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Discussion Paper

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The 2007-2013 European Cohesion Policy
A New Strategic Approach by the Commission?

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Sonja Schröder successfully completed the Master of European Studies at the University of Bonn, Center for European Integration Studies (ZEI) in 2008. During and after her studies in Political Science and Law at the University of Hamburg (2007), she gained professional experience by working in the European Parliament, the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence (Berlin) and the German-Romanian Research Institute in Bucharest. Her main research interests lie with the EU´s institutional reform, EU regional policy as well as new forms of European and global governance. She is also a keen observer of the evolutions in political systems in Central and Eastern Europe, especially Romania.

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1. Introduction

The European cohesion policy shares somehow the fate of top-politicians: the higher you get, the harder you have to fight to keep your position. Today, with allocations accounting for more than 30 per cent of the overall EU budget, the European cohesion policy certainly has reached high.

After a modest start in 1975 with the establishment of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), this policy field has constantly expanded both in terms of money and content. Beginning with 1988, successive reforms have transformed purely national efforts into a genuine European policy field with multi-annual planning documents and budgets, specific financial intruments (funds) and shared responsibilities between the supra-national, national and sub-national level. However, as the share of the EU budget grew constantly, criticism, especially from the part of the "net payers", did so, too. This was most visible during the last controversial debates about the European Financial Framework for 2007-13. British prime minister Tony Blair even risked a temporary failure of the negotiations to push through his demand for a "modernisation" of the budget.[1] In

1 Tony Blair´s speech to the European Parliament on 23 June 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4122288.stm (Accessed at: 21.07.2008).

order to bring negotiations back on track, the president of the Commission José Manuel Barroso, suggested to the Member States to use structural fund allocations to reach goals set out in the Lisbon Agenda.[2] This proposal was included in the agreement on the new European Financial Framework on December 15/16th 2005 and consequently formed the basis for the (at that time ongoing) negotiations on a realignment of EU structural funds. The inter-institutional agreement between Council, Parliament and Commission on May 17th 2006 finally laid down the new legal framework of European cohesion policy for the 2007-13 period, incorporating the idea of focusing structural funds more on economic growth, competitiveness and employment.

In the light of this development, this paper takes a closer look at the content of the new framework programme, trying to find out whether the European Commission has adopted a new strategic approach compared to the previous period. Since most of the literature devoted to this subject is restricted to a mere description of new features, this paper goes one step further trying to shed light on the reasons explaining the attempt of the Commission to keep some elements while changing others. Besides, special attention is given to the situation after eastward enlargment in 2004.

In order to address these issues, the paper starts by outlining its main research questions and methodological framework, while also presenting some background information on EU cohesion policy. In the following chapters, the four main principles *concentration*, *programming*, *additionality* and *partnership* are examined for the periods 2000-06 and 2007-13 as described below. Finally, some concluding remarks will bring the paper to a close.

2 President Barroso presents five proposals to relaunch negotiations on EU Financial Perspective for 2007-13, available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/1318&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en (Accessed at: 21.07.2008).

2. The Framework

Due to the given limits of this paper, the analysis cannot take a longitudinal approach, but has to restrict the comparison to the previous and current period. The four main principles *concentration*, *programming*, *additionality* and *partnership* will be in the centre of attention in order to account for a clear structure of the paper.

2.1. Research questions

The comparative analysis of this paper focuses on three research questions, of which the first is the leading one:

1. Does the European Commission follow a new strategic approach in the framework programme 2007-13?
2. What are the reasons explaining the attempt of the Commission to keep some elements while changing others?
3. To what extent is the eastward enlargement reflected in the new framework programme?

2.2. Methodological approach

In order to give an answer to these questions, the paper focuses on the four main principles *concentration*, *programming*, *addition* and *partnership*, which will be discussed in more detail below. Other aspects like financial management, new financial instruments or the process of evaluation are neglected on purpose in order to avoid a superficial analysis.

Comparing the current policy phase to the 2000-06 period, the same structure is applied to each of the four principles: *First*, the respective principle is described and examined in both the periods 2000-06 and 2007-13, trying to identify changes on the level of intruments and objectives. *Second*, a short summary highlightens major differences between the two periods, serving as a basis for the subsequent part.[3] *Finally*, attention will be given

3 As the principles of *additionality* and *partnership* are characterized by less complexity than the first two principles, there won´t be a separate chapter summing up the major differences.

to the reasons explaining why the Commission decided to take over some elements from the previous period while changing others.

The comparison between the 2000-06 and 2007-13 periods is based first and foremost on primary sources, especially the legal provisions laid down in Council Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999 and Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006. The attempt to explain elements of continuity and change is grounded on the annual reports of the Commission, comprising the so-called "progress reports on cohesion", "reports on economic and social cohesion" as well as thematic papers on the implementation of certain principles. Both parts of the analysis will be rounded off by secondary literature.

2.3. Definitions

Most of the basic terms used in this policy field have quite specific meaning, but are somehow used interchangeably. According to Hooghe, EU *cohesion* policy "refers to the set of activities aimed at the reduction of regional and social disparities in the European Union."[4] This definition might easily be used also to describe EU *regional* policy which is understood as a policy field "concerned with correcting economic and social disparities between European regions (…)."[5] Up to the new framework programme 2007-13, the main instruments for EU cohesion policy consisted of four main *structural funds*: the European Agricultural Fund for Guidance, the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the Financial Instrument of Fisheries Guidance. The Cohesion Fund is usually not included in this category.[6] However, in the framework of this paper the term "*structural fund"* will be used for all existing funds in order to facilitate reading. If attention is to be drawn to a special fund, this will be indicated.

Finally, the notion of "*strategic approach*" needs to be clarified in order to answer the leading question of this paper. A strategic approach is long-term

4 Hooghe, Liesbet (1996): Cohesion Policy and European Integration: Building Multi-Level Governance, Oxford University Press, p. 3.

5 Bache, Ian/George, Stephen (2006): Politics in the European Union, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, p. 458.

6 Ibid., p. 458.

oriented and usually not restricted to the level of instruments but refers to goals and objectives. In this sense, one can speak of a *new* strategic approach, if the long-term objectives of a policy are changed.

