OPINION

of the Committee on Regional Development

for the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

on Innovation Union: Transforming Europe for a post-crisis world
(2010/2245(INI))

Rapporteur: Danuta Maria Hübner
PA_NonLeg
SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Regional Development calls on the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Stresses that innovation can be addressed most effectively at the regional level, where physical proximity fosters partnership between actors such as universities, research organisations, large firms, SMEs and regional and local authorities, in particular within clusters; notes that the most dynamic technology industries are not necessarily located in or near capital cities but in proximity to the most innovative universities;

2. Points out that intervention targeting innovation should form part of regional smart specialisation strategies; notes that smart specialisation strategies can ensure a more efficient and effective use of public funds and enhance private investment at regional level;

3. Calls on every region to invest in innovation and adjust its innovation strategy to increase its efficiency, furthermore to upgrade its human capital and enhance the ability and willingness of its enterprises to innovate and be internationally competitive;

4. Points out that decision-takers at regional level must be fully aware of the potential for economic growth that research and innovation activities offer all regions, as the bulk of innovations come about at the practical interface (demand- and user-based innovations) and are mostly funded by the ERDF; notes therefore that, in so far as innovation activities do not necessarily or principally require the existence of higher education establishments, regions without universities and research centres should also be able to develop their own innovation capacities and derive maximum benefit from regional and local resources and assets in terms of potential for innovation;

5. Notes that fostering innovation at the regional level can help reduce regional disparities; encourages the various levels (regional, national and EU) nonetheless to coordinate their efforts more effectively as part of Europe-wide planning of R&D activities;

6. Points out that innovation – both in policy-making and in the activities of businesses and research centres – is of fundamental importance in fleshing out EU territorial cohesion policy and that, by its very nature, it can make a decisive contribution towards meeting cohesion objectives and overcoming the barriers standing in the way of this in areas with specific geographical and demographic features;

7. Calls on the Member States to enhance the business skills of young Europeans by adopting special national plans to mainstream innovation in all educational sectors and at all levels; points out that the best means of implementing those plans and boosting innovation in Europe is through close cooperation between the public and private sectors;

8. Takes the view that, since innovation is a complex concept, non-technological innovation efforts need to be strengthened, and that in this context best practices regarding this kind of innovation should be spread and rules and conditions governing access to EU financing
should be specified on the basis of an open and all-embracing approach;

9. Draws attention to the contribution that cultural diversity makes to innovation; considers, in this connection, that action to safeguard and promote regional cultural diversity should be given a prominent role in innovation policy;

10. Stresses that in order to raise the innovation potential of Europe’s regions, coordination and synergy between cohesion, research and innovation policies and their various instruments should be implemented at regional, national and EU level with a view to ensuring their effectiveness; emphasises the need in this context to seek instruments to eliminate obstacles to such synergies, to lower barriers between programmes and to explore possibilities of further simplification, in particular by harmonising the rules governing the implementation of these policy instruments, their audit and the eligibility of costs; believes it is necessary to continue simplifying the procedures for utilising EU funds, with a view to ensuring their flexibility and reducing red tape for researchers and innovators, thus allowing them to devote more time to their actual work;

11. Stresses the key role of the regions in drawing up policies to stimulate innovation at national level; points out, however, that in many Member States regional and local budgets are insufficient and national budgets for innovation are low;

12. Underlines the need to detect sleeping innovators, in particular among SMEs; points to the important role of intermediate organisations in detecting sleeping innovators, providing incentives, giving advice and supporting innovation; takes the view that these organisations should be strengthened, that a programme aimed at improving training, qualifications and expertise should be developed for them, and that in the future the importance of models for dual-purpose training courses for two professions should increase;

13. Emphasises human capital’s importance in innovation; draws attention, in this connection, to the role played by the ESF in lifelong learning for workers;

14. Takes the view that a well-functioning multi-level governance approach is a pre-condition for successfully setting and implementing innovation policy objectives; in this regard points out that regional policy has a consolidated methodology for the integrated approach and provides a well worked-out governance system able to mobilise local investment;

15. Considers that the innovation dimension needs to be properly integrated into all EU funding programmes, including the Cohesion Fund, thus ensuring a substantial level of financing commensurate with the needs of all innovation stakeholders;

