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53. Recognises that the geographical location of the Baltic Sea Region is exceptional, and that such a location provides opportunities to more actively develop ties with the EU and neighbouring external countries, and also stresses the importance of tourism to the regional economy and the scope for expansion; welcomes the declaration adopted at the 2nd Baltic Sea Tourism Forum, which referred to common promotional activities, efforts to find new international markets and infrastructure development;

54. Underlines the unique opportunity for sustainable tourism offered by the attractiveness of the Hanseatic cities in the Baltic Region; supports, furthermore, the promotion of cross-border cycle tourism, thereby creating win-win effects for the environment and for small and medium-sized enterprises;

55. Considers themes such as water sports, wellness and spa tourism, the cultural heritage and landscapes to offer great potential for developing the region's profile as a tourist destination; stresses, therefore, the need to protect natural coastal areas, landscapes and the cultural heritage as a resource for ensuring a sustainable economy in the Baltic Sea Region in the future;

56. Regards improvements in transport links and the elimination of bottlenecks to be of no less importance, and notes that border-crossing difficulties at checkpoints on the EU's eastern border with the Russian Federation, which cause long queues of lorries and pose threats to the environment, social harmony, traffic safety and drivers' safety, could be solved via this strategy in order to ensure the smooth flow of goods through the Baltic Sea Region;

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57. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, national parliaments, and the governments of the Russian Federation, Belarus and Norway.

Contribution of EU regional policy towards fighting the financial and economic crisis, with a special reference to Objective 2

P7_TA(2010)0255

European Parliament resolution of 6 July 2010 on the contribution of EU regional policy towards fighting the financial and economic crisis, with a special reference to Objective 2 (2009/2234(INI))

(2011/C 351 E/02)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission working document 'Consultation on the future "EU 2020" strategy' (COM(2009)0647),
- having regard to the Commission Communication 'Cohesion policy: Strategic Report 2010 on the implementation of the programmes 2007-2013' (COM(2010)0110),
- having regard to the Sixth progress report from the Commission on economic and social cohesion (COM(2009)0295),
- having regard to the Commission Communication 'Driving European recovery' (COM(2009)0114),
- having regard to the Commission Communication 'Cohesion Policy: investing in the real economy' (COM(2008)0876),

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- having regard to the Commission Communication 'New Skills for New Jobs: Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs' (COM(2008)0868),
 - having regard to the Commission Communication 'A European Economic Recovery Plan' (COM(2008)0800),
 - having regard to the Commission Communication 'From financial crisis to recovery: a European framework for action' (COM(2008)0706),
 - having regard to the Council Recommendation on the 2009 update of the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and the Community and on the implementation of Member States' employment policies (COM(2009)0034),
 - having regard to the National Strategic Reports from the Member States for 2009,
 - having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to its motion for a resolution of 11 March 2009 on Cohesion Policy: investing in the real economy ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Sixth progress report from the Commission on economic and social cohesion (COTER-IV-027),
 - having regard to the European Economic Forecast – Autumn 2009/ European Economy 10/2009 – DG Economic and Financial Affairs-European Commission,
 - having regard to the Quarterly Report on the Euro Area - Volume 8 No 4 (2009) – DG Economic and Financial Affairs – European Commission,
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A7-0206/2010),
- A. whereas between 2000 and 2006 15,2 % of Europeans (69,8 million) lived in Objective 2 areas and benefited from total financing of EUR 22,5 billion (9,6 % of total resources), with 730 000 'gross' jobs being created, and most indicators showing high performance levels (employment, innovation, research and development (R&D), human capital intensity, education and training, lifelong learning) while, on the other hand, other indicators (foreign direct investment (FDI), productivity) show lower performance levels than those of the convergence regions, and, as regards growth of per capita GDP compared with the EU average, the regions in question are quite a long way ahead (122 %) of the convergence regions (59 %) but nevertheless show a fall of 4,4 % over that period,
- B. noting that, with the 2006 reform, Objective 2 now concerns strengthening regional competitiveness and employment in a total of 168 regions in 19 Member States, i.e. 314 million inhabitants, with total financing for 2007-2013 of EUR 54,7 billion (just under 16 % of overall resources), and, it is worth pointing out, around 74 % of that amount is earmarked for improving knowledge and innovation (33,7 %) and for more and better jobs (40 %),

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 25.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2009)0124.

