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Debate in the European Parliament

Plenary session

Report Guellec
Report Kallenbach

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Introductory remarks

- Congratulations, Mr Guellec and Mrs Kallenbach, for your reports. Thanks to the Regional Development Committee who did an excellent work on the Fourth Cohesion Report and Territorial cohesion.
- Let me start by saying that the Commission fully shares your view that the European cohesion policy has played a major role in narrowing disparities across the European Union; thus fostering European integration and getting the Union closer to its people. **Therefore Commission firmly rejects attempts to renationalise this policy.**
- We also share your view that adequate ("increased" in the text of the report) financial resources for cohesion policy must be

guaranteed in the future in order to deal with the anticipated new challenges which will affect all European territories. We have to keep in mind that at the same time the cohesion policy will have to continue to cope with regional disparities resulting from the last and forthcoming enlargements.

- Let me reassure you about the risk which some of you perceive. In the context of the "lisbonisation" of our policy that objective is the main priority of the European cohesion policy and will remain it after 2013 as enshrined in the Reform Treaty. The solidarity dimension of the policy is central to this policy and the allocation of resources will certainly follow an inverse relation with the prosperity of countries and regions.
- This view is shared also by an impressive majority of stakeholders across the Union. What is also shared is that the European cohesion policy is much more than a mere redistributive mechanism of resources between Member States and regions; the European cohesion policy is first and foremost a development policy whose objective is to foster the endogenous development of all European regions.
- The Commission shares your concern about the need for more coherence between the European cohesion policy and Community sectoral policies such as rural development, research or competition. I would add here that the need for the coherence between different development policies also applies to the coordination between the European cohesion policy and national policies. I am convinced that this is a key issue for the future of European cohesion, also in its territorial dimension.

- Your report is building a bridge between the present and the future cohesion policy. Therefore let me add a few words on the public consultation launched at the Cohesion Forum on the future of EU cohesion policy. Until now a total of 100 elaborated opinions were submitted by national, regional and local governments but also by a number of European associations of territorial interests; economic and social partners, academics or research institutions and even by individual citizens. Due to the request of many stakeholders, the deadline was prolonged until the end of February. The 5th Cohesion Progress Report on Cohesion scheduled for June will summarize the conclusions of this public consultation. The report drafted by Mr Guellec is therefore coming very timely.
- As for report of Mrs Kallenbach, let me start by saying that I fully share your view that the success of the Territorial Agenda and the Leipzig Charter depends on two conditions. First we need to put in practice an integrated approach to the territorial development in order to avoid a piecemeal approach to our territories. A classic example here is thinking in categories of purely "rural" or "urban" strategies which misses the key importance of true "economic" regions. On the other hand the integrated approach means also the need of integrating different sectoral policies – both at the EU and MS level – which affect the development of our territories.
- The second condition – as you rightly point out – is the need for the Commission to monitor and assess regularly the progress in the implementation of actions agreed under the Territorial Agenda. We need to know more about the effects of these actions in the Member States, so that the Commission can offer them adequate

assistance. For example, on the basis of better monitoring the Commission can progress in the area of defining indicators of territorial cohesion.

- Clearly, the Commission sees as good news – as does your report - the introduction of the notion of territorial dimension in the Lisbon Treaty. Now, we have to make the most value of this new dimension of the cohesion policy and the venues it opens up – such as for example new definition of subsidiarity, giving more weight to local and regional authorities. That is why the Commission included the Green Paper on territorial cohesion in its Legislative and Work programme for 2008.
- I am pleased to confirm that the key recommendations made in your report regarding the definition of the concept of territorial cohesion, the implementation of an integrated approach to territorial development and the improvement of the synergies between Community policies are taken on board in the preparation of our Green Paper to be adopted next September.
- Let me also use this opportunity to inform you that we are progressing in a common understanding with Member States on a rather complex notion of territorial cohesion and its key components. As you know, we have received replies from 25 Member States to our questionnaire on territorial cohesion and we are currently working with them on a set of additional questions which would help us further refine this concept.
- Within the Commission, we have established an inter-service group which gives us a framework to work out an in-house reflection on territorial cohesion. We have already completed the first part of this

exercise – the identification of the territorial dimension of 10 key EU policies. Now we are moving to the second phase – an assessment of the territorial impact of these policies. The results of this work will provide an input to the Green Paper.

- The Commission is developing some tools will also match your request: in particular, investigating territorial impact assessment of policies and developing territorial cohesion indicators are among the priorities of the new ESPON Programme; on the urban development side, just allow me to remind you that the new round of Urban Audit (covering 321 cities of EU27) is currently finalised and a second report on the State of European cities is due for June 2009; and also that URBACT II has been now clearly upgraded to a strategic instrument for networking and exchanging experiences in urban development.
- Let me conclude by noting once again a high coherence of your views and the views of the Commission. I am looking forward to the debate now, after which I shall try to come back to some points you will be raising.

Concluding remarks

- Thanks for this fruitful debate. I have been pleased to see how many common points of view in a number of essential aspects regarding the achievements of the European cohesion policy as well as its future after 2013 we share with you.
- Let me reiterate here my point about the necessity of reorienting the cohesion policy towards those investments which bring the highest output in terms of growth, jobs and long-term competitiveness of European regions. This change must simply be seen in the context of the new, global economic environment. The Lisbon strategy and the objective of cohesion are not to be opposed but go hand in hand.
- It seems to me that we all agree on the significant role that the European cohesion policy has played for economic development of European regions.

Let me add that we are not alone in sharing this view:

1. The first preliminary analysis of the contributions to the consultations on the future of the policy confirm that the European cohesion policy stands out for having an impressive support of our citizens.
2. Our policy is appreciated not only in terms of its direct impact on socio-economic development but is also praised for having leveraged a significant amount of additional financial resources.
3. It is also recognized that European cohesion policy has developed a number of essential co-operation principles and

delivery mechanisms such as a culture of partnership, cross-border and transnational programmes between different European regions or stability through multi-annual planning. In addition, the reforms introduced in the period 2007-2013 are deemed positive.

- This positive view of our policy explains the overwhelming unanimity in favour of the continuation of the European cohesion policy beyond 2013. The Commission and the European Parliament are not alone either in identifying this policy as a valuable instrument for addressing the challenges to which the European Union is increasingly confronted. It is widely recognised that the European cohesion must provide its contribution to tackle restructuring, demographic change or climate change. We all agree that to address these challenges, an integrated approach is essential.
- The debate we had this morning and the public consultation confirms also that the coordination between the European cohesion policy and Community sectoral policies is a common concern of all the actors involved. I am convinced that further debate is needed on this matter to reinforce the synergies between our policy and other Community policies.