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Local is best in EU cohesion policy

EFA press release

A group of MEPs this week published a ten point statement of principles that they say should shape the future direction of EU Cohesion Policy after 2013.

Europe's cohesion policy is designed to reduce regional disparities in income, wealth and opportunity. The budget for cohesion funding alone amounts to more than seventy billion euros in the period 2007 - 2013.

The MEPs reject the suggestion of handing control over cohesion policy to member state governments (or 'renationalising' as it is known).

In a conference held at the European Parliament on Thursday, sectoral experts from countries including Scotland, Flanders, Wales, the Basque Country, Catalonia, Corsica and Latvia highlighted innovative examples of best practice in delivering projects at a local level, with an emphasis on the decentralised approach. MEPs taking part included Ian Hudghton (Scotland), Jill Evans (Wales), Alyn Smith (Scotland), Frieda Brepoels (Flanders), François Alfonsi (Corsica), Tatjana Zdanoka (Latvia) and Oriol Junqueras (Catalonia).

The statement also calls on the EU to ensure that the next reform of EU Cohesion Policy should uphold the principles of multilevel governance, bottom-up approach, partnership, integrated approach, result orientation, gender mainstreaming, additionality, transparency.

Plaid Cymru MEP **Jill Evans** (Wales), President of the EFA Group in the European Parliament said:

"We are currently in talks which will determine the future shape of EU funding after 2013. European funding has been invaluable in supporting jobs and companies, and in helping people find further work or learning opportunities. It's also important that we can create more green, sustainable jobs which can enhance the skills of the local work force.

"We have seen that the decentralised approach works best and many Welsh EU funded projects have been highlighted as examples of good practice. I am working with colleagues from across the EU, and across parties, to ensure that we make the best possible use of the funding."

EFA Group Vice President **Frieda Brepoels** (N-VA, Flanders) said:

"Projects that were highlighted as good examples at this conference, such as the Flemish National Park of Hoge Kempen, show that European cohesion policy is not only a policy that is primarily focussed towards specific regions, but that it remains useful for all regions in the European Union.

"Although Belgium has a system of representation through which our regional governments can participate in the Council of the EU as well as in its preparatory committees and working groups - for which other regions sometimes envy us in Flanders - the decision making procedure still needs improving when it comes to the position that is ultimately taken in the Council.

"With regard to future cohesion policy reform, we need to see simplification so that it is our regions which lead on these key negotiations at the level of the General Affairs Council. After all, it is our regions which deal primarily with these issues, it makes no sense for a federal minister to then take the lead at EU level."

Ends

Note - The ten point statement of principle is copied below.

EFA Principles for the future of Cohesion Policy

1. We reject any attempt to re-nationalise cohesion policy.
2. Cohesion policy has to remain an autonomous policy that can contribute to, but may not be absorbed by the EU2020 Strategy.
3. The next reform of EU Cohesion Policy should uphold the following principles: multilevel governance, bottom-up approach, partnership, integrated approach, result orientation, gender mainstreaming, additionality, transparency.
4. Cohesion policy should be developed and implemented in partnership. Legally binding definitions of the multilevel governance and partnership principles have to be included in the new Regulation. A 'partner regions of the Union' status has to be created.
5. The regional level, not only central government, must be included in the Development and Investment Partnership Contracts. No Partnership Contract is valid without the agreement of all partners concerned.
6. Cohesion policy has to focus on local development approaches. Funding should be targeted more effectively and concentrated on priorities that respond to relevant challenges for regional development:
 - local economies and green innovations
 - SMEs
 - access to labour market, education and training
 - social inclusion,
 - climate mitigation
 - biodiversity, green infrastructure
 - access to services of general interest
 - sustainable mobility
 - energy efficiency, renewable energies and energy supply (smart, decentralised energy infrastructure)
 - resource efficiency (in particular waste and water)
 - cultural heritage.

7. The ESF should remain closely integrated in cohesion policy. We support the Commission proposal for a common strategic framework.

8. We want to strengthen Objective 3 (cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation) and call for a review of the geographical limit of 150 km set for cross-border cooperation programmes for coastal and maritime regions.

9. Cohesion policy should continue to be based on a seven year cycle.

10. The amounts allocated to cohesion policy in the budget year 2013 should be at least maintained during the next financial programming period.

The European Free Alliance (EFA) Group in the European Parliament includes MEPs from Scotland, Wales, Catalonia, Flanders, Corsica and Latvia, who advance the cause of Europe's stateless nations, regions and disadvantaged minorities. Greens/EFA is an alliance of different parties from different Member States. Press statements on this website do not necessarily bind all parties. The Group respects the rights of minorities within it to take a separate line from the majority.

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