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- C. whereas, based on the latest Commission forecasts (2009-2011), the labour market situation will remain unfavourable and the unemployment rate will reach 10,25 % in the EU, with the loss of 2,25 % of jobs for 2009 and 1,25 % for 2010 and entailing inter alia an increase in social breakdown in the member countries; whereas the key sectors in the EU region show: (a) an increase in new orders and confidence, with an improvement in the overall EU industrial picture, although at a rate of production 20 % lower than at the start of 2008, (b) continued decline in activities in the manufacturing sector, and (c) continued difficulty for SMEs in accessing micro-credit/financing,
- D. whereas although it is true that initially the crisis affected men more, currently the rate of job loss is similar for men and women, and women's presence in the labour market is lower than that of men in most countries of the EU; whereas we have learned from other crises that women who lose their jobs are more likely to be unable to find other work; whereas equality between men and women has a positive impact on productivity and economic growth, and participation of women in the labour market has many social and economic benefits,
- E. stressing the fact that, based on the National Strategic Reports for 2009, and the Strategic Report 2010 of the Commission regarding cohesion policy and the implementation of the programmes 2007-2013, the Member States appear to have made rather different uses of the instruments, means and methods for facilitating cohesion policy proposed by the Commission to combat the crisis and increase actual expenditure, such as changes to the strategic guidelines, the axes and financing for the operational programmes and the response to the simplification of implementing procedures,
- F. stressing that from October 2008 onwards the Commission proposed a series of measures aimed at speeding up implementation of programmes under the cohesion policy 2007-2013 in order to mobilise all its resources and means to provide immediate and effective support for recovery efforts at national and regional level,
- G. whereas the Commission strategy to accelerate investment and simplify cohesion policy programmes through recommendations to the Member States and legislative or non-legislative measures is built around three axes: (a) greater flexibility for cohesion programmes, (b) giving the regions a head start, and (c) smart investment for cohesion programmes; whereas for 2010, of the EUR 64,3 billion earmarked for employment and competitiveness, EUR 49,4 billion are to be used for cohesion (an increase of 2 % over 2009) and EUR 14,9 billion for competitiveness (an increase of 7,9 % over 2009),
1. Stresses that, in the context of the global financial and economic crisis and the current economic slowdown, EU regional policy is a key delivery instrument, making a decisive contribution to the European Economic Recovery Plan, constituting the largest Community source of investment in the real economy and providing notable support for public investment, including at regional and local level; notes that it is essential to ensure a successful exit from the crisis in order to achieve long-term sustainable development by strengthening competitiveness, employment and the attractiveness of European regions;
 2. Notes that the Structural Funds are powerful instruments, designed for helping the regions in their economic and social restructuring and in promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion, as well as for implementation of the European Economic Recovery Plan and, in particular, development of competitiveness and job creation, by supporting their systematic and effective use; stresses that the aim of competitiveness cannot be attained to the detriment of cooperation and solidarity between regions;
 3. Is pleased to note the positive results with regard to most indicators observed in the period before the economic crisis in the Objective 2 regions, namely the high performance levels in employment, innovation, research and development (R&D), human capital intensity, education and training and lifelong learning; stresses that the impact of the crisis on the economy must not result in a reduction in support for more and better jobs, and calls for these comparative advantages to be sustained through a strengthening of the Objective 2 instruments;

