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Debate in the European Parliament
Plenary session

Report Harangazó

The role of the Cohesion Policy
in the integration of vulnerable communities and groups

19 June 2008

Introductory remarks

- **Mr President, I would like to thank Mr Harangozó for his report and also for his efforts to achieve a consensual position in his committee on the difficult topic of vulnerable communities and groups.**
- **To avoid economic growth being accompanied by social polarisation in our society, Cohesion policy targets social exclusion, in particular the integration of vulnerable communities and groups, and it will remain a cohesion policy goal in the future.**

- **It is true that problems identified in the report are at the frontier between territorial cohesion on one hand, and social cohesion challenges on the other. And social polarisation and social segregation problems - when concentrated on some territories, become territorial cohesion issues. We face social exclusion in the poorest territories of the Union, but we also have pockets of social deprivation in the richest cities of the European Union.**
- **The report calls on the Commission to present a comprehensive definition of territorial cohesion in the framework of the forthcoming Green Paper on territorial cohesion, and I can confirm that the Green Paper, to be published at the end of September 2008, will contribute to the progress towards a common understanding across the Union of the concept of territorial cohesion.**
- **The report also recognises that the notion of vulnerable groups and communities as such is certainly not an easy one and it should not be limited to the Roma communities only. However, it is generally recognised that the situation of Roma communities deserves special focus in Europe. To address the multi-faceted problems of Roma exclusion, we need an integrated approach And the Parliament discussed it in-depth in January when adopting a resolution on a European Strategy on the Roma. In the package on the renewed social agenda, the Commission will present at the beginning of July its Working Document on Community Instruments and Policies for Roma inclusion.**
- **I share the report's opinion on need to make greater use of the synergies and complementarities among European policies and also**

among various financial instruments available. The Commission paid much attention to this when negotiating Operational Programmes of the Cohesion policy 2007 – 2013 with the national and regional authorities.

- As to the issue of making available comparable intra-regional data for all regions in the EU, with special regard to social indicators, while essential, I share the report's view here: is a more complex one. As the Members will be aware, EUROSTAT does not produce data, but manages data provided by the national statistical systems.**
- We have just completed the second edition of the Urban audit, covering period up to 2004 and we clearly see how limited the availability of territorial data is below the NUTS 2 classical regional level. To address this challenge and also using the context of preparations of the Green Paper on territorial cohesion, DG REGIO worked on improving the quality of research on regional policy, including its statistical basis. As a result, the expenditure 2000 – 2006 is broken down to the NUTS 3 level, to 20 categories of expenditure and is available for Objective 1 regions, 2, Urban, Interreg and Cohesion Fund. Rural audit is a challenge ahead of us.**
- Unfortunately, I must admit today that reliable data do not yet exist on where particular excluded groups are concentrated, hence it is impossible to cross match our newly available information on what and where Cohesion policy resources are spent on with the location of such groups. I consider that the margin of progress in this area, as it seems today, is rather in specific research using qualitative analysis.**

- **Once again, I thank Parliament for bringing to our attention all those important issues, and I am looking forward to your debate.**

Conclusive remarks

Mr President, I think this was a good discussion and I would like to thank all those who contributed to the debate, which showed that the integrated policy approach is best way to address effectively the problems of different vulnerable communities and groups. The link between cohesion policy and rural development policy seems particularly important here.

I also share Members' concern that, in cases where territorial concentration of problems related to vulnerable groups takes place, a territorial approach to policy is justified. Social inclusion should not be dissociated from territorial cohesion.

I also appreciate Members' emphasis on intra-regional disparities. As many Members pointed out, developing good quality reliable intra-regional statistics would be of much help in this context.

As I said in my introductory remarks, the Commission intends to invest further in developing such data base. We are now building a rural audit in the same way as we did the urban audit in the past. Good cooperation with Member States on this issue will be essential and I count very much on Parliament's support in this context.