

INTERPARLIAMENTARY MEETING ON COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND COHESION POLICY

Cohesion and territorial competitiveness, regional development and equal opportunities

- Information sheet -

The viewpoint of the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council the Cohesion is that cohesion is an essential requisite for shaping the future of the Union and of strengthening citizen's confidence in the European project. The motto of the Presidency is about cohesion both as a common European value, as well as an expression of unity between the states and regions of the European Union. This message should be an important signal and also a proof of its impact in Romania.

The Cohesion Policy plays a key role in strengthening the economic, social and territorial convergence of the European Union by reducing disparities between the different regions of the EU, in accordance with Article 174 TFEU.

Following the proposal on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2021-2027, the European Commission presented on 29 May 2018 five regulations that set up the Cohesion package for the post-2020 period: the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF +), the European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) and the European Cross-Border Mechanism.

5 clear objectives were set forth out of 11 thematic objectives used during the 2014-2020 period, as follows:

1. A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation;
2. A greener, low-carbon Europe;
3. A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity;
4. A more social Europe by implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights and enhancing the access to quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to the health system;
5. A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas through local initiatives.

Gross domestic product per capita remains, according to the European Commission, the predominant standard for the allocation of funds. The main objective of the Cohesion Policy is and will remain that of helping Member States and regions that are lagging behind from economic or structural point of view to catch up and reach the level of the other Member States of the European Union. A number of new factors, such as unemployment (especially among young people), climate change, low levels of education and the reception/

integration of migrants, will also be taken into account. The European Commission also proposes to increase the national co-financing rates in order to better reflect the current economic realities. This fact has the advantage of increasing the responsibility at the national level, of supporting higher volumes of investments and of improving their quality.

According to the proposal on the future of the MFF, the Cohesion Policy has a budget of € 373 billion, representing almost 30% of the EU's total budget, over a seven-year period. The Cohesion Policy remains the main investment policy of Europe despite the budget gap left by the Brexit and the emergence of new challenges. In order to remain a competitive economy, the EU must anticipate market changes and its citizens must develop the necessary skills. The current economic recovery will not be sustainable unless investment is made in both physical and human capital. This is also essential to fulfillment of the social objectives of equity and equal opportunities set out in the European Social Rights Pillar. Regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, everyone has the right to equal treatment and chances in terms of employment, social protection, education and access to goods and services available to the public. The Cohesion Policy must guarantee an increased quality of life for the European citizens.

The European Parliament, in its resolution from 14 November 2018, declared its opposition to any reduction in the financing of the EU-27 Cohesion Policy and urged for it to be maintained at the level of the 2014-2020 budget.

From the point of view of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Cohesion Policy is one of the EU's most concrete policies, with a direct impact

on the everyday life of its citizens. In its notice from 17 October 2018, the EESC firmly rejects the European Commission's proposal to reduce the Cohesion Policy budget by 10% in real terms compared to the current MFF. Accordingly, the EESC calls on the Member States to find solutions to keep this budget at the levels for 2020.

The Committee of the Regions (COR) welcomes the modernization of Cohesion Policy through simplification, increasing flexibility and efficiency and making substantial reductions in unnecessary administrative duties for beneficiaries and managing authorities. In its notice from 5 December 2018, the COR expresses its concern regarding the Commission's proposal for a multiannual financial framework that foresees a considerable decrease of 46% in the Cohesion Fund budget and regrets the 12% decrease in the budget for European territorial cooperation, despite the fact that it is recognized as one of the European policies with the most added value. Meanwhile, it notes that the Cohesion Fund has shown throughout the time that it has a high European added value.

Elements for dialogue:

- *Does the European Union have the right tools to attenuate economic gaps and strengthen citizen's trust in the EU?*
- *Which is the future of macro-regional strategies?*