



Electronic Forum on Cohesion

In the last issue, we announced that a European Forum on economic and social cohesion was to be held soon. In order to generate the widest possible dialogue on this subject, there will also be an **electronic forum opening soon on the Commission's website where anyone who wishes can input their views.**

For electronic contributors

As from 1 March, people with access to Internet will be able to send in their messages (opinions, remarks, queries, etc.), in either English or another language, to the following electronic address: <http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg16/forum/home.htm>

For paper contributors

Other people can send their messages now by fax to +32-2-230.49.15 stating "Electronic Forum on Cohesion, DG XVI/F/2". All messages, tagged with the name and function of their originator, will be translated and added to the electronic forum.

Topics covered

Like the European Forum itself, the *electronic forum* will be based around three broad topics:

Topic 1: The EU's top priorities for cohesion: state of play

The Union has responded to the wide variety of problems facing the regions and various groups in society by identifying a series of top priorities for the Structural Funds. To what extent have the policies pursued under each Objective brought results? What have been the factors influencing success in the Member States and regions? How could these results be improved upon?

Objective 1: Support for the regions lagging behind in their development and reduction of gaps in competitiveness between regions

- Has the assistance provided by the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund radically changed development models?

- Should a greater role be given in future to promoting productive investment and upgrading human resources, as against investment in infrastructure?

Objective 2: Restructuring of areas dependent on traditional industries in decline

- What have been the successes and failures in encouraging growth of new jobs?
- How can the private sector be encouraged to become more involved?

Objectives 3 and 4: Support for the Union's human resources in order to maximize their potential and help them adapt to changes in the workplace

- Have the financial contributions of the EU really helped to reduce unemployment and social exclusion among the sectors of the population covered?
- Is the drive for greater efficiency and competitiveness compatible with the objective of safeguarding and creating jobs?

Objectives 5(a), 5(b) and 6: Support for structural adjustment in rural areas, areas dependent on fishing and regions with low population density

- To what extent are current EU structural policies helping to improve the economic and social situation and quality of life in rural, coastal and peripheral communities?
- What is the best way to tackle the specific problems of regions with low population density?
- What importance should be given to developing links between town and countryside?
- How could the EU step up its support for economic diversification in coastal areas affected by the restructuring of the fishing industry?

Topic 2: Reduction of development gaps: the contribution of the EU's cohesion and other policies to competitiveness and employment

The Union's cohesion policies set out to remedy, on the ground, the economic weaknesses in the Member States and their regions by surmounting the obstacles to development caused by the inadequacy or obsolescence of infrastructures, the lack of competitiveness of the manufacturing fabric and the lack of qualified human resources. What has been the specific contribution of the activities carried out in each field? Is there complementarity between national policies and those of the Union? What changes should be made in future?

The role of infrastructure in regional development, including the role of the EU's policies on transport, telecommunications and energy

Assistance under the structural policies:

- What types of infrastructure contribute most to development?
- How can infrastructure, including the trans-European networks (TENs), mitigate the effects of a peripheral location?
- How have EU policies helped to improve accessibility?
- Does liberalization of services contribute to the aims of cohesion?
- Do present energy networks meet the specific needs of the Member States and the weakest regions?

The role of productive investment, including the role of the EU's policies on research and technological development (RTD) and innovation

Assistance under the structural policies:

- What makes a region attractive to outside investors?
- What is the importance of RTD investment in the regions in terms of innovation and regional development?

The RTD framework programmes of the EU:

- Have the framework programmes been well adapted to the needs of the least developed regions?
- How can technology transfer to the weakest regions best be carried out?

The role of human resources

Activities under the Structural Funds:

- What is the role of education and training in regional development?
- How should a region set about defining its training needs?

The contribution of cohesion policies to agriculture and the environment

The common agricultural policy (CAP):

- Has the CAP contributed to regional development or has it delayed the necessary adjustments?
- What has been the impact of the CAP in the least well-off Member States and regions?

Environmental policy:

- What are the relationships between growth and protection of the environment?
- Have environmental policies taken account of the needs of the weakest Member States and regions?
- What has been the impact of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund in this field?

Topic 3: Policy implementation: value added by the EU's cohesion policies

The Union's chosen approach to cohesion has been via decentralization and partnership, combined with a concentration of resources on the most serious problems and the weakest regions. A framework of multiannual programming seeks to mobilize the human and financial resources needed to achieve the development priorities. To what extent has this approach worked? Beyond the issue of economic development itself, has it also encouraged the building of a genuine "people's Europe?"

Sharing of responsibilities (partnership)

- Who should be included in the partnerships?
- What contribution can the partnerships make to planning, implementing, monitoring and assessing programmes, and what mechanisms need to be put in place to make their role more effective?
- Has closer co-operation at regional level made it possible to establish lasting relationships among the partners which can lead on to future initiatives?

The advantages and limits of the programme approach (programming)

- What are the advantages of the programming approach?
- Should the Commission play a more important role in major projects?

Maximizing impact: the targeting of resources (concentration)

- Are the Objectives defined for the Structural Funds appropriate to current circumstances?
- Has there been an adequate degree of concentration on the major problems and the most affected regions?
- How can the targeting of Community Initiatives be improved?

Enhancing effectiveness (additionality, conditionality, monitoring, controls and assessment)

- What roles do monitoring, controls and assessment play in ensuring economic efficiency and improving results?
- Is the principle of additionality really helping to ensure that operations are efficient?

In brief: renewal of Parliament's regional committee

In the midst of electing its new president, Mr Luis Gil-Robles, the European Parliament has also newly appointed its committees. The Committee on Regional Policy will in future be chaired by Mr Miguel Arias Cañete (E, PPE), assisted by three vice-chairmen: Mr Richard Howitt (UK, PSE), Ms Pasqualina Napoletano (I, PSE) and Mr Francis Decourrière (F, PPE).



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