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<Commission>{CULT}Committee on Culture and Education</Commission>

<RefProc>2016/2148(INI)</RefProc>

<Date>{14/10/2016}14.10.2016</Date>

<TitreType>OPINION</TitreType>

<CommissionResp>of the Committee on Culture and Education</CommissionResp>

<CommissionInt>for the Committee on Regional Development</CommissionInt>

<Titre>on investing in jobs and growth – maximising the contribution of European Structural and Investment Funds: an evaluation of the report under Article 16(3) of the CPR</Titre>

<DocRef>(2016/2148(INI))</DocRef>

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Culture and Education calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Recalls that the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) are the EU Cohesion Policy’s main financial instruments for achieving the objective of a more prosperous, balanced and solidary Union, as well as the Europe 2020 strategy headline targets for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, by improving the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU; underlines that the aim of the ESIF funds is to support strategic investments in key areas such as infrastructure, education, research and innovation; underlines the potential of the efficient use of the ESIFs, especially the European Social Fund (ESF), to address structural and long-term unemployment, foster social inclusion and promote better education for all, especially for young people with poor qualifications, NEETs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds; welcomes in this regard the reinforced role of the ESF in 2014-2020, as equal access to quality formal and non-formal education, training and lifelong learning opportunities is one of the key priorities in delivering genuine convergence and reducing disparities and socio-economic inequalities among Member States, regions and territories in the EU; stresses that, to this end, effective, properly resourced, highly accessible public education systems and sustainable, high-quality jobs for young people are essential for reaching out to every stratum of European society;

2. Regrets that the overall level of the MFF 2014-2020 is lower than that of the MFF 2007-2013; stresses that in a period of austerity policies and extreme fiscal adjustments, pressure on Member States' budgets increases; highlights the fact that such pressure has led to a decrease, in some Member States, in public financing for education and has generated high and persistent unemployment, especially among young people;

3. Encourages the Member States to make the best use of the enhanced flexibility and results-orientation of the current programming period of the cohesion policy in order to increase its added value; underlines that it is necessary to adopt measures to optimise the use of the ESIF funds through investment in relevant infrastructure in order to promote solidarity, job creation and lasting employment, education, culture and sports, the provision of high-quality public services, environmental justice and a reduction in unemployment and social exclusion; expresses concern that possible suspension of payments by the ESIF funds will negatively affect Member States facing difficulties and substantial cuts in their cultural and education sectors;

4. Notes that the ESIF targets areas that foster an environment conducive to job creation such as those of education, training and the cultural and creative industries by supplementing national budgets and compensating for decreasing investment levels;

5. Calls on the Member States to use the ESIFs to their full potential by enhancing the added value and results-orientation of their projects and by providing sufficient and appropriate information to potential beneficiaries, including those from the education, culture and sport sectors;

6. Stresses that, according to the 2015 Education and Training Monitor's findings, there is an urgent need to improve the inclusiveness, quality and relevance of education in the EU in order to ensure sustainable growth, boost productivity, address structural and long-term unemployment, promote fair mobility and foster social inclusion; calls on the Member States to promote and support projects targeting education systems, teachers and trainers, and learners of all ages, in particular those from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, by making efficient use of the resources available under the ESIFs, especially the ESF, in conjunction with other EU tools such as Erasmus+ and the European Territorial Cooperation programmes;

7. Recalls that two million companies will be directly supported by the ESI Funds with a view to boosting their competitiveness and increasing their research and innovation capacity; welcomes the fact that almost 15 million households will have access to high-speed broadband thanks to European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) support, while almost 20 million people in rural areas will have new or improved ICT services or infrastructure with the support of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD);

8. Stresses the importance of the Structural and Investment Funds for improving pre‑school, educational and university infrastructure with a view to improving the quality of training and modernising education and training systems so as to offer young people the skills and qualifications that will enable them to find a job and to help workers improve their skills and qualifications;

9. Emphasises the huge innovation and employment potential of renewable energy sources, given the search for greater resource efficiency and energy efficiencies; calls on the Commission to develop a specific energy and environmental strategy for regional development with a view also to boosting education and employment;

10. Is of the opinion that a broader investment strategy is needed which should cover the full cycle of education and training, encompassing all sectors of lifelong learning, work-based learning and formal and non-formal learning; as 'Better education' is one of the main priorities of the European Social Fund, encourages Member States to make full use of it by channelling investment into inclusive education that responds to societal challenges with a view to ensuring equal access and opportunities for all;

11. Recognises the increasing importance of micro-enterprises and SMEs in the cultural and creative sector for investment, growth, innovation and employment, but also in their key role, together with cultural NGOs, networks and platforms, of preserving and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity and a wide range of traditional arts and crafts; recognises that culture and innovation are crucial factors in helping regions to attract investment, support creative talent and foster social cohesion, and thereby contribute to local development, which local and regional authorities are well placed to support;

