



GENERAL AFFAIRS Council (Cohesion)

Thursday 12 April 2018 in Luxembourg

This meeting of the General Affairs Council will be dedicated to cohesion policy. It will be chaired by Tomislav Donchev, Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria.

Starting at 10.00, the Council will discuss **the strategic context and priorities of cohesion policy post-2020** ahead of the Commission proposals for the new multiannual financial framework and the legislative package for cohesion policy post-2020.

The Commission will be invited to inform ministers on action taken to strengthen **the communication of cohesion policy**.

Without discussion, the Council is expected to adopt conclusions on **the delivery and implementation of cohesion policy post-2020**.

The Council will also adopt without discussion

- a decision on further **macro-financial assistance to Georgia**
- a regulation on **rail transport statistics** (recast)
- a directive on the **control of Newcastle disease**
- a regulation on the Creative Europe Programme – **EU Youth Orchestra**
- a decision on **Europass**
- a regulation on **cross-border parcel delivery services**
- a directive on the **qualification of professional drivers**

A presidency 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.

Cohesion policy post-2020

The main item on the agenda is an exchange of views on **the strategic context and priorities of cohesion policy post-2020**.

The debate will feed into the Commission's preparations for the presentation of its proposals on the legislative package for cohesion policy post-2020.

Ministers will be invited to focus on the following topics:

- Priorities for cohesion policy in the next programming period;
- The type of regions to be covered, a question related to the size of the future EU cohesion budget, as well as to the future co-financing rates and the categorisation of regions;
- Ways to make cohesion policy more effective in the next period and speed up its implementation.

The debate follows a series of discussions held on the future of cohesion policy within the Council, including an exchange of views in the GAC (Cohesion) on 15 November 2017 and discussions at technical level during the Bulgarian presidency.

Several documents published by the Commission over the past few months also provide a backdrop to the discussion among the ministers.

In particular, member states' deliberations have been spurred by the Commission's 7th report on economic, social and territorial cohesion, which raised questions about the territorial scope of cohesion policy and its investment priorities.

In December 2017, the Commission published its Strategic report on the implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds. Along with a positive assessment of the new elements introduced in the 2014-2020 programming period to improve delivery, as well as of the progress achieved across member states and policy areas with regard to the selection of projects, the Commission stressed the slow start of the programmes in this period. Various reasons for delays are outlined in the report, such as the late adoption of the legislation, the complexity of the rules and the introduction of new rules, as well as time-consuming procedures for designating the competent authorities in the Member States.

In its Communication “A new, modern Multiannual Financial Framework for a European Union that delivers efficiently on its priorities post-2020”, presented as a contribution to the Informal Leaders' meeting on 23 February 2018, the Commission put forward three possible scenarios for cohesion policy under the future financial framework: 1) support for all EU regions, including a modified ceiling for the eligibility of transition regions; 2) support for less developed regions and cohesion countries; 3) support for cohesion countries only.

The strategic debate among the ministers on the future cohesion policy will not pre-empt the negotiations on the next multiannual financial framework.

- [Seventh report on economic, social and territorial cohesion](#)
- [Strategic report 2017 on the implementation of European Structural and Investment Funds](#)
- [Commission communication on options for the next multiannual financial framework](#)
- [European structural and investment funds](#)
- [FAQ on cohesion policy](#)

Communication of cohesion policy

The Commission will be invited to inform ministers on **action taken to strengthen the communication of cohesion policy**.

This item follows up on the discussion ministers held on this issue at the GAC (Cohesion) meeting on 25 April 2017. The Commission then suggested seven actions, to be undertaken jointly by the Commission, the member states and other stakeholders, in order to improve the visibility of the cohesion policy. Member states voiced their support to strengthening the communication on the cohesion policy as part of the efforts to bring the EU closer to its citizens. The Council also adopted conclusions on making cohesion policy more effective, relevant and visible, in which it invited member states and the Commission to step up their efforts in order to raise awareness about the positive impact of cohesion policy on citizens' daily life.

The seven joint actions proposed by the Commission included:

- Launching a cohesion alliance coordinated by the Committee of the Regions to bring together cities and regions, associations and individuals willing to express their support for cohesion policy;
- Video competitions on the achievements of cohesion policy in the member states;
- A "Did you know?" campaign showing iconic projects completed with the support of cohesion policy funding;
- Photo-exhibitions picturing cities or regions before and after they received cohesion policy support;
- National versions of Regiostar awards' competitions to reward the best projects supported by cohesion policy;
- National campaigns organised on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the EU, highlighting projects funded by cohesion policy; and
- Debates on the future of cohesion policy at regional and local level.

The Commission is expected to give ministers an overview of the implementation of these actions one year on.

- [Council conclusions of on making cohesion policy more effective, relevant and visible](#)
- [Communication on cohesion policy \(Commission website\)](#)

Implementation of cohesion policy post-2020

The Council will be invited to adopt, without discussion, conclusions on **the delivery and implementation of cohesion policy post-2020**.

In its draft conclusions, the Council considers that the future implementation of cohesion policy should rely as much as possible on national rules and authorities, in line with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The Commission should focus on the objectives and strategic aspects of programming, monitoring output and results, and ensuring, together with the member states, effective management and control systems and sound financial management. It should explore ways to transfer more responsibility to member states concerning the operational aspects of implementation.

The Council also reiterates its call for simpler rules both at EU and national level. This includes a harmonisation of the rules and procedures applicable to the different funds under direct and shared management, whilst taking into account their specificities and ensuring continuity whenever appropriate. Synergies between structural funds and EU programmes in other policy areas should be increased and programming should be flexible in order to accommodate the specific needs of member states and their regions.

The draft conclusions also highlight that the Commission and the member states should cooperate closely and start early preparations in order to ensure a smooth transition to the next programming period. While the use of financial instruments should remain optional, where it is deemed appropriate, the relevant provisions should encourage member states and regions to deploy them. The Council also supports maintaining the current territorial instruments post-2020, taking the view that their use should be optional, based on territorial strategies and become considerably simpler.

- [Draft Council Conclusions on the delivery and implementation of cohesion policy post-2020](#)