P8_TA(2017)0254

Building blocks for a post-2020 EU Cohesion policy

European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2017 on building blocks for a post-2020 EU cohesion policy (2016/2326(INI))

(2018/C 331/06)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the Treaty on European Union (TEU), in particular Article 3, and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in particular Articles 4, 162, 174 to 178 and 349 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]) (‘the Common Provisions Regulation’),

— 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 ([2]),

— 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 ([3]),

— 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 ([4]),

— 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 ([5]),

— 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 ([6]),

— 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 ([7]),

— 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 ([8]),

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([1]) OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.
([2]) OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 289.
([3]) OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 470.
([4]) OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 259.
([5]) OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 303.
([6]) OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 281.
([7]) OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 884.
([8]) OJ L 298, 26.10.2012, p. 1.

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— having regard to the Commission communication of 14 September 2016 entitled 'Mid-term review/revision of the multiannual financial framework 2014-2020 — An EU budget focused on results' (COM(2016)0603),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 14 December 2015 entitled 'Investing in jobs and growth — maximising the contribution of European Structural and Investment Funds' (COM(2015)0639),

— having regard to its resolution of 16 February 2017 on investing in jobs and growth — maximising the contribution of European Structural and Investment Funds: an evaluation of the report under Article 16(3) of the CPR ([1]),

— having regard to its resolution of 13 September 2016 on European Territorial Cooperation — best practices and innovative measures ([2]),

— having regard to its resolution of 11 May 2016 on acceleration of implementation of cohesion policy ([3]),

— having regard to its resolution of 21 January 2010 on a European Strategy for the Danube Region ([4]), its resolution of 6 July 2010 on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the role of macro-regions in the future cohesion policy ([5]), its resolution of 28 October 2015 on an EU strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region ([6]), and its resolution of 13 September 2016 on an EU Strategy for the Alpine region ([7]),

— having regard to its resolution of 6 July 2016 on synergies for innovation: the European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other European innovation funds and EU programmes ([8]),

— having regard to its resolution of 10 May 2016 on new territorial development tools in cohesion policy 2014-2020: Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) ([9]),

— having regard to its resolution of 26 November 2015 on 'Towards simplification and performance orientation in cohesion policy for 2014-2020' ([10]),

— having regard to its resolution of 9 September 2015 on 'Investment for jobs and growth: promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Union' ([11]),

— having regard to its resolution of 9 September 2015 on the urban dimension of EU policies ([12]),

— having regard to Commission communications and Parliament resolutions on the outermost regions, in particular its resolution of 18 April 2012 on the role of Cohesion Policy in the outermost regions of the European Union in the context of EU 2020 ([13]) and that of 26 February 2014 on optimising the potential of outermost regions by creating synergies between the Structural Funds and other European Union programmes ([14]),

(1) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2017)0053.
(2) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0321.
(3) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0217.
(4) OJ C 305 E, 11.11.2010, p. 14.
(5) OJ C 351 E, 2.12.2011, p. 1.
(6) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0383.
(7) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0336.
(8) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0311.
(9) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0211.
(10) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0419.
(11) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0308.
(12) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0307.
(13) OJ C 258 E, 7.9.2013, p. 1.
(14) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0133.

— having regard to its resolution of 28 October 2015 on cohesion policy and the review of the Europe 2020 strategy ([1]),

— having regard to the conclusions and recommendations of the 'High Level Group monitoring simplification for beneficiaries of ESI funds',

— having regard to the Council conclusions on the 2016 European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 31, 'Spending at least one euro in every five from the EU budget on climate action: ambitious work underway, but serious risk of falling short', adopted on 21 March 2017,

— having regard to the Court of Justice judgment of 15 December 2015 ([2]) on the interpretation of Article 349 TFEU,

— having regard to the European Court of Auditors Special Report No 19/2016: Implementing the EU budget through financial instruments — lessons to be learnt from the 2007-2013 programme period,

— having regard to the report of the Commission of 22 February 2016 on the European Structural and Investment Funds and European Fund for Strategic Investments complementarities — ensuring coordination, synergies and complementarity,