12. Calls for more investment in the areas of education, social inclusion, vocational training and life-long learning with a view to improving both the relevance of education and training systems and the transition from education to work and life-long learning; stresses the need for concentrated funding to prevent early school leaving and for equal access to quality education;

13. Encourages the Member States to make the best use of the enhanced flexibility under the current cohesion policy in order to better respond to local and regional needs and specificities, including in the fields of education, culture and sport;

14. Highlights the importance of a wider, holistic approach to culture that takes into account its significant contribution to education and training, innovative social and economic development and social inclusion; calls therefore on the Commission and the Member States to increase awareness of culture's potential to foster smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and to encourage cultural projects, including cross-border projects that can contribute to strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion;

15. Notes the importance of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), which can address the persisting problem of high levels of youth unemployment, which in several Member States remains at over 40 %; asks the Commission to promote infrastructure that creates new quality jobs and social protection for young people within the framework of the European Structural and Investment Fund; urges the Member States to implement fully the Youth Guarantee on the basis of strong cooperation between employment services and the education system;

16. Highlights the potential of CCIs as regards youth employment; stresses that further promotion of, and investment in, the cultural and creative sector may contribute substantially to investment, growth, innovation and employment; calls on the Commission, therefore, to consider the special opportunities offered by the whole culture creative sector (CCS), comprising NGOs and small associations, in the framework, for example, of the Youth Employment Initiative;

17. Notes that there appear to be increased difficulties in filling vacancies because of a skills mismatch in the labour market; stresses that the problems of mismatched skills, limited geographic mobility and precarious work practices need to be addressed through the ESIF, and calls for closer cooperation between higher education institutions, training bodies and SMEs in the field of access to the ESIF;

18. Calls on the Commission to ensure that Member States comply with the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities when implementing projects supported by the ESIF;

19. Notes with approval that the objectives of the European Structural and Investment Fund legislative package for 2014-2020 include the aim of fostering a shift from institutional to community living for people with disabilities, and calls on the Commission to ensure that the Member States respect the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities when implementing the ESIF in this regard;

20. Stresses that the Member States should be committed to providing better access to high-quality broadband internet, especially to public wi-fi networks, which is of vital importance for rural and sparsely populated areas; calls on the Member States and regions to identify their ICT investment priorities; calls on the Commission and the Member States to improve accessibility and transparency, and to accelerate the simplification of procedures with regard to the use of ESIF funds in the ITC sector;

21. Emphasises the need to maintain the traditional trades, including the craft tradition and associated skills, and to establish strategies to foster growth for traditional trade entrepreneurship in order to maintain the cultural identity of the traditional trade sectors; draws attention to the importance of supporting work linked to professional training and the mobility of young craftsmen and women;

22. Stresses that the current migration crisis poses many challenges for the educational and training systems of the host Member States; calls on the EU institutions to provide Member States with the necessary flexibility and adequate funding, via ESIF and other Union Funds and programmes, as well as on the Member States to make full use of the opportunities provided and the existing funds for projects that substantially support the integration of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers into education and training systems; believes that access to lifelong learning, including non-formal learning and professional training, has the potential to be an effective tool for active inclusion of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, as well as for their integration into the European labour market and society; in this context underlines the important role of local and regional authorities;

23. Highlights the fact that cultural infrastructure has a significant impact on economic and social development and cohesion at local, regional and national level; calls on the Commission to revise the EUR 5 million limit for cultural infrastructure on the occasion of the adoption of the ‘Omnibus Regulation’, including the ERDF Regulation, to raise the maximum cost of cultural projects to EUR 10 million for all projects (not only for UNESCO sites) and to consider the eligible cost of projects rather than the total cost;

24. Underlines the need to enhance coordination and to enable and optimise synergies between ESIFs and other Union Funds and programmes in order to achieve greater impact and efficiency and to boost sustainable growth and jobs in the EU; calls for the continuation of investment by the Structural Funds in the transition regions in order to avoid interrupting the positive effects already achieved.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

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| **Date adopted** | 11.10.2016 |  |  |  |
| **Result of final vote** | +:  –:  0: | 26  2  1 | | |
| **Members present for the final vote** | Isabella Adinolfi, Dominique Bilde, Andrea Bocskor, Nikolaos Chountis, Silvia Costa, Mircea Diaconu, Damian Drăghici, Jill Evans, Giorgos Grammatikakis, Petra Kammerevert, Andrew Lewer, Svetoslav Hristov Malinov, Curzio Maltese, Stefano Maullu, Luigi Morgano, Momchil Nekov, Michaela Šojdrová, Helga Trüpel, Sabine Verheyen, Julie Ward, Bogdan Brunon Wenta, Theodoros Zagorakis, Bogdan Andrzej Zdrojewski, Milan Zver, Krystyna Łybacka | | | |
| **Substitutes present for the final vote** | Therese Comodini Cachia, Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Emma McClarkin, Hannu Takkula | | | |
| **Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote** | Marco Affronte | | | |