

PANORAMA

WINTER 2017 / No. 63

The outermost regions joining forces across the EU

IMPLEMENTATION
OF ESI FUNDS
IS ON TRACK



COHESION
POLICY AND THE
VALENCIA REGION



PANORAMA

EDITORIAL.....	3	MALTA BUILDS A BETTER FUTURE.....	46
BULGARIA LOOKS AHEAD TO EU PRESIDENCY	4	CAPTURED ON CAMERA IN MALTA.....	48
BOURGOGNE-FRANCHE-COMTÉ FORGES STRONGER TIES....	7	STRUCTURAL REFORM SUPPORT PROGRAMME.....	50
ESI FUNDS IMPLEMENTATION ON TRACK.....	10	TERRITORIES AT THE CENTRE OF COHESION.....	51
URBAN CITY PARTNERSHIPS TAKE ACTION	14	DEPARTMENTS OF FRANCE PUSH COHESION POLICY....	52
EU STRATEGY TO HELP ITS OUTERMOST REGIONS.....	16	EUROPEAN ENTREPRENEURIAL REGION 2017.....	53
WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT AND REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES...26		HEALTH CHECK FOR CROSS-BORDER CARE.....	54
REGIOSTARS' 10 TH ANNIVERSARY	28	MEDITERRANEAN REGION BOOSTS POLICYMAKING.....	56
EUROPE IN MY REGION CAMPAIGN	30	PROJECTS FROM BELGIUM, LITHUANIA, AND CZECH REPUBLIC	57
BUDDING YOUNG JOURNALISTS AT THE EWRC.....	34	NEWS IN BRIEF.....	60
IVY: SPREADING THE WORD	36	AGENDA.....	63
COMUNITAT VALENCIANA: A CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH...38			



04



16



46



54

In this issue ...

In this winter issue of *Panorama*, we visit the EU's outermost regions, reporting on the recent Conference of Presidents attended by President Juncker and Commissioner Crețu. We analyse the renewed strategy for these regions, which aims to help them make the most of their unique position within the EU and the wider world, and feature projects and testimonials. We also dive into the recently published Strategic Report on ESI Funds implementation, and find strong evidence of the scale and impact of these investments on the lives of citizens across the continent.

In this edition, our regional profile takes a look at Comunitat Valenciana in Spain, with project profiles and an interview with President Ximo Puig. We also feature young people and their various efforts to engage with the EU and regional policy, through our Europe In My Region blogging competition, young journalists training scheme and the Interreg Volunteer Youth programme.

Furthermore, there is news from the recent Cities Forum in Rotterdam concerning the EU's Urban Agenda, and a contribution from the upcoming Bulgarian presidency outlining their vision and priorities. 'In Your Own Words' includes contributions from the European Parliament, France, Italy and Spain, the projects section visits Belgium, the Czech Republic and Lithuania, and the picture spread points the camera at projects in Malta.

AGNÈS MONFRET

*Head of Communication Unit, Directorate-General
for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission*

EDITORIAL

The last months of 2017 have brought good news to everyone engaged in building a better and stronger Europe. The latest surveys show that citizens are regaining confidence in the ability of our Union to help them improve their lives and their children's prospects, and Cohesion Policy is certainly contributing to this.

The recently published Strategic Report on the implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds shows that half of the total EU allocation for 2014-2020 has already been assigned to 2 million projects across Europe, for a total value of EUR 278 billion.

This EUR 278-billion investment is delivering concrete improvements in citizens' lives: growth, jobs, health care, schools, accessibility, integration of migrants and climate change. In short, these investments embody a Europe that is in action for its citizens, as well as for future generations.

Moreover, these results are of the utmost importance for the near future. In just a few months, the Commission will present its proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework, beyond post-2020, which will be followed by the draft legal and policy framework for Cohesion Policy. In this context, it is essential that we join forces to raise awareness among



policy-makers, Cohesion Policy stakeholders and citizens in general that this policy works. It provides a long-term investment framework for EU countries and regions, which empowers thousands of partners on the ground to deliver on the policy priorities of the entire Union. As in previous issues, I am happy to read in this edition of *Panorama* contributions from Member States, regions and cities that are conveying the same message. I take full note of their encouragement and recommendations.

I am also pleased that this issue includes an 'outermost regions package'. Our recent Communication on these remote European regions followed by my visit to French Guiana alongside Presidents Juncker and Macron, show Cohesion Policy support to every single region of Europe, irrespective of their geographical location. ■

CORINA CREȚU

European Commissioner for Regional Policy

Bulgaria prepares to advance the Cohesion Policy debate

As Bulgaria gets ready to take over the EU presidency in January 2018, Tomislav Donchev, Deputy Prime Minister, adds his views to the current debate on Cohesion Policy post-2020 and the importance of European solidarity.



How important have the EU Cohesion Funds been for Bulgarian citizens since Bulgaria's accession to the EU 10 years ago? Could you highlight a few projects in particular?

The impact of Cohesion Policy on Bulgarian society is significant and the effects of investments build up over the long term. The results are already visible. More than 12 000 projects have been supported over the last 10 years and the achievements made in the country through implementation of the European funds are crucial: more than 800 000 students participated in extra-curricular and school activities; nearly 70 000 unemployed were supported by taking specialised training; grants were provided in 1 120 start-up enterprises; and more than 372 000 new workplaces were established, etc.

What benefits has Bulgaria experienced from collaborating with other Member States and EU regions?

Joining the European Union has made Bulgaria far bigger, without increasing our territory. The four freedoms in the EU – free movement of persons, goods, services and capital – have given us excellent opportunities and expanded our horizons considerably. We have a wider choice of products and services, more opportunities to work, live and study abroad, a huge potential market and it is easier to do business and to cooperate with different EU countries and regions. At the same time, we face a major challenge related to the 'brain drain'. The emigration of young, highly skilled and well-educated people is an issue for Bulgaria, as well as for the rest of the Eastern and Central European countries.

How far will the current programmes help to boost the economy?

What concrete results are you expecting at the end of the current programming period (2014-2020)?

We have seen the strong positive effect of European investments on Bulgaria's macroeconomic indicators for the period 2007-2013. Employment increased by more than 15%, the average wage rose by nearly 15% and private consumption increased by almost 14%. All this also reflects on gross domestic product which, according to our estimates, has increased by more than 11% thanks to European investments. Given that the quality of the programming process for the current period is better than the previous one, I am convinced that the results we will achieve by 2023 will be significantly better.



◀ Sofia Tech Park is the first science and technology park in the country designed as a platform for the exchange of knowledge and ideas between academia and business and to reinforce Bulgaria's presence on the global research and innovation map.

How do you respond to the perception that less-developed countries do not have the administrative capacity to manage the EU Funds at their disposal?

I cannot agree with such an assessment – at least it is hardly valid for all less-developed regions. In recent years, the most complex and large-scale infrastructure projects have been implemented in these regions.

It should not be forgotten that management of European investments relates not only to the objectives of Cohesion Policy but is also related to the correct application of European legislation in the field of state aid, public procurement, environmental protection, etc. Essentially, this requires complex, time-consuming procedures which sometimes give the impression of a delay or lack of capacity.

The first half of 2018 sees Bulgaria holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the first time since its accession in 2007. How do you perceive this opportunity?

The Presidency of the Council of the EU is an excellent opportunity to show what we have achieved during 10 years of EU membership. We will strive to provide opportunities for constructive debate on the key issues of our common European



“ More than 12 000 projects have been supported over the last 10 years and the achievements made in the country through implementation of the European funds are crucial. ”



▲ The bird observation tower in the Aldomirovci swamp was built as part of the project 'Restoration and conservation of the favourable status of protected species in the protected areas Aldomirovci swamp and the municipalities Slivnitsa and Dragoman'.

The project 'Improvement of public spaces significant for the social integration and sustainable urban development in Burgas Municipality' is promoting sustainable, accessible and attractive urban centres to make regions more competitive. >

future. I believe that only through an honest and open debate can we find the right way. We all know what challenges we are facing in the fields of defence, security, migration, and, at the same time, the EU's traditional policies must be adequately ensured. The Bulgarian Presidency comes at the right time because it is known that our position has always been based on the European values of freedom, unity and solidarity.

Discussions on Cohesion Policy post-2020 are intensifying. What are the Bulgarian Presidency's priorities in this field and how will you proceed?

Over the last few years, most of the discussions on European solidarity have been focused on its size and short-term effects. This has been caused by objective reasons such as the economic and financial crisis, the refugee crisis and separate regional crises of a different nature. In this context, we can state that the European institutions and the Member States have responded flexibly to the challenges which, to a great extent, helped the recovery of the European



economy and we are once again on the upside development trend. It is often forgotten that we have overcome the challenges because we managed to achieve good results with the European Funds' investments. The reason Europe can recover from severe crises is the conviction of its citizens, local authorities and business in the strength of European solidarity.

To what extent have you been in contact with the current Estonian Presidency as well as the Austrian one, scheduled for the second half of 2018?

It is clear that the Presidencies' Trio Programme is a joint effort of our countries, sharing a common vision on the main

priorities, trends and challenges facing the Union. We are in close and continuous contact with our colleagues on all key aspects and I think it is already the time to congratulate the Estonian Presidency for the tremendous work done, and not only in the field of Cohesion and regional policies. The Austrian Presidency will be faced with a great challenge to streamline the real negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework post-2020 and the legislative package for the EU Funds for the next programming period. We will try to support them not only by launching the first discussions once the dossiers are on the table but also by being a constructive partner afterwards. ■



▲ The Airport Sofia metro station provides a direct and easy-to-use connection between the capital city and the airport's passenger terminal.

INTERVIEW



Bourgogne-Franche-Comté: stronger ties to economic, social and territorial cohesion

Patrick Ayache, Vice-President in charge of European and international affairs in the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté region, explains how the merger is changing all aspects of territorial cohesion.

For the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté region, what impact has the recent French territorial reform had on the operational programmes and their management, which has remained within the regions as defined prior to the reform?

The decision in 2015 to merge the regions did in fact constitute an extremely important reform of French territorial organisation and has also strongly impacted the implementation of the Cohesion Policy at a local level. As a result of the reform, the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté region became the de-facto managing authority for five different European programmes representing more than EUR 1.4 billion dedicated to the development of our territories, our economy, employment, energy transition, and so on. This European leverage represents

both a considerable asset and an opportunity for the new large region.

Following the merger of Bourgogne and Franche-Comté, we did not wish to call into question operational programmes in Bourgogne and Franche-Comté/Jura.

“The regional merger has also helped to create and develop a unique tool to assist project leaders working across a wide territory: the project factory.”

These have long been the subject of ongoing and fruitful work together with the regional partnership and services of

the European Commission, and DG Regio in particular. The intention was to ensure the continuity of an ongoing implementation, and to bring stability and efficiency to beneficiaries of the operational programmes. However, we strive where possible to harmonise procedures to implement operational programmes that will ensure a unified intervention of European Structural and Investment Funds across the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté territory.

The regional merger has also helped to create and develop a unique tool to assist project leaders working across a wide territory: the project factory. I wanted to create this tool with the aim of contributing to the better use of European funds, by facilitating the creation of dossiers, simplifying procedures, and speeding up the mobilisation of European funds. In practice, establishing



◀ Overlooking the village of Morteau.

a network of experts in the region has helped assist potential beneficiaries of ESIF, informing them during general and thematic information sessions, and supporting them through educational workshops ranging from the design to the completion of their projects.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the approach that has been implemented for the current programming period, which is intended to integrate and harmonise regulations between European funds and allow the use of financial instruments such as loans or guarantees?

If the multi-fund approach has been strengthened by generating the 2014-2020 programme, it should go even further in defining common implementation rules and move towards greater simplification. In the Bourgogne-

Franche-Comté region, we try at our level to have the most integrated approach possible to European funds, especially in terms of communications used to reinforce knowledge of European interventions among local stakeholders and the general public.

Financial instruments are very important strategic tools to support the competitiveness of our SMEs and innovation. They play an essential role today, and in the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté region we have specifically used ERDF funds to develop a venture capital fund to support companies during their start-up phase. We are also currently thinking of deploying new tools across the larger region: funds for loans, or guarantees for innovation targeted at SMEs, which are specific investment vehicles for business recovery. Without the support of the ERDF, these instruments could not be deployed. However, I hope that in the

post-2020 programmes an ambitious Cohesion Policy can be put in place, which will confer an important role on grant-based support for local development projects that might not otherwise see the light of day. Financial instruments and conventional direct aid for projects must usefully complement each other to ensure solidarity between Cohesion Policy regions to which we are very attached.

The operational Bourgogne and Franche-Comté/Jura programmes have a primary objective of stimulating economic growth and creating jobs, particularly for SMEs, based on the region's specific strengths. To what extent has this objective been met, and what results do you want to achieve in terms of job creation?

The 2014-2020 programming is characterised by a performance framework to be adhered to and targets to be met, particularly in the areas of economic development and innovation. Many measures are aimed at SMEs and I welcome the success of these measures as they have improved the overall economic situation in our territory. In terms of targets, we plan to support 3000 companies in Bourgogne-Franche-Comté by 2023 and have already supported more than 600, including many new companies.

The ESIF also allow us to take specific action in the region's sectors of excellence, such as agri-food, health and automobiles, by promoting collaborative research and the emergence of clusters. We therefore support major projects in the micro-technology sector and structuring in our territory.

“ The ESI Funds also allow us to take specific action in the region's sectors of excellence, such as agri-food, health and automobiles, by promoting collaborative research and the emergence of clusters. ”



▲ In keeping with the region's sustainable mobility policy, funding has provided for bus lanes to connect Viotte station (Besançon) to the TEMIS activity hub.

Could you highlight some projects in your region that have been particularly beneficial for citizens?

I would like to mention two structured projects that will benefit citizens. As part of the FEDER Operational Programme FSE Franche-Comté and Massif du Jura, funding has been granted to TCSP+ (public transport bus lanes) for Besançon (25), which since September 2017 has connected Viotte station to the TEMIS activity hub, passing through the Bouloie university campus, in keeping with the sustainable mobility policy initiated by the Greater Besançon Urban Community. With 11 stations located over 4.1 km, planned use of this new line is estimated to be 8800 passengers each day! The objective is to encourage people to abandon their cars in favour of public transport, thereby helping to reduce environmental impacts (pollution, noise, etc.).

As regards the Bourgogne ERDF ESF programme, ERDF funds have been mobilised during the first high throughput

(THD) phase of deployment with a level of intervention of around 30% of the total eligible cost. Over the life of the programme, the aim is to significantly increase THD coverage via optical fibres in Bourgogne from 35% to 50% of the population at the regional level (or deployment of 145 000 sockets). Therefore, the region has scheduled a budget of EUR 8.4 million for the Côte d'Or department's FTTH (Fibre To The Home) public initiative network for the creation of 77 127 connectible optical sockets.

The debate on the post-2020 Cohesion Policy is intensifying. What is your point of view?

Cohesion Policy is a major investment tool for the European Union. It enables the mobilisation of public and private regional resources to work alongside European resources to achieve the objectives of EU 2020. It supports the territories in their economic, social and territorial development policy, and is essential to help reduce disparities both

between and within the territories. There are still obvious disparities between European regions, hence the necessary and accepted support targeted at those that are least developed.