— having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinion of the Committee on Budgets (A8-0202/2017),

A. whereas EU cohesion policy stems from the TEU and the TFEU and expresses the EU's solidarity as one of the fundamental principles of the Union, by pursuing its Treaty based objective of reducing regional disparities and promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion among all regions across the EU;

B. whereas the functioning of the EU as a 'convergence tool' stalled after 2008, causing an increase in existing divergences between and within Member States, as well as deepening social and economic inequalities throughout the EU; recalls that cohesion policy at European level is very effective, particularly in promoting various forms of territorial cooperation, and therefore remains — in its economic, social and territorial dimension — an urgently necessary policy which combines the specific needs of a territory with EU priorities and delivers tangible results on the ground for all citizens;

C. whereas cohesion policy remains the main, highly successful and valued EU-wide investment and development policy for sustainable job creation and for creating smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and competitiveness after 2020, especially against the backdrop of a sharp decline in public and private investments in many Member States and the implications of globalisation; recalls that cohesion policy has played a vital role and shown significant responsiveness to macroeconomic constraints;

D. whereas the last reform of cohesion policy in 2013 was extensive and substantial, shifting the focus of the policy towards a result-oriented approach, thematic concentration, effectiveness and efficiency on the one hand and principles including partnership, multi-level governance, smart specialisation and place-based approaches on the other;

E. whereas the renewed cohesion policy resulted in a gradual shift of focus from one based on major infrastructure-related projects towards one based on stimulating the knowledge economy and innovation;

F. whereas these principles should be maintained and consolidated after 2020 in order to ensure continuity, visibility, legal certainty, accessibility and transparency of policy implementation;

([1]) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0384.
([2]) ECLI:EU:C:2015:813.

G. whereas in order to render cohesion policy a success post-2020, it is essential to reduce the administrative burden for its beneficiaries and management authorities, to find the right balance between the result orientation of the policy and the level of checks and controls to increase proportionality, to introduce differentiation into the implementation of programmes, and to simplify the rules and procedures, as it is currently often perceived as too complex;

H. whereas these elements — combined with the integrated policy approach and the partnership principle — illustrate the added value of cohesion policy;

I. whereas the increasing constraints on both the EU and the national budgets and the consequences of Brexit should not lead to EU cohesion policy being weakened; calls, in this context, for the EU/UK negotiators to reflect on the pros and cons of the UK continuing to participate in European Territorial Cooperation programmes;

J. whereas cohesion policy already addresses a very wide range of challenges relating to its objectives as laid down in the Treaties and cannot be expected to tackle all new challenges the EU will face post 2020 with the same — or an even smaller — budget, although the impact may be bigger if Member States, regions and cities are allowed more flexibility to support new political challenges;

Added value of EU cohesion policy

1. Strongly opposes any scenario for the EU27 by 2025, as contained in the White Paper on the Future of Europe, which would scale down the EU's efforts in relation to cohesion policy; invites the Commission, on the contrary, to present a comprehensive legislative proposal for a strong and effective cohesion policy post-2020;

2. Underlines that growth and regional, economic and social convergence cannot be achieved without good governance, cooperation, mutual trust among all stakeholders and the effective involvement of partners at national, regional and local level, as is enshrined in the partnership principle (Article 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)); reiterates that the EU cohesion policy's shared management arrangement provides the EU with a unique tool to directly address the concerns of citizens in relation to internal and external challenges; is of the opinion that shared management, which is based on the partnership principle, multilevel governance and the coordination of different administrative levels, is of significant value in ensuring better ownership and responsibility for policy implementation among all stakeholders;

3. Emphasises the catalyst effects of cohesion policy and the lessons that can be learnt for administrations, beneficiaries and stakeholders; highlights the horizontal and cross-cutting approach of cohesion policy as a smart, sustainable and inclusive policy that provides a framework for mobilising and coordinating national and subnational actors, and for directly engaging them in working together towards reaching EU priorities through co-financed projects; calls in this context for optimal coordination and cooperation between the Commission DG responsible for cohesion policy and other DGs, as well as with national, regional and local authorities;

