

Wednesday 28 October 2015

P8\_TA(2015)0384

**Cohesion policy and review of the Europe 2020 strategy****European Parliament resolution of 28 October 2015 on cohesion policy and the review of the Europe 2020 strategy (2014/2246(INI))**

(2017/C 355/05)

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), and in particular Articles 4, 162 and 174 to 178 thereof,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 (hereinafter ‘the Common Provisions Regulation’) <sup>(1)</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 <sup>(2)</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 <sup>(3)</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal <sup>(4)</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings <sup>(5)</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1300/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the Cohesion Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1084/2006 <sup>(6)</sup>,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1311/2013 of 2 December 2013 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2014-2020 <sup>(7)</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission’s sixth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion entitled ‘Investment for jobs and growth: Promoting development and good governance in EU regions and cities’, of 23 July 2014 (hereinafter ‘the sixth cohesion report’),

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 289.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 470.

<sup>(4)</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 259.

<sup>(5)</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 303.

<sup>(6)</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 281.

<sup>(7)</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 884.

**Wednesday 28 October 2015**

- having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 <sup>(1)</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission's eighth progress report on economic, social and territorial cohesion entitled 'The urban and regional dimension of the crisis', of 26 June 2013,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 January 2014 on smart specialisation: networking excellence for a sound Cohesion Policy <sup>(2)</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 January 2014 on EU Member States preparedness to an effective and timely start of the new Cohesion Policy Programming period <sup>(3)</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 26 February 2014 on the European Commission's 7th and 8th progress reports on the EU Cohesion Policy and the Strategic Report 2013 on programme implementation 2007-2013 <sup>(4)</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 27 November 2014 on delays in the start-up of cohesion policy for 2014-2020 <sup>(5)</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 March 2010 entitled 'Europe 2020 — A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (COM(2010)2020),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 19 October 2011 entitled 'A framework for the next generation of innovative financial instruments — the EU equity and debt platforms' (COM(2011)0662),
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2015/760 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2015 on European long-term investment funds <sup>(6)</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 13 January 2015 entitled 'Making the best use of the flexibility within the existing rules of the stability and growth pact' (COM(2015)0012),
- having regard to the Council conclusions on the sixth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion: investment for jobs and growth, adopted by the General Affairs (Cohesion) Council on 19 November 2014,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 3 December 2014 on the sixth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion <sup>(7)</sup>,
- having regard to the working document entitled 'Blueprint for a revised Europe 2020 strategy: Contribution of the Steering Committee of the Committee of the Regions' Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform' <sup>(8)</sup>,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 21 January 2015 on the Commission's sixth cohesion report <sup>(9)</sup>,

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 298, 26.10.2012, p. 1.

<sup>(2)</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2014)0002.

<sup>(3)</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2014)0015.

<sup>(4)</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2014)0132.

<sup>(5)</sup> Texts adopted, P8\_TA(2014)0068.

<sup>(6)</sup> OJ L 123, 19.5.2015, p. 98.

<sup>(7)</sup> OJ C 19, 21.1.2015, p. 9.

<sup>(8)</sup> <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/europe2020/SiteCollectionDocuments/2459-brochure-BlueprintEU2020.pdf>

<sup>(9)</sup> OJ C 242, 23.7.2015, p. 43.