I support a policy of strong and ambitious cohesion after 2020. I will be active and vigilant in the months to come so that the Cohesion Policy is not reduced to simply being an adjustment variable in overall budget negotiations. Let us not forget the meaning of the Cohesion Policy: the harmonious development of the entire Union and the strengthening of economic, social and territorial cohesion. No region, no territory and no European citizen can be put aside from the European project. ■



Implementation of ESI Funds is on track

From helping people find jobs to providing better healthcare and protecting the environment, the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds play a pivotal role in improving the everyday lives of EU citizens.

A new European Commission report shows that EUR 278 billion – or about 44% of the resources available for the 2014-2020 programming period – had been invested in Member States and regions as of the end of October 2017.

“The implementation of the ESI Funds has taken off and is reaching cruising speed,” says the strategic overview, which is based on input from the EU-28. “The related investments deliver concrete improvements to the lives of people across the EU ... It is tangible evidence of the value added of the EU in action.”

The report says that while big differences remain, all countries report a “high to very high acceleration of implementation of ESI Funds programmes in 2016”. By the end of last year, the total financial volume of selected projects stood at EUR 182 billion, up from EUR 58.8 billion in late 2015.

The release of the ‘Strategic report 2017 on the implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds’ comes amid an intense debate about the EU’s post-2020 budget. In this context, it highlights the proven track record of ESI Funds



in fostering EU-wide socio-economic convergence, resilience and territorial cohesion, as well as providing Member States with a stable, long-term investment framework.

Making a difference

Considered to be the EU’s main investment tool, the five ESI Funds – the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) – have a 2014-2020 budget of EUR 454 billion and support programmes that run through 2023.

A review of the first three years of implementation shows that some 2 million projects have been selected for financing Europe-wide, according to the report, which notes that “more funding

“ *The strategic report shows that Cohesion Policy is delivering on the ground across Europe. Good for the post-2020 period.* ”

Commissioner Corina Crețu

than ever before is now concentrated in areas of highest EU value added, such as employment, social inclusion, skills, research and innovation, the environment or the low-carbon economy”.

For example, by the end of 2016, ESI Funds had helped around 7.8 million people look for work or enhance their skills to make them more marketable. An additional 11.5 million people had access to better health services.

But that is not all. The ESI Funds also helped Member States improve their investment environment, supporting structural reforms and mobilising private capital. For instance, under the ERDF, selected projects will generate some EUR 11.5 billion of leveraged private matching finance. ESI Funds also helped respond to the refugee and migrant crisis, natural disasters and other unforeseen circumstances.

As the EU’s main instrument to foster integrated territorial development, more than 3800 urban and territorial strategies are receiving support from ESI Funds with a more coherent framework in place aimed at promoting a more integrated approach, the report says. The implementation of the new territorial instruments led to positive change in local and regional planning culture, in particular fostering enhanced cooperation across sectors and levels of government.

The report also emphasises good progress made in implementing simplification measures and developing the capacities of authorities and beneficiaries to ensure more efficient and effective management of the funds.

Looking ahead, however, the authors stress that Member States must make a greater effort to ensure the selection and effective implementation of quality projects, adding: “it is now imperative that the accelerated pace of implementation is followed up by a strong and quick increase in actual spending”.

In light of the current debate concerning the future of Cohesion Policy, much is at stake.

“By supporting job creation, growth and investment, strengthening the Single Market, the Energy Union and economic governance these investments respond to the needs of the real economy,” the report says. “The Funds also greatly help the EU achieve its political objectives by translating them into action on the ground.” ■

FOSTERING SMART, SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

- › By the end of 2016, selected projects worth EUR 50.3 billion were linked to **small and medium-sized enterprises, research, development and innovation**, as well as **information and communications technology**.
- › This means, for instance, that so far some 915 000 additional households can expect to get **better broadband access**. More than 196 000 companies are receiving **valuable advisory assistance**. Meanwhile, about 29 000 researchers are now working in better facilities and have improved access to resources and services, fostering innovation.
- › Projects amounting to EUR 48.7 billion had been selected in the areas of **employment, social inclusion and education**. This includes EUR 14.6 billion in education and vocational training, with the report noting that 4.4 million new spots have been created in schools and childcare facilities.
- › In the **low-carbon economy, climate change, environment and transport** category, EUR 73.2 billion had been allocated to projects by the end of 2016. As a result, some 148 000 households are expected to receive improved energy consumption classifications. More than 4.6 million people are already benefitting from new or enhanced flood-protection measures while 3.5 million should access better water supplies.

ESI Funds: strengthening European regions and solidarity

MEP Kerstin Westphal, who is also a member of the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development, gives her views and expectations on ESI Funds implementation and impact to date.



“The Structural Funds are not only money. They are a signal of European solidarity.”

What is your opinion on the implementation so far of the ESI Funds for 2014-2020?

We had a late start. The first year of this period was lost, at least for some regions. In my opinion, things have sped up since then, and at this stage I have the impression that the implementation is going well. The funds arrive where they are needed, and great projects are under way.

I think it is too early to have the big picture, but I have also heard from people on the ground that some simplification measures are appreciated, and that the

thematic concentration is working – which means that we are really focusing on a few, important priorities.

Beyond the financial support that ESI Funds give to Member States, what other positive impacts of the Funds do you see?

The Structural Funds are not only money. They are a signal of European solidarity. In the field of European territorial cooperation, I see people from different countries working together to strengthen their regions. And when I think of regions reducing their CO₂ emissions or creating jobs, we can see that good

ideas are being supported. That is what I love about ESI Funds – they help regions to be creative and actually work for the people.

One of the key goals for this period is to make sure the ESI Funds and the European Fund for Strategic Investments work closely together. What is your opinion of this joint work and how could we do better?

I think this cooperation is improving – also with the so-called ‘Omnibus’ regulation. Nevertheless, despite their very similar names, ESIF and EFSI have different approaches. Cooperation between these two funds might work when it comes to larger projects, but from my experience it is the ESI Funds which really help with small and medium-sized projects on the ground in many regions. As rapporteur of the European Parliament,

I can say that the Parliament does not want the EFSI to undermine the strategic coherence, territorial concentration and long-term perspective of Cohesion Policy programming.

In the context of the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework, 2018 will be a key year for Cohesion Policy post-2020. What are your expectations regarding the future of this policy?

Next year – as well as 2019 – will indeed be decisive years. My expectations start with these dates: I think

we should avoid a situation like last time, when the start of many Operational Programmes was delayed. Regions need to know in time what they have to expect.

Apart from this, my report for the European Parliament asks for further simplification. With the High Level Group that Commissioner Crețu created, I feel that we can get some real improvements in this field. Also, the EP is asking for more flexibility. Our regions should be able to respond to new, unforeseen challenges that might arise in, say, 2025.

And last but not least: the actual discussion about the future MFF, and Commissioner Oettinger's true words that "more European tasks will need to be tackled with less money", should not lead to a weakening of Cohesion Policy. As I said: ESI Funds are a symbol of solidarity, which make regions creative. That should be maintained – in all European regions. ■



“ ESI Funds provides a long-term structural adjustment policy tool to help regional economies anticipate and adapt in order to offer residents everywhere an opportunity to find viable development options. ”

Mari Kiviniemi, Deputy Secretary-General of the OCDE¹

“ Cohesion Policy continues to bring clear and visible results to citizens in areas ranging from better access to schools, health and social care, cleaner air and water to improved and more sustainable mobility. ”

Daniël Termont, Mayor of Ghent and President of EUROCITIES²



“ The European Structural and Investment Funds enable us to create real impetus and increase investment. ”

Beate Merk, Minister of State for European affairs and regional relations of Bavaria, Germany³

1) Panorama 61

2) Panorama 61

3) Panorama 62



Europe's cities have their say

The Urban Agenda for the EU encourages cities to influence policymaking and propose solutions to societal challenges, such as poverty or pollution, which directly impact them. A year after its launch, a Commission report reveals the first results.

The May 2016 Pact of Amsterdam which established the Urban Agenda identified 12 themes – ranging from jobs and housing to urban mobility, air quality and the inclusion of migrants and refugees – as priorities.

In a bid to come up with concrete action plans to address these, 12 Partnerships – one per priority – have since been set up, according to the 'Report from the Commission to the Council on the Urban Agenda for the EU' adopted on 20 November.

The Partnerships comprise 84 cities, 22 Member States, 13 Directorates-General, the European Investment Bank (EIB), as well as an array of associations, NGOs and others.

"Through the work in the Partnerships many cities have demonstrated their ability to contribute in a meaningful way to EU policymaking," says the report.

Three action plans incorporating concrete but not legally binding proposals – on urban poverty, air quality and inclusion of migrants and refugees – will be finalised by the end of 2017. The rest are expected to follow over the next two years.

A dedicated website – or one-stop-shop – has been set up to promote a comprehensive overview of the resources available to cities, knowledge-sharing and information about urban policies and initiatives.

URBIS is a new dedicated urban investment advisory platform within the European Investment Advisory Hub.

It is to set up to provide advisory support to urban authorities to facilitate, accelerate and unlock urban investment.

URBIS can provide:

- Tailor made technical advice to support the development of urban investment strategies and investment programmes and to improve the quality and bankability of projects.
- Advice to support the development of innovative financing approaches for city investment, including urban based investment platform.

For further information including details of the eligibility criteria

Visit our website: eiah.eib.org

contact us: eiah@eib.org

AMSTERDAM 17 NOV 2017
Advisory Hub

According to the report, the Urban Agenda has triggered renewed interest in some Member States to develop or strengthen their national urban policies. It also found that cities are gaining ground in international efforts such as the fight against climate change.

The report also highlights that the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is investing around EUR 100 billion in cities for the 2014-2020 period, of which EUR 15 billion is managed directly by cities. ■

2017 CITIES Forum

The third CITIES Forum, held on 27-28 November in the Dutch city of Rotterdam, drew key stakeholders from around Europe, such as people working on urban issues, as well as representatives from ministries and NGOs. A major highlight was the launch of URBIS.

Here are some soundbites from the event:

“Thanks to this initiative, cities will have the support they need to create new opportunities for their inhabitants.”

Commissioner Corina Crețu.



FIND OUT MORE

Report from the Commission to the Council on the Urban Agenda for the EU:

<http://europa.eu/!Bx36qH>



^ From left to right: Ana Paula Zacarias, Secretary of State for European Affairs, Portugal; Daniel Gibbs, President of the Collectivity of Saint Martin; Soibahadine Ibrahim Ramadani, President of the Mayotte Departmental Council; Ary Chalus, President of the Regional Council of Guadeloupe; Younous Omarjee, Member of the European Parliament; Rodolphe Alexandre, President of the Territorial Collectivity of French Guiana; Corina Crețu, European Commissioner for Regional Policy; Juan Fernando López Aguilar, Member of the European Parliament; Fernando Clavijo, President of the Government of the Canary Islands; Alfred Marie-Jeanne, President of the Territorial Collectivity of Martinique; Didier Robert, President of the Regional Council of Réunion; Louis-Joseph Manscour, Member of the European Parliament; Miguel Albuquerque, President of the Regional Government of Madeira; Rui Bettencourt, Regional Assistant Secretary of the Presidency for External Relations, Regional Government of the Azores.

The EU's outermost regions: a privileged, renewed and strengthened partnership

‘United in diversity’, the EU’s motto symbolising European people working together for peace and prosperity, and the many different cultures, traditions and languages peacefully coexisting in Europe, certainly takes on particular significance when considering the richness the outermost regions bring to our Union.

The nine outermost regions – Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, Mayotte, Réunion, Saint-Martin, the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands – are a real asset to Europe. Their geographical location projects a European presence into strategic areas of the world, while their extensive maritime zones offer the potential for developing a strong blue economy.

These regions are also rich in resources. They account for 80% of Europe’s biodiversity and are ideal locations for research and innovation in sectors such as the circular economy, pharmacology, renewable energy, space sciences and astrophysics.

However, a number of specific geographic features limit the growth and development of these regions, such as their remoteness and/or insularity, small size, difficult topography and climate, and dependence on a few local products. The EU recognises their assets as well as their constraints and supports their efforts to unfold their potential through the special partnership developed between the Commission, the regions and their Member States. On 24 October 2017, the European Commission adopted a new strategy for the outermost regions establishing a privileged, renewed and strengthened partnership.

Why renew the strategy today?

Despite progress in recent years, the outermost regions are still facing serious challenges: high unemployment, particularly among young people, vulnerability to climate change, obstacles to growth due to insufficiently developed infrastructures, and dependency on economic sectors that have not incorporated innovative processes to a satisfactory degree. Some of these regions are also confronted with migratory pressures and social crises.

“ Research and innovation are crucial for enabling the outermost regions to become front runners in many promising sectors. ”



The Commission has therefore presented a new strategy for an enhanced partnership in order to double efforts to meet these challenges. It aims to better help these regions to take advantage of the globalised world, where they have already experienced the disadvantages without really reaping the benefits. This requires better integration in the European internal market as well as in their regional neighbourhood.

First of all, the strategy will seek to shape EU policies that better reflect the realities and interests of these regions, for example, European transport, energy or trade policy.

For that purpose, a platform for dialogue will bring together the regions and their Member States, the European institutions and other stakeholders to exchange views at all stages of policymaking and implementation. The Commission will also establish, on request, special task forces on specific issues, such as making the best use of European funds or promoting employment.

The strategy will help these regions to capitalise on their strengths. It will support their full regional integration in their neighbourhood by encouraging joint projects in areas such as the prevention of natural risks, waste management, transport or energy, for example.

Research and innovation are crucial for enabling the outermost regions to become front runners in many promising sectors. The new strategy will help them to develop innovation activities and to increase their participation in the EU's research programmes.

A PRIVILEGED OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT THE STRATEGY

The new strategy was presented by President Juncker together with Commissioner Crețu at the Conference of the Presidents of the outermost regions which took place on 26-27 October in Cayenne, French Guiana, and was hosted by President Alexandre.

The presence of President Juncker, President Macron, Commissioner Crețu and the presidents of the outermost regions underlined the strong partnership between the three levels of governance: regional, national and European. Beyond the Commission, the EU was also represented by three honourable members of the European Parliament (Mr Omarjee, Mr Manscour and Mr Aguillar) and the vice-president of the European Investment Bank, Mr Fayolle.

During the conference, the regions' presidents welcomed the tailor-made approach set up by the strategy, an approach shared by Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic of France. They appealed for EU solidarity and equal opportunities for all EU citizens, in particular those in the poorest or most remote regions of the EU. They showed their appreciation for the strong political support for the Cohesion Policy expressed by President Juncker, emphasising the flexibility required in implementing this policy to meet their specific needs. And they stressed the need for greater transparency in trade agreement negotiations, for continued support of their local economies, and for specific measures in sectors important for their development, such as fisheries and the blue economy.

>

Smart use of assets

Making use of the smart specialisation model, the strategy seeks to help the regions to build on their assets, supporting greater innovation, including in traditional sectors such as fisheries and agri-food. To that end, the Commission will seek continuation of the Programme of Options Specifically Relating to Remoteness and Insularity (POSEI) beyond 2020, and will assess whether state aid can be used to support the renewal of small-scale fishing fleets.

The new strategy also aims to create equal opportunities in these regions. To promote the acquisition of skills and mobility, the EU will encourage stronger participation of young people from the outermost regions in both the Erasmus programme and the European Solidarity Corps.