4. Regrets the late adoption of several operational programmes and the late designation of the managing authorities in some Member States during the current programming period; welcomes the first signs of the accelerated implementation of the operational programmes observed during 2016; urges the Commission to continue with the Task Force for Better Implementation in order to support implementation and to identify the causes of the delays, and to propose practical ways and measures of avoiding such problems at the outset of the next programming period; strongly encourages all actors involved to continue to further improve and accelerate implementation without causing bottlenecks;

5. Notes that the shortcomings of the financial planning and implementation system led to the accumulation of unpaid bills and the build-up of an unprecedented backlog that rolled over from the last Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to the current one; calls on the Commission to come up with a structured solution to solve such problems before the end of the current MFF and to prevent them from spilling over into the next MFF; underlines that the level of payment appropriations must match past commitments, especially towards the end of the period, when the level of payment claims from the Member States tends to increase significantly;

6. Recognises that in some Member States the partnership principle has led to closer cooperation with regional and local authorities, while there is still room for improvement in order to ensure the real and early involvement of all stakeholders, including from civil society, with a view to ensuring increased accountability and visibility in the implementation of cohesion policy without increasing administrative burdens or causing delays; underlines that stakeholders should continue to be involved in accordance with the multi-level governance approach; is of the opinion that the partnership principle and the code of conduct should be further strengthened in the future by, for example, introducing clear minimum requirements for partnership involvement;

7. Stresses that although cohesion policy has mitigated the impact of the recent economic and financial crisis in the EU, and that of the austerity measures, regional disparities, as well as disparities in competitiveness and social inequalities, remain high; calls for strengthened action to reduce these disparities and prevent the development of new disparities in all types of regions, while maintaining and consolidating support for the regions so as to facilitate ownership of the policy in every type of region and to achieve EU objectives throughout the EU; considers, in this context, that more attention needs to be paid to making regions more resilient to sudden shocks;

8. Points out that territorial cooperation in all its forms, including macro-regional strategies, whose potential is still to be fully exploited, transposes the concept of political cooperation and the coordination of regions and citizens across borders in the EU; underlines the value of cohesion policy in addressing the challenges inherent to islands, cross-border regions and the northernmost sparsely populated regions as provided for in Article 174 TFEU, to the outermost regions defined in Articles 349 and 355 TFEU which enjoy a special status and whose specific tools and financing should be maintained post-2020, and to peripheral regions;

9. Notes that European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) is one of the important goals of cohesion policy 2014-2020 which adds substantial added value to EU objectives, encourages solidarity between EU regions and with its neighbours and facilitates the exchange of experience and transfer of good practice, e.g. via standardised documents; insists on the need to continue pursuing cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation as part of the aim of strengthening territorial cohesion in line with Article 174 TFEU; considers that it should remain an important instrument post-2020; underlines, however, that the current ETC budget does not match the great challenges facing Interreg programmes nor does it effectively support cross-border cooperation; calls therefore for a substantially increased budget for ETC in the next programming period;

10. Underlines the importance of the current Interreg Europe cooperation programme for European public authorities to facilitate the exchange of experience and transfer of good practice; suggests that the funding possibilities in the next Interreg Europe programme after 2020 be enlarged to enable investment in physical pilot projects and demonstration projects, with the involvement of stakeholders across Europe also being taken into account;

Architecture of cohesion policy after 2020 — continuity and areas for improvement

11. Underlines that the current categorisation of regions, the reforms introduced, such as thematic concentration, and the performance framework have demonstrated the value of cohesion policy; asks the Commission to present ideas for greater flexibility in the implementation of the EU budget as a whole; considers the creation of a reserve an interesting option in this context to address major unforeseen events during the programming period and to facilitate the re-programming of operational programmes in order to adapt ESIF investments to the changing needs of each region, and also to address the effects of globalisation at regional and local level without, however, negatively affecting cohesion policy investments or impacting on the strategic orientation, long-term objectives and planning certainty and stability of multi-annual programmes for regional and local authorities;

