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Contribution of the Cohesion policy to the achievement of Lisbon and the EU2020 objectives

European Parliament resolution of 20 May 2010 on the contribution of the Cohesion policy to the achievement of Lisbon and the EU2020 objectives (2009/2235(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 174 to 178 thereof,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund¹,
- having regard to Council Decision 2006/702/EC of 6 October 2006 on Community strategic guidelines on cohesion²,
- having regard to its resolution of 24 March 2009 on 'The implementation of the Structural Funds Regulation 2007-2013: the results of the negotiations on the national cohesion strategies and the operational programmes'³,
- having regard to the Commission's Communication of 16 August 2007 on 'Competitive European Regions through research and innovation - A contribution to more growth and more and better jobs' (COM(2007)0474),
- having regard to the Commission Staff Working document of 14 November 2007 on 'Regions delivering innovation through the cohesion policy' (SEC(2007)1547),
- having regard to the Commission communication 'Working together for growth and jobs A new start for the Lisbon Strategy' (COM(2005)0024),
- having regard to the Commission staff working document 'Lisbon Strategy evaluation document' (SEC(2010)0114),
- having regard to the Commission's Communication of 11 December 2007 on 'Member States and Regions delivering the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs through EU cohesion policy, 2007-2013' (COM(2007)0798),
- having regard to the Commission's Communication of 14 May 2008 on 'The results of the negotiations concerning cohesion policy strategies and programmes for the programming period 2007-2013' (COM(2008)0301),
- having regard to the Commission's Communication of 21 December 2009 on the 20th

¹ OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 25.

² OJ L 291, 21.10.2006, p. 11.

³ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2009)0165.

- annual report on implementation of the Structural Funds (2008) (COM(2009)0617),
- having regard to the ex post evaluations of the 2000-2006 programming period,
 - having regard to the Commission's Working Document of 24 November 2009 on consultation on the future EU2020 strategy (COM(2009)0647),
 - having regard to the conclusions of the Informal European Council of 11 February 2010,
 - having regard to the public consultation launched by the Commission on EU 2020 and its outcome (SEC2010)0116),
 - having regard to the Commission proposal of 3 March 2010 'Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (COM(2010)2020),
 - having regard to the Commission Strategic Report of 31 March 2010 promoting an EU debate on cohesion,
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A7-0129/2010),
- A. whereas, bearing in mind that the ultimate aim of cohesion policy is to reduce the gap between the levels of development of the various regions and the extent to which the least-favoured regions and islands (including rural areas) are lagging behind, since 2007 the Structural Funds regulations include obligatory earmarking to the Lisbon objectives for the EU15 and a similar non-obligatory earmarking mechanism has been voluntarily applied by the EU12, targeting cohesion policy resources at the attractiveness of Member States and regions, growth and jobs,
- B. whereas - particularly during the current recession - the cohesion policy is one of the main instruments to foster growth, competitiveness and jobs in the EU due, among other things, to its stable amount of funding for long-term development programmes and policies, the decentralised management system applied and the inclusion of Community sustainable development priorities among its fundamental objectives,
- C. whereas two-thirds of public sector investment across the EU comes from the regional and local levels, regional and local authorities often concentrate substantial policy competences and are key actors in delivering both the current Lisbon Strategy and the future EU2020 Strategy,
- D. whereas cohesion policy and the EU2020 Strategy should be integrated because cohesion policy is included in the Lisbon Treaty in order to foster growth, competitiveness and employment, which are the key objectives of the Strategy,
- E. whereas the proposed EU2020 strategy, similar to the Lisbon Strategy, does not sufficiently reflect the different development levels of regions and Member States and therefore does not put enough stress on economic cohesion in the enlarged EU,

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1. Observes that in the programme allocations for 2007-2013 approx. €228 billion over the 7-

year period has been earmarked to the Lisbon priorities; highlights that the overall allocations, also in the EU12, went beyond the percentages suggested;