Wednesday 28 October 2015

- having regard to the Commission communication of 2 March 2015 entitled 'Results of the public consultation on the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (COM(2015)0100),
  - having regard to the Commission communication of 13 January 2015 entitled 'Making the best use of the flexibility within the existing rules of the Stability and Growth Pact' (COM(2015)0012),
  - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A8-0277/2015),
- A. whereas cohesion policy is the EU's main investment growth and development policy aligned with the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and aimed at reducing disparities between regions and promoting convergence, with a budget of EUR 351,8 billion until the end of 2020; whereas the EU continues to face the effects of the economic and financial crisis — high unemployment, uneven and slow pace economic recovery; and whereas cohesion policy seeks to ensure that all energies and capacities are mobilised and focused on the pursuit of the Europe 2020 strategy's objectives of sustainable growth and jobs;
- B. whereas it is crucial that different EU initiatives for growth and jobs, as well as environment and climate protection, maintain a coherent approach; whereas the Europe 2020 strategy flagship initiatives play a key role in enhancing coordination at local and regional level as regards the implementation of cohesion policy; whereas there is no explicit mechanism built into the programming or the reporting provisions that would explicitly target flagship initiatives in terms of the contribution of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) to their delivery; whereas the Europe 2020 strategy review will need to address the implementation of the flagship initiatives and aim for a balance between financial, fiscal and economic measures on the one hand and social, educational, environmental and equality (especially gender equality) aspects on the other;
- C. whereas there is a growing need for stronger co-ownership of the strategy by the different levels of governance and by the different actors involved, and for shared responsibility with the corresponding rights and obligations at all levels of implementation; whereas multi-level governance and partnership must be enhanced, as these principles have the potential to address the lack of administrative capacity;
- D. whereas the goals of cohesion policy have unquestionably evolved over time to support investment in the main EU priorities, demonstrating their adaptability and effectiveness, while maintaining the reduction of disparities between the levels of development of the various regions as the central objective, strengthening regions' potential and promoting sustainable development; whereas the European Fund for Strategic Investments brings new elements to the overall EU strategy aimed at creating innovative, sustainable and inclusive growth and skilled jobs;
- E. whereas the review of the Europe 2020 strategy should take account of the serious, uneven effects the economic and financial crisis has had on the Member States and regions and be smart and balanced for reasons of coherence and effectiveness; whereas it might nevertheless consider other measures, such as infrastructure, internal market and administrative capacity measures; whereas different territorial characteristics should be taken into account, with special attention being given to the EU's regions mentioned in Articles 174 and 349 of the TFEU;
- F. whereas the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy, though delayed in 2015, affords above all an opportunity to assess (and acknowledge) the contribution of cohesion policy to achieving the strategy's targets and to improve existing interactions and links between various EU policies and with the EU budget, with a view to them acting as an effective driving force for the implementation of the strategy; whereas this stage is essential for shaping future cohesion policy, as an EU-wide investment policy, while prioritising the reduction of development disparities and re-accelerating the convergence process;

Wednesday 28 October 2015

***The Europe 2020 strategy and its interrelationship with cohesion policy***

1. Recalls that the Europe 2020 strategy is an overarching, long-term 'growth and jobs' strategy of the European Union, built around five ambitious objectives: employment, innovation, climate change and energy sustainability, education, and fighting poverty and social exclusion; notes that the objectives are accompanied by seven flagship initiatives and notes that the challenges identified in 2010 have been unevenly addressed and that progress at EU level towards achieving some of them, such as fighting unemployment, is still moderate; emphasises that the EU should concentrate on sustainable growth and development, as well as on decent jobs in order to gain long-term benefits from its investments;
2. Highlights the fact that progress in gender equality could also contribute to economic growth, sustainable development and social cohesion;
3. Points out that an EU economic governance framework and its implementation mechanism, the 'European Semester', were established in 2010 to ensure coordination of Member States' fiscal policies, structural reforms and better alignment of national budgetary policies on growth and jobs at EU and national level, in order to support the delivery of the strategy; draws attention to the fact that further coordination and synchronisation challenges still remain to be addressed;
4. Stresses that cohesion policy for 2007-2013, aligned with the predecessor Lisbon Strategy and having similar core objectives, was already in the implementation phase when the Europe 2020 strategy was launched, and that reprogramming in accordance with the new strategy objectives would therefore have been both difficult and counterproductive; points out, nevertheless, that, at a time of global economic crisis, cohesion policy has not only been the sole source of investment for many Member States, but has also, through 'Lisbon earmarking', substantially supported and contributed to countries' policies for the implementation of the strategy, as shown by the sixth cohesion report and by several Commission communications and studies; recalls that the Lisbon Strategy lost the commitment of Member States, regions and cities over time, and that Europe 2020 governance is particularly consistent with cohesion policy principles and instruments, which can ensure a co-ownership commitment on the implementation of the strategy;
5. Calls on the Commission, in the context of the ex-post evaluations for the 2007-2013 programming period, to provide information on both the output and result orientation and the concrete contribution made to the Europe 2020 objectives by cohesion policy; stresses the importance of understanding the realities and limitations of the available evidence on cohesion policy's contribution to the overarching objectives of the strategy and of considering the upheavals which the EU economies have suffered, especially in the case of those countries severely hit during the crisis; appreciates that those conclusions could be useful for the current delivery of the strategy;
6. Emphasises that cohesion policy is the main EU instrument, covering all regions, for investment in the real economy and acts as the expression of European solidarity by extending growth and prosperity and reducing economic, social and territorial disparities; points out that cohesion policy is fully aligned with the Europe 2020 objectives and provides the investment framework needed, without being simply a tool for its implementation; stresses, in this context, that through thematic concentration the ESIF under the new architecture are oriented towards 11 thematic objectives derived straight from the Europe 2020 objectives, and that preconditions linked directly to these thematic objectives have been established in order to ensure that investments are made in such a way as to maximise their effectiveness; underlines its full support for this new approach, which will contribute to increasing the effectiveness of spending;
7. Underlines the fact that cohesion policy is developing synergies with other EU policies such as the digital single market, the energy union, the single capital market and social policy and that, through all its instruments and objectives, including macro-regional strategies, the urban agenda, the territorial agenda, investment in SMEs, smart growth and smart specialisation strategies, it is substantially contributing to the strengthening of the single market and achieving Europe 2020 strategy targets; calls in this context on national and regional authorities across Europe to design smart specialisation strategies and exploit synergies between different EU, national and regional instruments, both public and private;

