



Territorial Design and Implementation of Structural Funds Programmes

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In its Strategic Agenda adopted on 27 June 2024, the European Council requested to "enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion, aiming for continuous upward convergence, reducing disparities, increasing our resilience and competitiveness and stimulating long-term growth across the Union". Moreover, in her Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029, the President of the European Commission confirmed that "regions will remain at the centre of our work" and stated that cohesion and growth policy must be designed in partnership with national, regional and local authorities.

Taking into account the need to strengthen competitiveness, facilitate fair transition and ensure the resilience of the Union, cohesion policy should provide even more incentives for structural reforms in the future. Heads of state and government are set to decide inter alia on the new budget structure for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). In light of the European Commission's proposals for the future MFF in 2025 and for a new mechanism to link investments and structural reforms, France, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Romania and Slovenia must reiterate support for the principles that form the core of cohesion policy as set out in the Treaty and must insist that these continue to be respected in plans outlined for the future MFF.

As emphasised in the European legal framework, cohesion policy is and must remain at its core a policy for territorial development that relies on a place-based approach, shared management and the partnership principle.

Therefore, we consider it crucial that regions, or the appropriate territorial level as per to the specific Member State framework in place, continue to have a central role in the design and implementation of programmes and in the selection of projects in line with shared management principles. A future conditionality arrangement must not contradict sub-national competences, especially in Member States with a federal structure. The fight against fraud must not be undermined by issues surrounding the traceability of funds.

We therefore call upon the Commission to:

- Ensure that cohesion policy investments provide strong incentives for the implementation of relevant structural reforms in the Member States, while respecting the existing division of competences among different levels of government;
- Recognise a central role of the regions in enhancing the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the Union and ensure that this is adequately reflected in the implementation mechanism of the next funding period, as per to the specific Member State framework in place;
- Submit appropriate proposals for necessary legislation respecting the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity as early as possible in 2025 to enable swift negotiations and a timely, smooth start to their implementation.