3. EU Cohesion Policy: some general remarks

The aim of this chapter is not to give a complete historical overview of the EU cohesion policy, this has been done more accurately and in-depth elsewhere.[7] It is rather the attempt to present some selective background information in order to facilitate the understanding of the subsequent analysis.

According to Art. 158 EC Treaty, the purpose of EU cohesion policy is to promote economic and social cohesion across Europe by "reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions or islands, including rural areas". Although a very general version of this objective can be traced back to the Treaty of Rome (1957), it was not until 1975 that the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was created. Similar to the parallel evolving European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) it remained however a rather national policy with little influence of the Commission. The starting shot for a genuine European cohesion policy took place in the late 1980´s in the context of southern enlargement and the single market programme. While the Single European Act (SEA) introduced the "objective of economic and social cohesion" in 1986, the landmark reform of 1988 doubled financial allocations and introduced the four core principles of cohesion policy, which are still valid today: *concentration*, *programming*, *additionality* and *partnership*. European cohesion policy was further developed under two additional reforms (1993 and 1999) aiming at improving the design, management and

7 For a review of the history see, among others: Bache/George (2006); Allen, David (2005): Cohesion and Structural Funds, in: Wallace, Helen/Wallace, William/Pollack, Mark A. (eds.): Policy-Making in the European Union, Fifth Edition, Oxford University Press, pp. 213-243; Leonardi, Robert (2005): Cohesion Policy in the European Union. The Building of Europe, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York.

implementation of the funds.[8] New challenges resulting from eastward enlargement and a general economic slowdown have finally led to the fourth major reform in 2006, upon which the current framework programme is based.[9] In the period 2007-13 cohesion policy will benefit from 35.7% of the total EU budget or 347.41 billion Euros (current prices).[10] On the one hand, this represents the highest amount in the history of EU cohesion policy. On the other hand, the number of potential recipients has also grown due to the fifth enlargement round.

4. Concentration

The first principle to be examined is concentration, which means that EU assistance is to be concentrated on the areas of greatest need as defined by a limited number of objectives.

4.1. Objectives 2000-2006

In the 2000-06 period, there were three priority objectives as well as four Community initiatives. Objective 1 continued to promote the development of regions where the GDP per capita was less than 75 per cent of the EU average, but with a stricter application of the eligibility criterion.[11] Furthermore, Objective 1 also included those regions previously eligible for Objective 6.[12] The new Objective 2 was supposed to support regions facing structural difficulties like "industrial and service sectors, declining rural

8 For more details see Sutcliffe, John B. (2000): The 1999 reform of the structural fund regulations: multi-level governance or renationalization?, in: *Journal of European Public Policy* 7:2, June 2000, pp. 290-309.

9 The current framework is based on one general regulation (Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006) as well as four specific regulations related to each fund.

10 Regional Policy – Inforegio, available at: http:// ec.europa.eu/regional_policy /policy/funds/index_en.htm. (Accessed at: 5.07.2008).

11 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999, p. 2.

12 Objective 6 was introduced after the 1995 enlargement (Austria, Finland, Sweden) for developing sparsely populated Nordic regions. It drew funds from the ERDF, ESF and EAGGF and accounted for less than 3 per cent of total funds. See Allen (2005), p. 221.

areas, urban areas in difficulty and depressed areas dependent on fishing".[13] The population of the Community covered by Objective 2 was not to exceed 18 per cent of the total EU population.[14] Objective 3 applied to those areas not covered by the first objective and focused especially on the modernization of systems of education, training and employment.[15] Finally, another change concerning the concentration of funds was the reduction in the number of Community initiatives from thirteen to four: INTERREG, URBAN, LEADER and EQUAL.

Table 1: The cohesion policy architecture.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">2006-06</th><th colspan="2">2007-13</th></tr>
<tr><th>Objectives</th><th>Financial instruments</th><th>Objectives</th><th>Financial instruments</th></tr>
<tr><td>Objective 1
Regions lagging behind in development terms</td><td>ERDF
ESF
EAGGF-Guarantee
EAGGF-Guidance
FIFG</td><td rowspan="2">Convergence</td><td rowspan="2">ERDF
ESF
Cohesion Fund</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cohesion Fund</td><td>Cohesion Fund</td></tr>
<tr><td>Objective 2
Economic and social conversion zones</td><td>ERDF
ESF</td><td rowspan="2">Regional competitiveness and employment</td><td rowspan="2">ERDF
ESF</td></tr>
<tr><td>Objective 3
Training systems and employment policies</td><td>ESF</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interreg III</td><td>ERDF</td><td rowspan="4">European territorial copperation</td><td rowspan="4">ERDF</td></tr>
<tr><td>URBAN II</td><td>ERDF</td></tr>
<tr><td>EQUAL</td><td>ESF</td></tr>
<tr><td>Leader+</td><td>EAGGF-Guarantee</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Commission of the European Communities (2007b): Cohesion Policy 2007-13. Commentaries and official texts, January 2007, p.10.

13 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999, p. 2.

14 According to Concil Regulation 1260/1999, the population should constitute about 10 % of the population in the case of industrial areas, 5 % in the case of rural areas, 2 % in the case of the urban areas and 1 % in the case of fisheries areas. Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999, p. 3.

15 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999, p. 3.

4.2. Objectives 2007-2013

Taking into account the existing structural funds as well as Community initiatives, the number of objectives and funds was further reduced in the 2007-2013 period. The new Council Regulation 1083/2006 distinguishes three main objectives, which will be elaborated in greater detail below: Convergence, Regional Competitiveness and Employment as well as European Territorial Cooperation.[16] In addition, the number of financial instruments (funds) was reduced from six to three and the principle of "monofunding" introduced, meaning that one programme can only be financed by a single fund.

Convergence objective

According to the new Council Regulation (EC) No.1083/2006, the Convergence objective aims at "speeding up the convergence of the least developed Member States and regions by improving conditions for growth and employment (…)".[17] The main emphasis is put on the development of innovation and the knowledge society, the investment in human capital, the adaptability to economic and social change as well as the quality of the environment and administrative efficiency.[18] For the first time, the old Member States (EU15) have to invest 60 per cent of their allocations granted under the Convergence objective to achieve goals set out in the Lisbon Agenda. While this so-called "earmarking" is compulsory for the EU15, it is only voluntary for the new Member States.