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4. Warmly supports the key priorities of the EU 2020 strategy, particularly smart, sustainable, inclusive growth achieved, inter alia, by exploiting new ways of achieving sustainable economic growth via the digital economy, improving the regulatory framework for strengthening territorial and social cohesion and promoting better conditions and a better business environment with fair competition, job creation, entrepreneurship and innovation for all the regions, developing SMEs and supporting their growth potential; also supports the efforts towards more and better jobs, with decent working conditions for men and women and guaranteed access to basic and advanced training; calls for these policies to be strengthened further, including through measures to capitalise on the advantages offered by Europe's single market within the framework of the forthcoming deepening of the EU 2020 strategy, while ensuring that Objective 2 remains focused on delivering EU territorial cohesion;
5. Notes with concern the negative social consequences that have been brought about by the crisis in Objective 2 regions, with an increase in unemployment, poverty and social exclusion and harm to the most vulnerable social groups (the unemployed, women, the elderly), and calls on the Commission to take initiatives to support SMEs in securing the viability of existing jobs and creating, where possible, more new jobs;
6. Emphasises that economic, social and territorial cohesion is at the heart of the EU2020 Strategy; cohesion policy and the structural funds are a key tool in achieving the priorities of smart, sustainable, inclusive growth in the Member States and the regions;
7. Underlines the significant problem posed by the reduction in the contribution of national co-financing to programmes, which also has implications for Objective 2 owing to the major financial problems of many Member States, and supports Commission policy regarding the use of the Community contribution; considers it necessary, therefore, for the amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 in its present form, as adopted by Parliament, to be speedily implemented, considers 100 % financing to be excessive, since it takes away the incentive for the Member States to ensure that the measures supported are effective and efficient through national co-financing, and concurs with the view taken by the Council in rejecting 'frontloading' as its stands;
8. Notes that, out of a total of 117 operational programmes financed by the ESF, 13 were amended (for Austria, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, two for the United Kingdom, and two for Spain) with the aim of tackling specific needs resulting from the crisis, and calls on the Commission to help the Member States use this flexibility to reorient their operational programmes, and to publicise the fact widely among the relevant regional and local actors as quickly as possible with a view to providing short-term assistance to specific at-risk groups and categories;
9. Notes that the Sixth progress report on economic and social cohesion reflects the different socio-economic situations in the three types of region, particularly with regard to their capacity for creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. Both the current economic crisis and the different variables which affect the opportunities for regional development (demography, accessibility, capacity for innovation, etc.) provide evidence of the existence of important data that must be taken into consideration when assessing the situation of local and regional economies and formulating an effective cohesion policy;
10. Supports the Council's proposal to increase advances for 2010 by 4 % in the case of the ESF and by 2 % in the case of the Cohesion Fund, but only for Member States whose GDP has fallen by more than two digits or which have received IMF balance-of-payments support; calls on the Commission to study the causes of the delays in implementation and to find flexible solutions for the n+2/n+3 rules, so that funds are not forfeited to the Member States;
11. Regrets the fact that the Sixth progress report from the Commission on economic and social cohesion does not include specific qualitative and quantitative data on the short-term and long-term impact of the financial and economic crisis in the EU regions, particularly with regard to the most significant economic and social indicators; therefore calls on the Commission to present a special report/study on the effects of the financial and economic crisis in the EU regions, in particular the Objective 2 regions and phasing-out regions, as well as on a possible widening or narrowing of regional disparities in the context of the crisis; notes that those evaluations must be carried out without delay in order to be able to counter undesirable developments and that they can be used as the basis for a proposal on the continuation of Objective 2 in those areas where it can provide added value regarding national funds;

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12. Welcomes the support measures for undertakings under the cohesion policy (approximately EUR 55 billion between 2007 and 2013), most of which relates to strengthening innovation, technology transfer and modernisation of SMEs, stresses the importance of promoting successful models in this area and understands that the proposed measures under the intervention in favour of undertakings must be targeted at their long-term restructuring outcomes and the transition to a more sustainable economy, and not at fire-fighting interventions for economic survival, which in many cases are incompatible with State aid policies;

13. Emphasises that, in order to tackle the crisis, investment is needed in research and development, innovation, education and technologies that use resources efficiently; such investment will benefit traditional sectors, rural areas and highly skilled service economies and will therefore strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion; notes that it is necessary to provide for an affordable, accessible funding mechanism in which the structural funds play a key role;

14. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to monitor, on a continuous basis, the impact of the crisis in various structural and development fields and the use made of the opportunities offered by the financing instruments earmarked for Objective 2 primarily to support entrepreneurship and SMEs and bodies working for a social, inclusive economy, with a view to increasing their competitiveness and thus the potential for greater employment, and facilitating their access to financial engineering instruments (Jaspers, Jeremie, Jessica, Jasmine); calls on the Commission and the Member States to use this evidence to prepare and target the future Objective 2 EU Cohesion to those areas, at regional and local level, where added value of EU interventions can be demonstrated (in particular innovations in the tourism, service, IT, and industrial sectors, alongside protection and improvement of the environment and the potential development of renewable energy or technologies that would significantly improve conventional energy undertakings, targeting low emissions and minimising waste production, as well as innovations in the primary sector);

15. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to utilise and promote all synergies of tools for cohesion policy and competitiveness at a regional, national, cross-border and European level;

