

INFORMAL MEETING OF MINISTERS ON COHESION POLICY

Nicosia, 6 November 2012

DRAFT Presidency Conclusions

At the invitation of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union, an Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy was held in Nicosia on the 6th November 2012, to discuss issues related to the effectiveness and governance of the new Cohesion Policy of the Union.

The Commissioner for Regional Policy, the Chairperson of the Committee on Regional Development of the European Parliament, the Presidents of the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee and representative of the European Investment Bank participated in the meeting. The Presidency was also pleased to welcome representatives from Croatia and Iceland and a representative from Switzerland, as well as representatives of other organisations.

Ministers engaged in an open exchange of views on issues on the basis of the two papers prepared by the Presidency in order to facilitate the discussion.

The Ministers took into consideration the substantial progress achieved in the Council in reaching partial general approach agreement on seventeen (17) negotiating blocks of the legislative package on Cohesion Policy at the General Affairs Council (GAC) of April 24, June 26 and October 16 under the Danish and the Cyprus Presidencies. They also noted that the informal trialogues with the European Parliament have already started with an intensive schedule of work. Without prejudice to the continuation of discussions and the final outcomes from these negotiations, a number of key political messages generally shared by the Ministers need to be underlined. In particular **the Ministers:**

- **Reiterated** the key role that Cohesion Policy could play in enhancing growth and jobs throughout the Union, especially at these difficult times and consider that the next programming period offers an opportunity to further strengthen the EU added value and impact of Cohesion Policy. Within this framework, they confirmed their commitment to strengthen the added value of Cohesion Policy and the quality of its expenditure, notably by strengthening its linkage with Europe 2020 and the European Semester and by

promoting the pursuit of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth at regional and local levels in ways that meet specific territorial challenges and needs.

- **Recalled** that they have already reached preliminary agreement on the main elements of a stronger, result-oriented Cohesion Policy firmly embedded in the European Economic Governance.
- **Resolved** to deliver on these commitments in the context of the preparation of the Partnership Agreements and programmes for the new programming period 2014-2020.
- **Reiterated** the need that legislative proposals should be adopted as soon as possible to allow for a successful implementation from 1 January 2014 and a smooth transition to the next programming period. For this reason, they stressed the importance of reaching partial agreement in the coming months at the Council on the remaining pending issues of the Cohesion Policy legislative package and make as much progress as possible in the trialogue discussions with European Parliament. In this context, they acknowledged that it is crucial to achieve the soonest possible a common understanding amongst the competent Institutions on the main issues of programming providing thus certainty to the timely preparations for the new period.

Furthermore, the Presidency Conclusions of the discussion carried out at the Informal Ministerial Meeting, structured according to the main issues addressed by the Ministers, are:

Effectiveness and EU value added of Cohesion Policy

- (1) The provisions of the legislative package for the new EU Cohesion Policy will upgrade the strategic programming framework for 2014-2020 and make possible a more coordinated and coherent approach across EU Funds and policies while maintaining a strong focus on the Union's strategic objectives. The use of Common Strategic Framework (CSF) covering ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund, EAFRD and EMFF must contribute in capitalising on the Funds' support for achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth through strategic orientation and facilitation of sectoral and territorial coordination among the CSF Funds and with other relevant Union policies and instruments.
- (2) Available resources must be concentrated on a limited number of important priorities linked to the Europe 2020 agenda and at the same time addressing the development needs of regions and Member States.
- (3) Clear objectives need to be set in the programmes to be adopted at the beginning of the programming period. These shall be supported by transparent and measurable indicators to allow for a regular and meaningful assessment of, and debate on, the performance of the policy. The performance framework for each programme must become an effective tool for regular monitoring, which will allow for timely action to be taken in order to adjust the planned use of funds when justified.

- (4) The right conditions must be in place to optimize the use of resources. It was confirmed that ex-ante conditionalities are an essential mechanism to achieve this, and that it will be a core part of the preparations for the new period to identify the applicable conditionalities and to ensure that they are fulfilled prior to the adoption of the programmes. At the same time it is important that this effort respects the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity.

Territorial Dimension

- (5) Territorial dimension as well as integrated approach are major assets of Cohesion Policy. It is necessary to address the specific territorial challenges of each region to unlock their development potential. In this respect, territorial analysis is a very valuable instrument in order to apply integrated development solutions.
- (6) Recognizing in addition, the importance of Territorial Cohesion, as this is provided by the Treaty and hence the need to enhance the territorial dimension of Cohesion Policy in the new programming period, it is also of great importance to keep up the political momentum, through the intergovernmental cooperation on territorial development aspects.

Governance of Cohesion Policy

- (7) Coordination must be reinforced both within Member States and within the Commission in order to exploit synergies between policies and instruments and to reduce overlaps, complexity and bureaucracy. The reinforcement of inter-department coordination and closer coordination amongst the Commissions' services responsible for the Common Strategic Framework Funds at all stages of negotiation and implementation is instrumental, in order to ensure a more coherent and harmonised approach and to produce necessary guidance to reinforce coordination between EU instruments.
- (8) It is of key importance to keep and further enhance discussion on Cohesion Policy at political level and within the formal framework of the Council. A regular debate at the highest political level on the achievements of Cohesion Policy is needed. The Ministers request the Commission to present every year, starting in 2016, a report summarising the main elements of the annual implementation reports related to performance.