16. Stresses the need to strengthen the links between EU budget instruments and EIB funding; recognises the investment leverage potential of these sources of funding and asks for them to be strengthened, especially as regards Jeremie and Jessica; emphasises the need to develop funding instruments that are geared to the specific circumstances and needs of the smallest firms, and to considerably simplify the procedures for gaining access to the funding;
17. Calls on the Commission to consider multi-fund programmes for Member States and regions that want to use them; considers that it would contribute to working in a more integrated and flexible manner and would increase the effectiveness of interaction between the different funds (Structural Funds and the Framework Programmes for Research and Development);

18. Underlines the importance of differentiating between innovation and research; points out that innovation is a complex cross-cutting socio-economic process, which involves efforts to increase spending on R&D and support for SMEs and for high-tech activities, and focuses on developing integrated systems based on the characteristics and specificities of the different territories;

19. Believes that innovation policy needs to be related to policies for education, training and the labour market; advocates efforts to mobilise citizens and workers in support of the processes of change, via the framing and implementation of inclusive political strategies for innovation, with a view to speeding up the development of innovative products and services and paving the way for higher employment and growth;

20. Welcomes the proposal to launch European Innovation Partnerships as a tool to bring together stakeholders across policies, sectors and borders to speed up innovation in order to tackle major societal challenges; notes that the partnerships and the regional policy instruments addressing these challenges, with particular reference to European groupings of territorial cooperation, should be better aligned and genuinely accessible to the various regions and that partnerships should capitalise on the experience gained with existing national and regional initiatives with similar features; calls, to this end, for closer cooperation between regions, especially through programmes involving exchanges, training initiatives and the sharing of best practices; calls for improvement of the access of SMEs to support for research and innovation;

21. Considers that priority should be given to fostering the development at regional level of an innovation culture, both among entrepreneurs, young people undergoing vocational training and workers, and among the partners who have an influence on business activities, such as regional public decision-makers, research centres, business clusters and funding bodies, which in many cases are not sufficiently aware of the innovation capacities of the firms in their regions, in particular the SMEs (including micro-enterprises and craft firms);

22. Stresses that the full innovation potential of EU regions must be mobilised in order to meet the Europe 2020 objective of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, and points out that future regional policy must treat this challenge as a major priority; believes that this prioritisation applies to all the objectives of regional policy, and emphasises the need to ensure that the competitiveness of Europe is guaranteed by world standards; calls for industry to be involved in eco-innovation, since entrepreneurs have a very important role to play in spreading eco-innovation more widely at regional level; notes in this regard that informing entrepreneurs – by demonstrating new business opportunities – will be crucial to the success of a strategy aimed at developing resource-efficient economies and sustainable industries.
RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

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<th>Date adopted</th>
<th>22.3.2011</th>
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| Result of final vote | +: 41  
| | –: 1  
| | 0: 4 |
| Members present for the final vote | François Alfonsi, Luís Paulo Alves, Charalampos Angourakis, Sophie Auconie, Victor Boştinaru, Zuzana Brzobohatá, Francesco De Angelis, Tamás Deutsch, Rosa Estarás Ferragut, Danuta Maria Hübner, Juozas Imbrasas, María Irigoyen Pérez, Seán Kelly, Evgeni Kirilov, Constanze Angela Krehl, Petru Constantin Luhan, Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska, Ramona Nicole Mănescu, Riikka Manner, Iosif Matula, Erminia Mazzoni, Miroslav Mikolášik, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Franz Obermayr, Jan Olbrycht, Markus Pieper, Tomasz Piotr Poręba, Monika Smolíková, Georgios Stavrakakis, Csanád Szegedi, Nuno Teixeira, Michail Tremopoulos, Oldřich Vlasák, Joachim Zeller |
| Substitutes present for the final vote | Andrea Cozzolino, Karima Delli, Jens Geier, Ivars Godmanis, Karin Kadenbach, Marie-Thérèse Sanchez-Schmid, Vilja Savisaar-Toomast, Elisabeth Schroedter, László Surján |
| Substitutes under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote | Vladko Todorov Panayotov, Britta Reimers, Ivo Strejček |