16. Welcomes Commission policy on (a) extending the eligibility period under the operational programmes 2000-2006 to allow maximum take-up of all cohesion policy resources, (b) simplifying the administrative requirements and procedures and the financial management of the programmes, while at the same time still ensuring the necessary checking for any instances of errors or fraud; takes the view in this connection that conditions should be created with a view to encouraging reasonable projects and preventing unlawful behaviour in advance;

17. Supports the 'pre-financing' policy for programmes under the cohesion policy 2007-2013, which produced immediate liquidity of EUR 6,25 billion for 2009 for investment within the framework of the financing packages agreed for each Member State;

18. Notes that urban regions and urban centres present, by their very nature, particular and significant social problems (high unemployment, marginalisation, social exclusion etc.), which have increased owing to the impact of the crisis and which must be studied carefully in order to take appropriate action and both short- and long-term measures;

19. Supports the assistance policy and the new financing instruments for major projects for the regions (planned total cost of EUR 50 million and above) introduced by the Commission in 2009, values the importance of financial engineering instruments and EIB/EIF cooperation, especially JASPERS, JEREMIE AND JESSICA, and calls for a further increase beyond 25 % in the financing provided through JASPERS (Joint Assistance in Supporting Projects in European Regions) that relates specifically to the regions in Objective 2, with a view to encouraging their full preparation and very rapid implementation even though, at the present stage, these projects remain few in number; hopes that the previous increase in financing for JASPERS has a medium- and long-term impact on the growth of the economic competitiveness of European regions, and advocates the regular inclusion of a comparative analysis of the results obtained and objectives pursued, and of the financing awarded and the financing required to fulfil the respective objectives;

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20. Stresses that only with genuinely integrated multi-level governance among local, regional, national, cross-border and EU public authorities can EU, national and regional policy be efficient and effective; calls on the Commission to evaluate the possibilities of innovation-related territorial cooperation, both national and international, in each cohesion policy objective, and to analyse the possibilities for reinforcing the European territorial cooperation objective with regard to fostering innovation-related cooperation between regions; in parallel with the reinforcement of the Territorial Cooperation Objective (Objective 3), the possibility of developing transnational territorial cooperation actions in the framework of Objective 2 should also be reinforced; notes that such a possibility is now made possible by Article 37(6)(b) of Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006; is of the opinion that, without changing the overall cohesion objectives' budget, the reinforcement of territorial cooperation should be accompanied by a move towards an increased budget for this extended territorial cooperation;

21. Supports the proposed changes to the implementing rules aimed at strengthening the flexibility of the Structural Funds and their adaptation to meet the need, in the exceptional economic circumstances, for immediate implementation of 455 programmes under the cohesion policy, in particular as regards Objective 2 programmes, while still taking account of the need for national and regional institutions and managing authorities to adapt to this new situation so as to prevent any mismanagement or misuse of funds and to ensure that any remaining funds are redirected to existing or upcoming projects; calls for the managing authorities to propose ways of making the implementation of Objective 2 operational programmes more efficient;

22. Insists that in special circumstances (such as the economic crisis) greater flexibility can be exceptionally required in the N+2 rule in view of the objectives pursued by the cohesion policy and the effects of cyclical economic changes on public finances and private investment;

23. Recommends that all funds that remain unspent in a region under N+2 and N+3 are allocated again to regionally based projects and community initiatives;

24. Calls on the Commission to evaluate the Small Business Act action plan/initiative for legislative proposals after a year of implementation (December 2008), primarily as regards results in strengthening small businesses' competitiveness and access to financing and operating capital, as well as promoting innovative start-ups, reducing administrative burdens, etc.;

25. Emphasises the positive effect which equality between men and women has on economic growth; notes in that regard that some studies calculate that if the rates of employment, part-time employment and productivity of women were similar to those of men, GDP would increase by 30 % in the programming period beyond 2013; therefore requests special scrutiny for those projects financed under the structural funds which promote equality and the inclusion of women in the labour market;

26. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Member States.

A sustainable future for transport

P7_TA(2010)0260

European Parliament resolution of 6 July 2010 on a sustainable future for transport (2009/2096(INI))

(2011/C 351 E/03)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the Commission communication entitled 'A sustainable future for transport: Towards an integrated, technology-led and user friendly system' (COM(2009)0279),