The Convergence objective is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund. Three types of areas are eligible under the Convergence objective: convergence regions, phasing-out regions and states eligible for Cohesion Funds.

16 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down the general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999.

17 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, p. 37.

18 Commission of the European Communities (2007b): Cohesion Policy 2007-13. Commentaries and official texts, January 2007, p. 13.

Convergence regions are comparable with the former Objective 1 regions under Council Regulation 1260/1999. These are NUTS 2 regions whose per capita gross domestic product (GDP) is less than 75 per cent of the Community average.[19] Coverage of the convergence regions is heavily concentrated in the new EU member states as well as the southern periphery.[20] In comparison, less than half of the former least developed regions of the EU15 will be funded under this objective in the new period 2007-13.[21]

Because of the so-called "statistical effect" of enlargement some regions are not eligible for the Convergence objective anymore. Therefore, regions with a GDP per head between 75 per cent of the EU25 average and 75 per cent of the EU15 average have a "phasing-out" status und will get transitional support up to 2013.

In the 2007-13 period the Cohesion Fund will no longer function independently but be included in the Convergence objective (see Table 1). Member States where the gross national income (GNI) per capita is below 90 per cent of the Community average are eligible for the Cohesion Fund. Member States who would have been eligible for the Cohesion Fund if the threshold had remained 90 per cent of the EU15, get transitional support similar to the "phasing-out" regions. In this way, a financial instrument whose eligibility depends on *national* performance, is used to attain the goal of fighting the socio-economic disparaties between *regions.*[22]

19 In order to classify territorial units, the European Union adopted the definition developed by Eurostat, which divides the European territory into five levels of geographic aggregations. The regional level was definied as NUTS II. See Leonardi (2005), p. 7.

20 Bachtler, John/Wishlade, Fiona/Mendez, Carlos (2007): New Budget, New Regulations, New Strategies: The 2006 Reform of EU Cohesion Policy, European Policy Research Paper, Number 63, European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde, p. 14.

21 Becker, Peter/Zaun, Natascha (2007): Die neue strategische Planung der europäischen Kohäsionspolitik in Theorie und Praxis, Diskussionspapier der FG 1, 2007/22, Dezember 2007, SWP Berlin, p. 9.

22 Ibid., p. 10.

Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective

According to Council Regulation No. 1083/2006 the Regional Competitiveness and Employment (RCE) objective aims at "strenghening regions′ competitiveness and attractiveness as well as employment by anticipating economic and social changes" and is financed by the ERDF and ESF.[23] The previous Objectives 2 and 3 are therefore concentrated in the RCE objective, which includes *all* regions which are *not* eligible for the Convergence objective.[24] Generally, the RCE comprises two different strands: Phasing-in regions and RCE regions. Phasing-in regions are former Objective 1 regions which have outgrown that status for the period 2007-13.[25] RCE regions cover all regions that do not fall under the Covergence, Phasing-out or Phasing-in objectives. Consequently, the RCE objective is heavily concentrated in the old Member States, most notably in Germany, France and the UK.[26]

Regarding the merging of former Objectives 2 and 3 into the new Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective, two important observations can be made: First, while the former Objective 2 was spatially restricted to areas facing structural change, the new regional competitiveness and employment objective is rather *thematic* than *geographical* in approach.[27] Therefore the latter may be considered comparable rather to former Objective 3 since it was also restricted to areas not eligible for Objective 1 (respective convergence) regions. Second, there is no area designation at EU level for the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective, since it is now the responsibility of the Member States to determine the NUTS I and II regions.[28] Finally, the so-called "earmarking" is also visible in the

23 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, p. 37.
24 Becker/Zaun (2007), p. 10.
25 In 2007, there were 13 such regions in the EU25, with a total population of over 19 million people or 4.2 per cent of the EU25 population. See Bachtler/Wishlade/Méndez (2007), p. 17.
26 Ibid., p. 18.
27 Ibid., p. 20.
28 Bachtler, John/Mendez, Carlos (2007): Who Governs EU Cohesion Policy? Deconstructing the Reforms of the Structural Funds, Journal of Common Market Studies 2007, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 535-564, p. 544.

Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective with 75 per cent of the available funds dedicated to the Lisbon goals.

European Territorial Cooperation objective

The European Territorial Cooperation objective aims at strenghening cross-border cooperation, transnational cooperation and inter-territorial cooperation. The previous Community initiatives INTERREG III, URBAN, EQUAL and LEADER are concentrated in this new objective, while the previous financial instruments are substituted by one single fund, the ERDF (see Table 1).

For cross-border cooperation, eligible areas are NUTS level 3 regions along all internal and some external land borders as well as maritime borders separated by a maximum of 150 km.[29] For transnational cooperation all regions are theoretically eligible, but the Commission has, in consultation with the Member States, identified 13 specific cooperation zones.[30] Inter-territorial cooperation is finally possible between all European Union regions. Compared to the previous period, the main difference consists of upgrading Community initiatives and shifting priorities. The status of the former Community initatives INTERREG III, EQUAL, LEADER and URBAN was upgraded in the new period 2007-13, since they were transferred into a separate category, the European Territorial Cooperation objective. Furthermore, thematic emphasis shifted from classical infrastructure projects to economic subjects such as research and development, information society etc.

4.3. Main differences

To sum up, in the period 2007-13 the principle of concentration is characterized by the following:

1. Priority of cohesion policy still on lagging regions
2. No real concentration of funds
3. Strong focus on Lisbon strategy

29 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, p. 38.
30 Commission (2007b), p. 20.

The most visible element of continuity is the ongoing priority on lagging regions with a per capita GDP less than 75 per cent under the new Convergence objective. Eligibility under this objective is still decided by EU-wide criteria. However, it should be noticed that no real concentration of funds has been attained. Even if 81,54 per cent of the cohesion policy budget for 2007-13 is spent on this first objective, several additional provisions impede a real concentration on the most disadvantaged regions.[31] First of all, the so-called "phasing-out" regions and all areas eligible for the Cohesion Fund account together for around 30 per cent of the overall resources for the Convergence objective.[32] Second, the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective includes *all* regions not eligible for the Convergence objective, which therefore includes mainly old Member States. Finally, more regions than before are eligible under the new European Territorial Cooperation objective, also weakening the concentration of resources.[33] Finally, it is noteworthy, that under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective, it is now the Member States who decide eligibility of their regions.

