Pillar principles through ESF programmes, Mr Nowaczek said there would indeed be, in the next period, a strong focus on investment in people, which would definitely help implement the principles of the Pillar. Regarding the freedom of movement of people with disabilities, he replied that the Pillar did not provide any specific guarantee for this, but that the proposed European Labour Authority could help address this issue.

## **6. The support of cohesion policy to the EU energy and climate agenda**

Dr Gergana Miladinova from DG REGIO started by underlining that, with the reformed framework introduced for the 2014-2020 period, climate and energy were now at the heart of cohesion policy. She explained that many legal obligations were introduced to mainstream sustainable development, notably through the first 4 thematic objectives and the various ex ante conditionalities (such as the request to transpose the directive on energy efficiency). Ms Miladinova underlined that the EU's commitment to low-carbon economy had become much stronger under the current programming period, with more than a doubling of ERDF and Cohesion Fund allocations, compared to the previous period. She highlighted the overachievements of Member States, which showed their real interest in low-carbon

strategies. Ms Miladinova added that the use of financial instruments in the field of energy was relatively high, notably because of its revenue-generating nature.

Ms Miladinova then touched upon the expected results of this policy, mentioning for example the 900 000 households that will live in more energy-efficient buildings, or the 3 million additional energy users connected to smart grids. She added that the Commission provided assistance to Member States to use these increased allocations in the best possible way, notably through FI Compass, peer-to-peer exchanges, or a smart specialisation thematic platform on energy.

More generally, Ms Miladinova explained that cohesion policy did not only provide more funds for energy and climate, but also an enabling framework. She referred to the substantive contribution of cohesion policy to the Energy Union, adopted by the Commission in 2015, or to the recent “coal regions” initiative.

In her conclusions, Ms Miladinova stressed that the reformed cohesion policy was an important driver for low-carbon investments, and that energy and climate would continue to be a top priority for the EU. She added that it was important to go beyond investment and have a long-term approach regarding energy transition.

The floor was open for comments: CEMR (arguing that the thematic concentration towards low-carbon economy may have had a disruptive effect on the capacity of Member States and regions to identify their most important priorities, pushing for example regions to overdo their investments in low-carbon projects - even those who already had good results in this field – instead of focusing more on social inclusion matters), MOT (underlining the different approaches on energy but deploring the lack of energy projects under cross border cooperation), ESIN (mentioning their involvement in the clean EU island strategy; asking however how to ensure a better bottom-up approach at regional level, since small islands have difficulties to remain visible at EU level), FEANTSA (arguing that because of the housing crisis in Europe, energy efficiency may have a backfire effect by increasing prices on the housing market).

On thematic concentration, Ms Miladinova replied that there were 6 objectives under low-carbon economy, offering a wide scope of investment possibilities for Member States to match their needs. On cross border energy issues, she referred to the work done under macro-regional cooperation. On the islands issues, she replied that the Commission was supportive of the clean EU island strategy, but that it was up to Member States to ensure that all levels of governance were effectively involved. Regarding housing and homelessness, Ms Miladinova reminded that support schemes also fell under the responsibility of Member States and regions. She added that the social housing sector should continue to benefit from EU grants.

## **7. Any other business**

The Chair gave the floor to EUA, who had proposed, prior to the meeting, presenting their work on the role of universities in promoting smart specialisation strategies. Professor Bolivar started by congratulating the Commission for successfully promoting smart specialisation strategies at local level. He focused on 5 key-actions to maximise the effect of smart specialisation strategies: investing, through a more coherent and coordinated approach in human talent and skills to ensure enduring innovation; enhancing the strategic involvement of universities in regional innovation ecosystems (notably by going beyond simple consultation of partners) ; promoting the engagement of all EU regions (calling for stronger incentivising measures for reforms); strengthening collaborations at regional level (notably at interregional level); reinforcing synergies and multi-level governance (proposing that smart specialisation strategies also comprise administrative guidance to ensure better collaboration between all levels of governance). To conclude, Professor Bolivar underlined that there was a clear correlation between research and innovation, meaning that regions with stronger research activities were more innovative.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS/OPINIONS**

N/A

#### **V. NEXT STEPS**

The minutes will be forwarded to the European Parliament and the Council in order to fulfil the requirement of Article 5(6) of the CPR. They will also be forwarded for information to the European Economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

#### **VI. NEXT MEETING**

The Chair informed the members that the next meeting would take place in the autumn. He added that an additional meeting might be organised beforehand, as several members asked for a specific session on the post-2020 legislative package. The group will be informed in due time.

#### **VII. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

EUROCITIES  
EUROHEALTHNET

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATIONS (EARTO)  
EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS WORKING WITH THE HOMELESS (FEANTSA)  
EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK (EAPN)  
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF SERVICE PROVIDERS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (EASPD)  
EUROPEAN NETWORK OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION ENTERPRISES (ENSIE)  
EUROPEAN NETWORK OF CITIES AND REGIONS FOR THE SOCIAL ECONOMY (REVES AISBL)  
COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS (CEMR)  
EUROPEAN NETWORK ON INDEPENDENT LIVING (ENIL)  
UNION EUROPEENNE DE L'ARTISANAT ET DES PETITES ET MOYENNES ENTREPRISES (UEAPME)  
MEDCITIES  
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION (EUA)  
EUROPEAN NETWORK ON ROMA INCLUSION AND ESI FUNDS (EUROMA)  
CONFERENCE OF PERIPHERAL MARITIME REGIONS (CPMR)  
HOUSING EUROPE  
EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ETUC)  
EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE (EESC)  
THEMATIC NETWORK ON PARTNERSHIP / ESF TRANSNATIONAL PLATFORM  
EUROPEAN FARMERS (COPA)  
CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK (CAN) EUROPE  
EUROCHILD  
EUROPEAN SMALL ISLANDS FEDERATION (ESIN)  
EUROPEAN REGIONS RESEARCH AND INNOVATION NETWORK (ERRIN)  
LUMOS  
BUSINESSEUROPE  
BUSINESS ANGELS EUROPE (BAE)  
CONFERENCE OF ATLANTIC ARC CITIES (CAAC)  
COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS (CEMR)  
EUROPEAN AGRI-COOPERATIVES (COGECA)  
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES (EURADA)  
CAPITAL CITIES AND REGIONS NETWORK (CCRN)  
EUROPEAN LEADER ASSOCIATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT (ELARD)  
EUROPEAN CENTRE OF EMPLOYERS AND ENTERPRISES PROVIDING PUBLIC SERVICES AND SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST (CEEP)  
ENERGYCITIES  
MISSION OPERATIONNELLE TRANSFRONTALIERE (MOT)  
EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (COR)  
EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE (EESC)