

Newsletter



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[In Focus](#)

REGI missions to Northern Ireland and Slovenia

"The EU's remarkable convergence machine has boosted growth and prosperity, benefitting people and firms across all of Europe for more than sixty years"

[\(World Bank Chief Executive Officer Kristalina Georgieva\)](#)

A word from the Chair



Dear Colleagues,
Dear Friends,

There is only a month to go before the new legislative proposals for the next generation of cohesion policy are published. The Multiannual Financial Framework proposal will come even sooner, already on 2 May. These are very important dossiers, and the decisions we take on them will shape cohesion policy in Europe for the years to come.

In our April meeting we will continue our work on the new Structural Reform Support Programme proposal, and will also hold a first discussion on the amendment to the Common Provisions Regulation that aims to redeploy the performance reserves.

Cohesion policy in both Northern Ireland and in Greece will also be on the agenda. Our committee recently sent a delegation to Northern Ireland to learn more about the situation on the ground, and the draft report to be debated in the committee meeting draws on that experience. For Greece, the committee will hold its first exchange of views on an implementation report that looks at specific measures for Greece that were adopted to help the country as it faced an unprecedented crisis.

Finally, the committee will turn for the first time to consider the EU budget in 2019: the rapporteur from the Committee on Budgets with overall responsibility for budget 2019 will hold an exchange of views with REGI Members.

I look forward to seeing you in our next meeting,

Yours,

Iskra Mihaylova



In Focus

REGI fact-finding mission to Northern Ireland

In order to assess the impact of cohesion policy in Northern Ireland for the purposes of drawing up its implementation report on that topic, the Committee on Regional Development sent a fact-finding mission to Northern Ireland from 21 to 23 April 2018.

The Members taking part were Joachim Zeller (leader of the mission), Martina Anderson, John Flack, Ivan Jakovčić, Demetris Papadakis, Terry Reintke, Lambert van Nistelrooij, and Derek Vaughan (rapporteur).

During that fact-finding mission, the Members met various stakeholders in order to collect information on cohesion policy in Northern Ireland, and visited several projects financed with the assistance of cohesion programmes.



Those included urban projects in Belfast, cross-border projects in the Derry/Londonderry area and rural projects in the Giant's Causeway area.

In particular, Members visited the Skainos Centre in East Belfast and the Girdwood Hub in North Belfast, which are examples of cross-community, shared spaces.

In Derry/Londonderry, the mission participants visited the North West Regional Science Park (Catalyst Inc), which helps small and medium-sized businesses in the knowledge economy to grow.

At the Giant's Causeway, the committee representatives visited the Visitor Centre, which is important for attracting tourism to the area, but also heard from three local businesses and initiatives which had obtained EU funding to assist the development of the local economy.

In Belfast, meetings were also held with the Commission office, the Special EU Programmes Body, the Department of Finance and the Department for the Economy.

The meetings and project visits are described in detail in the mission report.



REGI mission to Slovenia

The mission of the Committee on Regional Development of the European Parliament to Slovenia took place from 3 to 5 April 2018 with the purpose to gain a general overview of the operation of cohesion policy in a relatively disadvantaged region of the EU as a way of preparing for the new, post-2020 cohesion policy.



The programme included meetings with national, regional and local authorities and associations; as well as visits to projects supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The Members taking part were Lambert van Nistelrooij (leader of the mission), Franc Bogovič, Ivan Jakovčič, Ivana Maletič, Fernando Ruas, Julie Ward, Maria Gabriela Zoană and Milan Zver.

In particular, Members visited the “Ljubljana Regional Waste Management Centre (RCERO)” the biggest environmental project in Slovenia supported by the Cohesion Fund and the most modern facility for waste treatment in Europe, the Rajhenburg castle, Brestanica, in the Posavje region (the renovation of the castle building under the operational programme for strengthening regional development potentials) and Olimje village (Podčetrtek municipality) whose redevelopment was largely funded through ESI Funds.

