

Thursday 27 November 2014

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Delays in the start-up of cohesion policy for 2014-2020

European Parliament resolution of 27 November 2014 on delays in the start-up of cohesion policy for 2014-2020 (2014/2946(RSP))

(2016/C 289/08)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 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 ⁽¹⁾,
 - 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 ⁽²⁾,
 - 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 ⁽³⁾,
 - having regard to Draft Amending Budget No 3 to the General Budget 2014 (COM(2014)0329),
 - having regard to Rules 128(5) and 123(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas cohesion policy represents the main EU-wide investment policy in the real economy and is an established catalyst for growth and jobs in the EU, with a budget of over EUR 350 billion until 2020; whereas it forms a major part of the EU's strategy to redress regional imbalances and inequalities, to assist diversification and adaptation to industrial change and to achieve economic, social and territorial cohesion; and whereas in some Member States it forms the principal source of public investment;
- B. whereas through thematic concentration these resources are targeted at a limited number of strategic goals with growth-enhancing potential, such as innovation and research, the digital agenda, support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the low-carbon economy, training, education and infrastructure;
- C. whereas the Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes are strategic tools for guiding investments in Member States and regions, in line with the overall Europe 2020 goal of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth;
- D. whereas Articles 14, 16 and 29 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 lay down the timeline for the submission and adoption of Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes, according to which Partnership Agreements should have been adopted by the end of August 2014 and Operational Programmes by the end of January 2015 at the latest;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 884.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 298, 26.10.2012, p. 1.

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- E. whereas there is a clear delay in the programming process, with only a limited number of Operational Programmes (just over 100) expected to be adopted by the end of 2014;
- F. whereas, at the request of the Member States, the Commission has prepared a non-paper on the treatment of 2014 commitments under programmes co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund which are not adopted by the Commission by 31 December 2014;
- G. whereas two scenarios are envisaged for the adoption of Operational Programmes, both implying further delays as regards the start of implementation, namely: (i) the carry-over procedure for those programmes considered 'ready for adoption' by 31 December 2014, and (ii) the rebudgeting of the unused 2014 allocation for the European Structural and Investment Funds — entailing a technical revision of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) — for those considered 'not ready for adoption' by the end of 2014;
- H. whereas, according to the timeline presented by the Commission, Operational Programmes could be adopted between 15 February and 31 March 2015 under the carry-over procedure, and after 1 May 2015 under the rebudgeting procedure;
- I. whereas in addition to the delay in implementation for the 2014-2020 programming period, cohesion policy also faces a backlog in payments amounting to some EUR 23 billion for the 2007-2013 programming period, further undermining its credibility, effectiveness and sustainability;
- J. whereas the President of the Commission has indicated that he intends to launch a EUR 315 billion investment package;
1. Expresses its serious concern as regards the significant delay in the implementation of cohesion policy for the 2014-2020 period, while recognising the importance of adopting high-quality Operational Programmes at the start of the programming period in order to avoid reprogramming at a later stage;
 2. Stresses that the current delays are challenging national, regional and local authorities' capacity to plan effectively and implement the European Structural and Investment Funds for the 2014-2020 period;
 3. Recalls that cohesion policy, together with the co-financing ensured by the Member States, provides for a major proportion of the growth-related public expenditure in the EU; stresses that it is therefore imperative to start the implementation of the new programmes as soon as possible in order to maximise the results of the investments, boost job creation and raise productivity growth;
 4. Urges the Commission and the Member States to show responsibility and do their utmost to speed up the adoption of a maximum number of Operational Programmes in 2014, and to ensure that as many programmes as possible are 'ready for adoption' by 31 December 2014 so that they can benefit from the carry-over procedure in accordance with Article 13 (2)(a) of the Financial Regulation and Article 4 of its Rules of Application;
 5. Demands that the Commission — while keeping a high focus on quality and the need to keep up the fight against fraud — to analyse all possible ways of streamlining its internal procedures in order to ensure that Operational Programmes resubmitted after the deadline of 24 November 2014 are also taken into consideration in order to conclude the inter-service consultation by the end of the year, being treated as ready for adoption if they fulfil the quality requirements;
 6. Is aware that the second of the aforementioned scenarios, applicable to those Operational Programmes not ready for adoption by the end of 2014, namely the rebudgeting of uncommitted amounts from 2014 in 2015 in accordance with Article 19 of the MFF, implies a revision of the MFF by 1 May 2015 which, albeit technical, must comply with the multiannual budget procedure; invites the Commission, therefore, to engage as soon as possible in discussions with Parliament and the Council in order to lay out a credible roadmap that ensures the adoption of the MFF revision as early as possible in 2015;

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7. Stresses, moreover, that in order to have the Operational Programmes adopted, a corresponding draft amending budget covering the respective commitment appropriations for 2015 also needs to be approved, and that this implies, in the best-case scenario, a delay in the effective start of the implementation of those programmes until mid-2015;
 8. Asks the Commission, in view of the above, to present to Parliament the measures it envisages taking to facilitate, as soon as possible, the implementation of the Operational Programmes, together with the timeline it envisages;
 9. Is alarmed about the status of the payments backlog under cohesion policy for the 2007-2013 Operational Programmes; stresses the importance and the urgency of reaching an agreement on the subject, on the basis of new proposals from the Commission, by the end of 2014;
 10. Calls on the Commission to explain the impact of this delay in payments on the start of implementation of the new Operational Programmes, and to put forward solutions for limiting the damage as far as possible; demands, furthermore, that the Commission, in the context of the report on the outcome of the negotiations provided for in Article 16(3) of the Common Provisions Regulation, analyse the possible impact of the belated start-up of the 2014-2020 cohesion policy on growth and jobs, and to make recommendations based on the lessons learnt;
 11. Requests that the EUR 315 billion investment package to be announced by the Commission be fully complementary with the 2014-2020 cohesion policy;
 12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and the other relevant institutions.
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