The most visible change compared to the previous period is certainly the strong focus on priorities set out in the Lisbon Agenda. In the Convergence objective the old Member States (EU15) have to spend around 60 per cent of their funds to achieve goals mentioned in the Lisbon Agenda.[34] This so-called "earmarking" is also visible in the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective, where even 75 per cent of the available funds have be used for programmes related to the Lisbon Agenda.[35]

31 The numbers correspond to the indications made in Concil Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006. The shares of the total amount allocated to cohesion policy are the following: Convergence objective receives 81.54 %, the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective 15.95 % and the European Territorial objective 2.52 % of the overall cohesion budget.

32 According to Concil Regulation No. 1083/2006, 4,99% are spent for phasing-out regions, 23,22 % for the regions eligible under the Cohesion fund and 1,29% for transitional support under the Cohesion fund.

33 Becker/Zaun (2007), p. 11.

34 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, p. 38.

35 Becker/Zaun (2007), p. 10.

4.4. Explaining elements of continuity and change

In the run-up to a new legal framework for the European cohesion policy 2007-13 and especially against the background of eastward enlargement, the topic of concentration was one of the most frequent discussed issues (apart from the notorious struggle about the EU budget). From the very beginning the Commission acknowledged that “cohesion policy should continue to target the least developed regions”.[36] In every “progress report on economic and social cohesion” since 2001, a multitude of indicators was presented in order to illustrate the approaching economic and social difficulties linked to eastward enlargement. While numbers differed slightly from year to year, the general trend was clear: First, enlargement would bring about a widening of regional and territorial disparities without precedent, as the average level of GDP per head would fall between 13 and 18 per cent.[37] Second, a geographical shift in the pattern of disparities was indicated, meaning that in a EU25 more people would live in regions with a per capita GDP below 75 per cent.[38] Third, enlargement would give rise to a less advantageous employment situation, so that more jobs need to be created to account for differences in the rate of unemployment.[39]

While pointing out to the challenges of enlargement, the Commission indirectly used a second approach to justify the continuing priority on lagging regions: the confirmation of real convergence between EU Member States. According to its first progress report in 2002, economic disparities between

36 Commission of the European Communities (2002): Communication from the Commission. First progress report on economic and social cohesion, Brussels, 30.1.2002, COM (2002) 46 final, p. 4.

37 According to 1999 data, passing from 15 to 27 Member States, average GDP would fall by 18%, while passing from 15 to 25 Member States, GDP per head would only fall by 13%. Commission (2002), p. 2.

38 The indicated numbers are the following: in a EU25, 116 million people, representing around 25% of the total population, will live in regions with a per capita GDP below 75% as against 68 million people, or 18% of the total population, in the EU15. Commission of the European Communities (2003): Communication from the Commission. Second progress report on economic and social cohesion, Brussels, 30.1.2003, COM (2003) 34 final, p. 2.

39 According to the Communication of the Commission (2002), three million jobs need to be created if the average level of employment in the new Member States is to be aligned with the situation in the old Member States. Commission (2002), p. 2.

the Member States, especially in the cohesion countries, have diminished. Furthermore, a reduction in regional disparities was identified, even if to a lesser extent than at the national level.[40]

Finally, the choice of the indicator for eligibility of lagging regions remained also relatively undisputed. As stated by the Commission there was no "viable alternative to that of GDP per head".[41] Furthermore, the previous eligibility criteria based on NUTS II and GDP per head had the "merit of being simple and transparent".[42] Consequently, the current Convergence regions were based on criteria comparable to that of the previous Objective 1 regions, namely a GDP per capita below 75 per cent.

Despite the agreed priority on lagging regions, there was nevertheless a broad agreement on the need to include regions whose process of economic convergence was not (yet) completed, but were not eligible for the Convergence objective due to "statistical effects".[43] In addition, the Commission mentioned at an early stage all other possible "special cases" which had to be taken into account even if not among the most needy regions. This principle of giving everyone an equal share partly undermines the real concentration of funds, but has to be understood as a common pattern under the primacy of unanimity.[44]

Regarding the transfer of responsibility for area designation to the Member States under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective, Bachtler and Mendez offer a plausible explanation.[45] In the run-up to the negotiations of the new budget, the existence of a future Objective 2 was threatened by a group of "net payers", namely Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, who wanted to restrict EU cohesion policy to the poorest regions.[46] The Commission responded to this threat by proposing to

40 Commission (2002), p. 8.
41 Commission (2002), p. 4.
42 Commission (2003), p. 3.
43 Commission (2003), p. 3.
44 See Petzold, Wolfgang (2006): Die Reform der EU-Strukturpolitik 2007-2013 zwischen Verteilungslogik und Europäisierung, in: Jahrbuch des Föderalismus 2006, pp. 552-575, p. 558.
45 The following ideas are completely based on Bachtler and Mendez (2007), p. 545.
46 Bachtler/Mendez (2007), p. 545.

transform Objectives 2 and 3 into a Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective, linking it to the goals of the Lisbon/Gothenburg agendas. According to the authors, this transfer of responsibility for area designation has to be seen "as a trade-off (…) to secure the continuation of structural funds outside the least-developed countries, thus retaining Commission influence on cohesion policy across the EU".[47]

Finally, the strong focus on the priorities set out in the Lisbon Agenda has to be adressed. In order to explain this step, the Commission brought forward two main reasons: the weak performance of the European economy and the suitability of cohesion policy to implement the Lisbon goals. It appears that already in 2001 the Commission prepared the ground for such a reform by stating the following: "While enlargement is major part of the explanation for the need for change, it is not the only one in view of the far reaching economic and social and territorial changes affecting the present EU15".[48] The challenges implied in this statement were, among others, a slowdown in economic growth, low productivity, high unemployment, low R&D expenditure etc.[49]

The link to the Lisbon Agenda was established in two different ways. First, the Commission made a reference to an evaluation stressing the overlapping objectives of both the EU cohesion policy and the Lisbon strategy.[50] Second, the delivery system of the Structural Funds was seen as very suitable to implement the Lisbon goals and in this way "enhancing the ownership of the Lisbon strategy by the regions and of managing complex development tasks under different conditions on the ground".[51]

Allowing some room for interpretation, a third reason can finally be identified. With regard to an enlarged union with 27 Member states, there was a

47 Bachtler/Mendez (2007), p. 545.

48 Commission of the European Communities (2001): Second report on economic and social cohesion, adopted by the Commission on 31 January 2001, no pages indicated.