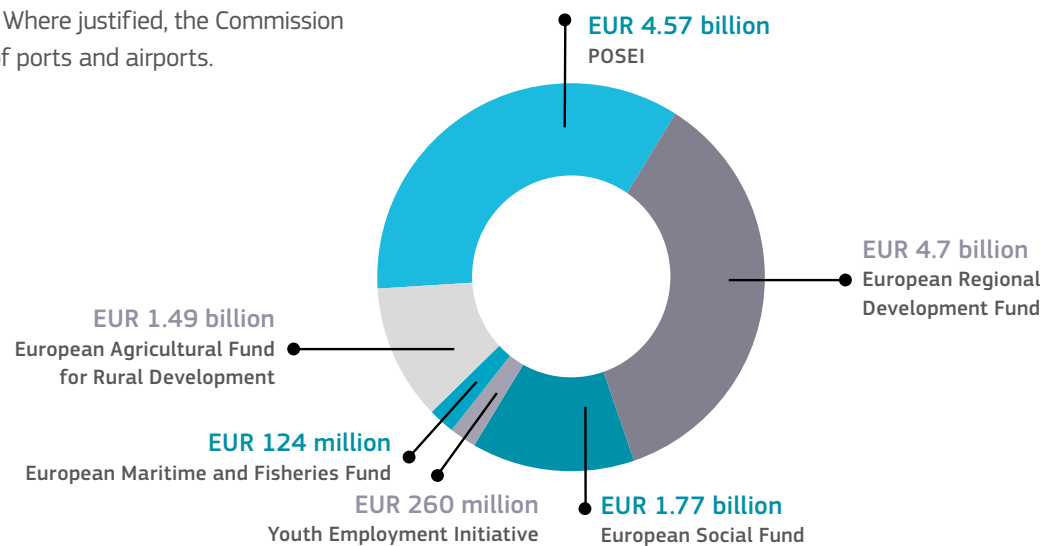
Furthermore, better transport links are crucial to economic development and quality of life in these regions. The Commission has just launched a study to identify their needs, prepare a pipeline of transport projects and better reflect their specific situations in EU transport programme(s). Where justified, the Commission will also support the funding of ports and airports.

Fighting the effects of climate change is one of the greatest challenges these regions face, and the risk of extreme weather events, such as hurricane Irma, happening again. The EU will incorporate these challenges into its LIFE environment programme and its strategy on adaptation to climate change.

What is Europe doing for these regions?

The European Union supports the efforts of the outermost regions in their pursuit of sustainable and inclusive growth. In the 2014-2020 period, EUR 13.3 billion of European Union funding is available for the outermost regions under the European Structural and Investment Funds and POSEI:

Moreover, the outermost regions benefit from specific or derogating measures, in areas such as agriculture, fishery, transport, state aid and taxation, in order to mitigate the impact of their specific constraints and boost their economic growth. ■



“ You are also at the heart of all the major challenges that will influence our future: climate change, renewable energies, biodiversity. Everything you are able to do, and actually achieve in each of these domains, can serve as an example and model for the rest of Europe... We are all united within the same Union and the Cohesion Policy of this Union is, and must remain, an essential binding element, and all policies must benefit and guarantee greater prosperity for everyone. ”

Extract from President Juncker’s speech at the 7th Conference of the Presidents of the outermost regions, on 26 and 27 October in Cayenne, French Guiana.

100 ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGY THROUGH A RENEWED PARTNERSHIP

The Commission is already working with the partnership to ensure implementation of the 100 actions listed in the Communication. Each level of governance, the EU, the concerned Member States – France, Spain and Portugal – and the regions will do its part.

The Commission has already launched a number of actions. A new initiative dedicated to the outermost regions, under the Juncker Plan, for enhanced support of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) is being set up in partnership

with the European Investment Bank. A study is being carried out to determine the requirements for air and maritime connections and to identify key transport projects. Within the Horizon 2020 work programme 2018-2020, a dedicated Coordination and Support Action, with a budget of EUR 4 million, will enhance the participation of the outermost regions in the EU's research programme and the visibility of their research and innovation capacities and assets.

A STRONG SIGNAL FROM A UNITED FRONT



The 2016-2017 Conference of the Presidents of the outermost regions – which French Guiana had the privilege of chairing was exceptional for many reasons. In view of the renewed strategy towards the outermost regions, my counterparts and I presented a memorandum to the European Commission.

I recall the campaigns led by our remote territories to build up a legislative framework suited to the realities of our outermost regions. Hard-fought, complex campaigns require patience and pugnacity, as well as lively and argumentative dialogue with the Commission. But there is still much to do. Thus, the memorandum represents a strong signal from a united voice.

Furthermore, President Jean-Claude Juncker was present, which was a first for the outermost regions and for French Guiana. This was a gesture which reiterated the fact we are members of the European Union, and one that supported the soundness of our approach. The visit by Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic, has made my country the focus of special attention, which I can only welcome.

However, over and above these aspects, I cannot forget the challenges facing French Guiana. During the conference, I emphasised the need to prioritise certain economic sectors facing severe budgetary constraints for public support: the hotel industry, fishing, agriculture and production companies.

I found such a request to be even more legitimate since the revision of the European Union regulations on state aid (General Block Exemption Regulation) was completed this year. On this occasion, we had requested that the EU develops a specific approach for state aid. It is therefore necessary to ensure consistency between community and national policies.








I am fully aware that this conference is only a first step. I share great concerns with my outermost regions counterparts about Cohesion Policy. Our territories need to follow the dynamic of European construction, through ongoing renewal, by providing them with the financial means to address the challenges they are facing, and by exploiting their advantages. It is vital for the outermost regions that the current strategy is implemented. I would even say enshrined, it being the responsibility of us, the territorial executives, to improve its effectiveness.

Rodolphe Alexandre, President of the Territorial Collectivity of French Guiana, Outgoing Chair of the Conference of Presidents of the outermost regions.





FACTS AND FIGURES

		Population (2015)	Per capita GDP (EU28=100) (2015)	Unemployment (2016)	Youth unemployment (15-24 years) (2016)*	Female unemployment (2016)*
	Açores	245 766	68	11.2	41.5	9.5
	Canarias	2 135 722	74	26.1	51.3	27.8
	Guadeloupe	429 849	69	23.9	46.7	25.3
	Guyane	262 527	53	23.2	43.9	24.7
	Madeira	256 424	72	13	50.5	11.9
	Martinique	376 847	78	17.6	44.3	17.5
	Mayotte	235 132	32	27.1	54.5	31.8
	La Réunion	850 996	71	22.4	44	22

* 2016 data except for the Azores and Madeira (2014)

The demographic data for Guadeloupe include Saint-Martin (population of 36 457 in 2013)

Source: Eurostat

OUTERMOST REGIONS: PRESENTING A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY AND ADDED VALUE FOR THE EU

At a time when Europe is experiencing a difficult identity crisis, the outermost regions are reaffirming their commitment to the European project and their desire to move forward with the Union to ensure high levels of economic development and well-being for their citizens. This objective can only be achieved if European policies and initiatives are adapted to these regions' unique situation.

The European Commission's renewed commitment to support the outermost regions to achieve a better place in the EU, expressed in its new Communication 'A stronger and renewed strategic partnership with the EU's outermost regions', is a very important milestone for the future regions and for the design of the forthcoming programming period. It must be implemented in the light of the EU Court of Justice judgement on the scope of Article 349 TFUE, which establishes this article as the single and sufficient legal basis to adopt European legislation taking into account the specificities of the outermost regions.

The new Communication should allow equal opportunities, competitiveness and external projection – elements which are absolutely inseparable – to become indicators of any ambitious public policy for the outermost regions, constituting an excellent starting point for this ambition.

In this context, the Conference of Presidents of the outermost regions, in its memorandum of March 2017, set objectives which seek to increase the visibility of the outermost regions, defend their interests in a coordinated manner in relation to the funding and budgetary renewal, and to move forward jointly in areas of common interest, demonstrating the added value that the outermost regions can bring to the EU.

In spite of the permanent constraints they face, the outermost regions provide a unique and different dimension, without which the EU would certainly be less rich: a geo-strategic position, a diversified biodiversity, and privileged natural surroundings for implementing scientific and technological investigation activities, especially in fields like the blue and circular economy or renewable energies, while offering exceptional natural surroundings for safe and sustainable tourism.



During this uncertain but promising period, technical collaboration will be reinforced through the employment, energy and smart specialisation networks set by the outermost regions, and efforts will be made to strengthen cooperation with their neighbours. This will help the needs of these regions to be identified and the opportunities they offer to be discovered and better implemented.

Fernando Clavijo
President of the Government of the Canary Islands,
Chair of the Conference of Presidents of the outermost regions





AZORES

NONAGON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PARK

EU funding: EUR 7.6 million

Located on São Miguel Island, the aim of the NONAGON Science and Technology Park is to enhance the articulation between the public, private and university sectors, with the objective of promoting technology-based entrepreneurship. The idea is to encourage the sharing of experience and skills among enterprises and promote the diffusion of innovative practices.

The project is endeavouring to create the conditions required to attract companies from other regions, which will bring added value to the regional industrial sector. It provides incubation services and co-working spaces for start-ups, and organises an international 'start-up weekend and creative night' in which students from the USA and Canada also participate.

This centre also houses the CoderDojo in the Azores, which is an international community of programming clubs for young people to develop websites and other IT applications.

“NONAGON has enabled UrActive to be close to several companies in a range of areas and has stimulated interaction with local businesses, thus leveraging our partnerships. Furthermore, the NONAGON building offers unique conditions in the region for us to pursue our business.”

Paulo Leite (UrActive)

MADEIRA

PROTECTING THE POPULATION AGAINST FLOOD RISK

EU funding: EUR 76.3 million

The project includes a set of structural interventions aiming to minimise and alleviate the effects of flooding and guarantee the systematic use of risk-prevention and management mechanisms. As such, it will help to better protect the population, the built heritage and economic activities.

The work responds to the requirements defined by the Madeira Island Flood Risk Evaluation Study (EARAIM). This includes interventions to improve the hydraulic function of the main rivers in Funchal, to protect the seafront zone in the east of the city, and to protect and repair the site of the temporary embankment built after the bad weather in 2010.



“The city of Funchal is now more beautiful and is also safer. During heavy rain, the river banks are protected and catastrophes can therefore be averted. It is also an excellent place for leisure and family outings.”

Carmo Cabral

GUADELOUPE

PREPARING FOR EMPLOYMENT WITH TRAINING/
WORK-EXPERIENCE SCHEMES

EU funding: EUR 0.6 million

The goal of the project is to provide support to disadvantaged young people to enhance their employability. The training will help students to define their professional vocation and working profile in line with the requirements laid down by employers. The educational course also includes a trial period in a company to ensure the students have a genuine interest in their future professional life.



MARTINIQUE

A NEW HOSPITAL PLATFORM RESISTANT
TO HIGH-INTENSITY EARTHQUAKES

EU funding: EUR 34.6 million

Martinique is situated in an area of high seismic risk (class 5) and, as such, the construction of a new hospital platform connected to the existing hospital, in accordance with new seismic protection standards, is vital for the region.

The project has supported the construction of essential assistance units which enable work to be done in extreme conditions and autonomously, even when external energy and water supplies are unavailable for a week. The reconstructed technical facility consists of an earthquake-resistant building covering 28 788m² and 191 beds. The installation also includes a helipad area for transporting sick people.

RÉUNION ISLAND

FUND OF FUNDS: 'FINANCIÈRE RÉGION RÉUNION'

EU funding: EUR 44 million

With ERDF and EIB support, the Réunion region has created a fund to foster the growth of local companies. The aim of the project is to increase and strengthen the competitiveness of small enterprises.

The fund will operate with two tools: low-interest loans through the so-called 'risk sharing loan' system to provide liquidity for local companies; and the equity-type operations or quasi-equity operations which target small and medium-sized businesses.



“This means, first of all, putting our outermost regions at the heart of the EU’s decision-making process – making sure that your concerns and interests fully feed into the design, preparation and implementation of EU policies.”

Extract from the speech given by Commissioner Crețu at the 7th Conference of the Presidents of the outermost regions, 26 and 27 October, Cayenne, French Guiana



MAYOTTE

NARISOMÉ, LET’S LEARN TOGETHER’ OR HOW TO BOOST YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN MAYOTTE

EU funding: EUR 1.3 million

Narisomé is a programme implemented by AGE PAC, the inter-regional employment training portal, which aims to encourage the integration of young people (16-25 years old) in the work environment by fostering motivation, self-confidence and socialisation. The project endeavours to promote the acquisition of a set

of cross-disciplinary skills, to develop an action plan for each young person’s professional project and thus to validate and secure his or her path to employment.

In 2016, the project supported 141 young people, of whom 48% found employment or a training course and 42% started an internship.

SAINT-MARTIN

VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR FISHERIES PROFESSIONALS

EU funding: EUR 91 221

This project helped unemployed young people to acquire the relevant competencies to work in the fishing industry. The vocational training project aimed to equip them with the skills they needed either to become immediately employable in the local market or to set up their own company. The training activity was held outside the region, which enabled the participants to experience a new cultural and social environment, too.



PROMOTING THE OUTERMOST REGION CULTURE

The Commission has recently presented a new strategy for the outermost regions to help them fully realise their potential. From your point of view, to what extent is this strategy moving in the right direction?

First of all, I think it's important to say that the working method implemented on the initiative of Commissioner Corina Crețu for writing this new strategy is in itself a step forward. There has been real substantive work initiated between members of the European Parliament and European Commission who have listened carefully and fully to the outermost regions. In the end, this strategy is the result of a broader partnership-based dialogue, and that is the first thing to be praised.

The second merit is the fact that, as a result of writing this strategy, intense discussions have taken place inside the European Commission, right up to the level of the Commissioners themselves. It is the start of what I would call an outermost region culture. In other words, it is transversally taking into consideration the outermost regions at all levels of decision-making within the European Commission.

And we can see that this new strategy has ultimately been adopted by the highest level of the European Commission, by President Jean-Claude Juncker, and that the political agenda of the outermost regions has become a political priority for the Commission. I welcome this.

Of course, everything is always judged in light of how the proposals are implemented and not how they are announced. That said, I think that the relationship of trust between the outermost regions and the European Commission has been restored by this Communication and the long collective work that preceded it.

This new strategy contains a series of concrete measures and candid responses on the European Commission's part. We have a common basis from which we can move forward and can all use to measure progress by identifying the responsibilities of each party – the Commission, the states and the regions – since they are clearly identified.



How important have successive EU investments been for these regions during the recent programming periods (EUR 13.3 billion granted during the 2014-2020 period alone)?

For the outermost regions, Cohesion Policy is crucial because it is based on the principle of making up for delays in development and the redistribution of wealth from the wealthiest regions to the poorest regions. And everyone must surely realise that Mayotte, the youngest outermost region, is one of the two poorest regions in the EU.

Cohesion Policy is a real tool that can be used for further development as it forms part of a logic of both project and progress.

What is your position concerning the ongoing debate about the post-2020 Cohesion Policy, especially in relation to the outermost regions?

This debate goes beyond the issue of the outermost regions. It has an effect on the foundations of the EU, its principles and its values. Without a strong Cohesion Policy that is firmly anchored to the objectives conferred upon it by the Treaties, the EU risks losing one of its main *raison d'être*, and without doubt, the cement holding it together.

