

HIGH LEVEL GROUP REFLECTING ON FUTURE COHESION POLICY

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VENUE: EUROPEAN COMMISSION, CHARLEMAGNE (LORD JENKINS ROOM)

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INCREASED COHERENCE IN THE DELIVERY OF EU STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

There is a broad consensus on the need for better coordination between Cohesion Policy and other Community Policies and policy instruments. Evidence suggests that there is sometimes a lack of a strategic vision for the coordinated use of Community funds, leading to artificial delimitations of intervention areas and fragmentation of EU funding. Furthermore, stakeholders underline that the different rules, procedures, practices, guidelines and interpretations hinder the effective and efficient implementation.

In the current programming period, the Community Strategic Guidelines and the Regulations provide the framework for the intervention of the funds integrating EU strategic priorities into Cohesion policy and providing coherence with other relevant Community policies. They aim to concentrate resources on investments underpinning sustainable development and strengthening competitiveness. The National strategic reference frameworks set out the coordination mechanisms between Community cohesion policy and relevant national, sectoral and regional policies of Member States. The earmarking exercise calls for concentration of the funds on Lisbon strategy priorities (60 % of spending of EU15 on the Convergence objective, 75 % of the expenditure on the regional competitiveness and employment objective).

On the one hand, it can be argued that the Strategic Guidelines and National Reference Frameworks have reinforced the strategic dimension of Cohesion policy and strengthened integration of EU priorities and linkages between EU, national and regional levels. Cohesion Policy has been strategically aligned with the Lisbon process through monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

On the other hand, while the Community Strategic Guidelines and the regulations aim at concentration, they became rather extensive, identifying a broad range of areas for intervention (with a more 'shopping list of actions' approach). At the same time, it has been suggested that more could have been done to encourage the integration of EU priorities. Evidence from evaluations¹ points out that there is significant scope for increasing the practical integration of sustainable development and the energy agenda into delivery of Cohesion policy (i.e. implementation of programmes and projects).

Furthermore, it has been underlined that one of the deficiencies in the delivery of the Lisbon strategy has been the lack of an efficient multilevel governance system. A recent opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the future of the Lisbon Strategy post 2010 refers to the failure to give sufficient recognition of the key role played by actors at the local and regional level in delivering and communicating the Lisbon Strategy on the ground.

¹ The potential of regional policy instruments 2007-2013 to contribute to the Lisbon and Göteborg objectives for growth, jobs and sustainable development (Final report, 13 February 2009)

The success of the EU2020 strategy will largely depend on the effectiveness of policy delivery. As stated in the consultation document on EU2020, there is interdependence between different levels of government in the Union: European, national and sub-national. Effective responses to challenges facing Europe require coordinated and coherent policy approaches and instruments acting at different levels. Many of the policy solutions of the EU2020 strategy will need to be implemented at sub-national level; in which regional and local actors have a vital role to play.

Based on their experience of implementation of Cohesion policy and other EU and national programmes, Member State experts are invited to address the following questions:

- *How can objectives and targets at EU level best be translated in Cohesion policy programmes?*
- *How can the coherence in the delivery of EU strategic priorities between Cohesion policy and other Community policies be improved?*
- *How can the multi-level governance system of Cohesion policy contribute to the delivery of EU priorities?*