



St. Pölten Manifesto

EU Cohesion Policy 2014+

On 21 October 2011, following the adoption of the EC legislative proposals for the future Cohesion policy and the earlier proposal for the next Multi-annual Financial Framework 2014-2020, the Presidents of the undersigned interregional and city networks have agreed to deliver the following key messages as regards the future EU Cohesion Policy.

For the first time ever, all European territories, strengthened by their diversity in an exemplary and unique partnership, have agreed to join forces and deliver the following common message:

We, territories of Europe, commit to and remind all EU Member States and institutions of the following principles, which make the unique added-value of cohesion policy in Europe:

- Cohesion policy significantly reduces economic, social and territorial differences within Europe.
- It is a proven driver for territorial, smart, sustainable and inclusive development in all European regions.
- Cohesion policy is a development but also an innovation policy based on solidarity and public investment in the interest of and with a positive added-value for each citizen of Europe.
- In times of financial crisis, and taking into account the future challenges to be faced by the European Union, resources should be concentrated on the less developed regions and cities in need.
- It is important that the investments should not drop drastically, which would damage the advances achieved in the field of cohesion, whereas those investments increase economic activity and reduce social disparities. Simplification, concentration, integrated approach, flexibility and effectiveness of this policy should be the key words in the final legislative package.
- Fairness, solidarity and proportionality should be ensured with continued support to all regions: less developed, transition and more developed regions as well as appropriate consideration for regions with special geographic or demographic features.
- The importance of interregional cooperation in all existing forms like joint cross-border projects, Euregios and Groupings of territorial cooperation (EGTC) is uncontested. The enthusiasm and rapidity of the creation of macro-regional strategies demonstrate an innovative and necessary EU activity field of territorial cooperation which is further expandable in the future and which brings additional opportunities and values for the whole of Europe.
- The territorial cooperation objective must be strengthened, as suggested by the proposed budget increase, and made even more effective thanks to an enhanced strategic dimension as well as rationalised implementation rules and control procedures.

In this context, we, territories of Europe, call the European Council and all Member States to agree that the future EU Cohesion policy should:

- Receive appropriate funding: the budget proposed by the European Commission in the Multi-annual Financial Framework should be agreed on and the economic and social achievements of cohesion policy should not be damaged¹.

The Europe 2020 strategy is the overarching strategy for the future of the European Union. Regions and cities are ready to carry it out at territorial level, since cohesion policy has been deservedly designated as its main instrument. This strategy needs proper funding if it is to succeed. Therefore, the proposed resource allocation for cohesion policy should not be reduced.

- Take a fully integrated and comprehensive approach to territorial development: Through the synergies that can be created between the different funds and the involvement of key stakeholders, and through its integrated and long-term action, cohesion policy responds not only to structural issues but also to economic and social difficulties. Cohesion policy should be the place for different but interlinked territories to build together sustainable strategies for future economic, social and territorial development.

- Adopt simplified and better coordinated rules and procedures: Focusing on results involves a rationalisation of all the procedures ruling the different structural funds and in this respect, the Common Strategic Framework is a step forward. Harmonising the rules can only reduce legal uncertainties and risks of errors, even though simplification should also concern controls and monitoring, which should be more proportional to the size of the programmes and projects.

- Implement conditionality with determination but caution: Regional and local authorities acknowledge that a certain conditionality based on performance is necessary to make sure that the funds are appropriately spent. However, conditionality must be closely related to the implementation of EU support and guarantee reliability in the execution of the operational programmes. It must in particular consider the competencies of national, regional and local authorities and avoid penalising regions for shortcomings beyond their control.

- Ensure a decision-making process that complies with the partnership principle: All territories, namely regional and local authorities, cities, rural areas, functional areas, mountains, ultra-peripheral and sparsely populated areas, must be included into a full and equal partnership with all other decision-makers, at European and national level. The territorial cohesion objective can only be achieved with a substantially increased involvement of local and regional authorities, at all stages of the decision-making process. They must be involved via their national and European network organisations but also directly via their political leadership. Only by governing in partnership will we ensure fairness, planning capacity, flexibility and visibility for EU citizens.

Request to the Council Presidency and European Parliament to support regional and local interests on Cohesion policy in the upcoming council negotiations

¹ Here the demand of the net contributor countries to limit the multi-annual financial framework after 2013 to max. 1% of the Gross National Income of the EU must be taken into consideration.

Regions, cities and local governments have shown in recent years that they can support their territories' development with their own resources, with sometimes limited support from their central governments. They have proved capable to deliver results under the Lisbon strategy, whereas the coordination foreseen initially between Member States did not deliver the expected outcomes.

Hence, we, regions, cities, local governments,

Strengthened by our experience of implementing structural funds on the ground and developing local development strategies,

Reinforced by our unique partnership bringing together all different territories and places in Europe,

Wishing to contribute to the well-being of all citizens in our territories,

Thereby strongly supporting the main policy that brings the EU closer to European citizens,

are prepared and eager to work in partnership with the EU Member States and institutions, in order to make the Europe 2020 a success for all.

Therefore, we call upon the Council Presidency to invite the main interregional and city networks at the negotiating table for all the discussions that will concern future Cohesion Policy. The previous initiatives taken in this respect by a number of previous Presidencies are warmly welcomed and the Council presidency is invited to pursue this initiative in the future.

*St. Pölten, Niederösterreich (A)
21 October 2011*

This Declaration is supported by:

Assembly of European Regions (AER),

Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)

Conference of European Legislative Assemblies (CALRE)

Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power (REGLEG),

Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR)

Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

EUROCITIES,

Working community of Adriatic Alps (Alpe Adria),

Working Community of Alpine regions (Arge Alp)

Working Community of the Danube area (Arge Donauländer),

Working community of the Pyrenees (CTP)

A majority of the 143 competitiveness regions group from 7th October 2010