Council of the European Union

PRESS

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BACKGROUND[1]
Brussels, 14 November 2017

GENERAL AFFAIRS Council (Cohesion)
Wednesday 15 November in Brussels

This meeting of the General Affairs Council will be dedicated to cohesion policy. It will be chaired by Jaak Aab, Minister of Public Administration of Estonia.

The meeting will concentrate on two items:

Firstly, the Estonian presidency will report to the Council on the progress made on ongoing work to improve the "common provisions regulation", in particular on the **simplification of the European structural and investment funds** provisions which are included in the so-called "omnibus" proposal.

The omnibus proposal is meant to streamline and simplify the general and sectoral financial rules of the EU. It is a part of the mid-term review of the EU's multiannual financial framework 2014-2020.

Secondly, ministers will be invited to discuss on the **future of cohesion policy after 2020**, following the publication of the 7th Commission report on economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The outcome of the debate will feed into the process undertaken by the Commission with a view to preparations for a legislative package on cohesion policy post-2020 to be presented next year.

Without discussion, the Council will be invited to adopt conclusions on **synergies and simplification for cohesion policy post-2020**.

A press conference will be held at the end of the meeting (+/- 13.00).

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[1] This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

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Simplification of the European structural and investment funds

During a public session, the Estonian presidency will update ministers on the progress made on ongoing work on two Commission proposals to improve the "common provisions regulation", in particular on the simplification of the European structural and investment (ESI) funds provisions which are included in the so-called "omnibus" proposal.

The common provisions regulation defines the common principles, rules and standards for the implementation of the five ESI funds. These are:

- the European regional development fund (ERDF)
- the European social fund (ESF)
- the cohesion fund
- the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD)
- the European maritime and fisheries fund (EMFF).

The omnibus regulation seeks to simplify the financial rules applicable to the EU budget and to a number of sectorial legislative acts, including in the field of cohesion policy. It was presented by the Commission in September 2016 as a part of the multiannual financial framework mid-term review for the period 2014 to 2020.

In cohesion policy, the modifications proposed by the Commission would facilitate the access to and the management of EU funding, thereby contributing to the reduction of disparities between the various regions to the benefit of EU citizens.

On the Council side, technical work on the cohesion part of the omnibus legislative proposal was concluded by the Council preparatory bodies last June.

The interinstitutional negotiations between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on the legislative provisions to simplify the ESI funds started in September 2017 and are still ongoing.

Member states broadly supported the adjustments proposed by the Commission to make the life of both managing authorities and beneficiaries of funds easier.

In addition, the Commission proposed in October 2017 another modification to the common provisions regulation to introduce technical changes in order to take into account the most recent statistical data available and to update the financial figures in the regulation so they reflect the outcome of various financial decisions already taken. This proposal has already been endorsed at Coreper level.

Future of cohesion policy

The Council will discuss the future of cohesion policy post-2020, following the publication of the 7th Commission report on economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The outcome of the debate will feed into the preparatory process undertaken by the Commission with a view to a new legislative package for cohesion policy post-2020 to be presented next year.

The debate will be structured by means of a presidency document. Ministers will be invited to focus on the following topics:

- The policy areas to be supported and prioritised in the future
- Stability of planning for long-term investment vs. more flexibility to address new challenges
- The transition between programming periods
- The link between structural reforms and cohesion policy
- A single set of rules
- A substantial simplification in the delivery of the policy

The 7th Cohesion report fulfils two legal requirements:

- it shows how cohesion has evolved in EU regions over the recent past and assesses the impact on this of national policies, cohesion policy and other EU policies, and

- it reviews the measures linking the effectiveness of the ESI funds to sound economic governance, as required by the regulation on common provisions with regard to the structural funds.

Cohesion policy represents one third of the EU budget for the programming period 2014-2020.

Synergies and simplification for cohesion policy post-2020

Without debate, the Council is due to adopt conclusions on synergies and simplification for cohesion policy post-2020 (13860/17).

The conclusions will call on the Commission to take into account a number of elements in its preparation for the legislative proposals on cohesion policy for the period post-2020.

Among other things, the conclusions will also recall the commitment to continue simplifying cohesion policy for both beneficiaries and managing authorities.

On 25 April 2017, the Council adopted conclusions on "Making cohesion policy more effective, relevant and visible to our citizens".

In these conclusions, the Council emphasized the importance of a looking-forward view in cohesion policy to continue providing a stable and predictable investment and cooperation framework in order to reduce the disparities between the levels of development of European regions.