12. Recognises the value of ex-ante conditionalities, in particular the one on Research and Innovation Strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3), which continue to support the strategic programming of the ESI Funds and have led to increased performance orientation; notes that ex-ante conditionalities enable the ESIF to support the Europe post-2020 objectives effectively without prejudice to the cohesion policy objectives, as stipulated in the Treaty;

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13. Opposes macro-economic conditionalities and highlights that the link between cohesion policy and economic governance processes in the European Semester must be balanced, reciprocal and non-punitive towards all the interested parties; supports a further recognition of the territorial dimension which could be beneficial for the European Semester, i.e. economic governance and the cohesion policy objectives of economic, social and territorial cohesion, as well as of sustainable growth, employment and environmental protection, should be considered in a balanced approach;

14. Believes, given that cohesion policy funding is intended to boost investment, growth and employment throughout the EU, that the Commission should explore, in the 7th Cohesion Report and in close cooperation with the Member State governments, how to address the impact of these investments on the budget deficits of these governments;

15. Points out that increasing administrative and institutional capacities — and therefore strengthening national and regional agencies for supporting investments — in the area of the programming, implementation and evaluation of operational programmes, as well as in the quality of professional training, in the Member States and regions is crucial for timely and successful cohesion policy performance and for bringing about convergence towards higher standards; stresses, in this context, the importance of the Taiex Regio Peer 2 Peer initiative which improves administrative and institutional capacity and produces better results for EU investments;

16. Highlights the need to simplify the cohesion policy's overall management system at all governance levels, facilitating the programming, management and evaluation of operational programmes, in order to make it more accessible, flexible and effective; emphasises, in this context, the importance of combating gold-plating in the Member States; asks the Commission to increase the possibilities for e-cohesion and specific types of expenditure, such as standard scales of unit costs and flat-rate amounts under CPR, and to introduce a digital platform or one-stop shops for information for applicants and beneficiaries; supports the conclusions and recommendations hitherto adopted by the 'High Level Group monitoring simplification for beneficiaries of ESI Funds', and encourages Member States to implement these recommendations;

17. Asks the Commission to reflect on solutions according to proportionality and differentiation in the implementation of programmes, based on risk, objective criteria and positive incentives for programmes, their scale and administrative capacity, especially with regard to the multiple layers of audit, which should focus on combating irregularities, namely fraud and corruption, and the number of controls, to achieve greater harmonisation between cohesion policy, competition policy and other Union policies, in particular state aid rules, which apply to the ESI Funds but not to EFSI or Horizon 2020, as well as with regard to the possibility of a single set of rules for all ESI Funds to make financing more efficient while taking into account the specificities of each Fund;

18. Calls on the Commission, with a view to real simplification, and in agreement with the managing authorities of national and regional programmes, to draw up a feasible plan to extend the simplified cost regime to the ERDF, also in keeping with the provisions of the proposal for a regulation to amend the financial rules applicable to the budget — the so-called Omnibus regulation;

19. Believes that grants should remain the basis of the financing of cohesion policy; notes, however, the increasing role of financial instruments; points out that loans, equity or guarantees can play a complementary role, but they should be used with caution, based on an appropriate ex-ante assessment and grants should be complemented only where such financial instruments demonstrate an added value and could have a leverage effect by attracting additional financial support, taking into account regional disparities and the diversity of practices and experiences;

20. Stresses the importance of assistance by the Commission, EIB and Member States to local and regional authorities on the innovative financial instruments through platforms such as fi-compass or by providing incentives for beneficiaries; recalls that these instruments are not suitable for all types of interventions under cohesion policy; is of the opinion that all regions, on a voluntary basis, ought to be able to decide on the implementation of financial instruments in line with their needs; opposes, however, binding quantitative targets for the use of financial instruments, and underlines that the increasing use of financial instruments should not lead to a reduction in the EU budget in general;