Wednesday 28 October 2015

8. Points to the connection with a broader economic governance process through measures linking the effectiveness of the ESI Funds to sound economic governance; calls on the Member States to act with full responsibility in order to avoid their application to the greatest possible extent and to prevent negative impacts on the implementation of the ESIF and on the attainment of cohesion policy goals; stresses furthermore, that support should be provided to Member States experiencing temporary budgetary difficulties; welcomes the flexibility mechanisms within the existing rules of the Stability and Growth Pact (COM(2015)0012) aimed at strengthening the link between investment, structural reforms and the use of resources in order to promote long-term sustainable growth and facilitate progress towards the Europe 2020 objectives;

9. Stresses with concern the delays in implementing cohesion policy during the current programming period; points out that, although a large majority of operational programmes have now been agreed, the implementation itself is still at a very early stage; stresses, nevertheless, that assessments can be made as regards directing policy resources to priorities that contribute to sustainable growth and jobs; notes, in this context, that according to the first evaluation released by the Commission, the amounts allocated to R&I, support for SMEs, ICT, the low-carbon economy, employment, social inclusion, education and capacity-building have increased substantially as compared with the previous programming periods, while the level of support for transport and environmental infrastructure has decreased; draws attention to the fact that, at the time of the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy, data on implementation of the ESI Funds 2014-2020 may still be lacking, and that, as a result, a concrete evaluation of the contribution of these funds to achieving the strategy's targets may still not be possible at that stage; appreciates the fact that Member States have taken action, e.g. to ensure that 20 % of their resources are spent on climate action;

10. Acknowledges that establishing a performance framework and introducing ex ante conditionalities and linkages with country-specific recommendations (CSRs) in the cohesion policy programming 2014-2020 could provide a better investment environment for maximising the cohesion policy contribution to achieving Europe 2020 strategy headline targets;

### ***Review momentum and related challenges***

11. Recalls that the Commission launched the strategy review process in 2014 by publishing its communication entitled 'Taking stock of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth', and considers it regrettable that insufficient reference was made to cohesion policy and the associated instruments in that document; appreciates the fact that the process continued with a public consultation carried out between May and October 2014 with a view to collecting evidence for the review process, and welcomes the fact that the strategy's relevance and the meaningfulness of its objectives and priorities were confirmed;

12. Notes that the flagship initiatives are considered to be serving their purpose, but also highlights the fact that their visibility is considered to be rather low; regrets that the economic and financial crisis has aggravated the disparities within the European Union and that insufficient progress has been made towards several of the strategy's headline targets, especially as regards employment, research and development, poverty and social exclusion; welcomes the conclusion drawn as to the need to enhance ownership and involvement on the ground, by consolidating vertical and horizontal partnerships with a view to improving the delivery of the strategy; stresses that the strategy should encourage the shift from process and outcome orientation to an actual result orientation approach in order to ensure the highest possible efficiency and effectiveness for the EU policies linked thereto;

13. Welcomes Eurostat's regular publication of progress indicators as regards the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy; calls, nevertheless, for greater and more accurate regional details in respect of the data provided at the NUTS II and NUTS III levels, which is going to be of increasing importance due to unforeseen economic and social problems occurring in various EU regions irrespective of their development level; points, moreover, to the three dimensions of cohesion policy — economic, social and territorial — and considers, in the light of this, that it should not be measured solely on the basis of economic indicators; calls, in this context, on the Commission and the Member States to continue the discussion and engage in more efficient cooperation on the development of a more inclusive set of indicators to complement GDP, with a view to them being more relevant to evaluating the progress made towards achieving the priority objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy;