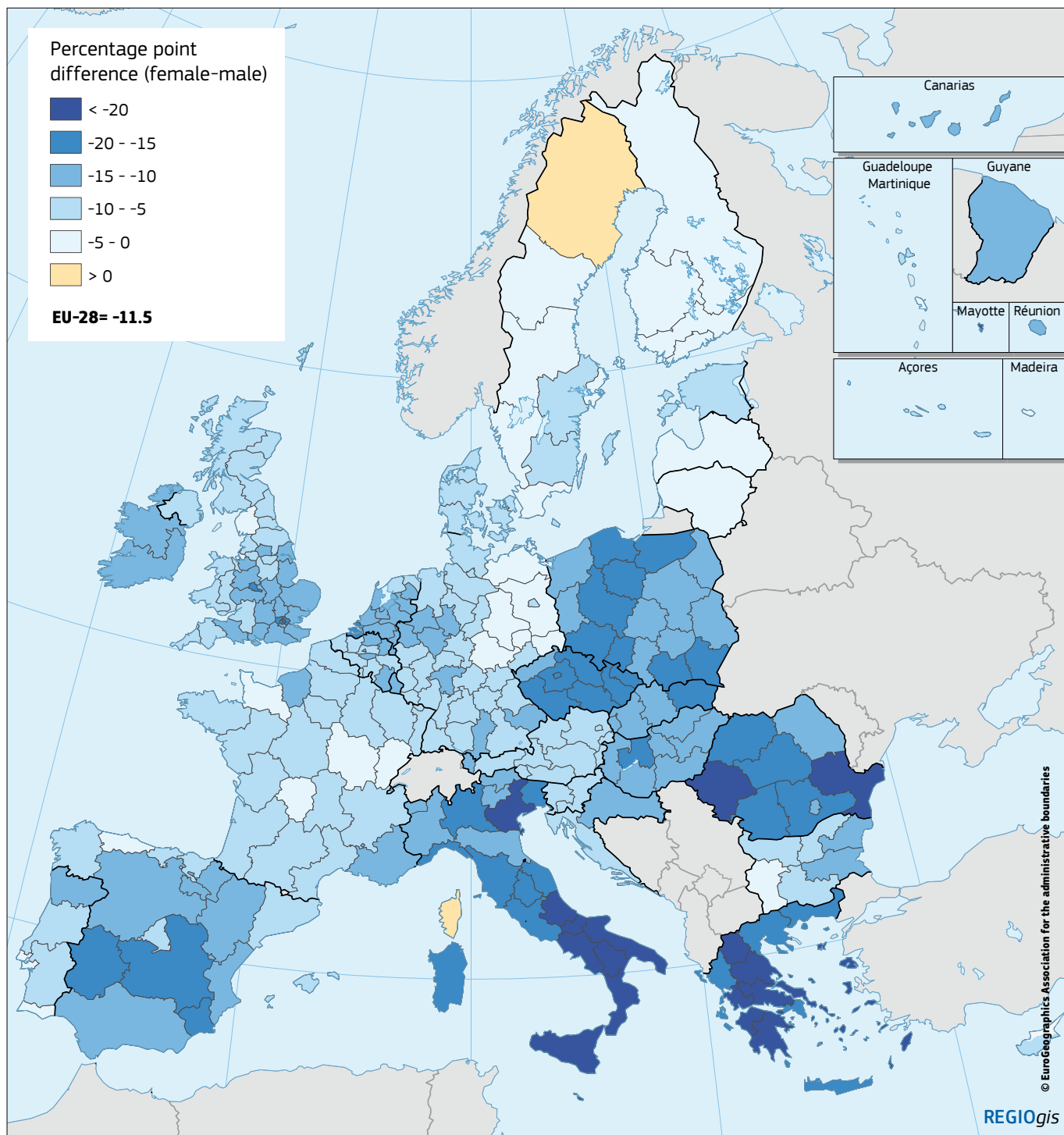
Without solidarity at the heart of the European project, the common destiny will erode. This is something that nobody should lose sight of. And a weakening of regional policy would also weaken the implementation of the objectives set by the new strategy for the outermost regions.

Younous Omarjee,
Member of the European Parliament

Difference between female and male employment rates (20-64), 2016

In the EU, the female employment rate is 12 percentage points lower than the male rate. Only two EU regions – Corsica and Upper Norrland in Sweden – report a higher share of women working than men. In contrast, the female employment rate in Puglia in Italy and North Aegean in Greece is

28 percentage points lower, which means their overall employment rate is very low (48% and 59% respectively). If women were able to catch up with men everywhere in the EU, we would reach the Europe 2020 target of 75% employment rate. ■

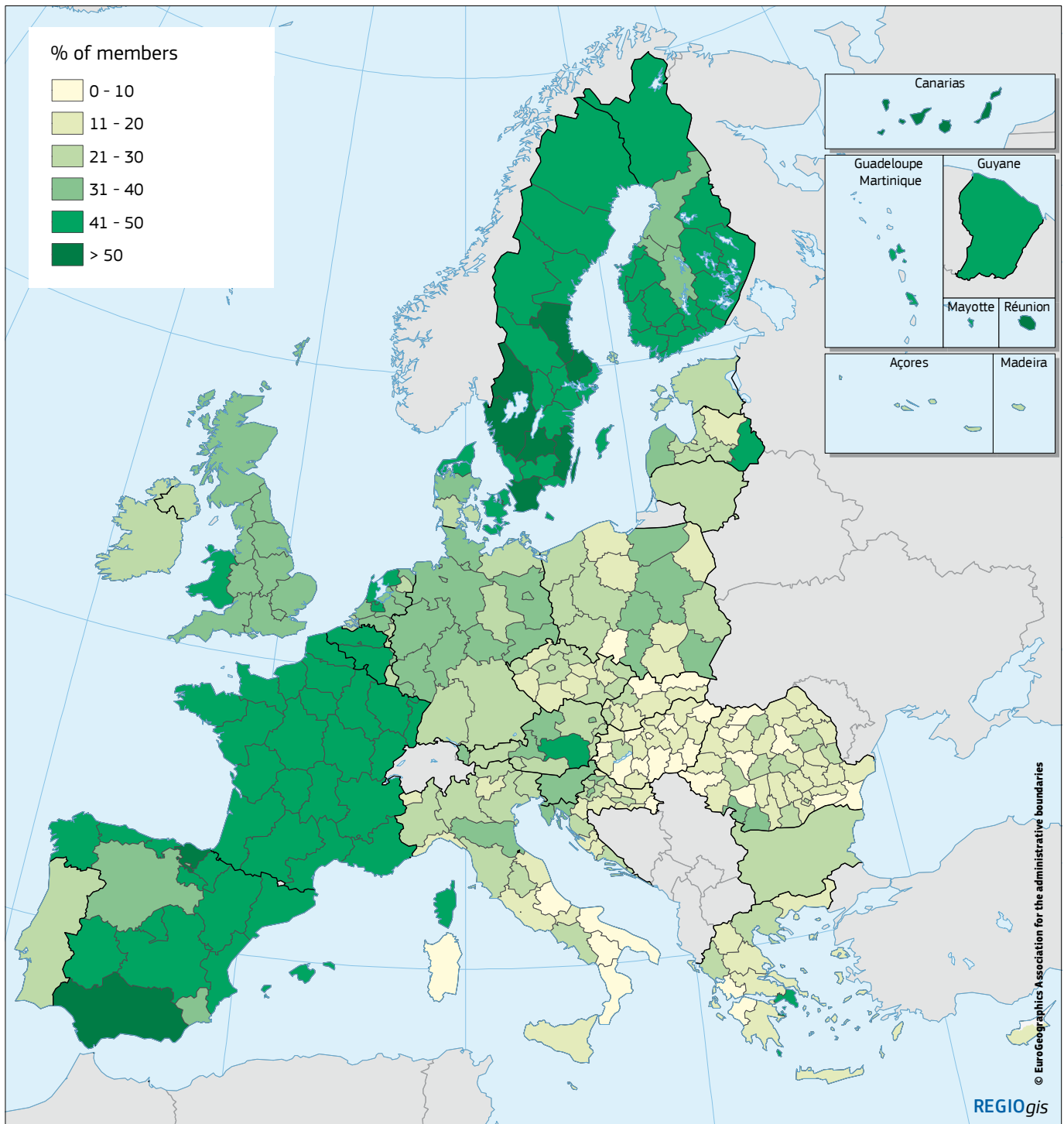


Source: Eurostat

Women in regional assemblies, 2017

The regional assemblies in Basilicata in Italy, in three Hungarian NUTS-3 regions and in Alba in Romania do not feature any women. In contrast, four Spanish, four French and nine Swedish regions have at least 50% women representatives in their regional parliaments. National politicians often

begin their careers in local or regional politics. A low share of women at the regional level will also make it harder for them to launch a career in national politics. Please note that the share in the national parliament is shown for the countries and regions without a regional assembly. ■



Countries without regional assemblies: BG, EE, IE, CY, LT, LU, MT, SI (women in national assembly)

Regions without assembly: ES63, ES64, PT1, England excl London (women in national assembly)

Source: European Institute of Gender Equality, JRC, DG REGIO

TEN YEARS OF SUCCESS

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the RegioStars Awards. Here are just a few testimonials from citizens who have benefited from these successful innovative projects across the EU.



“Thanks to the Green Tech Cluster, our product is seeing success on the market and we were able to collaborate with a major research institute in a move that could lead to promising new developments.”

Werner Färber, managing director of EcoCan GmbH
Austria - Green Tech cluster – RegioStars award winner 2012

“A clear and comprehensive explanation to senior citizens by a bank representative about why seniors should not be afraid to use online banking and how to do it safely, as well as his answers to questions, provided significant practical benefits.”

Regina Dovidavičiūtė, Vice Chair, Association of Universities of the Third Age
Lithuania - ICT applications for e-inclusion - RegioStars award winner 2010



“New skills and knowledge are very important in farming. EkoBiz taught me about production techniques, plant protection and funding. I now have the knowledge I need to manage my farm.”

Božo Vukušić, olive farmer
Croatia - EkoBiz - RegioStars award winner 2017

“The programme changed my life by giving me direction and a clear focus, which has been something that has stayed with me. It gave me the drive and confidence to go for the things I wanted.”

Katie Gillmon, owner and head chef, Wood and Green
UK - Fifteen Cornwall - RegioStars award winner 2014



“Bus trips have become more comfortable and I can now consult an app to check schedules. The creation of new routes has made my commutes so much faster and easier and cut transit times. I hope that Horários do Funchal keeps up its good work.”

Joana Sousa
Portugal - CIVITAS MIMOSA - RegioStars award winner 2011



“I just graduated from school and am about to start a plumbing apprenticeship – so fortunately things are going well for me. The guidance I received from a Diritti a scuola counsellor gave me the confidence to believe in myself and helped me identify my talents and aspirations.”

Antonio Grassi, Italy - Diritti a scuola - RegioStars award winner 2015

“The SÖM Fosie social inclusion project improved the area but also benefitted me as a person. Previously, there had been a lack of tools and resources but SÖM Fosie made it possible for me to become stronger personally and to invest in my education.”

Safija Imsirovic
Sweden - SÖM Fosie - RegioStars award winner 2012



The ‘RegioStars Awards: 10 years of success stories’ marks the impressive achievements of outstanding EU-funded regional projects and includes a selection of testimonials from the project winners and beneficiaries:

<http://europa.eu/!PJ39Yg>

A little advice for the EU from a British ‘supergirl activist’

Madeleina Kay was one of four winners of this year’s Europe In My Region blogging competition, which rewards young people blogging about EU-funded projects. Part of her prize was a trip to Brussels during the European Week of Regions and Cities, where she received mobile journalism training. Here she describes her trip to Brussels and her ongoing campaign to keep the UK in the EU.

Winning the #EUinMyRegion blogging competition allowed me to visit Brussels for the first time and see the work of the EU Commission and Parliament. I have been on a steep learning curve since the EU referendum in Britain. Unfortunately, my lack of knowledge was not a unique case but a nationwide problem that resulted in people voting for their future based on very little understanding and information.

The level of political education in the UK is abysmal and EU-funded projects are poorly publicised. The injustice of the Brexit vote is striking given the lies told by leading political figures who are still making their unfounded and deceitful claims.

UK citizens voted for Brexit for a plethora of often conflicting reasons. Many people living in deprived regional areas voted for Brexit thinking that the EU was somehow to blame for the inequality in the UK. Others earnestly believed the lie about funding for the National Health Service. The EU was used as a scapegoat for the failings of domestic policy, when in fact it has been working to address deprivation in those very regions that voted most highly to leave.

Having spent a week at the heart of the European Union, I can’t help but think we have done you a great disservice and I sincerely hope that we will be welcomed back when we finally admit the error of our decision.

Nonetheless, I also think the EU needs to work to prevent other nations from following a similarly erroneous trajectory. Increasing knowledge and understanding about the EU is one of the key aims in my campaigning, although I use a fun, friendly and engaging style to be accessible to a wider audience. An attitude shift will be necessary to make the European institutions more inclusive and engaging to a wider group of citizens, which is needed alongside much better publicity of the fantastic work that the EU does to support the development of its Member States.

Using alternative methods to reach out to young people and citizens who are typically disengaged with politics is imperative in reversing the rise of populism in Europe and garnering the future generation’s support for the EU.

In December, I will be returning to Brussels with 1000 handwritten letters with a message of solidarity at Christmas time and hope for our future inside the EU. ■



FIND OUT MORE

<http://europa.eu/!jp93vW>

EUROPE IN MY REGION PHOTO COMPETITION 2017

Winning shots

Spot an EU-funded project, find a good angle, frame the project and the information about it in a single photo and shoot! Easier said than done? Well, that was the challenge for participants to the Europe In My Region photo competition, now in its sixth edition.

The annual contest aims to highlight the excellent work that projects across Europe are doing with the help of EU funding, and to explore what these projects mean to local communities.

Actually, EU funds help tackle a wide range of issues across Europe, from improving transport links and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, to investing in a cleaner environment, developing new products, and improving education and skills.

The 2017 competition took place over the summer, run on social media. Entries were uploaded on to the online platform, and then open to a public vote. Finally, the jury – comprising two photographers and a social media expert – selected the three winners from photos which received the most votes online and a selection of wild cards chosen for their aesthetic quality, creativity and relevance to the competition theme.

From over 700 photos, the jury picked Aliya Kazandzhieva from Bulgaria, Mathew Browne from the UK and Dirk Harmsen from Sweden, who won a trip for two to Brussels to attend the European Week of Region and Cities event and to participate in a photo workshop.

FIND OUT MORE

<http://bit.ly/1N6v7G5>

<http://europa.eu/!nd83PT>



▲ 'Environment and landscape improvement project in Skurup' by Dirk Harmsen from Sweden. European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)



▲ 'Sustainable development of the urban environment in support of social integration in Burgas' by Aliya Kazandzhieva from Bulgaria. European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)



▲ 'Road improvement, walkways and cycleways in Wales' by Mathew Browne from the UK. European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)



Mystery solved

Paolo Isoardi and his family visited Stockholm to discover an EU-funded project in the Swedish capital as a prize for winning the online project hunt organised in the context of the Europe In My Region Campaign. "It was very useful to see how our common EU money contributes to development in Stockholm. I had interesting visits to projects in housing and food production," said Paolo.