49 See for instance: Commission (2003).

50 Commission of the European Communities (2005a): Communication from the Commission. Third progress report on cohesion: Towards a new partnership for growth, jobs and cohesion, Brussels, xxxx, COM (2005), p. 7.

high pressure to trim the policy and the budget of the structural funds. By linking cohesion policy to the Lisbon strategy, the Commission was able to justify the existence of the policy field and to secure its own sphere of influence in the long-run.[52]

5. Programming

Programming is the thematic allocation of EU structural funds. Like the principle of concentration this approach was introduced by the 1988 reforms. It basically included a shift from individual projects under Member States schemes to multi-annual programmes, designed in line with Community objectives and approved by the Commission.[53]

5.1. 2000-2006: CSFs, OPs and SPDs

During the 2000-06 period the implementation of structural fund assistance continued to take place similar to the previous framework programme, but was streamlined and simplified in some respect. First, a development plan had to be submitted by the Member States, drawn up in partnership with its regional authorities. On the basis of this development plan a so-called Community Support Framework (CSF) was established and adopted by the Commission. Operational Programmes (OPs) were then suggested by Member States. Finally, Single Programming Documents (SPDs) were adopted by the Commission.

51 Commission (2005a), p. 7.
52 See also Petzold (2006), p. 570.
53 Bachtler/ Méndez (2007), p. 547.

Table 2: Strategic approach and programming

2000-06	2007-13
1. Development Plan 2. Community support framework (CSFs) 3. Operational programmes (OPs) 4. Single Programming Document (SPDs) 5. Programming Complement	1. Community Strategic Guidelines 2. National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) 3. Operational Programmes (OPs)

Source: European Commission (2007b), p. 29.

5.2. 2007-2013: A single strategic version?

Under the new Council Regulation 1083/2006 the principle of programming is divided into two different parts, namely a “strategic approach to cohesion” (Title II) and “programming” (Title III).[54] Title II introduces a new strategic layer, while Title III refers to the so-called “Operational Programmes”.

The new strategic approach to cohesion represents an important change compared to the previous period. It involves the adoption of Community Strategic Guidelines (CSGs) at the EU level to support the design of National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRFs), which in turn form the basis of the above mentioned Operational Programmes (OPs).

Community Strategic Guidelines are guidelines suggested by the Commission and adopted by the Council, in accordance with the Parliament´s opinion. Their main purpose is to define “an indicative framework for the intervention of the Funds, taking account of other relevant Community policies”.[55] The current guidelines presented by the Commission on 5th July 2006 include three main priorities: (1) Making Europe and its regions more

54 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006.
55 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, p. 42.

attractive places to invest and work, (2) improving knowledge and innovation for growth and (3) more and better jobs.[56]

The Member States have then to prepare National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRFs), which have to be in line with the Community Strategic Guidelines. According to the Commission, the NSRFs do not represent classical management instruments, as were the Community Support Frameworks (CSFs) in the period 2000-06, but define policy priorities according to the CSGs while suggesting key elements of implementation.[57] The NSRFs have to be applied to the Convergence and Regional Competitiveness and Employment objectives, while their applicability to the European Teritorial Cooperation objective is voluntary. The main elements of the NSRFs are an outline of the strategy and its justification based on development problems and trends, a list of the OPs, an indicative annual allocation from each fund as well as arrangements for coordination with other EU funding. It is worth emphasizing that the NSRFs shall also include a description concerning their contribution to the Lisbon strategy priorities.[58]

Finally, a so-called “strategic follow-up” has been introduced. Within the framework of the Lisbon strategy, EU Member States have to adopt National Reform Programmes (NRPs). For the first time, these annual reports must include also a section explaing the contribution of the Operational Programmes to the implementation of the NRP. Furthermore, there is a “strategic reporting” by the Commission including summaries of the Member States´ annual reports as well as a Cohesion report.

The Member States´ Operational Programmes (OPs), which focus on the *regional* level, are built around the priorities set out in the National Strategic Reference Frameworks. They are only concerned with one of the three objectives and benefit only from the funding of a single fund (“monofund-

56 Commission of the European Communities (2005c): Communication from the Commission. Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs: Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007-2013, Brussels, 5.7.2005, COM (2005) 299 final. See also Becker/Zaun (2007), p. 12 ff.

57 European Commission (2007b), p. 28.

58 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, p. 43.

ing").[59] The main elements which the OPs must consists of are: an analysis of the eligible area, a justification of priorities based on the CSG, NSRF and an ex-ante evaluation, the specific objectives of the key priorities, funding plans, the implementation of the programmes as well as an indicative list of large projects.[60] The Commission evaluates each programme in order to determine whether it complies with the objectives and priorities set out in the Community Strategic Guidelines and the National Strategic Reference Frameworks. [61]

5.3. Main differences

To sum up, the main changes concerning the principle of programming are as follows:

1. Reduction in the number of instruments and simplification of management
2. A hierarchical structure with strong focus on Lisbon Agenda
3. A shift in the Commission´s influence from the programme level to the strategic policy level

In comparison to the previous period the number of instruments has been reduced. Community support frameworks (CSFs), single programming documents (SPDs) and programming complements do not exist anymore. Even if priorities existed in the period 2000-06, there will be only one single document adopted by the Council, the Community Strategic Guidelines, defining the programming priorities. Furthermore, with the National Strategic Reference Frameworks the Member States introduce a single strategy for their national level. Regarding the interplay of the new instruments introduced, a clear vertical structure can be identified. At the top the Com-

59 There are nevertheless exceptions to this rule: the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund can participate together for infrastructure and environmental programmes. Furthermore, according to Art. 32.2 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, it is possible to follow more than one objective under certain circumstances. See Commission of the European Communities (2007b): Cohesion Policy 2007-13. Commentaries and official texts, January 2007, p. 32.