21. Calls on the Commission to ensure better synergies and communication between and about the ESI Funds and other Union funds and programmes, including EFSI, and to facilitate the implementation of multi-fund operations; stresses that the EFSI should not undermine the strategic coherence, territorial concentration and long-term perspective of cohesion policy programming and should not replace or crowd out the grants nor aim to replace or reduce the ESIF budget; insists on the real additionality of its resources; calls for the establishment of clear delimitations between the EFSI and cohesion policy, together with the provision of opportunities for their combination and facilitated use without mixing them, which can make the funding structure more attractive, in order to make good use of scarce EU resources; believes that the harmonisation of rules for multi-fund operations is needed, as well as a clear communication strategy on existing funding possibilities; invites the Commission, in this context, to develop a toolbox for beneficiaries;

22. Invites the Commission to reflect on the development of an additional set of indicators that complement the GDP indicator, which remains the main legitimate and reliable method for allocating ESI Funds fairly; believes that the Social Progress Index or a demographic indicator should be evaluated and considered in this context in order to provide a comprehensive picture of regional development; considers that such indicators could better respond to the new types of inequalities between EU regions that are arising; stresses, furthermore, the relevance of outcome indicators to strengthen the result and performance orientation of the policy;

23. Calls on the Commission to consider measures aimed at resolving the issue of national financing of cohesion policy projects in view of the problem faced by local and regional authorities in highly centralised Member States that do not have sufficient fiscal and financial capacities and that experience great difficulties in co-financing projects, and often even in drafting project documentation, due to the lack of available financial resources, which leads to lower utilisation of cohesion policy;

24. Encourages the Commission to consider the possibility of using the NUTS III level as a classification of regions in cohesion policy for some selected priorities;

Key policy areas for a modernised cohesion Policy after 2020

25. Stresses the importance of the ESF, the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative, especially in the fight against long-term and youth unemployment in the Union, which are at a historically high level, particularly in less developed regions, in the outermost regions and in regions which have been hit hardest by the crisis; emphasises the key role played by SMEs in job creation — accounting for 80 % of jobs in the Union — in promoting innovative sectors such as the digital and low-carbon economies;

26. Believes that the post-2020 cohesion policy should continue to care for the vulnerable and the marginalised, address growing inequalities and build solidarity; notes the positive impact in terms of the social and employment-related added value of investments in education, training and culture; points, furthermore, to the need to maintain social inclusion, including ESF spending, complemented by ERDF investments in that field;

27. Suggests a better use of ESI Funds in order to tackle demographic change and address its regional and local consequences; is of the opinion that in regions facing challenges such as depopulation ESI Funds should be optimally targeted to create jobs and growth;

28. Notes the increasing importance of the Territorial Agenda and of successful rural-urban partnerships, as well as the exemplary role of smart cities as microcosms and catalysts for innovative solutions to regional and local challenges;

29. Welcomes the Pact of Amsterdam and the better recognition accorded to the role of cities and urban areas in European policy-making and demands an effective implementation of the cooperative working method through the partnerships that the Pact entails; expects the results to be incorporated in future EU policies post-2020;

30. Underlines the enhanced urban dimension of cohesion policy in the form of specific provisions for sustainable urban development and urban innovative actions; considers that this should be further developed and financially strengthened post-2020, and that the sub-delegation of competences to lower levels should be reinforced; encourages the Commission to improve coordination between various measures aimed at cities to enhance the direct support to local governments under cohesion policy by providing financing and tailored instruments for territorial development; emphasises the future role of territorial development tools, such as Community-Led Local Development and the Integrated Territorial Investments;

31. Endorses the EU's commitments under the Paris climate change agreement; recalls in this context, the goal endorsed by all EU institutions of spending at least 20 % of the EU budget on climate change-related action, and underlines that the ESI Funds play a key role in this direction and should continue be used as effectively as possible for climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as for green economies and renewable energies; considers it necessary to improve the monitoring and tracking system for climate spending; highlights the potential of ETC in this regard, as well as the role of cities and regions in the context of the Urban Agenda;