**Wednesday 28 October 2015**

14. Notes that the publication of the Commission's proposal on the review of the Europe 2020 strategy is due before the end of 2015 and regrets this delay, given that it was initially scheduled for early 2015; stresses that this will once again take place at a rather 'inopportune moment' in the cohesion policy cycle, when the effective implementation process is under way; stresses, moreover, that early reprogramming would be completely counterproductive for the long-term strategic planning of cohesion policy;

15. Welcomes the setting-up of a task force for better implementation of EU funds; also welcomes the establishment of the 'Structural Reform Support Service', which officially started work on 1 July 2015 and which will provide technical assistance to Member States with a view to the more effective implementation of structural reforms and CSRs;

16. Acknowledges, at the same time, the need to consider the evolution of the economic outlook, the use of new instruments, the progress made towards the strategy objectives and the consequent necessity of making operational adjustments;

17. Calls therefore for the scope of the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy to be smart and balanced and to be focused on better interlinking the strategy's five objectives and its flagship initiatives and on identifying methods as to how they could be better carried forward and evaluated without creating additional layers of complexity and excessive administrative burden; stresses that it should take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the EU economy, the growing inequalities (such as in wealth), high unemployment and high public debts; emphasises that, in parallel with the focus on macro-economic criteria of fiscal and economic governance, progress towards all the Europe 2020 headline targets should be pursued; considers that attention should also be paid to increased societal and environmental sustainability, greater social inclusion and gender equality; underlines the importance of continued support from the Commission services for Member State authorities in improving administrative capacity;

18. Reiterates its calls to enhance the responsibility, ownership, transparency and participation dimensions of the strategy by involving LRAs and all relevant civil society stakeholders and interested parties from the target-setting and development of objectives to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy; insists on the crucial importance of a strengthened governance structure based on multi-level governance, incentive structures, an effective mixed top-down/bottom-up approach, the partnership model of cohesion policy and public-private partnerships in general, with a view to the consultation and cooperation of all stakeholders, in order to ensure effective capacity to deliver on the long-term objectives; recalls that, in accordance with Member States' institutional and legal frameworks, regional and local authorities are also responsible for public investment and should therefore be acknowledged as key actors in the implementation of the strategy;

19. Suggests, moreover, that the commitment by LRAs and stakeholders in the Europe 2020 strategy project should be renewed in the form of a pact between those partners, the Member States and the Commission, in order to ensure ownership and participation and that a code of conduct similar to the one on partnership, introduced by cohesion policy 2014-2020, should be adopted;

20. Emphasises the need for a truly territorial approach to the Europe 2020 strategy with a view to adjusting public interventions and investments to different territorial characteristics and specific needs; considers it of the utmost importance to bridge the overall approach of the Europe 2020 strategy and the territorial approach of the Territorial Agenda 2020 (TA 2020); takes the view, moreover, that tailor-made Europe 2020 voluntary regional targets should be possible and should be discussed at regional level without adding to the bureaucratic burden on the ground; stresses that such tailor-made voluntary regional targets should be consistent with the strategy's overarching architecture and be comprised within the pre-defined targets; recalls also, in this connection, the importance of community-led local development strategies;

21. Acknowledges the significant role of cities and urban areas as drivers for growth and jobs, and demands that the review of the Europe 2020 strategy also take into account a wider holistic approach to the future development of cities as entities which play an active role in meeting Europe 2020 objectives; calls on the Commission, therefore, to give due consideration to the Riga Declaration on the Urban Agenda, in view of the fundamental role played by urban areas, whether small, medium-sized or large; stresses, in particular, the need for a strategy that takes account of the specific needs of small

Wednesday 28 October 2015

and medium-sized urban areas on the basis of an approach that builds synergies with the Digital Agenda and the Connecting Europe Facility;

22. Calls on the Commission to provide information about the role of territorial aspects as factors of economic growth, job creation and sustainable development, and demands that the review of the Europe 2020 strategy address territorial impacts and provide guidance on how to tackle them; reiterates the importance of consultation with LRAs in this regard, as they play a determinant role in the implementation of territorial development strategies; highlights also the role that macro-regional strategies and European territorial cooperation in general could play in the successful implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy's goals, given that many development projects involve cross-border areas, including several regions and countries, and are able to develop place-based responses to the long-term challenges;