60 Ibid.

61 For a detailed description see Bachtler/Wishlade/Méndez (2007), p. 54.

munity Strategic Guidelines define the indicative framework for the EU27 at the supra-national level. These are followed by National Strategic Reference Frameworks at the national level, which in turn form the basis of the Operational Programmes at the regional level.[62] The very new feature consists of the fact that the CSGs are now adopted by the Council with qualified majority and not only by the Commission as it was the case in the 2000-06 period.[63] In addition, there is a clear link between the new cohesion policy instruments and the strategic instruments in the framework of the Lisbon Agenda. The CSGs as well as the NSRFs refer to the respective documents of the Lisbon strategy, namely the "Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs" for the European level and the "National Reform Programmes" of the EU Member States.[64] The strong focus on the Lisbon goals becomes also visible when comparing the concrete strategic guidelines of the Commission. While the guidelines for the 2000-06 period mention the EU´s cohesion policy first aim to "help to reduce economic and social disparities", the guidelines for 2007-13 start with a citation of the European Council in March 2005: "Europe must renew the basis of its competitiveness, increase its growth potential and its productivity and strenghen social cohesion, placing the main emphasis on knowledge, innovation and the optimisation of human capital".[65]

Finally, there is a shift in the Commission´s influence from the programme level to the strategic policy level as will be explained in more detail below.

5.4. Explaining elements of continuity and change

The Commission acknowledged from the very beginning the high demand for a simplificiation of the management and implementation system of

62 Becker/Zaun (2007), p. 12.

63 Similar guidelines existed already in the previous period 2000-06, but these were only adopted by the Commission after consultation with the Member States. Petzold (2006), p. 570.

64 Commission of the European Communities (2005d): Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008), Brussels, 12.4.2005, COM (2005), 141 final, p. 12.

65 Commission (2005c), p. 4 and Commission of the European Communities (1999): The structural funds and their coordination with the cohesion fund. Guidelines for programmes in the period 2000-06, 1.7.1999, p. 1.

funds by the Member States.[66] Especially the level of details required by the Commission and additional information in the so-called “programme complements” were mentioned as matters of concern.[67] Member States also demanded a greater decentralisation of responsibilities while broad strategic aspects should still be agreed with the Commission.[68] As a response the Commission reduced the number of instruments as outlined in the previous chapter and relinquished the requirement of certain documents like the “programme complements”.[69] The management and delivery of the funds was increasingly decentralised to the Member States.[70] Besides, the “principle of proportionality” was introduced, requiring the financial and administrative resources in the implementation of funds to be proportional to the “total amount of expenditure allocated to an operational programme”.[71] In this way, simplified administrative procedures are allowed in the case of smaller programmes.[72]

The reasons for the strong link between programming and the Lisbon Agenda may partly resemble with those mentioned in chapter 4.4. Especially after the 2004 enlargement and the revitalization of the Lisbon Agenda in 2005, the issue of growth and jobs became increasingly relevant to the reform of the cohesion policy. By introducing Community Strategic Guidelines, the Commission (and the Council!) ensures that their content is targeted on the Lisbon goals. The National Strategic Frameworks on the other hand define priorities in line with the Lisbon Agenda while also “in-

66 For instance in the first progress report on cohesion it is stated that „ one of the goals set out in Agenda 2000 was to simplify the system for implementing the Structural Funds. There appears to have been insufficient practical progress in this direction.” Commission (2002), p. 23.
67 Commission (2002), p. 23.
68 Commission (2003), p. 6.
69 Petzold (2006), p. 571.
70 Ferry, Martin/Gross, Frederike/Bachtler, John/McMaster, Irene (2007): Turning Strategies into Projects: The Implication of 2007-13 Structural Funds Programmes, IQ-Net Thematic Paper No. 20(2), European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde, p. 12.
71 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, p. 38.
72 The principle applies to the choice of indicators, evaluation procedures, general principles of management and control systems as well as reporting requirements. Bachtler/Wishlade/Méndez (2007), p. 52.

creasing the consistency with the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines and the European Employment Strategy”.[73] The underlying understanding of the new programming period is probably best described by the Commission itself: “ The key test for cohesion policy programmes in (the) future will be their contribution to growth and jobs in line with the renewed Lisbon Agenda”.[74]

Finally, a shift in the Commission´s influence from the programme level to the strategic policy level was identified. This can be explained as follows: According to an analysis by Bachtler and Wishlade, the complexity of structural funds programme management was a cause of tensions between the Commission and some EU Member States.[75] Additionally, several national governments drafted proposals for radical reform of the EU cohesion policy for the 2007-13 period.[76] As a response to this development, the Commission tried to shift its influence from the programming level to the strategic policy level. In return for decentralisation and a simplification of operational programme management, the Commission introduced a new strategic layer of policy planning.[77] In this way, the Member States gain more influence in the field of management and implementation, while the Commission can ensure more coherence between cohesion policy and the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas and make Member States more politically acountable for the implementation of the funds.[78] This last aspect is most visible in the new “strategic follow-up”. For the first time, all Member

73 Commission (2005a), p. 11.
74 Commission of the European Communities (2006a): Communication from the Commission. The Growth and Jobs Strategy and the Reform of European cohesion policy. Fourth progress report on cohesion, Brussels, 12.6.2006, COM (2006) 281 final, p. 7.
75 Bachtler, John/Wishlade, Fiona (2005): From Building Blocks to Negotiating Boxes: The Reform of EU Cohesion Policy, November 2005, European Policy Research Paper Number 57, European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde.
76 Bachtler/ Méndez (2007), p. 554.
77 As examples for the simplification of operational programme management, Bachtler and Méndez mention: audit, financial control, monitoring and evaluation. Bachtler/ Méndez (2007), p. 554.
78 Bachtler/ Méndez (2007), p. 555.

States have to report on a regular basis on the progress of their cohesion policy in meeting Community strategic objectives.

6. Additionality

The principle of additionality requires Member States to spend allocations from the Structural Funds in *addition* to their own domestic expenditure, so that structural policies represent an *addition* rather than a *substitute* for national policies.