2. Notes that the allocations vary significantly across Member States and among Objectives; stresses that there is no one-size-fits-all policy for all areas and that such an attempt would lead to a lack of ownership and identification with any strategy for growth and result in its poor implementation;
3. Recalls that already in the 2000-2006 period, despite the absence of an earmarking mechanism, the link between cohesion policy programmes and the Lisbon Strategy was strong with €10.2 billion invested in research and innovation;
4. Takes the view that the original Lisbon Strategy, based solely on the open method of coordination, was structurally unable to obtain its stated goals and that it was only when it was linked to the Cohesion policy that true results were reached; stresses that this error should be avoided in the proposed EU2020 strategy;
5. Regrets that due to the delayed start-up of the programmes and the subsequent lack of data on expenditure, the correspondence between programme allocations and actual expenditure cannot be verified at this stage, nor is it possible to assess the soundness of the Lisbon investments, particularly as regards programming in less advanced countries; welcomes the publication of the Commission's strategic report and asks that a high level inter-institutional debate is carried out on this basis to analyse the contribution of the cohesion policy to the Lisbon objectives and to assess the future interrelations;
6. Criticises the lack of an overall assessment of the impact of cohesion expenditure on regional development; calls upon the Commission to assess the territorial impact of earmarking Structural Funds to the Lisbon Strategy and to evaluate whether this system is actually contributing to balanced and coherent regional development;
7. Recognises that an effective evaluation must be based on indicators allowing data comparison and aggregation among regions; urges the Commission to come up with a proposal for evaluation indicators before 2012 in order to provide the means to measure the impact produced, also as regards quantity and quality, and to make the necessary adjustments for the next programming period;
8. Regrets that, while the main objectives of the Lisbon Agenda initially included economic growth, employment and social cohesion, the re-launch of the Strategy in 2005 presented a less ambitious programme;
9. Considers weak multi-level governance one of the main limits of the Lisbon Strategy, with the insufficient involvement of regional and local authorities and civil society in the design, implementation, communication and evaluation of the strategy; recommends their stronger integration in the future at all stages;
10. Highlights that when the partnership principle has been applied in the Lisbon Strategy, it has increased the sense of ownership of the objectives by the local and regional authorities, as well as by the economic and social stakeholders, and ensured higher sustainability of the interventions; calls on the Commission to monitor the implementation of the partnership principle in the Member States more effectively;

11. Notes that Europe's regions and cities play a fundamental part in implementing the Lisbon Strategy, being key players in the field of innovation, research and education policy; points out that they implement more than one third of all public investment in the EU and are increasingly focusing Structural Fund spending on growth- and job-related objectives;
12. Points out that the regional and local level in particular has a crucial role to play as the vehicle to reach the countless economic and social actors living and producing in Europe, especially SMEs, and to foster education and vocational training, research, innovation and development;
13. Regrets the weak synergies that existed between National Strategic Reference Frameworks and the National Reform Programmes under the strategy; recommends a stronger and regular dialogue at all levels, including the Community level, between administrations responsible for the cohesion policy and the Lisbon/EU2020 Strategies and the relevant partners from the monitoring committee;
14. Appreciates the results produced so far through the financial engineering instruments and the cooperation with the EIB in fostering innovation and research through renewable forms of funding and stresses the need to strengthen the links between EU financing instruments and EIB financing instruments; recognises their leverage potential for investments and asks for their strengthening especially as regards JEREMIE and JESSICA to ensure better support to business and SMEs; recommends that the rules governing these instruments be simplified to allow their greater use by beneficiaries;

