

## **“A strong, renewed Cohesion Policy for all regions post 2020” – Reaction<sup>1</sup> to the White Paper on the Future of Europe, the Reflection Paper on the Future of EU Finances and the 7th Cohesion Report**

“The EU regional level plays a significant role in implementing European objectives, as well as capacity building for increased competitiveness, growth and social security. A stronger regional dimension in the discussion on the Future of Europe is therefore necessary to facilitate the move towards a competitive, social and sustainable Europe.” EU Cohesion Policy combines strategic targets for addressing European and even global challenges through long-term regional and local development strategies, thus securing a multi-level implementation close to our citizens. For this reason regional and local entities should be strongly involved in further reflections on reforms.”

Our network of regions - on the basis of the position paper of 28th September 2016 comprising 193 NUTS 2 regions and representing 73,7% (EU28) and 83,2% (EU27) of the EU population - would like to respond to the White Paper on the Future of Europe, the Reflection Paper on the Future of EU Finances and the 7th Cohesion Report as follows:

1. **Europe continues to need a significant regional growth policy.** The 7<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report evidences that regional disparities are widespread across the EU. Therefore, a **strong European Cohesion Policy for all regions is needed more than ever.** Cohesion Policy **should continue to reduce regional and intraregional disparities, stimulate investment in EU priorities, and address new challenges.**
2. It remains essential that Cohesion Policy is based on **adequate funding.** The percentage share of the budget allocated to Cohesion Policy in the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) should remain at least the same.
3. The **principle of subsidiarity** and **European added-value** are considered as crucial elements in the discussion on the future of Europe. EU Cohesion Policy **guarantees a region-specific, multi-level governance, through an integrated approach.** This ensures the visibility of EU investments on the ground.
4. We share the commitment of **concentrating funding on the most important regional challenges and priorities, aligned with the EU's direction.** These elements ensure a **high level of EU added-value.**
5. We stress the need for the **European Social Fund to remain an integral part of Cohesion Policy.**

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<sup>1</sup> Follow-Up action of the partners of the lobbying-initiative from September 2016 “A strong, renewed Regional Policy for all regions post 2020”

6. **Conditionalities must be linked to the objectives of EU Cohesion Policy post 2020.** This means that the role and contribution of the future Cohesion Policy regarding compliance with conditionalities has to be clarified with the regions beforehand.
7. The **introduction of a common set of rules and the alignment of the state aid regime** are embraced from the point of view of simplification and coherent investment activity of the different Structural Funds but must not lead to further complexity for the beneficiaries.
8. The **fundamental reform of implementation and control procedures is indispensable** to improve the added-value of the Cohesion Policy. This should follow a differentiated approach aligned with national and regional framework conditions. We object reductions of EU co-financing rate. **In any case the EU co-financing rate has to follow a differentiated and proportionate approach** and should **correspond with the level of EU-requirements, related to administrative and control systems for the regions and the beneficiaries.**
9. **Cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation need to be reinforced** since the European added value of European Territorial Cooperation is especially visible.
10. **Opportunities for cooperation between regions in two or more countries (for example in the framework of macro-regional strategies or sea-basin strategies) need to be extended and embedded. Allowing a more tailor-made implementation process between participating regions enables us to better address higher strategic European challenges.**
11. **Financial instruments and other revolving instruments should only be foreseen for profitable projects.** To improve coherence between Cohesion Policy, the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) and other instruments, the managing authorities should decide on the **optimal mix to achieve complementarity and synergy.**
12. **EU Cohesion Policy is a long-term development policy that needs planning security.** We are **against the idea of reducing the Cohesion Policy budget in order to fund a new reserve for emergency situations and other instruments** centrally managed at EU level.
13. The continuation of a **multiannual programme for Cohesion Policy for at least 7 years is necessary.**
14. Regions and cities and their cooperation are the strength of Europe!
15. A **final scenario for the Future of Europe** including these suggestions is warmly welcomed.