

CONCLUSIONS

**from the meeting of Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy
of the Visegrad Group countries, Bulgaria, Romania and Republic
of Slovenia in the presence of the Member of European Commission
responsible for regional policy**

Adopted on 15th of November 2010 in Bratislava

1. Ministers welcome the Communication of the Commission on the EU Budget Review. The new EU budget should be designed as one of the most important instruments to implement the Europe 2020 objectives. In this mission it has to pursue a result oriented approach while building on mutual benefits through solidarity, which is one of the cornerstones of the European Union. Ministers welcome the strategic and integrated orientation of the EU budget review as opposed to a revolutionary change based on sectoral approach. Cohesion Policy is rightly identified as an engine for the harmonious development and economic and social growth of the whole European Union.
2. Ministers welcome the publication of the 5th Cohesion Report, which shows inter alia significant contribution made by Cohesion Policy to the growth of the whole EU and to the reduction of economic, social and territorial disparities. The 5th Cohesion Report also proposes a reform of future Cohesion Policy based on its close linkage to Europe 2020 objectives, presenting a more strategic approach to Cohesion Policy.
3. Ministers welcome the proposal on reinforced strategic programming, especially the Common Strategic Framework for Cohesion Policy Funds, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and European Fisheries Fund. As far as thematic concentration is concerned, we agree that Member States and regions need to concentrate the resources on a smaller number of priorities contributing to reduction of disparities and to the achievement of Europe 2020 objectives.
4. In this respect, the ministers wish to stress that the priorities chosen have to be selected according to the specific conditions of individual territories, in particular allowing the less developed regions the possibility to access a wider range of priorities including basic infrastructure and capacity building. This will allow creating conditions for economic growth, employment and innovation and thus directly contributing to Europe 2020 objectives.
5. Thematic concentration is directly connected with the need to focus more on outcomes of Cohesion Policy. The definition of clear national targets and quantifiable indicators during

the programming phase is the basic precondition for the result oriented approach to work. In this respect, ministers wish to stress that the indicators need to be defined in a clear and predictable way and have to measure the direct effects of the investment activities co-financed by Cohesion Policy not the impact of the investments on the global economic and social situation.

6. To achieve more visible and strengthened results of Cohesion Policy interventions it is vital to ensure a deeper integration of Cohesion Policy funds. Economic, social and territorial cohesion can be fully achieved only by integrated approach to implementation of the defined objectives with the use of European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund.
7. Referring to the issue of conditionalities proposed in the 5th Cohesion Report, ministers are in favour of a fair, equal and proportionate incentive mechanism, which would contribute to a more effective implementation of Cohesion Policy. We invite the Commission to provide more concrete proposals together with Member States on how this could be put in place.
8. The objective to support the growth of the least developed EU regions and Member States has to remain the main focus of Cohesion Policy. As a development policy, Cohesion Policy has to support all EU regions in their efforts to overcome structural changes and attain growth; therefore we support the current architecture of objectives for Cohesion Policy Funding. As suggested by the European Commission, attention should also be paid to transition mechanisms in order to ensure simple and fair support system. In order to reduce unnecessary policy restrictions due to the geographical eligibility of territories within a Member State, greater flexibility in the implementation phase should be established at national level in order to allow for support of place-based approach. In this context, ministers wish to emphasize that the distribution of resources between priorities has to be decided by Member States according to their specific needs and objectives.
9. Ministers recognise the value added of local development approaches under Cohesion Policy. Therefore we need to strengthen the territorial approach as a complementary one to the sectoral approach and develop the mechanisms to address urban-rural links. For the future it is necessary to improve multi-level management and coordination between policies, ensure the reduction of regional disparities and intra-regional disparities to make better use of development potential of the territory, focusing on the integrated place-based approach.
10. Ministers are of the opinion that the evolution of management and control system for Cohesion Policy post 2013 should be based on the current experiences and in-depth

assessment of the present institutional framework. In order for Cohesion Policy to be a stimulus for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of EU regions, it is necessary to streamline and simplify the policy through a better balance between control-based and a trust-based system.

11. Ministers are of the opinion that a debate on the results of Cohesion Policy and its contribution to the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives should be carried out within the structures of the Council of Ministers. Strengthening the political system of the Cohesion Policy at the level of the Council will bring about a coordinated approach in the Cohesion Policy and will strengthen its relation to other policies.

12. Ministers welcome the ambitions of the Commission to prepare concrete proposals related to the Multiannual Financial Framework and to the policies and programmes implementing it by the end of 2011. Nevertheless they urge the Commission to present its proposals concerning the future regulatory and financial framework as soon as possible. Timely debate on the complex package of Cohesion Policy legislation (embracing rules of all its funds: European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and Cohesion Fund) is a prerequisite for launching the programmes of the new financial period on time, thereby contributing to delivering on our common goals for the future.