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15. Welcomes the debate on the EU2020 strategy; stresses the long-term nature of this strategy that aims to create framework conditions for stable growth and jobs creation in Europe and a transition to a sustainable economy, and agrees with the identified priorities; stresses that there is a need to subsequently develop a multilevel governance approach to the territorial cohesion so much needed in Europe;
16. Regrets that this strategy has been proposed before the completion of the review of the current Lisbon Strategy; strongly recommends the Commission to prepare a forthright evaluation of the shortcomings in the Lisbon strategy implementation; stresses that the recommendations of this parliamentary report should be included in the final version of the new strategy;
17. Calls for the need to ensure an efficient and extensive infrastructure by modernising transport systems, introducing non-polluting transport arrangements, improving access to drinking water and drainage and waste management systems, introducing more effective environmental management, and ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources and renewable energies, with a view to economic development and improved cohesion;
18. Urges the EU to adopt specific provisions and take appropriate action to meet the special needs of regions characterised by natural or demographic handicaps of a serious and permanent nature, such as coastal regions, islands, mountain regions, cross-border and outermost regions, in the light of the legal basis for territorial cohesion that the new Lisbon Treaty provides;
19. Appreciates that the social dimension is taken into account in the proposal, but stresses that

the economic pillar has the central role in terms of job creation and therefore it is vital to complete the free, open and functional Internal Market enabling businesses to react with flexibility to macro-economic trends; stresses that the recent crisis has demonstrated that no strategy for growth can neglect the objectives of social protection, access to services, the fight against poverty and social exclusion and the creation of quality jobs;

20. Welcomes the call for more sustainable, smart jobs, but acknowledges that a new economic model might lead to an uneven distribution of costs and benefits among individual Member States and regions, and thus in order to prevent this happening, calls on the Union to take responsibility and identify key areas of action where, according to the principle of subsidiarity, European level intervention is the most appropriate to achieve the best results for all;
21. Stresses that research and innovation are key instruments for the development of the EU and can make it more competitive in the face of global challenges; is of the opinion that there must be regular investment in these fields as well as a regular assessment of the progress made on the basis of the results achieved; calls in this regard for a better coordination of the Structural Funds and the Framework Programme to maximise the benefits of the funding for research and innovation in the future and for the development of regional innovative clusters within and between Member States;
22. Is convinced that education and training are the fundamental preconditions for the development of the EU and can make it more competitive in the face of global challenges; believes that investment has to be regularly ensured in this domain and that progress on achievements must be regularly assessed;
23. Acknowledges that the established structure of objectives in the structural policies has proven a success during its first years; calls for the sake of planning reliability for the perpetuation of this structure as well as for the perpetuation of the principle of shared management; acknowledges that an adjustment of the objective contents might be necessary for an adaption to the 2020 goals;
24. Notes that infrastructural deficiencies, particularly in rural regions, still vary considerably across Europe, blocking its growth potential and the smooth functioning of the Internal Market; stresses the importance of cross-border cooperation in this respect and believes that a true level playing field in transport, energy, telecommunications and IT infrastructure needs to be created, should be included in the strategy and continue to be a vital part of the cohesion policy;
25. Recognises that the EU Budget must play a central role in achieving the EU 2020 targets; considers that cohesion policy due to its strategic focus, strong and binding conditionality, tailor-made interventions, and monitoring and technical assistance, is an efficient and effective mechanism for EU2020 strategy delivery;
26. Notes that, particularly with regard to access to broadband, major deficits exist in rural areas, which must be overcome, in accordance with the objective stated in the Digital Agenda, in order to support the sustainable economic development of these regions;
27. Welcomes the recognition of the role of the Structural Funds in the delivery of the EU2020 goals; stresses, however, that the cohesion policy is not just the source of stable financial allocations but is also a powerful instrument for the economic development of all of

Europe's regions. Its main goals - overcoming the disparities between regions and introducing real economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe - and principles - an integrated approach, multi-level governance and real partnership - are key complementary elements for the success of the strategy and should be coordinated with it;

