
THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION SHOULD PUSH FORWARD AMBITIOUS PROPOSALS THAT WILL INCREASE THE PROSPECTS OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND RESTORE CITIZENS' CONFIDENCE

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On the eve of the adoption of the proposals for the future multi-annual financial framework, local and regional authorities are concerned by 'calls for moderation' that, despite the convergent views expressed during the debates on the 5th Cohesion report and the budget review, will weaken EU integration.

We urge the Commission to push forward ambitious proposals that will increase the prospects of economic recovery and restore citizens' confidence in the EU institutions and major EU policy tools including the single market, the euro, and cohesion policy.

In particular we consider as top priorities:

1) The design and implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy in partnership with local and regional authorities

A thriving Europe 2020 strategy needs to create ownership at all levels of governance, not only member states and regions, but also cities.

Major aspects of the Europe 2020's key priorities are predominantly local and regional matters such as development of renewable energies, applied research, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and new businesses, developing skills according to local and regional needs, changing citizens' behaviour on issues like climate and energy, lifelong learning and social inclusion.

Real partnership – based on sharing intelligence, joint planning and pooling resources between all levels of governance - will help increase efficiency and the impact of policy at all levels.

2) Retaining a substantial EU budget, based if needed on new own resources, with a fair part dedicated to cohesion policy

The future budget must ensure we get more for our money: it must be results-driven, based on smarter spending to ensure critical mass and a stronger, quicker impact, with results visible for as many as possible.

If we are to achieve these objectives and ensure we are on the right path to delivering Europe 2020, the EU budget must have enough financial means to deliver new EU competencies and should be better designed to empower, equip and resource local and regional authorities.

The added value of EU funding should be the promotion of an integrated approach, strengthening multi-level governance, supporting innovation and ensuring solidarity. Recent attempts to sectorialise the EU budget by setting separate funds on infrastructure should be discarded.

Future cohesion policy should promote the principle of territorial cohesion and take into account the diversity of Europe's territories and their different needs or territorial scales (sub-regional as well as macro-regional), whether urban, rural, mountainous, peripheral, or otherwise. Cohesion policy should also address all EU regions concentrating most of the funding to convergence regions while supporting the intermediate and the competitive regions.

The management of Structural Funds has to be simplified and made more efficient. To this end, it is essential to remove legal uncertainty and better coordinate the different levels of regulatory decision making.

We call for the formal involvement of competent local and regional authorities in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the operational programmes and the Development and Investment Partnership Contracts which will cover the structural funds and other territorial funds (EAFRD, EFF).

3) The development of new projects and stronger EU policies, notably in accordance with the current external political and democratic context.

The Treaty of Lisbon and the current political and democratic context in its borders represent a historical challenge that requires new and effective solutions. Local and regional authorities are convinced of the value of stronger common policies based on solidarity.

It is fundamental therefore that the neighborhood policy of the EU should be strengthened and most importantly, should involve all partners at all levels of governance in particular associating civil society, and local and regional authorities. There is a need for a policy at the borders of the Union that follows the successful design of Cohesion Policy, so that the geopolitical space of 800 million of people could boost Europe to remain competitive at global level.

We urge the Commission to give a new breath to the European project for all citizens, in particular the youngest ones.