A number of aspects of cohesion policy were touched upon: continuing need for infrastructural investment; the growth of disparities within regions; a perceived over-emphasis on “soft” aspects of cohesion policy (knowledge, skills), which was seen as favouring capital cities; the heavy administrative burden of the current policy and the pressing need for simplification; the problems arising from unregulated migration (the area is a Schengen border); and demographic change and the importance of maintaining job opportunities in rural areas.

The meetings and project visits are described in detail in the mission report.



Last time

REGI meeting – 26 & 27 March 2018

Cohesion policy and the circular economy



Davor Škrlec

During the March REGI meeting, Mr Davor Škrlec (Verts/ALE) presented his draft implementation report on cohesion policy and the circular economy.

In his presentation, Mr Škrlec underlined that cohesion policy is key to making the circular economy a reality. He also stressed that circular economy is needed to change the current model and that this transition will help the European Union achieve its goals of creating local jobs, of enhancing economic competitiveness and of making the European economies more resistant on the world stage.

The rapporteur also pointed out that the conditions to create a circular economy are there and that it is our responsibility to make that paradigm alive. His draft report outlines several proposals to strengthen existing policy tools within both policies to fully exploit their potential.

In the debate that ensued, Members emphasised the need to put local and regional authorities at the centre of the transition to a circular economy and highlighted the role of cities and rural and remote areas in the process.

The vote of the report in the REGI committee is foreseen for May.

Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions



Krzysztof Hetman

The REGI committee continues to follow and act on this significant issue and has therefore decided to draft an INI report to address the Commission's communication entitled 'Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions' to consider the conclusions and actions it proposes.

The rapporteur, Mr Hetman, presented his initial thoughts on the topic during an exchange of views on 26 March 2018. He emphasized the importance of the EU internal border regions which generally perform less well economically than other regions while holding 30% of our population. The presentation of the draft report is foreseen for the REGI May meeting.

Increase of the financial envelope of the Structural Reform Support Programme and adapt its general objective



Ruža Tomašić

At the last committee meeting, Ruža Tomašić, the rapporteur, led the first exchange of views on the Commission proposal to amend the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP).

This proposal seeks to amend Regulation (EU) 2017/825 to increase the financial envelope of the SRSP and adapt its general objective. In particular, the amending act seeks to amend the article on the objective of the SRSP by adding support for preparations for Eurozone membership to the goals of the programme (the words 'which will also prepare for participation in the euro area' are added to the article). It also inserts an article permitting funding for euro preparation actions and

activities. Finally, the overall financial envelope for the SRSP is increased from EUR 142.8 million to EUR 222.8 million, which could be further complemented through the technical assistance budget, taking the total to around EUR 300 million.

The debate focused on the popularity of the existing SRSP – the number of applications for specific structural reform projects far exceeded the available budget. A majority of shadow rapporteurs agreed that the budget should indeed be increased, bearing in mind that structural reform projects often seemed to be successful. Some reservations were, however, expressed as to the loss of the money in question for traditional cohesion projects and the process for choosing structural reform projects.

Exchange of views with Corina Crețu, Commissioner for Regional Policy



Corina Crețu

On 27 March 2018, the REGI Committee held an exchange of views with Corina Crețu, Commissioner for Regional Policy. The main topic of discussion was the Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework and the future of cohesion policy. The last time Ms Crețu held an exchange of views with REGI on this topic was in December 2017, and the discussion on the post-2020 MFF and cohesion policy has evolved since then.

The Commissioner emphasized the importance of cohesion policy for all European countries and regions. She regretted the fact that national debates on the future of cohesion policy have taken a win-or-lose approach, and said that she believes it is important to point out the added value of cohesion policy and European integration for the Union as a whole. While Brexit will leave a gap in the post-2020 MFF, she stated that it is very important that all European Member States show their willingness to increase their contribution to the budget in order to continue supporting cohesion projects in all European regions, and to tackle new challenges related to migration, defence and security. The Commissioner therefore called upon REGI Members to support the Commission's efforts in promoting the importance of cohesion policy amongst national and local policy makers and European citizens. Later, Ms Crețu underlined the importance of effective cooperation between the institutions in preparing the next MFF, and welcomed the readiness of the Parliament to start working directly after receiving the Commission's proposals in May.