23. Notes the importance of the new EU investment instrument, the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), which will support the mobilisation of up to EUR 315 billion in investments, with the aim of closing the investment gap in the EU and maximising the impact of public spending; emphasises that the EFSI should be complementary and additional to the ESI Funds; regrets that it is not clearly linked to the Europe 2020 strategy, but considers that, through its objectives and the selection of viable, sustainable projects, it should contribute to the implementation of the strategy in specific areas;

24. Stresses, moreover, the imperative of ensuring full coherence and synergies between all EU instruments, by considering the smart specialisation strategies as one of the core investment instruments, in order to avoid overlapping or contradictions between them or between the different levels of policy implementation; demands, therefore, that the review of the Europe 2020 strategy confirm it as the EU's long-term strategic framework for growth and jobs and address this challenge of coordinating policy instruments, including the EFSI, with a view to using all the available resources effectively and achieving the expected results as regards the overarching strategic goals;

25. Asks the Commission, with a view to promoting the overall harmonious development of the EU and in view of cohesion policy's key role in delivering Europe 2020 strategy objectives, to take into consideration, when reviewing the strategy's goals and objectives, the characteristics and constraints of specific territories, such as those of rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, regions suffering from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, island, cross-border and mountain regions and the EU's outermost regions, in accordance with Articles 174 and 349 of the TFEU; points, in this context, to the latter regions' potential in such areas as biotechnology, renewable energy and biodiversity;

26. Stresses the improved results arising from increasing the quantity, quality and impact of R&I investments, through the coordinated use of cohesion policy instruments and Horizon 2020 in the context of the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy; asks the Commission, in this connection, to reinforce all possible interactions and synergies between these two important policy frameworks when reviewing the Europe 2020 goals and objectives and to set up a web-based tracking system in order to identify cases of combinations of funding from the ESI Funds with Horizon 2020, EFSI and the other Community-funded programmes; welcomes also the plan to introduce a 'seal of excellence' for applicants that are evaluated as excellent, but cannot obtain financing from Horizon 2020, in order to help them access ESI Funds;

27. Calls on the Commission to establish a coherent ongoing evaluation process in order to regularly assess the progress of Europe 2020 strategy targets and suggest appropriate measures for their achievement, as well as recommendations for post-2020 cohesion policy; emphasises also Parliament's role to supervise the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy and cohesion policy in a coordinated manner, not only within Parliament, but also with all relevant institutions; calls, in this connection, for the timely involvement of Parliament in all relevant discussions targeting the design of the policies covered by the strategy, their implementation and their evaluation; points to the importance of also mobilising in these exchanges of views the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, national and regional parliaments, LRAs, other stakeholders and interested parties;

Wednesday 28 October 2015

***Future cohesion policy — looking beyond the short term***

28. Considers that the review of the Europe 2020 strategy, which will precede the launch of the proposal for the mid-term revision of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2014-2020, will provide the basis for the future cohesion policy architecture post-2020, as well as for other MFF instruments; stresses, in this context, the importance of effectively addressing all the concerns raised above, while ensuring the continuity of the strategic approach; recalls, also, the added value of an EU-wide cohesion policy, which must continue to be one of the main EU investment instruments for growth, job creation and climate protection, while ensuring balanced, harmonious development across the EU, as a catalyst for change and a stimulator of prosperity, including in the less developed regions; underlines, in this regard, the need to ensure a sustainable level of financing for the ESI Funds after 2020;

29. Points out that both future cohesion policy and the future EU long-term strategy should be drafted before the end of the Commission's current term, bearing in mind that there will be elections to the European Parliament in 2019, and that this imposes significant specific time constraints on the co-legislators as regards the negotiation calendar, and on the new Commission and the Member States as regards the preparation and adoption of the new partnership agreements and operational programmes before the start of the next MFF; notes, at the same time, that negotiations will also be entered into on the future MFF; calls on the Commission, therefore, to take into consideration all the specific constraints generated by interlinkages and timing coordination requirements and to develop a coherent approach as regards the EU's future long-term sustainable growth and jobs strategy, the EU budget, cohesion policy in particular, and other instruments under the MFF;

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

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