32. Notes that RIS3 strengthens the regional innovation ecosystems; stresses that research, innovation and technology development should continue to play a prominent role to allow the EU to compete globally; considers that the smart specialisation model should become one of the leading approaches of post-2020 cohesion policy by encouraging cooperation between different regions, urban and rural areas and bolstering the economic development of the EU, creating synergies between transnational RIS3 and world-class clusters; recalls the existing Stairway to Excellence (S2E) pilot project, which continues to support regions in the development and exploitation of synergies between the ESIF, Horizon 2020 and other EU funding programmes; consequently takes the view that further efforts must be made to maximise synergies in order to further strengthen smart specialisation and innovation post-2020;

33. Underlines that the increased visibility of the cohesion policy is vital to fight against euroscepticism and can contribute to regaining citizens' confidence and trust; highlights that in order to improve the visibility of ESI Funds, greater focus must be placed on the content and results of their programmes, through a top-down and bottom-up approach allowing participation by stakeholders and recipients who can act as an effective channel through which to disseminate cohesion policy achievements; urges, furthermore, the Commission, Member States, regions and cities to communicate in a more efficient way on the measureable results of cohesion policy which bring added value to the everyday life of EU citizens; urges that communication activities under a specific budget within the technical assistance should continue, if appropriate, until after a project has closed when its results become clearly visible;

Outlook

34. Calls for the fostering of economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity across the EU and for the steering of EU funds towards growth, jobs and competitiveness to be put at the top of the EU agenda; calls also for the fight against regional disparities, poverty and social exclusion, as well as against discrimination, to be maintained; considers that, in addition to the goals enshrined in the Treaties, cohesion policy should continue to serve as a tool to attain EU political objectives, thus also contributing to a greater awareness of its performance and remaining the Union's main investment policy available to all regions;

35. Reiterates that it is high time to prepare the post-2020 EU cohesion policy in order to launch it effectively at the very start of the new programming period; calls therefore for the Commission's preparation of the new legislative framework to start in due time, namely swiftly after the presentation and translation into the official languages of the Commission proposal for the next MFF; calls, furthermore, for the timely adoption of all legislative proposals for future cohesion policy, and for guidance on management and control before the start of the new programming period, with no retro-active effect; underlines that the delayed implementation of operational programmes affects the efficiency of cohesion policy;

36. Notes that the core of the current cohesion policy legislative framework should be maintained after 2020 with a refined, strengthened, easily accessible and result-orientated policy and with an added value of the policy which is better communicated to citizens;

37. Stresses in view of the Commission's proposal 2016/0282(COD) that the reception of migrants and refugees under international protection as well as their social and economic integration requires a coherent transnational approach, which should also be addressed through the current and future EU cohesion policy;

38. Points to the importance of stability in the rules; calls on the Commission, when drawing up the implementation provisions for cohesion policy under the next MFF, to keep changes to a minimum; is convinced of the need for the EU budget share for cohesion policy after 2020 to be maintained at an adequate level, if not increased, in light of the complex internal and external challenges that the policy will have to address in view of its objectives; considers that this policy must not be weakened under any circumstances, Brexit included, and that its share of the total EU budget should not be reduced by siphoning off means for new challenges; underlines, furthermore, the multi-annual nature of cohesion policy and calls for its 7-year programming period to be maintained or for the introduction of a 5+5 years programming period with an obligatory mid-term revision;

39. Calls for the swift allocation of the performance reserve; notes that the time between performance and the release of the reserve is too long, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the reserve; urges the Commission to allow Member States to operationalise the use of the performance reserve as soon as the review has been finalised;

40. Points out in this context that the digital agenda, including the provision of the necessary infrastructure and advanced technological solutions, must be a priority within the framework of cohesion policy, particularly in the next funding period; notes that developments in the telecommunications sector must in any case be accompanied by appropriate training, which should also be supported by cohesion policy;

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41. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission as well as the Member States and their parliaments and the Committee of the Regions.