European Commission



PHOTO COMPETITION 2017

ZOLA

#EUinmyRegion



SWEDEN



POLONE



MALLA



UNITED KINGDOM



SERBIA



ECONOMIQUE



L'ART INDUSTRIEL



NETHERLANDS



NOVIYO



MONTENEGRO



LITVIA



ITALY



GERMANY / FERRIS



LITVIA



PORTUGAL



BALTIC SEA REGION



ROMANIA



SLOVAKIA



BELGIUM



ALGERIA

f EUinmyRegion

#EUinmyRegion

ec.europa.eu/info/region

Winning ways with words

This year's European Week of Regions and Cities, held in Brussels, Belgium on 9-12 October, proved to be particularly exciting for some of Europe's budding journalists! Competition winners from the Youth4Regions Media Programme were invited to be part of the media pool covering the event.



The European Week of Regions and Cities is by and for the people

As a Colombian living in Spain, through the ERWC Youth4Regions Media Programme I had an authentic European experience, living it both from the point of view of an outsider who learned several things to apply in Latin America, and as a human being who thinks of people first rather than borders.

When I was accepted as part of the Youth4Regions Media Programme of the European Week of Regions and Cities 2017, I first thought it was just an opportunity for networking, but I got much more than that.

The first and most basic take-away is that Europe is neither Brussels nor the European institutions – not even the variety of representatives who come from each Member State. Europe is its people. That statement is why I also learned how important regional policy is: it is important because the European Union must start from the problems and needs of its people, from their reality and from what they want.

That is why, as a Colombian living in Spain, the EWRC taught me that no matter how history has been, it is possible to make a common project for a better future coming from countries

with diverse cultures and languages. The environment of solidarity and cooperation, but also of arduous work shown by the specific projects that were presented, made me ask myself why that if in Latin America we are 20 countries with a similar culture and the same language, why can't we do something like that?

On the other hand, I wanted to live the EWRC not only with the curiosity of an outsider, but also as a journalist and as a human being, even considering all those identities as one. Those days in Brussels with future colleagues from all Europe and getting in touch with local but high impact projects taught me that outside the bubble we live in there are lots of people working to make their communities better and, maybe not even knowing, something bigger, like the European project in this case.

Therefore, there are many stories waiting to be written, found and shared, no matter where they come from or who is sharing them because, as Gandhi once said: "human nature is the same everywhere, regardless of the ground that we step on or the sky that we contemplate".



José Manuel Cuevas



Get out of your comfort zone, push your limits and you will go far

Youth4Regions winner and trainee journalist, Bruna Tomsic, shares her impressions of the 2017 EU Week of Regions and Cities.

I must admit, the 2017 European Week of Regions and Cities will certainly be one of the most memorable experiences of my life. Considering the fact that the EU has so many successful regional projects, no wonder I met so many other aspiring journalists who also got the chance to visit this beautiful, multicultural city.

This was my first time visiting Brussels and I was very grateful to have met talented people from all over Europe, got the chance to network with the EU officials and listen to some interesting future plans that the EU regional team have created.

After the mobile storytelling session, I was mind-blown by all the possibilities of digital reporting. For example, different ways of holding a phone when doing a Facebook live, how to broadcast live footage from several devices just by using an app, etc. With these reporting ideas in mind, it was far easier for me to charge my batteries before returning to the UK to continue my final multimedia journalism year.



Sitting in the European Parliament, visiting the EU Commission through to the press launch of the 7th Cohesion Report and the Cohesion Alliance made me understand the scope of work the EU does. I would like to hope that all the 2030 climate targets will be met, as well as successfully tackling youth unemployment rates in regions across the Member States, and what will happen financially post-2020, considering that Brexit negotiations are still on-going.

Attending the RegioStars awards on the final night made me realise how important it is to keep creating an impact, inspiring people and challenging yourself to achieve the unimaginable. I have to congratulate all the regional winners and nominees because I truly admire their work. Considering that my home country is Croatia, I was very proud when I saw EKOBIZ Split getting the award for its powerful young entrepreneurship scheme in the organic agriculture section for sustainable food. Hopefully, all of this will inspire many people who would like to create a social impact and help their communities. I strongly believe that unity, creativity, and change-making should be the driving force for the future of Europe, the future full of possibilities and achieved dreams.

Bruna Tomsic



After almost nine months of activity, IVY has spread all over the European Union having sprouted over 50 volunteers. Thanks to their commitment to the European project, these young Europeans are helping solidarity, territorial cooperation and cohesion values to flourish.

“Interreg Volunteer Youth”: territorial cooperation for all

When IVY branches spread across surfaces, they create a great visual impact: by projecting beauty on to objects which belong to everyday life, they make them visible and attractive to everyone’s eye. The IVY volunteers participating in the ‘Interreg Volunteer Youth’ (IVY) initiative are triggering the very same result among the Interreg managing authorities, joint secretariats and projects which are hosting them by helping to give them a new profile –which is more inclusive for young people and thus better seized upon by European citizens.

Managing IVY, as the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) we have had the chance to meet the volunteers on many occasions. They have accompanied us to events such as the European Week of Regions and Cities, the European

Commission conference on ‘Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions’ and the ‘European Public Communication Conference EuroPCom 2017’ organised by the Committee of the Regions.

Spreading the word

Therefore, we can appreciate what the Interreg programmes and projects which are already hosting a volunteer under the IVY initiative have been telling us: given their firm willingness to contribute to EU policy tools and to play their part in the making of the EU, the volunteers are bringing an influential input to the way the impact of Interreg is being communicated.

IVY volunteers have also introduced a whole new public to territorial cooperation policies. In mid-November, the IVY Facebook page had 1 715 followers, and the Twitter account 873. Most of our followers are young people interested in discovering new opportunities to engage in European projects. They are now learning more about the initiatives the European Commission puts in place to achieve a more cohesive Union across its 28 countries.

Furthermore, our social media channels are also linked to those of the volunteers: the stories they share with us and we bestow on them are thus being exported to their networks, too. The result is a jigsaw puzzle of Interreg stories circulating among a great number of European citizens and conveying its achievements to the local population in every European region – and yet another ivy bush is growing exponentially prompting a positive trail. ■



FIND OUT MORE

https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en

<https://www.interregyouth.com/>

Taking open borders to the next level

My uncle and aunt just returned from a road trip along the wildly beautiful coastline of northern Spain. While their original plan was to travel from Bilbao to Porto, keeping things Spanish turned out to be the easier alternative. Overcoming the administrative nightmare of picking up a rental car in one of the Iberian states and returning it in the other was not how they decided to spend their holidays. For them, this cross-border obstacle was a new and temporary inconvenience of minor importance. For others, these issues are a daily reality.

There is no continent with as many internal borders as Europe. Invisible as these borders may seem, the EU is still fragmented by administrative, legal and psychological barriers. These complexities do not just cost time and money – they compromise the freedom of citizens to carry out their citizenship. For example, firefighters can be made to wait at the border before being allowed to go and help their colleagues on the other side.

People are often astounded when they hear I commute between Belgium and the Netherlands each week, even if their daily commuting time within the Netherlands is twice as long. Distance, in this case, is a feeling. We will have to overcome border-induced complexities to erase borders from the hearts and minds of people. This is also the core message of the Commission's new Communication: 'Boosting Growth and Cohesion in European Border Regions'.

I volunteer as an IVY reporter at Interreg Vlaanderen-Nederland because I believe that actively demonstrating European solidarity is a great way of uniting Europe's diverse communities. By reporting on innovative cross-border projects in my region, I want to share the 'European feeling' with a broad audience.

Europeans are able to achieve great things by working and thinking beyond borders. Innovations within our programme will transform our society and market for the better: think about biobased 3D-printing or a tool that helps people suffering from a tremor with drinking. These disruptive technologies are under development thanks to cross-border cooperation. Interreg turns cross-border challenges into opportunities.

Having learned from my IVY experience, I've stopped seeing our region as a collective of peripheries. Culturally diverse as border regions may be, their populations are united by common challenges and opportunities. Border regions are powerful symbols of the EU's motto: united in diversity.

Robbert (Dutch)





Cohesion Policy and the Valencia Region – an indispensable tool for European construction

↗ City of Valencia, Spain.

The European Union's current integration and expansion processes face a myriad of obstacles. For this reason, a sense of belonging to Europe is the necessary link between those people and communities, like the Valencian people and community, which share principles and values that have only become part of our lives by traversing a complicated road and which, for all that, are built on European foundations now violently shaken by countless challenges.

Like all actors in the European sphere – in a general sense – we must do everything we can with all the means at our disposal to ensure that equality, liberty and solidarity continue to be the central axes of the European construction.

In this context, we, the regional authorities, have within our reach a golden opportunity: EU Cohesion Policy allows investments to be made according to a series of criteria set by the European Commission, albeit with room for manoeuvre. Even taking into account the frequent criticisms of this tool, ranging from lack of flexibility and transparency to the complexity of its processes, Cohesion Policy is the EU's fundamental instrument for making public investments. Its aim is to contribute to the harmonious development of the regions and guarantee a common path towards social, economic and environmental convergence – in agreement with the Europa 2020 strategy priorities.



Such is the case of the Valencian Region, an open land with a marked European and international character. Celebrations were recently held in Valencia for the second 'Grow Your Region' European conference which has benefitted from Cohesion Policy since 1988, the year the Generalitat took its first steps towards managing these resources, while funding became significant in the following year.

From 1989 until 2006, the Region was a beneficiary of the Structural Funds in the target region No.1 (currently called 'convergence') category, which continued throughout three planning periods. In the 2007-2013 period, the Region became part of the Competitiveness and Employment regions group, but with a specific transitional status called phasing-in, as a consequence of its exit from Objective No.1.

Reduced resources

The move to a phasing-in region brought with it a substantial reduction in allocated financial resources, motivated by its improved position in the prosperity rankings among European regions. This act, for essentially methodological reasons, is at odds with the financial discrimination from which the Valencia Region suffers, recognised by all the scientific reports published by the Spanish Government, such as the most recent by the Committee of Experts for the Reform of the Autonomous Financing System, or by bodies such as the Independent Authority for Fiscal Responsibility.

All of these have underscored the unusual situation of our territory, not only as a Spanish national lever, but at the EU level, as this is a community which has a lower-than-average income per capita and which, despite this, is the system's net contributor. And it is precisely due to the lack of resources through the system of financing and investments that the Valencia Region is enduring, a circumstance that compromises convergence and possibilities for future development under equal conditions with other territories.

The combination of a crisis situation with autonomic underfunding and the shift to being a phasing-in region means that it is essential, now more than ever, to maintain, if not improve, resources originating from Europe, to safeguard fundamental public services and to provide them with the necessary infrastructures for their development.

Returning to Cohesion Policy, in the current financial period 2014-2020, the Valencia Region continues to receive European funding through various Operational Programmes, both regional (European Social Fund – ESF and the European Fund for Regional Development – ERDF), and multiregional (Youth Employment, Sustainable Growth, Smart Growth and the SME Initiative). In total, this amounts to over EUR 975 million, excluding the remainder of the current Structural Funds and European Investments – FEIE (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and European Maritime and Fisheries Fund), which are not considered part of regional policy and European cohesion.

Building a stronger Europe

Broadly speaking, the Generalitat is carrying out a series of co-financed measures with ESF and ERDF. These include: support for recruiting young people, the Eurodisney programme, projects to improve employability, employment quality and labour mobility, the conservation of Valencia's cultural heritage, support for R&D&I in sectors such as healthcare, entrepreneurship, and SME innovation, the funding of Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development Strategies or Sustainable Urban Development Plans, the set of energy efficiency projects in public buildings and the computerisation of eco-parks, to name but a few.

In the present debate on the future of Europe, in the context of economic and social difficulties arising from the financial crisis, it is essential to remember that the EU's Cohesion Policy is not only one of the main instruments of public investment at a regional level, but also one of the indispensable foundations of the European construction. Therefore, it must continue to be the main reinforcing element of long-term economic, social and territorial cohesion, and is of vital importance in regions where there has been a double loss of resources, as is the case of the Valencia Region. European regions have the advantage of being able to easily combine operability and closer contact with citizens, hence the need to maintain the principles of subsidiarity and regionalism, as well as to encourage dialogue and debate on the future of our continent with citizens. ■

Vincent Soler I Marco, Regional Minister of Finance and Economic Model, Generalitat Valenciana.



▲ *Robotising the production process in the footwear industry allows for better management and use of energy resources, materials and production planning more in line with market demand.*

Promoting the entrepreneurial spirit

Mr Ximo Puig, President of the Generalitat Valenciana and head of the Comunitat Valenciana explains the current situation in the Spanish autonomous community and its priorities and hopes for the future.



Under Cohesion Policy programmes, Comunitat Valenciana was an Objective 1 region until 2006, then phasing-in in 2007-2013 and, for the current programming period, a more developed region. In your view, does this rightly reflect the region's evolution over the last decade? How would you consider the role of the EU in this process?

In recent times, the Comunitat Valenciana has been regarded as a rich region, following positive development with the support of European Union funding. However, the crisis sharply cut short this trend. Furthermore, in Spain, we have a chronic underfunding problem, in addition to a problem of underimplementing state investments. This leaves the Comunitat with practically no room to pursue active policies in terms of economic and social development, innovation and economic model promotion.

The shift to a phasing-in region, combined with the economic crisis, exacerbated this situation. Thus, we have greater recognition of the situation, a realistic methodology, and more flexibility for categorising regions.

The current regional programme aims to further boost economic growth and jobs in Comunitat Valenciana. How do you intend to boost productivity, in particular among SMEs?

With the goal of improving the competitiveness of SMEs, through its European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Operational Programme 2014-2020, the Comunitat Valenciana tries to prioritise promoting the entrepreneurial spirit, facilitating the harnessing of new ideas and encouraging the creation of businesses, especially those that could be considered innovative or technology-based. Likewise, support for their capacity to grow in

regional, national and international markets, and to get involved in innovation processes – above all in terms of improving access to funding, including the financial instruments with European funds – contributes to improving business productivity.

Under your programme, support can take the form of either grants or financial instruments. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this new approach?

In principle, the use of financial instruments has some disadvantages in the Comunitat Valenciana that should be temporary, such as a lack of experience in their management and a lack of awareness of their availability on the part of the citizens generally. In any case, the proper use of public funds through financial instruments leads to better leverage of financial resources by combining them with private funds,

“The separation of funds must be ensured in Cohesion Policy post-2020, so that the ESF is the main instrument of ‘Social Europe’, since its integration with the ERDF would jeopardise the very essence of the ESF’s social purpose.”

while at the same time reusing the resources, which enables the same funds to be used in various cycles.

In the Comunitat Valenciana, we are implementing financial instruments both with the European Social Fund (ESF) and the ERDF, with different objectives. With the latter, through loans and equity instruments, support is given to SME entrepreneurs with a highly innovative component and for their internationalisation strategies. In the case of ESF, we try to give support via microcredits to unemployed people and, currently, we are the only autonomous community, together with that of Madrid, which implements financial instruments with the ESF. In this context, it should be noted that the Comunitat Valenciana, along with the communities of Andalucía, Piemonte and Lombardia, is currently carrying out a European project which aims to improve the social economy through financial instruments.

European Territorial Cooperation is a key pillar of Cohesion Policy. We know that you are particularly active in this area, but could you please tell us what kind of contacts you have with other European regions and how you benefit from them?

The Comunitat Valenciana has shown strong commitment to collaborating in the attainment of objectives set by cooperation programmes, so that it accom-

modates different related structures such as the Antenna for the Western Mediterranean from the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument Programme, or the Valencia Interact Office, the only one that currently exists in the south of Europe. Through the ETC, Valencian entities have participated in dozens of Interreg MED and Sudoe projects, along with different regions throughout the Mediterranean and France, Portugal and Andorra, respectively.