Some of the Committee Members raised questions about the structure of the cohesion funds under the next MFF, the number of thematic objectives, simplification and the proposal related to conditionality and the Rule of Law. Ms Crețu emphasized that the Commission's services are currently working at full speed to prepare the proposal and legislative texts, and that she will keep the committee informed of new developments in the coming months.

*** VOTED IN THE LAST MEETING ***

During the Committee meeting on 27 March 2018 the following texts were adopted (for more information please follow the hyperlink):

TITLE	RAPPORTEUR
Draft report on "Strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion in the European Union: the 7th report of the European Commission" 2017/2279(INI)	Marc Joulaud (PPE)
Draft report on "Cohesion Policy and thematic objective 'promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures' - Article 9(7) of the Common Provisions Regulation" 2017/2285(INI)	Andrey Novakov (PPE)

Ahead of us

REGI meeting – 25 & 26 April 2018

(*) agenda of the forthcoming meeting might be changed after publication of the Newsletter

Increase of the financial envelope of the Structural Reform Support Programme and adapt its general objective



Ruža Tomašić

At this meeting, the rapporteur, Ruža Tomašić, will present her draft report on amending the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP).

Ms Tomašić is in favour of the proposal, as she considers that the budget increase is justified and that the extension of the programme to projects supporting preparations for euro area membership will bring benefits. The amendments she proposes concentrate on the strengthening the concept of European added value for SRSP projects and on the importance of involving regional and local authorities.

The rapporteurs for the SRSP in the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee will attend the debate in order to present their opinions on the proposal. The ECON and BUDG committees have associated status under Rule 54 of the Rules of Procedure.

The deadline for amendments will be set on 14 May 2018, with the vote due to take place on 20 June.

Performance Reserve



Lambert van Nistelrooij

At this meeting, the co-rapporteurs, Constanze Krehl and Lambert van Nistelrooij, will lead the first exchange of views on the changes to the performance reserve. The proposal in question was made by the Commission in December 2017, and seeks to amend the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR).

The changes will essentially allow the performance reserve (6% of the resources allocated to the ERDF, ESF and CF Investment for Jobs and Growth Goal, to the EAFRD and to the EMFF) to be used for structural reforms instead of for the 'specific priorities' set out in Partnership Agreements.

In particular, the proposal inserts Articles 22(1a), 22(8) and 23a into the CPR, setting out the principles and procedures for using cohesion policy monies for structural reforms. In addition, consequential amendments affect CPR's provisions on its objective, definitions and reporting obligations accordingly.



Constanze Krehl

The competency objection raised by the ECON committee has now finally been dismissed by the Conference of Presidents, which means that work can commence. The ECON and BUDG committees have associated status under Rule 54. Up to six other committees will issue ordinary opinions under Rule 53.

Exchange of views with World Bank on “Priorities and approaches for the future delivery of cohesion policy”



On 25 April 2018, the REGI committee will hold an exchange of views with the World Bank on “lagging regions”.

Over the past years, the World Bank has published several reports and publications about regional disparities and lagging regions within the EU, such as a report about the [“Catching-Up Regions” project in Poland](#) and an article about the importance of [strong urban centres for regional development](#).

An upcoming World Bank Report entitled “Rethinking Lagging Regions in the EU (2018)”, will contribute to the discussion about lagging regions by examining factors that stimulate economic growth or deepen inequality across the EU’s many regions.

In February this year, the REGI committee adopted a report on lagging regions in the EU by rapporteur Ms. Michela Giuffrida, which identified possible solutions for enhancing growth and increasing income within those regions. During the Committee meeting of 25/26 April, the World Bank will exchange views with REGI on lagging regions within the Union and will provide recommendations for future policies.

The impact of EU cohesion policy on Northern Ireland



Derek Vaughan

At this meeting, the rapporteur, Derek Vaughan, will present his draft report on the impact of cohesion policy in Northern Ireland. One of the key points of the draft report is the importance of cohesion funding, not only for the Northern Irish economy, but also for the peace process. Projects funded under the Peace Programme and the Interreg Programmes are particularly important in this respect, as they encourage cross-community and cross-border contacts.