28. Emphasises that a strong and well-financed cohesion policy, embracing all European regions, must be a key element of the EU2020 Strategy; believes that this policy, with its horizontal approach, is a pre-condition for the successful delivery of the EU2020 goals, as well as for achieving social, economic and territorial cohesion in the EU; rejects all attempts to renationalise the cohesion policy and asks for the regional dimension to be fully supported in the review of the EU budget;
29. Stresses that the timely definition of delivery mechanisms is of pivotal importance for the success of the EU 2020 Strategy;
30. Stresses that the cohesion policy is not subordinated to the EU2020 Strategy; highlights that whilst the cohesion policy's priorities should be aligned with the EU2020 objectives, sufficient flexibility should be allowed to accommodate regional specificities and support the weaker and neediest regions to overcome their socio-economic difficulties, natural handicaps and reduce disparities;
31. Asks for an improved governance system in the EU2020 Strategy compared to the Lisbon Strategy; recommends its design and implementation, while using Cohesion and structural funds, according to the multi-level governance principle so as to ensure the greater involvement of local and regional authorities and civil society stakeholders; stresses that this involvement could include the adoption of multi-level governance agreements;
32. Considers that the EU2020 strategy must be an integral part in the achievement of the goal of territorial cohesion, included as a new objective in the Lisbon Treaty; believes that local initiatives for cross-border cooperation offer a potential for territorial cohesion which has as yet not been sufficiently exploited; invites the Commission to set out the role of the macro-regions strategies in greater detail in its proposals for the future territorial cooperation arrangements;
33. Points out that a stronger territorial dimension of the strategy, considering the specificities and different development levels of the European regions, with the direct involvement of regional and local authorities and partners as referred to in the Regulation on the Structural Funds in the planning and implementation of the relevant programmes, will lead to a greater sense of ownership of its goals at all levels and ensure a better awareness of objectives and outputs on the ground; believes, in addition, that the regions need to be continuously supported by developing innovative financial instruments so that their role in achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy can be maintained;
34. Stresses the importance of ground-level knowledge, both locally and regionally, for the objectives of the EU2020 Strategy; to this end, considers it essential to ensure the provision of joint statistics, as well as reading capacity in respect of the indicators, at both local and regional level;
35. Points out the key role of cities in achieving the EU2020 goals; urges that their experience and contribution be taken into account in implementing the EU2020 priorities, especially as regards climate change, social integration, demographic change and investments in

sustainable economic development, energy, transport, water management, health care, public safety etc; agrees with the Council's draft conclusions that regions are to be involved in the future growth and jobs strategy; since any strategy in this field is to be executed in cooperation with regions and cities, suggests that the Commission and Council take into account the advice of the Committee of the Regions on the EU 2020 Strategy;

36. Expects the Commission to present concrete proposals for creating synergies between the cohesion policy and existing sectoral policies according to an integrated approach; recommends rationalisation of the objectives, instruments and administrative procedures of the programmes and alignment of the programme duration of these policies;
37. Believes, however, that the Union should continue to use, as its main financing mechanisms, the Cohesion Fund and structural funds, which have well-established and operational delivery methods; considers it unnecessary to create new separate thematic funds to address the EU2020 goals and instead deems that they should be included in cohesion and rural development policies;
38. Recommends the adoption of a simplified approach to the use of the Structural Funds in the future regulatory framework; highlights that the harmonisation of rules and procedures as well as taking into account best practice models, may lead to simplified delivery systems and encourage participation by potential beneficiaries in EU co-funded programmes;
39. Recommends that the Commission undertake an annual review of the priorities of the EU-2020 Strategy, on the basis of the results obtained in implementing it and taking account of any alterations in the conditions as initially envisaged and the identification of new priorities as closely bound up with changes of a permanent nature at local, regional and global level;
40. Calls on the Commission to present to the Parliament as soon as possible a structured working programme for the implementation of the Strategy and, in the future, clear implementation assessments; moreover calls for a clear working document setting out the relationship between the Strategy and the Cohesion policy;
41. Considers that the Committee of the Regions, through its Lisbon Monitoring Platform, should continue monitoring progress on the ground of the future EU2020 strategy and that Member States should be asked to report yearly, in a structured manner, on the progress made;

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42. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.