6.1. The principle of Additionality: 2000-06

In this respect, the Council Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999 states that “appropriations of the Funds may not replace public or other equivalent structural expenditure by the Member State”.[79] Additionality is to be verified by setting baseline figures for public or equivalent structural expenditure in a Member States´ Objective 1 regions or, in the case of Objective 2 and 3, the level of public expenditure that concerns the respective objectives at the national level.[80] However, a certain flexibility is allowed in setting these figures so that Member States can take account of “certain specific economic situations, namely privatisations, an exceptional level of public structural effort or equivalent effort on the part of the Member State during the previous programming period and national economic trends”.[81] Therefore, the major problem exists in the verification of additionality and the missing leverage of the Commission in case of non-compliance by the Member States.[82]

6.2. The principle of Additionality: 2007-13

Concerning the general meaning of additionality, the wording of the new Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006 is almost the same as in the previous regulation: “Contributions from the Structural Funds shall not replace

79 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999, p. 14.
80 Sutcliffe (2000), p. 304.
81 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999, p. 14.
82 Sutcliffe (2000), p. 304.

public or equivalent structural expenditure by a Member State”.[83] Even if the new regulation continues to state that structural fund support should be genuinely additional, there are nevertheless some differences. In the new period 2007-13 the Commission and the Member States shall verify the level of public expenditure *only* for those regions covered by the Convergence objective. The Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective as well as the European Territorial objective are not mentioned in this respect. Furthermore, a new financial corrective mechanism exists in the case that the principle of additionality is not respected.[84]

6.3. Explaining elements of continuity and change

In its “Third Report on Economic and Social Cohesion” the Commission states that the principle of additionality has “demonstrably been respected in Objective 1 regions, where, despite the complexities involved, it is possible to identify the amount of resources being invested”.[85] In contrast, verifying the additionality principle in Objectives 2 and 3 regions has proved more difficult, leading to an erosion of “its value as a core principle for all Objectives of the Funds”.[86] It can therefore be concluded, that because of the demonstrated difficulties the Commission decided to restrict the verification of the additionality principle to the Convergence objective (former Objective 1) while offering Member States greater responsibility for ensuring that additionality is respected. The latter is also documented in a Commission Working Document, which explicitely states that the principle of additonality will be verified at the national level.[87]

83 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, p. 40.

84 According to Working Document No.3 (December 2006), the Commission may proceed to a financial correction in the case that even after submitting all required information a Member is still unable to prove that the additionality principle has been respected. The exact procedure is laid down in Art. 99 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006. See European Commission, Working Document No. 3, December 2006.

85 Commission of the European Communities (2004): A new partnership for cohesion. Covergence, competitiveness, cooperation. Third report on economic and social cohesion. COM (2004) 107 of 18 February 2004, p. 164.

86 Commission (2004), p. 165.

87 Commission (2006b).

7. Partnership

Officially, the principle of partnership was introduced by the 1988 reforms to enhance efficiency of regional policy by involving sub-national actors in the planning, decision-making and implementation of structural funds.[88] Unofficially, the Commission´s intent was also to generate a particular governance structure in which the regions should play a significant role.[89] While this was partially met with resistance by central governments, it is still difficult to say whether the principle of partnership has indeed enhanced regional and local governmental involvement in the policy process.[90] While this has been the subject of intensive study elsewhere, the following section focuses on possible changes of the partnership principle in the new period 2007-13, especially against the background of eastward enlargement.

7.1. The principle of Partnership: 2000-06

Council Regulation 1260/1999 refers to the principle of partnership by stating that "Community actions (…) shall be drawn up in close consultation, hereinafter referred to as the "partnership", between the Commission and the Member State, together with the authorities and bodies designated by the Member State (…)".[91] These authorities could comprise a) regional and local authorities as well as other public authorities, b) the economic and social partners and c) any other relevant competent bodies within the given framework.[92] Regarding the various stages of programme management, the

88 See also Bache, Ian (2004): Multi-level Governance and European Union Regional Policy, p. 166, in: Bache, Ian/Flinders, Matthew (2004): Multi-level Governance, Oxford University Press, pp. 165-179.

89 This aspect is also emphasized by Allen: "The intent was clear: it was not just to improve the efficiency of regional policy, but to give it features specifically designed to penetrate national policy processes. In this sense one core goal was a policy made for the regions and by the regions; in other words, a policy that encouraged not just regionalization, but regionalism." Allen (2005), p. 231.

90 The first comprehensive study on the implications of the partnership principle for member states was published by Hooghe (1996). Other examples are given in Allen (2005), p. 231.

91 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999, p. 11.

92 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999, p. 11.

partnership was to cover the preparation, financing, monitoring and evaluation of assistance.

7.2. The principle of Partnership: 2007-13

The new Council Regulation No.1083/2006 takes over the main ideas, but modifies certain aspects. First, it changes the previous definition of partnership from "close consultation" into "close cooperation".[93] Second, it extends the number of possible actors by broadening the list of partners. According to the new regulation, a partnership is possible with authorities and bodies such as: a) the competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities, b) the economic and social partners and c) any other appropriate body representing civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women.[94] Regarding the different states of programming, the principle of partnership still covers preparation, monitoring and evaluation (of operational programmes), but changes "financing" into "implementation" and makes a new reference to involving "particularly the regions".[95]

7.3. Explaining elements of continuity and change

The first impression when comparing the legal provisions of the principle of partnership is that not much has been changed. Partnership is widely regarded as successful and extended to even more potential "partners". Several reports prepared by the Commission confirm this view, outlining in more detail the experience made in the previous period. The "Third Report on Economic and Social Cohesion" for instance emphasizes that partnership remains "a core principle for management, monitoring and evaluation of the Funds"[96] and "contributes to the success of programmes by giving them greater legitimacy, by making it easier to coordinate them and by increasing their effectiveness as well as transparency".[97] The value-added of

93 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, p. 39.
94 See also Bachtler/Wishlade/Méndez (2007), p. 52.
95 Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, p. 39.
96 Commission (2004), p. 163.
97 Commission (2004), p. 164.