In order to prepare the draft report, a fact-finding mission was sent to Northern Ireland (see above).

The report forms part of the committee’s reflection on the functioning of cohesion policy in practice across the EU, and will contribute to forming its position on the next generation of the policy. It could also help to inform Parliament’s position on the future of cohesion policy in Northern Ireland after 2020.

The deadline for amendments will be set on 14 May, with the vote in committee planned for 20 June 2018.

The EU has played an important role in promoting the economic development of Northern Ireland and its recovery from decades of conflict and division, especially since the 1998 Belfast Agreement (also known as the Good Friday Agreement) and the subsequent establishment of a devolved administration.

The EU has provided financial support for the peace process since 1989, both through EU regional policy and through EU contributions to the International Fund for Ireland. The PEACE I (1995-1999), PEACE II (1999-2006), and PEACE III (2007-2013) programmes, funded from the Structural Funds and later the European Regional Development Fund, provided a financial contribution of EUR 1.3 billion.

The programmes were implemented as cross-border cooperation programmes (in the context of European Territorial Cooperation) between the UK and the Republic of Ireland, and had two aims: (i) cohesion between the communities involved in the conflict in Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic; and (ii) economic and social stability. The PEACE IV programme (2014-2020) has a total value of EUR 270 million, of which EUR 229 million (85%) will be provided from the ERDF.

Exchange of views with Daniele Viotti, Rapporteur-general on EU Budget for the financial year 2019



Daniele Viotti

On Thursday 26 April, the Members of REGI will have an exchange of views with Daniele Viotti (S&D), rapporteur-general of the Committee on Budgets, on the general budget of the EU for the 2019 financial year.

The REGI rapporteur for opinion on this matter is Mr Derek Vaughan (S&D).

As in the past, the BUDG rapporteur wishes to work closely with the committees responsible for individual policy areas. Cohesion policy, for which REGI is responsible, accounts for about one-third of the total Commission budget.

The exchange of views will focus on the guidelines and strategy of the Parliament in the budget procedure and on other aspects of the budget.

Specific measures for Greece under Regulation 2015/1839



Pascal Arimont

REGI will hold a first exchange of views on Mr Arimont's report on "Specific measures for Greece under Regulation 2015/1839".

In Greece, the 2007-2013 programming period coincided with a prolonged and deep recession. The public sector financial balance which was already in significant deficit in 2007 deteriorated further as GDP collapsed. In 2009, the deficit rose to 15% of GDP. Consolidated public debt increased to 178% of GDP in 2013. At the same time, Greece has experienced an unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants.

This exceptional situation needed to be addressed. Adoption of Regulation 2015/1839 introduces specific measures for Greece, among which is an increase of the EU co-financing rate to 100%, a removal of the 95% ceiling for the cumulative total of pre-financing and interim payments for the 2007-2013 programmes regarding ERDF, ESF CF, and an increase by 7% of the initial pre-financing for the 2014-2020 period as regards ERDF, ESF, CF and the EMFF, in 2015 and 2016.

The report of Mr Arimont, which is expected to be discussed during the next committee meeting, will propose an evaluation of those specific measures.

Upcoming events in Brussels or near to your home

Date	Event	Place	Additional info
25-26 April	REGI committee meeting	EP, Brussels JAN 6Q2	
3-4 May	Conference: Smart Specialisation and Technology Transfer as Innovation Drivers for Regional Growth	Sofia, Bulgaria	
7-11 May	REGI mission	Washington D.C & Boston, USA	
14-15 May	REGI committee meeting	EP, Brussels	
24 May	Conference on Good Governance for Cohesion Policy	EC, Brussels	Registration deadline: 27/04/2018
24-25 May	3rd Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region	Catania, Italy	
4-5 June	9th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region	Tallinn, Estonia	Registration deadline: 18/05/2018

Useful internet links

[REGI Website](#)

[EP studies Website](#)

[EP Library - Info on items related to regional development](#)

[OEIL - The Legislative Observatory](#)

[EUR-Lex](#)

[EC Regional Policy - InfoRegio](#)

[Committee of the Regions](#)