For the new period 2014-2020, although only the first calls have been made, the Valencian entities already participate in 29 Interreg projects, among which PANORAMED stands out, which seeks to contribute to the regional dialogue on multilateral operational frameworks and agreements to solve common problems (see page 56). Furthermore, the Comunitat Valenciana has participated in projects with regions outside this area which have resulted in permanent cooperation, as is the case in our relationship with Sachsen Anhalt or the multiple projects with Helsinki-Uusimaa.

Preparations on Cohesion Policy post-2020 are intensifying. What are your views on the current debate?

From the Comunitat Valenciana’s point of view, European Union post-2020 Cohesion Policy needs a substantial

budget allocation to maintain and achieve its objectives of social, economic, and territorial cohesion, covering all the regions of Europe, and to deliver European public resources, in accordance with EU Treaties, through shared management, subsidiarity and multilevel governance. Accordingly, at all costs, it must be prevented from becoming a tool for carrying out structural reforms in the states. Finally, the separation between funds must be ensured, so that the ESF is the main instrument of ‘Social Europe’, since its integration with the ERDF would jeopardise the very essence of the ESF’s social purpose. ■



Comunitat Valenciana

The Comunitat Valenciana is an autonomous community of Spain located in central and south-eastern Iberian Peninsula. Its capital and the largest city is Valencia. The region is divided into three provinces – Alicante, Castellón and Valencia – and 34 counties.

POPULATION: The Comunitat Valenciana, which covers an area of 23 255 km², is a large region in comparison with the other Autonomous Communities. With a population of 4 934 993, it is the fourth largest community in Spain; its population density of 212 inhabitants per km², is much higher than the overall density of the Spanish population.

ECONOMY: The Comunitat Valenciana's GDP is EUR 105.077 million, which makes it the fourth Spanish economy by GDP volume. As for GDP per capita, which is a good indicator of quality of life, in 2016, it was EUR 21 296 as against EUR 24 100 GDP per capita in Spain as a whole.

In 2016, its public debt was EUR 44 663 million, 42.3% of its GDP, and its debt per capita was EUR 9 050 per inhabitant. Ranking the Autonomous Communities from least to greatest debt, the Valencian Region is 11th in the table and 16th with regards to debt per inhabitant.

LABOUR MARKET: The region's unemployment rate is 17.5% which is higher than the national level, and with 427 000 unemployed, it ranks 12th in the Autonomous Communities.

INDUSTRY: Strategic sectors in the region which are important for Spain's overall economy, include ceramics and tiles, shoes and leather goods, games and toys, wood and furniture, textiles and clothing and automotive.



REFURBISHMENT OF THE CARMEN CONVENT IN THE COMUNITAT VALENCIANA

Thanks to the European Regional Development Fund, the community's cultural museum centre has been refurbished. The Royal Monastery of Our Lady of Carmen was established in Valenciana in 1281, in the Roterós district, outside of the city's Arab walls. It owes its name to one of the city's most popular and central neighbourhoods: the Carmen district.

The monastery was active until the Spanish confiscation (1835-37) when it was changed into the Museum of Fine Arts. Its new function saved it from being demolished, and in the 19th and 20th centuries many of Valencia's top artists passed through its classrooms.

The refurbishment was carried out in various phases and was completed in 2011. It is now a centre of contemporary culture, hosting various artistic events while also serving as the headquarters of the Comunitat Valenciana's Consortium of Museums.

In the Renaissance cloister and rooms above it, Islamic archaeological ruins were found as soon as the work began and are exhibited today in another room. As regards to the refectory,



the remarkable beam system has been salvaged, the paintings on the 13th century walls and arches have been restored, and supports have been prepared for exhibits to prevent damage to the perimeter walls. Other rooms have also been restored, such as the chapter hall and the dormitory.

With ERDF support of EUR 2 470 029.58 the project has recovered 3 300 m² of exhibition space, which has been visited by over 650 000 people to date. In 2017 alone, more than 150 000 people have already come to visit more activities and exhibitions this year than ever. Thanks to the ERDF, the Comunitat Valenciana has been able to reclaim a cultural and historic space for its citizens which previously stood in ruins.

DEVELOPING HEALTH APPLICATIONS AND ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS

The Comunitat Valenciana, with the help of the European Regional Development Fund, is promoting three major projects related to health records:

- › The 'Electronic Health Record' (HER) integrates all public clinical information, ensures continuity of care between the various healthcare areas and enables access to health-care information, irrespective of the location of the service user (a professional or member of the public);
- › 'ABUCASIS' integrates health-record information concerning primary care. It is already in general use throughout the Comunitat Valenciana and new modules and functionalities are in the development phase;
- › The 'ORION-CLINIC' integrates health-record information concerning hospital care and is currently being used in 10 hospitals.

Given the progress achieved, both in terms of functionality and the widespread use of electronic records in the primary-care setting, efforts are focusing on the extension of the ORION-CLINIC programme to all publicly managed hospitals in Valencia.

ORION-CLINIC is a clinical-healthcare information system for hospitals in the Comunitat Valenciana, with a strong emphasis on everyday clinical practice. It focuses on improving care provision for patients and healthcare outcomes by helping healthcare staff in their work, increasing efficiency in the healthcare process as a whole, and facilitating healthcare continuity for the public.

It has been developed to facilitate its evolution and has been implemented through careful management of change, adapting to future improvements in healthcare management and practice, and becoming integrated with other Ministry for Universal Health Care and Public Health's systems. It attracts users by offering them a wide functional range and a unique interface based on strict usability tests.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE HIRING AND MOBILITY OF RESEARCH STAFF

The objective is to grant financial assistance to train doctoral research staff, by hiring them to develop a research project in collaboration with a university or research centre of international prestige, outside the Valencian system of science and technology. Furthermore, it is intended to hire research staff in pre-doctoral training in research centres and to fund their living and travel expenses for three to six months in research centres outside of the Comunitat Valenciana. The staff aim to acquire new techniques, access to scientific facilities, consultation of bibliographic or documentary collections, and other significant activities in the context of each beneficiary's thesis project, all of which will contribute to their scientific and technical training.

All this financial assistance contributes to achieving smart growth by promoting employment and improving its quality, aiming to promote a high level of education and training for all, and supporting the transition of young people from education to employment. More specifically, it is helping to train research staff, as well as increasing their employability, in order to encourage research, technological development and innovation (RDI). This is in line with the Europe 2020 strategy to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The availability of adequate human capital in RDI is essential for Europe's competitiveness, for the generation of new knowledge and technology and for its adaptation, transformation and exploitation, as well as to encourage the introduction of new models and organisational principles.



THE EURODYSSSEY PROGRAMME



Since 1987, the Comunitat Valenciana has participated in the Assembly of European Regions (AER) Eurodysssey programme, the goal of which is to give young people aged between 18 and 30, and having a professional qualification for completing their studies, the opportunity to carry out work experience in companies in various European regions. This experience takes place over three to six months, with support from their region. In the Comunitat Valenciana, this programme is accountable to the General Directorate for Financing and European Funds of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Model and is co-financed up to 50% by the European Social Fund (ESF) within the Comunitat Valenciana operational programme (POCV) 2014-2020.

In addition to giving the young participants the opportunity to access professional experience, the programme facilitates learning a foreign language and improves their knowledge of the language and culture of the host region. The programme is also interesting for the companies which have the possibility to host young people from all over Europe who are trained in the specialities and languages of interest to them.

There are 29 regions participating in the Eurodysssey programme. The programme participants are unemployed young people registered as citizens in the Comunitat Valenciana. They also have a professional qualification having completed

their training (university, regulated professional or for employment) and knowledge of a foreign language. By virtue of the principle of reciprocity which is established in the programme statute, the Valencian regional government welcomes an equal number of young Europeans who will carry out their internships in Valencian companies for two to five months.

The stays include a four-week period of linguistic training and cultural immersion, which the host region is responsible for, and a period in the company, with a salary or grant (if it is outside the EU), of a minimum of two months and a maximum of five months. The host region also facilitates the search for accommodation for the entire stay.

The Comunitat Valenciana, through the General Directorate for Financing and European Funds, grants a subsidy of EUR 1403 a month per job offered, to which a minimum contribution of EUR 122 a month will be incorporated from the company, with the total being allocated to meet the labour costs of those contracted. After income tax deductions (19%) and social security from the company and worker, the young person receives a minimum of EUR 843 35 net.

A large number of young people have benefited from this initiative. Over the last 10 years (2008-2017), 616 young Valencians have visited other participating regions (Germany, Belgium, Croatia, Italy, France, Georgia, Norway, Portugal, Romania and Switzerland) and a total of 556 young people from other European regions have been hosted by Valencian organisations and companies.

From the follow-up with the young Valencians who have returned in recent years, it is estimated that around 60% find work in the first year of returning, 45% of whom have found it relatively quickly. Current circumstances of the labour market are different and it remains to be seen how they affect the inclusion rate.

The budget available for the region's entire operational programme is EUR 3776656. The investment budgeted for the 2017 financial year is EUR 732000, which is distributed between subsidies for the Valencian companies hosting the young people, assistance for accommodation for the young people, language courses, technical assistance and cultural immersion.

SUSTAINABLE URBAN MOBILITY PLANS

The Government of the Generalitat Valenciana, in alignment with the Europe 2020 strategy, approved the European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme for the Comunitat Valenciana, for the period 2014-2020.

The Comunitat Valenciana's objective for 2020 is to focus resources on those sectors with greater added value that enable it to consolidate its development model around smart growth. It will expand those activities where the region has a specialisation and a more pronounced qualification, while taking the territory into account as a competitiveness factor.

With this focus and to ensure a greater efficiency in the use of funds, all of the existing regional strategies have been taken into account that are applicable within the scope of the Comunitat Valenciana.

Consequently, on 23 November, the Comunitat Valenciana called for a series of grants in this area to support local action projects for municipalities eligible for co-funding by the ERDF OP of the CV 2014-2020, priority axes 4 and 6.

In relation to axis 4 (Favouring the passage to a low-carbon economy in all sectors), the actions that have an impact on the specific objective 4.5.1 will be subsidised: 'Promotion of sustainable urban mobility: clean urban transport, collective transport, urban-rural connection, improvements to the road network, cyclist and pedestrian transport, electric mobility and development of the clean energy supply system.' Specifically, the drafting and approval, as well as the implementation by the municipalities of the Comunitat Valenciana of their own Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP).

It should be noted that for their elaboration and implementation, these SUMP rely on a process of citizen participation to make them a transforming instrument for cities, aimed at prioritising journeys on foot and by bicycle, improving accessibility, generating urban spaces for citizen coexistence and moving around the urban environment in a healthier way.

In the planning and elaboration of the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, the local entities have considered the needs of the different agents involved in urban mobility, designing a participatory process open to the associative network, economic players and residents interested in participating on an individual level.

EU funding continues to bring benefits to Malta

Throughout the 2007-2013 programming period, EUR 850 million of EU funds (European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund) were invested in key areas of the Maltese economy with the aim of substantially improving the quality of life of Malta's citizens.

Building on the success already achieved in the past, a further EUR 700 million were allocated for the 2014-2020 programming period and are currently being used to support job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth, sustainable development, and to further improve Maltese citizens' quality of life.

As part of the Europe 2020 strategy, which places research and innovation (R&I) at the forefront of Europe's efforts to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy with high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion, Malta has allocated funds to both R&I infrastructure and measures to strengthen the links between academia and industry. During the current programming period, this trend has been maintained and prospective investments will continue to focus on R&I facilities and access to finance for enterprises.

Previously, investment in educational infrastructure focused on providing a solid platform to increase the level of participation in education at post-secondary and tertiary level. ERDF investment of EUR 112.5 million was made in infrastructure and expansions, upgrades and other capital investments in the main post-secondary and tertiary institutions. During the 2014-2020 programming period, interventions will continue to try to reach Malta's national targets of reducing early school leaving and increasing the number of 30- to 34-year-olds completing tertiary education. Educational investments are always complemented by the European Social Fund which place greater emphasis on the quality of education and students' skills.



Promoting an economic hub

Due to Malta's lack of natural resources, size and geographical position, the development of specific niche markets within which to excel and create economic wealth is crucial. With this in mind, several investments have and will continue to take place thanks to EU funding to increase Malta's competitiveness and make it a hub of excellence in various economical activities. EU funding will also continue to be used for restructuring and re-modernising efforts in the private sector through various grants and financial instruments.

The health sector is also one of the islands' main priorities, especially since it ensures a more socially inclusive society. Flagship projects, such as the oncology centre, which featured in the previous programming period, will be further complemented with additional investments to improve health-care services in Malta and ensure the provision of community-based services.

The development of improved facilities for Malta's tourism industry is considered vital given its importance to the local economy and the substantial employment it generates. The 2007-2013 programming period saw investments to improve the local tourism services, develop new niche markets, and restore a number of historical sites with high tourism value. Complementary measures for preservation of the natural, historical and cultural assets will continue during this period.

Malta's specific characteristics, including its small size and the relatively high urban density, pose significant challenges for the country's transport sector. Thus, EU funds will continue to focus on optimising the connectivity of the Maltese Islands, both domestically and internationally. This will be achieved through various investments in the TEN-T road infrastructures, maritime infrastructure as well as modal shift. Such investments help to reduce bottlenecks and journey times, among others, and thus will definitely lead to greater competitiveness.

To address Malta's EU 2020 energy-related targets, a number of initiatives using EU funds have been undertaken to encourage the generation of clean energy and the introduction of energy-efficiency practices, thereby addressing the environmental impact of electricity and consumption. The positive results obtained will continue to flourish with interventions and initiatives targeting households, enterprises and the public sector by encouraging energy savings and promoting energy-efficiency systems.

Managing waste and water

Waste and water management are also two important pillars. To counteract the waste-management challenge Malta faces and its negative impact on the environment, EUR 125 million were allocated in the previous programming period to major investments such as the rehabilitation and restoration of closed landfills. New interventions will be implemented to reduce the amount of waste and divert remaining residues for recycling.

“ Due to Malta's lack of natural resources, size and geographical position, the development of specific niche markets within which to excel and create economic wealth is crucial. ”

The security of water supply and the management of waste water are also major challenges for the country. In the past, substantial investments were carried out to tackle both problems. These sectors will continue to receive Cohesion Policy investments in order to develop the necessary infrastructure to provide Malta with enough water resources without depleting the natural aquifer. In an effort to address severe pressures on the islands' water resources and to improve water quality while adapting to climate change, interventions will also seek to raise awareness on water conservation and efficiency and to optimise the use and quality of ground water. ■

Dr Aaron Farrugia, Parliamentary Secretary
for EU funds and Social Dialogue.

Esplora, Malta's Interactive Science Centre providing an informal educational setting for scientific discovery. ▼



CAPTURED ON CAMERA IN MALTA

Projects funded by the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund in Malta are helping to create jobs, encouraging economic growth, making business more competitive, enhancing learning and training, promoting sustainable development, and boosting the country's cultural heritage and tourism trade.



