

## INFORMAL MEETING OF MINISTERS ON COHESION POLICY

Nicosia, 6 November 2012

### Presidency Conclusions

At the invitation of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union, an Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy was held in Nicosia, on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2012, to discuss issues related to the effectiveness and governance of the new Cohesion Policy of the Union.

The Commissioner for Regional Policy, the Chairperson of the Committee on Regional Development of the European Parliament, the Presidents of the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee and representative of the European Investment Bank participated in the meeting. The Presidency was also pleased to welcome representatives from Croatia and Iceland and from Switzerland, as well as representatives of other organisations.

Ministers engaged in an open exchange of views on the basis of the two papers prepared by the Presidency in order to facilitate the discussion.

The Ministers took into consideration the substantial progress achieved in the Council in reaching partial general approach agreement on seventeen (17) negotiating blocks of the legislative package on Cohesion Policy at the General Affairs Council (GAC) of April 24, June 26 and October 16 under the Danish and the Cyprus Presidencies. They also noted that the informal trilogues with the European Parliament have already started with an intensive schedule of work. Without prejudice to the continuation of discussions and the final outcomes from these negotiations, a number of key political messages generally shared by the Ministers need to be underlined. In particular **the Ministers:**

- **Reiterated** the key role that Cohesion Policy should play in enhancing growth and jobs throughout the Union, especially at these difficult times and consider that the next programming period offers an opportunity to improve the quality of spending and impact of Cohesion Policy. Within this framework, they confirmed their commitment to strengthen the added value of spending of Cohesion Policy, notably by strengthening its linkage with Europe 2020 and the European Semester and the pursuit of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth at regional and local levels in ways that meet specific territorial challenges and needs.
- **Recalled** that they have already reached preliminary agreement on the main elements of a stronger, results-oriented Cohesion Policy firmly embedded in the European Economic Governance.
- **Resolved** to deliver on these commitments in the context of the preparation of the Partnership Agreements and programmes for the new programming period 2014-2020 and their subsequent implementation.
- **Reiterated** the need for legislative proposals to be adopted as soon as possible to allow for a successful implementation from 1 January 2014 and a smooth transition to the next programming period. For this reason, they stressed the importance of reaching partial agreement in the coming months at the Council on the outstanding issues of the Cohesion Policy legislative package and make as much progress as possible in the trilogue discussions with the European Parliament. In this context, they acknowledged that it is crucial to achieve, as soon as possible, a common understanding amongst the competent Institutions on the main issues of programming, thereby providing certainty and facilitating timely preparations for the new period.
- **Supported** the idea that a regular dedicated debate on Cohesion Policy and its implementation at political level and within the formal framework of the Council, on the basis of a synthesis report to be prepared by the Commission, will contribute to the improvement of the governance of the policy.

Furthermore, the Presidency Conclusions of the discussion carried out at the Informal Ministerial Meeting, structured according to the main issues addressed by the Ministers, are as follows:

### **Effectiveness and EU value added of Cohesion Policy**

- (1) The provisions of the legislative package for the new Cohesion Policy will enhance the strategic programming framework for 2014-2020 and make possible a more coordinated and coherent approach across EU Funds and policies while maintaining a strong focus on the Union's strategic objectives. The use of the Common Strategic Framework (CSF) covering ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund, EAFRD and EMFF must contribute towards capitalising on the Funds' support for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by encouraging greater strategic orientation and facilitating sectoral and territorial coordination among the CSF Funds and with other relevant Union policies and instruments.
- (2) Available resources must be concentrated on a limited number of important priorities linked to the Europe 2020 agenda whilst at the same time allowing for necessary flexibility to address the development needs and specificities of Member States and regions.
- (3) Clear objectives need to be set out in the programmes to be adopted at the beginning of the programming period. These must be supported by transparent and measurable indicators to allow for a regular and meaningful assessment of, and debate on, the performance of the policy. The performance framework for each programme must become an effective tool for regular monitoring, which will allow for timely action to be taken in order to adjust the planned use of funds, when justified.
- (4) The right conditions must be in place to optimize the use of resources. It was confirmed that ex-ante conditionalities are an essential mechanism to achieve this, and that it will be a core part of the preparations for the new period to identify the applicable conditionalities linked to the Cohesion Policy and to ensure that they are fulfilled prior to the adoption of the programmes or at the latest by the end of 2016. At the same time it is important that this effort respects the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity.

## **Territorial Dimension**

- (5) Territorial dimension and the integrated approach are major assets of Cohesion Policy. It is necessary to address the specific territorial challenges of each region to unlock its development potential, bearing in mind, where relevant, the consequences of permanent and severe geographical and demographic handicaps, such as insularity. In this respect, territorial analysis is a very valuable instrument for supporting the development and application of integrated development solutions.
- (6) Recognizing in addition, the importance of Territorial Cohesion, as stated in the Treaty and hence the need to enhance the territorial dimension of Cohesion Policy in the new programming period, it is also of great importance to maintain the political momentum through multilevel governance approach and the intergovernmental cooperation on territorial development aspects.

## **Governance of Cohesion Policy**

- (7) Coordination must be reinforced both within Member States and within the Commission in order to exploit synergies between policies and instruments and to reduce overlaps, complexity and bureaucracy. This requires closer coordination between and within the Commission services responsible for the Common Strategic Framework Funds at all stages of negotiation and implementation, in order to ensure a more coherent and harmonised approach but in ways which do not increase administrative burden.
- (8) Regular information on the implementation of Cohesion Policy and its results at the highest EU political level, as part of the European Semester, would increase the effectiveness of the policy. The Commission is requested to present every year, starting in 2016, a synthesis report summarising the main elements of the annual implementation reports related to performance. The issue related to reporting on CSF funds is also part of the discussions on the Multi-Annual Financial Framework.