partnership is localized in four main areas: First, a wide range of expertise is available through the involvement of a broad range of views. Second, the decision-making process is legitimized through the participation of regional and local authorities as well as civil society. Third, the involvement of regional and local partners contributes to the development of institutional capacity. Last but not least, the planning and implementation process has been improved through partnership.[98] However, it has been acknowledged that the success of the principle varies from Member State to Member State and that there is still room for improvement regarding transparency and efficiency.[99]

A mere comparison of the legal provisions would consequently lead to the conclusion that the partnership principle has been further strenghened in the new period 2007-13. However, the opposite might be the case if taking into account two additional aspects. First, the “partners” are still chosen by the Member States´ national governments. It is therefore *not* compulsory for national governments to include potential partners listed in the new regulation. Second, it is helpful to put the partnership principle in its broader context. Bachtler and Mendez do this best by stating that “it is important to bear in mind that the partnership principle is not independent of programming, but is a cross-cutting principle which applies to the different stages of the programming process (e.g. design, management and implementation and monitoring and evaluation of structural funds programmes)”.[100] As shown in chapter 5.4 (programming), there is a shift in the Commission´s influence from the programme level to the strategic policy level, leaving Member States with greater powers in the fields of management and implementation of the funds. Consequently, as the Commission has less influence in this field, this restricts its direct cooperation with regional and local actors, too.

98 European Commission, Discussion paper of GD Regio (2005), p. 4/5.

99 One point of criticism refers to the fact that the selection of partners is not always transparent to the public and that the involvement of regional or local partners is sometimes regarded rather a burden than a gain. European Commission, Discussion paper of GD Regio (2005), p. 12.

100 Bachtler/Mendez (2207), p. 540.

This might be especially important in relation to the new Member States, which traditionally have rather centralised systems. On several occasions the Commission pointed out to the difficulties related to weak administrative structures and the missing tradition of decentralised policies in order to justify certain procedures applied to the new Member States e.g. that in the management of funds the central authorities should remain responsible to the Commission.[101] Besides, on the eve of enlargement, the Commission suggested a transitional phase in order to "balance the aim of the decentralisation of management with the need to ensure the successful absorption of Community funds".[102] Therefore, it might be possible that despite the formal extension to a greater number of actors, the partnership principle might be weakened in the long-run.

8. Conclusions

After analysing the current design of the four core principles *concentration*, *programming*, *additionality* and *partnership* in comparison to the previous period, the following can be concluded:

Against the background of eastward enlargement, the Commission has tried to keep the priority on lagging regions with a per capita GDP less than 75 per cent. Nevertheless, in order to make new Member States benefit under this objective, the Commission had to respect several additional provisions related to the old Member States (phasing-in regions, phasing-out regions etc.). This partly undermined a real concentration of the funds. On the other hand, several changes occurred to major policy instruments aiming at simplifying and streamlining EU cohesion policy. Under the principle of concentration, a special mention should be made to the reduction in the number of objectives and funds as well as the introduction of the principle of "monofunding". As the principle of programming is concerned, the elimination of certain programming documents (e.g. programme complements), the streamlining of the implementation process as well as the introduction

101 Commission (2002), p. 28.
102 Commission (2002), p. 17.

of the “proportionality principle” are among the most important steps taken.

Given the leading question of this paper, these changes might certainly be worth describing, but do not represent a major shift at the strategic level. However, there are *two features* which justify to speak of a new *strategic* approach by the Commission:

1. A strong link to the Lisbon Agenda
2. A shift of the Commission´s influence from the programming level to the strategic policy level

(1) The strong link to the Lisbon Agenda is manifested in two different ways. First, there is a clear change at the *linguistic* level, most visible in the official documents of the Commission as described in chapter 5.4. While cohesion is still mentioned as a primary goal, all recent documents focus in the first place on notions like growth, competitiveness or innovation.

Second, cohesion policy and Lisbon Agenda are connected at a *procedural* level including formal requirements that Member States have to fulfill. Under the principle of concentration, these relate to the process of “earmarking” which demands the old Member States (EU15) to spend a fixed share of the available funds to achieve goals mentioned in the Lisbon Agenda. Under the principle of programming, the link is most visible in the hierarchical structure of the new programming instruments where Community Strategic Guidelines define an indicative framework. This has to be respected both on the national and regional level. In order to demonstrate compliance in this field, Member States have to report on a regular basis on the progress of their cohesion policy in meeting Community strategic goals.

The reasons for introducing this clear link to the Lisbon Agenda can be divided into two different categories: *formal* (practical) and *informal* (strategic) reasons. The formal reasons given by the Commission were related to the weak performance of the European economy, which could only be enhanced through a strong focus on innovation, the knowledge society and investment in R&D etc. As European cohesion policy is considered to be most suitable to implement these policy goals, a connection between both “fields” seemed favourable. However, the Commission was guided also by strategic reasons. Since there was a high pressure to cut back cohesion policy both in terms of money and content, a link to the Lisbon goals did not only legitimize the existence of European cohesion policy (beyond lagging regions), but also guaranteed the Commission to further exert its powers in the long-run.

(2) The second major feature is a shift of the Commission´s influence from the programming level to the strategic policy level. This was most apparent not only in the introduction of Community Strategic Guidelines but also in the greater decentralisation of responsibilities and simplification of operational programmes. Allowing Member States more powers in the implementation and management of the funds has furthermore affected the principle of partnership. Since the Commission has less influence in this field, its direct cooperation with regional and local actors might be restricted, too.

Possible reasons for this second major feature can again be subdivided. Officially, the complex nature of the programming process was acknowledged as a severe obstacle. Therefore, decentralisation represented an appropriate means to enhance efficiency. However, a more interesting explanation can be found when taking into acccount the growing tensions between the Commission and the Member States in the run-up to the negotiations on a new cohesion framework. In return for decentralisation and a simplification of operational programmes as demanded by the Member States, the Commission can now focus on strategic policy goals. Hereby the Commission ensures a coherent approach linked to the Lisbon Agenda, while making Member States more politically accountable for the implementation of the funds.

Given the above analysis the main conclusion of this paper is that the Commission has adopted a new strategic approach in the framework programme 2007-13. By partially linking allocation, programming and implementation of structural funds to the goals of the Lisbon Agenda, the Commission has altered long-term objectives of European cohesion policy. Whether this approach will promote economic growth and lead to greater cohesion across Europe, remains an interesting question for further research.

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