01



04



05



02



06



03



07



08



09



10



11



12

- 01 The Rehabilitation and Restoration of Closed Landfills project aims to restore landfill sites as public parks.
- 02 The National Flood Relief project will provide better storm-water drainage infrastructure and valley management.
- 03 The Salina Coast Road has been extended and upgraded.
- 04 The Masterplan: Development of Applied Science and Business and Commerce Institutes project delivered new premises and modern teaching resources and equipment.
- 05 The National Interactive Science Centre provides a state-of-the-art permanent infrastructure for an interactive science experience.
- 06 The Archaeological Heritage Conservation project has conserved two UNESCO World Heritage sites as part of the Maltese Megalithic Temples.
- 07 The project has created landscaped urban space, a public aquarium, a diving institute, parking facilities, a cycle track and Garigue Heritage Park.
- 08 The University Computing Services Centre Building houses a data centre, computer laboratories, training rooms and video-conferencing facilities.
- 09 The Oncology Centre at Mater Dei Hospital offers advanced cancer treatment facilities.
- 10 The project installed a 30KWp photovoltaic panel system on the Għajnsielem Band Club roof.
- 11 The Fort St. Angelo Heritage Experience included the restoration of this historic icon in the Grand Harbour.
- 12 Restoration of the Cittadella included the creation of a Visitor's Centre and rehabilitating public spaces and infrastructure.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS

PANORAMA
welcomes your
contributions!

In Your Own Words is the section in *Panorama* where stakeholders at local, regional, national and European level outline their achievements for the 2014-2020 period and share their views on the ongoing and crucial discussions on Cohesion Policy post-2020.

Panorama welcomes contributions in your own language, which we may feature in future editions. Please contact us at region-panorama@ec.europa.eu for further information on guidelines and deadlines.

Structural Reform Support Programme: the new kid on the block



Lambert Van Nistelrooij,
Co-rapporteur SRSP, Member
of the European Parliament

Since April 2017, Member States can voluntarily request support for implementing reforms, economic adjustment programmes and reforms following the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs).

The underlying thought is that specific reforms in public administration give a boost to innovation, investment and socio-economic growth. At the same time, this creates more synergies between the general economic and fiscal reforms and the European Structural and Investments Funds (ESIF). With the experience and expertise of the front runners, Member States, now supported by the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) instrument, can be more efficient and effective.

To date, more than half of the Member States have made use of the SRSP: the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) – the European Commission’s service which coordinates the SRSP – has received over 200 support requests from 16 different EU countries. Of these requests, 60%, spread across different fields, such as public financial management, governance, the business environment, the labour market, social services and capital market development, were deemed eligible.

Over EUR 22 million is being spent to help implement these reforms in the initial year. As funding for this programme is enabled by the ESI Funds, one of the key elements introduced was the partnership principle, a core value of Cohesion Policy. It is good to see that this principle is actively being taken up by the Commission and the Member States in the cooperation and support plans presented.

Next steps

The SRSP, now adopted for the 2017-2020 period, is contributing to institutional, administrative and growth-sustaining structural reforms in the Member States. The budget for the programme is set at EUR 142.8 million from the ESIF. By June 2019 at the latest, the European Commission will present the mid-term evaluation of the programme, which is all about European added value and addressing local, regional and national challenges. ■

Putting territories at the centre of Cohesion Policy

As Cohesion Policy is providing European citizens with unquestionable benefits it is essential that it continues to have an effect in all regions, with regional programmes and strategies actively taking into account all existing socio-economic and territorial contexts.



Enrico Mattei,
Autonomous region of Valle
d'Aosta, Department Coordinator
of structural policies
and European affairs

Furthermore, its continuation post 2020 should lead to resolving the current pending issues: poor visibility of the results and the low appropriation of Cohesion Policy by its intended final recipients, the citizens; excessive complexity of the rules for accessing the funds and difficulty in quickly responding to emerging needs; insufficient consideration of the diversity of the territories and their particular circumstances, and the presence of uniform rules which tend to increase disparity at the local level.

There will also be the need to consider that excessive fragmentation of interventions does not allow a critical mass to be achieved which is sufficient to produce positive downfalls in the long term, and that integration between interventions often comes up against significant difficulties. In this way, it will be necessary

to go beyond a vision that is still too segment-focused, to drastically simplify the regulatory apparatus, and to permit greater flexibility in the programmes.

Thus, an integrated territorial approach could better respond to the challenges of all territories within the European Union. In fact, recent research finds

that discrepancy between the levels of development of urban and rural areas are accentuated, which means that it will be essential to pay proper attention to the different territorial circumstances – in particular to the advantage of those areas, such as mountains, with a permanent geographical handicap. Here, in particular, the decreasing population trend can only be reversed by improving the circumstances of inhabitants which, in turn, requires improved access to services as well as better conditions for locating businesses (for example, compensating altitude-driven cost differentials).

All of this is also needed in an effort to give proper recognition to the importance of the key role that mountain commons (protected and humanised countryside, limited hydrogeological risks, and a non-polluted environment) play, not only to the advantage of local dwellers but also of all communities ranging from the lowlands to the large cities. ■

“... it will be necessary to go beyond a vision that is still too segment-focused, to drastically simplify the regulatory apparatus, and to permit greater flexibility in the programmes.”

Departments of France position on the future of European Cohesion Policy

“ *Cohesion Policy is a crucial part of European integration as it helps reduce gaps in wealth and encourages development between European territories.* ”

In this period of debate and institutional positioning on the duration and future of European Cohesion Funds for the post-2020 period, the French Departments could not, of course, remain idle.

With their experience and prominent role in the mobilisation of European and Structural Investment Funds, particularly in the implementation of the European Social Fund's third key area of 'Inclusion' – of which 78 departments of France are intermediary organisations – their elected representatives have come together to take up a common position on this topic. Their conclusions are based on the following remarks and principles.

Cohesion Policy is a crucial part of European integration as it helps reduce gaps in wealth and encourages development between European territories.

While the discussions surrounding the future of European Cohesion Policy post-2020 commit to the prospect of a budget reduced by the lack of financial contribution from the United Kingdom, this policy should not be used as a control variable.

In this context, the French departments are mobilising to maintain a real Cohesion Policy, across all territories and on broad themes.

The position held by the departments of France focuses primarily on five major principles:

- A strong and ambitious Cohesion Policy;
- A strong commitment in favour of inclusion supported by the departments



Simon Letonturier (left) and Augustin Rossi (right), Assembly of French Departments, Advisers

in their capacity as leaders of solidarity and guarantors of efficient implementation of the European Social Funds (ESF);

- Consideration of specific territories within Cohesion Policy;
- Consideration of cross-border cooperation specificities within Cohesion Policy and;
- Better governance of Cohesion Policy.

A resolution to this effect was presented to the Assembly of French Departments (ADF) at the end of November. ■

Extremadura, an innovation model based on specialisation and entrepreneurship

The Spanish region of Extremadura, recognised by Europe with the award for the European Entrepreneurial Region 2017, has opted for entrepreneurship and business development as one of the pillars of its growth and convergence towards other European regions, with an action plan focused on smart specialisation areas, contemplated in the RIS3 Extremadura strategy.



Jesús Alonso Sánchez,
General Secretary of Science,
Technology and Innovation
of the Regional Ministry
of Infrastructures, Junta de Extremadura

“ *The VI Regional Plan is the basic instrument for the planning, promotion, management and execution of research, development and innovation with a budget of EUR 420 million for four years.* ”

An example of this approach is the financing programme within the framework of the VI Regional Plan for Research, Technological Development and Innovation in the areas of specialization. Launched by the regional government, it is the basic instrument for the planning, promotion, management and execution of research, development and innovation which, as a whole and with many other actions, has a budget of EUR 420 million for the next four years.

Currently, the first package within the programme is being executed to finance projects in technology-based

and start-up companies. These are financial products intended for private companies, with a total value of EUR 32 million. Their strategic lines are focused on the promotion of R&D&i in areas such as agri-food, health, renewable energy, tourism, ICT, bio-economy and circular economy, digital transformation, humanities and social sciences.

The implementation of the plan is intended to strengthen the Extremadura science system as a whole, fostering technology centres and research groups, and connecting research to companies through a total of 66 measures. In addition,

a ‘bio-incubator’ will be launched in the city of Cáceres and another one focusing on the bioeconomy and circular economy will be set up in Mérida, the capital of Extremadura.

Apart from the programmes designed for companies, the youth employment plan must also be mentioned. With a budget of EUR 4.5 million, this programme aims not only to improve the employability of young people with university training or higher and middle vocational training, but also to give value to young talent and to promote the research culture of regional companies in the region’s areas of specialisation. ■



Healthy outlook for cross-border medical care

In recent years, NÖGUS (Lower Austrian Health and Social Fund) has established numerous cooperative efforts and projects between Lower Austria and neighbouring countries in the health sector, thanks to ERDF funding. The aim is to ensure that those living on both sides of the border can receive medical care in country. As a result of this very successful project, all cross-border activities were put under a common framework in September 2017, known as 'Healthacross'.

Healthacross stands for health-care provision without borders. International cooperation and innovative health projects in the border regions between Lower Austria and the Czech Republic, as well as Lower Austria and Slovakia, are now bringing the brand to life.

True to the motto "European ideas taking root in the border region", the dedicated team led by director Elke Ledl, MA, is reducing boundaries even further when it comes to health-care provision: "We want our work to help build bridges between Lower Austria and other European countries so that people on both sides of the border can benefit from care close to home."

Cross-border projects have many advantages. Patients can make their own decisions about which side of the border they would like to go to for treatment, and can also benefit from medical treatment locally. This is particularly important in

an emergency and could save lives if the closest hospital or nearest available ambulance happens to be on the other side of the border. International networks and cooperation also provide the opportunity for expertise from other countries to be brought into Lower Austria.

Care across the communities

Czech patients visit Gmünd regional hospital

In the regions of Gmünd and České Velenice in particular, cross-border cooperation has made everyday life easier for people. The Waldviertel-Gmünd regional hospital is right on the border, the closest ambulance station on the Czech side is more than 30 kilometres away, and the nearest hospital is even further away at 60 kilometres.

"The care given at Gmünd regional hospital is not simply medical care, but concentrates on the human aspect, too. Today, you don't want to have to think back to the hassle of making long journeys to the nearest Czech hospital, and I really appreciate the possibility of receiving fast medical care," explains one highly satisfied patient, Zdenek Tomas, from České Velenice, who became the 4000th Czech patient to be treated at Gmünd regional hospital.



As a result of the project, Czech insurance companies will cover the treatment costs of their patients. Interpreters and Czech-speaking staff help patients and hospital staff to communicate with each other. Discussions are currently under way with participating organisations in Southern Bohemia to extend the scope of treatment for Czech patients in Gmünd from just outpatient treatment to include inpatient treatment, too. Furthermore, opportunities will be developed for long-term cooperation within the framework of Cross-border Health Cubes (cross-border health centres) at Gmünd/České Velenice.

Radiotherapy for Lower Austrians at Znojmo Hospital

In 2018, 15 patients from the Weinviertel clinics at Mistelbach, Hollabrunn and Krems will receive radiation therapy at the hospital in Znojmo as part of their initial experience of project implementation.



“Our pioneering projects where neighbouring regions work together are exemplary throughout Europe. Lower Austria was therefore selected by the World Health Organisation as a flagship region,” says Johanna Mikl-Leitner, the regional governor of Lower Austria.

Cross-border rescue cooperation with South Moravia and South Bohemia

Lower Austria has already signed emergency service agreements with South Moravia and South Bohemia. In the next step, software adaptation will professionalise communications between the emergency call centre 144 Lower Austria and the emergency control call centres in South Moravia and South Bohemia to facilitate cross-border rescue operations.

This will ensure speedy mutual assistance in an emergency without bureaucratic complications.

Endometriosis centre at Melk Regional Hospital

The basis for the first EU-certified endometriosis centre in Lower Austria is the exchange of knowledge between Melk regional hospital and the hospital in Znojmo. The latter is responsible for this area and already hosts such a centre where patients will now receive a diagnosis and treatment more quickly. One in ten women of childbearing age is affected by endometriosis, which is a chronic disease, the symptoms of which are severe pain and the inability to have children. ■

“Since the start of the project at the end of November 2016, we have already successfully treated 80 patients with endometriosis at the Melk regional hospital. Five patients were able to fulfil their desire to have children – four became pregnant naturally and one patient became pregnant via artificial insemination,” explains Prim. Dr Leopold Wanderer, Head of the Department of Gynaecology and Obstetrics at the Melk regional hospital.



FIND OUT MORE

www.noegus.at



Health knows no borders

Patients should have access to the nearest hospital, even in another country.

Cross-border cooperation on health is a way to manage shortages and failings while taking advantage of opportunities.

More information: ‘European Cross-border Cooperation on Health: Theory and Practice’: <http://europa.eu/!MX44jk>



◀ All eyes on the PANORAMED project which was launched in Seville, Spain on 27 September

“PANORAMED represents a unique opportunity for the Spanish Ministry of Finance to lead an innovative process to improve the opportunities in the Mediterranean region. The initiative will hopefully engage and coordinate national and regional stakeholders, EU and others’ initiatives in this area towards shared approaches and joint strategic actions in future years.”

Jorge García Reig – Spanish Ministry of Finance,
Director-General of EU Funds

Mediterranean policies gain new governance forum

A new European transnational cooperation governance forum has been launched in the Mediterranean, to boost policymaking across the region.

PANORAMED – Mediterranean governance platform is a new large-scale project approved by the Interreg Mediterranean Programme, joining national ministries and regional authorities of the European states of the Mediterranean shores. Members from Portugal to Cyprus will work together closely and regularly to tackle relevant challenges, such as coastal and maritime tourism or maritime surveillance in the area.

Headed up by the Spanish Ministry of Finance and Public Administration, as the lead partner, the project is focusing on promoting new solutions for challenges and growth opportunities which are common within these territories.

With a budget of EUR 9 million, and running until spring 2022, the project will ensure there is sufficient time and funding to effectively impact on political decisions regarding sustainable development planning in the area.

Flagship project for the Mediterranean

Already considered as a ‘flagship’ project by the European Commission, three different Directorates-General – Regional and Urban Policy, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries and Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations – are accompanying the initiative.

Other significant Mediterranean players are also associated with it in order to support the project by bringing wider possibilities to the joint solutions.

The main intervention by associated partners, such as the Union for the Mediterranean, UNEP/MAP, West Mediterranean initiative, EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, and IMC-CRPM concerns aligning the initiatives and funds to produce much stronger results and impacts.

The European states recognised the strategic relevance of PANORAMED in affecting future cooperation and cohesion policies in the Mediterranean beyond 2020, when the present programming period closes. Thus, the project has the potential to continue to make a positive contribution to new EU strategies in the Mediterranean beyond the duration of the programme. ■

FIND OUT MORE

<https://governance.interreg-med.eu>

PROJECTS

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND AT THE EURO SPACE CENTER IN BELGIUM

**TOTAL INVESTMENT
EUR 6 305 400**

**EU CONTRIBUTION
EUR 2 360 400**

Using a combination of multimedia and virtual reality simulators, 5D cinema and ‘moonwalk’ activities, the Euro Space Center, backed by the European Regional Development Fund, aims to enlighten all ages about the mysteries of space.

Built in the early 1990s, the centre’s goal is to educate and entertain a growing number of visitors about all things space. Part museum, part amusement park, the activities provided guarantee a fun-filled day for school groups, families and anyone keen to widen their horizons!

Over time and with additional funding, the centre has been modernised to cater for growing interest from all ages and is now recognised as Belgium’s leading authority on science and technology linked to space and space travel. To make the exhibitions more educational, visitors can now enjoy a more evolutionary experience thanks to a new scenography, among other new features.

Other attractions for budding astronauts include an anti-gravity harness, a 5D cinema rocket-launch experience and virtual reality simulators. Wearing the harness, guests can bounce around in gravity similar to that on the moon or Mars. A virtual reality headset displays a planetary landscape which explains the challenges humans encounter in outer space.

Three, two, one, blast off!

In a 5D cinema experience, you can ‘join’ the Apollo 11 launch and relive the 1969 moon landing, made all the more realistic by numerous special effects .

The multimedia exhibition offers citizens a taste of daily life in outer space. Powdered food, airbags, specially-designed fire alarms and emergency blankets are on show, alongside exhibits portraying personal stories of space travellers.

Using a digital tablet, younger visitors can play the ‘Space Heroes’ game and take part in a ‘space mission’. Played in the centre’s outdoor area, the educational game uses cartoon characters to share information about space, while inside the planetarium reveals fascinating facts about the stars and planets, illustrated in a full night sky projected on the ceiling.


Astronauts-at-heart can book a ‘Mission Weekend’ and get first-hand experience of simulators like the multi-axis chair and zero-gravity wall, tools used by real astronauts preparing for lift-off.

For the under-18s, the centre runs week-long summer camps featuring six different priority areas, including satellite building, rocket launches, astronaut training and flying drones. Students with a fascination for stargazing can build telescopes and map the heavens, while lessons on air pressure, temperature and humidity are all part of the learning curve.

By developing a venue where education meets fun, the Euro Space Center has succeeded in providing visitors with a unique insight into space exploration and the benefits space brings to life on earth. ■

FIND OUT MORE

<http://www.eurospacecenter.be/en/>



PROJECTS

A BIG STEP FORWARD FOR R&D IN CENTRAL EUROPE

**TOTAL INVESTMENT
EUR 97 000 000**

**EU CONTRIBUTION
EUR 82 000 000**

A new research and development (R&D) centre in the Czech Republic is set to play a vital role in shaping Europe's future energy supply. Supported by the European Regional Development Fund, SUSEN offers opportunities for researchers, graduates and students to apply natural sciences and engineering to the generation of sustainable energy.

The SUSEN (SUSustainable ENergy) R&D facility, which opened in 2017, houses infrastructure designed to help the Czech Republic make a positive contribution to European efforts to ensure safe and efficient energy generation in the 21st century. Spread across two sites in the country's South-West and Central Bohemia regions, the centre occupies over 8800 square metres and represents an important feature on Central Europe's R&D landscape.

A main focus of SUSEN's work is the further development of nuclear technology as a means of sustainable energy production. With a view to strengthening working relationships and creating synergies in this area, it is forging links with other research institutes across Europe, in particular within the European Research Area (ERA). ERA supports the free movement of scientific researchers, knowledge and technology to improve the EU's research performance, strengthen its competitiveness, boost growth and create jobs.

SUSEN has made its own contribution to job creation by providing 128 new positions at the centre. Of these, around 60% are for research staff. It is also offering exciting educational opportunities, giving some 55 graduates and students the chance to get involved in its activities each year.

Focus on the future

Development of the facility began with the construction of two new buildings and the extension and renovation of five existing structures. This was followed by the installation and launch of state-of-the-art technological instruments, giving top-class researchers the tools they need to compete in a globalised world. Together, the building work and fitting out of the centre cost EUR 97 million, of which EUR 82 million was funded by the EU through the ERDF.

Initially planned to begin in early 2011 and scheduled for December 2015, the opening of the SUSEN facility was put back in the aftermath of the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan. This led to changes in policy and requirements in the nuclear energy sector, which in turn necessitated a shift in the scope of the centre's research, delaying the project's approval and start.

SUSEN is fundamentally based on creating cutting-edge, often unique technologies with very limited pools of potential suppliers. Of the EUR 82 million from the ERDF, the budget for the installation and setting up of the equipment alone reached EUR 60 million. ■

FIND OUT MORE

www.susen2020.cz

PROJECTS

GOING WITH THE TRAFFIC FLOW IN VILNIUS

**TOTAL INVESTMENT
EUR 107 000 000**

**EU CONTRIBUTION
EUR 84 000 000**

The north-western districts of Lithuania's capital Vilnius and the surrounding towns and villages have seen big growth since the country became independent in 1991. But road building has not always kept pace. Thanks in part to the European Regional Development Fund, the city is now getting the western bypass it so badly needs.

Vilnius lies at an important point on Europe's road network. It is criss-crossed by European routes, including the E28, which goes from Germany to Belarus, and the E85, which runs from Greece all the way up to Lithuania's Baltic coast.

While the city is well served by roads going in and out – nearly all of which have four lanes – it lacked a complete network of bypasses. Transit traffic often had to use narrow urban streets that were not built to take the volumes with which they subsequently had to cope.

The problem was exacerbated by the fact that, due to exponential development of the towns and villages around Vilnius in recent years, some 150 000 people now travel into and out of the city every day. Furthermore, north-west Vilnius has seen a 25% rise in population over the last two decades and is currently home to some 200 000 people. But it only has one major artery able to handle really big traffic flows.

Slowly but surely

Vilnius' western bypass has been a long time coming. Land was set aside for its construction as far back as the 1980s, but the project did not get the final go-ahead until 1998. It was another six years before the precise route was actually approved.

Work finally started in 2009 and was carried out in three phases. The first section, stretching over half a kilometre, included rebuilding the Lazdynai Bridge, which was completed in 2011. This was followed in 2014 by the opening of a second section of just under three kilometres.

Although the first two sections of the bypass improved the situation for local road users, much of the city's transit, incoming and outgoing traffic still had to go through the centre. Completed in 2017, the third stage has put matters right. Covering the remaining 5.4 kilometres, it links up with the A2, the country's third longest highway which runs from Vilnius to Panevėžys, 135 kilometres away. The ERDF financed the final stretch of the bypass which cost EUR 107 million in total.

The finished road has been built to handle an expected 6% rise in traffic by 2039. By taking vehicles out of the city, the road will shorten journey times for local and long-distance users. Other positive outcomes include cutting congestion and exhaust fumes, which will bring significant benefits for both the environment and the quality of life of the people working and living in Vilnius. ■

FIND OUT MORE
www.vilnius.lt

BETTER COMPETENCIES FOR BETTER RESULTS

A new EU Competency Framework is helping public officials to develop their skills.

According to the 7th Cohesion Report, in order to amplify the impact of the Cohesion policy investment, Member States and regions need high-quality institutions. Public officials require more sophisticated operational, professional and managerial competencies, not only in the area of the EU funds but also in other policy fields such as public procurement, state aid, etc.

Identifying competency gaps and addressing them in a comprehensive way is now possible thanks to a brand new tool developed by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy. It is designed for public institutions involved in managing the European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund – i.e. national coordinating bodies, managing, audit and certifying authorities, joint secretariats and intermediate bodies.

All these administrations can now use an EU Competency Framework which contains a set of competencies that administrations and officials should possess, and a web-based self-assessment tool allowing employees to rate their proficiency level for each competency required for their job-specific profile. This will help to define future development objectives.



Data friendly

An important feature, especially for managers, is the possibility to aggregate data from the self-assessments of all employees, thereby creating an overview of the administration as a whole. Thus, the findings can serve as a basis for developing learning and development plans to fill the gaps.

This user-friendly and flexible tool covers a full range of competencies and can be applied to all kinds of administrations regardless of their size or whether they

are managing a sectoral or regional operational programme. Its impact goes well beyond the management of the funds. It can also contribute to a greater focus and a strategic approach towards longer-term competency development, ultimately improving the functioning of the entire administration and the quality of the services it provides for citizens and businesses. ■

EUSALP ANNUAL FORUM 23 AND 24 NOVEMBER 2017, MUNICH, GERMANY

The annual EU Alpine Strategy Forum gathered together the key institutions and stakeholders from the Alpine macroregion. Participants took stock of the progress achieved so far, and showcased the first results of the nine thematic action groups.



“Macro-regional strategies are first and foremost political frameworks with a strategic dimension, a long-term ambition to work together for a better future.”

Commissioner Corina Crețu

GENERAL OUTCOMES

A joint declaration was approved, which outlined essential factors for the future success and effectiveness of the strategies:

- › Political commitment, stronger and closer cooperation and exploration of synergies
- › Integration of the EU macroregional strategies in the EU funding programmes post-2020
- › Proper communication of the strategies' added value and benefits for the general public and multipliers.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE MEETS CLIMATE ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

- › Ensure coordination of local, national and EU actions on climate change and deployment of green infrastructure
- › Prioritise efficient and sustainable forest management.

SHAPING THE FUTURE: BIO-BASED VALUE CHAINS AND TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC FIELDS

- › Fight depopulation and create job opportunities for young people
- › Facilitate networking and sharing experience between different fields, and among young farmers and agricultural experts
- › Engage stakeholders in developing solutions.

MOVING IN INTERCONNECTED TRANSPORT SYSTEMS

- › Aim to improve transnational connectivity
- › Optimise and harmonise travel information systems across alpine regions and states
- › Investigate main challenges to creating an interconnected multimodal travel information system, and making public transport and sustainable modes more attractive.

SMART VILLAGE APPROACH

- › A gearwheel to innovation, development, sustainability and job opportunities
- › Promoting the concept of smart villages to create synergies between the three action groups concerned and to investigate the potential for cooperation
- › Finding concrete solutions to digitalisation in the Alps to identify ways of spreading these solutions to other areas in the Alpine Arc not actively involved in the EUSALP.

ALPINE REGION AS A GLOBALLY ATTRACTIVE, HEALTH-PROMOTING PLACE

- › Alpine health tourism combines medical and tourism within the cornerstones of tourism, alpine authenticity, medical evidence, indication-based development, and regional development
- › Providing insights into transnational projects that serve as role models for developing Alpine health tourism based on unique natural healing resources.

FIND OUT MORE

<https://www.alpine-region.eu/>

NEWS [IN BRIEF]

7TH COHESION REPORT TRANSLATED



Published in October 2017 in English, the 7th Cohesion Report is now available in French, German, Spanish, Italian and Polish on the Inforegio website, with the remaining language versions to follow by mid-February 2018.

The report zooms in on EU regions and cities, draws lessons from cohesion spending during the crisis years, and sets the scene for Cohesion Policy after 2020. Analysing the current state of the EU's economic, social and territorial cohesion, the Cohesion Report covers all our territories: Europe's economy is bouncing back but disparities persist between and within our Member States. Public investment in the EU is still below pre-crisis levels, while regions and Member States need

to invest more to respond to the challenges identified in the reflection paper on the future of EU finances, the digital revolution, globalisation, demographic change and social cohesion, economic convergence and climate change.

The report suggests an EU-wide policy serving three main purposes: harnessing globalisation, leaving no one behind, and supporting structural reforms. ■

FIND OUT MORE

<http://europa.eu/!uy68YC>

EU BROADBAND AWARDS 2017

The European Broadband Awards 2017 winners were announced by European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Corina Crețu and Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan at the award ceremony in Brussels on 20 November. The five projects were selected in categories focusing on innovative models of financing, cost reduction, territorial cohesion, socio-economic impact and competition. These projects serve as examples for the other regions and organisations planning broadband roll-out.

One of the winners, 'Rural Broadband' in Greece, is a national project supported by the European Regional Development Fund and implemented via a Public Private Partnership. It provides broadband infrastructure coverage and affordable connectivity services to citizens living in remote areas of Greece – and previously deprived of the full benefits of broadband. Thanks to this project, high-capacity networks reached remote areas where private players would not invest due to their low commercial value. It developed a broadband infrastructure network to cover areas located in the northern, central and southern regions of Greece and covers

almost 45% of the Greek territory (geographically) i.e. 5 077 villages/settlements and 525 287 inhabitants in the country's rural and insular areas. ■



FIND OUT MORE

<http://europa.eu/!tH46yD>

AGENDA

MAY 2018

Italy (IT) (precise date and venue tbd)

3rd Annual Forum of the EUSAIR

4-5 JUNE 2018

Tallinn (EE)

9th Annual Forum of the EUSBSR

8-12 OCTOBER 2018

Brussels (BE)

European Week of Regions and Cities 2018

18-19 OCTOBER 2018

Sofia (BG)

7th Annual Forum of the EUSDR

20-21 NOVEMBER 2018

Innsbruck (AT)

2nd Annual Forum of the EUSALP

More information on these events can be found in the Agenda section of the Inforegio website: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/events/

LEGAL NOTICE

Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the European Commission is responsible for the use that might be made of the following information.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017

Print: ISSN 1608-389X

PDF: ISSN 1725-8308

© European Union, 2017

Reuse is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

The reuse policy of European Commission documents is regulated by Decision 2011/833/EU (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39).

For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not under the EU copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

Printed in Belgium

This magazine is printed in English, French, German, Bulgarian, Greek, Spanish, Italian, Polish and Romanian on recycled paper.

It is available online in 22 languages at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/panorama-magazine/

The content of this issue was finalised in December 2017.

PHOTOGRAPHS (PAGES):

Cover: © European Union

Page 3: © European Union, 2017

Pages 4, 5, 6: © Government of Bulgaria

Page 7: © Vincent Arbelet

Page 8: © Morteau © David Cesbron

Page 9: © Emmanuel Erne

Page 10: © Shutterstock

Page 12: © European Union – Source: European Parliament

Page 13: Mari Kiviniemi © Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Page 13: Daniel Termont © Eurocities

Page 13: Beate Merk © Ministry of European affairs and regional relations, Bavaria

Page 16: © European Union, 2017

Page 17: © European Union, 2017

Page 19: © Territorial Collectivity of French Guyana

Page 21: © Government of the Canary Islands

Page 22: © European Union, 2017

Page 23: © European Union, 2017

Page 24: © European Union, 2017

Page 25: © European Union – Source: European Parliament

Page 28: Werner Färber: © Associated Press; Regina: @ ICT applications for e-inclusion; Vukusic: © Associated Press; Katie Gillmon: © Fifteen Cornwall

Page 29: Civitas mimosa © Tiago Sousa; Antonio Grassi: © Diritti a scuola; Safija Imsirovic © Joel Nilsson

Page 30: © European Union, 2017

Page 31: © European Union, 2017

Pages 34, 35: © European Union, 2017

Pages 36, 37: © European Union, 2017

Page 38: © iStock_Leonid Andronov; Vincent Soler | Marco © Generalitat Valenciana

Page 39: © Generalitat Valenciana, Sira

Page 40: © Generalitat Valenciana

Pages 43: © Generalitat Valenciana

Page 44: © Universitat de Valencia; © Generalitat Valenciana

Page 46: © Government of Malta

Page 47: © Government of Malta

Pages 48, 49: © Government of Malta

Page 50: © European Union – Source: European Parliament

Page 51: © Region of Valle d'Aosta

Page 52: © Assemblée des Départements de France

Page 53: © Region of Extremadura

Pages 54, 55: © NÖGUS

Page 56: © Panoramad

Page 57: © Euro Space Centre

Page 58: © Susen

Page 59: © Common Creative Pixabay

STAY CONNECTED



ec.europa.eu/regional_policy
cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu



@EU_Regional
#CohesionPolicy | #ESIFunds



EUinmyRegion



[flickr.com/euregional](https://www.flickr.com/euregional)



RegioNetwork



[ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/
cretu_en](http://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/cretu_en)
@CorinaCretuEU



■ Publications Office

European Commission,
Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
Communication – Agnès Monfret
Avenue de Beaulieu 1 – B-1160 Brussels
E-mail: regio-panorama@ec.europa.eu