

<p style="text-align: center;">BRINGING OPPORTUNITIES TO EUROPEANS: COMMUNICATING TOGETHER THE RESULTS OF EU COHESION POLICY</p>

On 25 April 2017 in Luxembourg, EU Commissioner for regional policy Corina Crețu presented to the General Affairs Council (GAC), on her and Commissioner Marianne Thyssen's behalf, seven proposals to increase the visibility of cohesion policy across Europe.

Member States generally expressed support to those proposed actions and the Presidency of the Council informed Member States that a second debate on the visibility of cohesion policy would be held at the 15 November GAC, under Estonia's presidency.

Based on the 25 April conclusions of the GAC meeting stating that Member States and the Commission need to scale up their efforts to increase the visibility of cohesion policy, this document aims to provide more concrete elements on the implementation of the seven proposed actions.

This communication campaign must rest on two principles:

1. Communicating on cohesion policy is a shared responsibility. For practical as well as political reasons, the European Commission cannot, and should not be the driving force behind it. Member States, local and regional authorities and civil society should all play their due role to ensure these proposals are implemented with the best possible impact. The Member States have a legal obligation to provide information about the projects funded by cohesion policy, according to articles 115-116 of the Common Provisions Regulation¹.
2. To avoid reinventing the wheel, most proposed actions should use existing tools such as the 'EU in My Region' campaign, which is already implemented in most Member States, or the European Commission's campaign to communicate the concrete benefits of the EU for citizens. Its first pillar, '**InvestEU**', will be followed by two other themes relevant for cohesion policy, '**EUEmpowers**' and '**EUprotects**'. By the same token, the European Commission's representations and the Europe Direct Information Centres as well as the European Parliament's information offices should be mobilised.

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¹ Regulation (EU) N°1303/2013 laying down common provisions for the ESI funds.

IMPLEMENTING SEVEN COMMUNICATION ACTIONS

1. The **cohesion policy coalition**'s main aim will be to raise the profile of cohesion policy across the whole of Europe by bringing together beneficiaries of cohesion funds. In order to generate a truly grassroots movement, it will not be led by the European Commission. Preliminary contacts with the Committee of the Regions indicate that it could play the role of giving the first impulse to the coalition by bringing together representatives of Europe's cities and regions, of civil society as well as other parties willing to join the coalition.

The coalition will not require a permanent structure as it will not be centralised. Beyond the first meeting at which those willing to be involved will agree on what specific actions to take, it must very much work in a "subsidiarity" way: umbrella associations of local and regional authorities, of the health or education sectors, etc., will pledge to spread the message to their members and will stand ready to support those members of theirs willing to play an active role. Other parties (individuals, Member States, Regions, Cities, NGOs) are more than welcome to join on equal footing.

Such "active role" cannot be defined with maximum precision as each party to the coalition should be free to decide what to do (and how) to raise the profile of cohesion Policy in their city or region. However, in order to give the coalition a truly pan-European dimension, actions will include gathering short video messages in which beneficiaries state how cohesion policy helped them and why they believe it is needed in future. Such video messages will be mainly shared on social media.

A formal launching ceremony, linked to an event such as the European Week of Regions and Cities for instance, which takes place in Brussels in October, will be organised as the launch of the coalition itself constitutes a communication opportunity.

NEXT STEPS: Pursuing contacts with Committee of the Regions with the aim to launch the coalition by the end of 2017 at the latest.

2. The **video competition** on the achievements of cohesion policy will be organised at national level. It will reward the most original way to present such achievements. The competition will be open to any European individual or organisation. Commission's representations and the European Parliament's information offices in the Member States will work hand in hand with national authorities to organise the competition. Each Member States will organise it the way it sees fit within an agreed common framework.

The winners from each Member State will be invited to present their videos at the European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels the winning videos will be shared on social media, including by parties to the coalition.

NEXT STEPS: Member States willing to take part to organise competition at national level. Commission, Committee of the Regions and Parliament to provide support (via representations or in kind) if and when required.

3. National, regional or local authorities should launch, as soon as feasible, a '**Did you know?**' campaign revealing how some of their country's/region's most iconic monuments or most popular products have been built, renovated, supported or launched with

investments from cohesion policy. Or how some successful start-ups, for instance, took off with EU support and how people benefitted from EU support to find a job.

Three emblematic projects for each country – and where possible **for each region** - should be identified and the appropriate ways and channels should be used to communicate to the public about how the EU provided support to make them happen. These could include, for instance, short documentaries disseminated through social media, exhibitions, TV reportages, newspaper articles, social media quizzes, school competitions.

Following the implementation of the campaign, national or regional authorities should present its concept and results to a meeting of their representatives in charge of communicating cohesion policy (joint meeting of the INFORM & INIO networks). This should enable them to share best practices and explore, if suitable, possibilities to disseminate each other's' examples. This would enable Europeans to see how the EU funded certain touristic objectives in other EU countries which they visited, for instance, or supported socially marginalised groups that face similar challenges in their country.

NEXT STEPS: Member States that are willing to join to launch the campaign as soon as feasible, and to complete it before the end of 2017. European Commission to provide support as appropriate, including by making available graphic material, producing content or promoting the campaign.

4. National, regional and local authorities should help people remember or discover how their city or region looked before cohesion policy changed the landscape through its numerous investments. And they should incite people to dream about how they want their city or region to look in the future. **Photo exhibitions** on the theme **yesterday-today-tomorrow** should picture cities or regions before projects supported by cohesion policy were implemented, contrasted with the present pictures, and completed with drawings or paintings portraying the city or region as it is imagined by its citizens in 20 years.

An exhibition should be organised in each region, and where suitable in each city or village where cohesion policy brought sizeable changes over time. It would take the appropriate format for the local circumstances – either with photos exhibited in public squares, public buildings, schools, or be web-based.

The exhibitions would provide an appropriate **preamble for dialogues with the people** about what has been achieved over the decades through cohesion policy and what the priorities for the future should be. The discussions should seek to bring together a trans-generational public to remember the past, reflect on the present and imagine the future – and identify ways in which the EU can support the vision of the future.

NEXT STEPS: National, regional or local authorities to launch exhibitions followed by debates on the future of cohesion policy throughout the year. European Commission to provide logistics support, as appropriate, and to promote them.

5. Member States' authorities should organise their own versions of the **European Regiostars awards**, rewarding successful cohesion projects, on an annual basis. The type and number of categories would be adapted to the priorities of each Member State or

region. Member States authorities could consider enlarging the scope of the awards to cover all type of projects funded by the EU, not just from cohesion policy.

A separate category covering outstanding or innovative communication initiatives on cohesion policy could be included in the awards in each Member State. This could reward media for reporting on cohesion policy achievements or citizens proposing innovative ways to communicate to the public on the tangible benefits that the EU delivers through cohesion policy.

Voting by the public to select the winners in each category should help raise awareness of cohesion policy, incite reflections and debates about the merits of specific projects or investments and thus raise the visibility of the benefits brought by cohesion policy.

The winners of the national Regiostar awards will be announced at the European Regiostar awards during the European Week of Regions and Cities, in Brussels.

NEXT STEPS: Member States to launch preparations for the national Regiostars awards, with the aim of holding the first edition at the latest in 2018. The 2018 European Regiostar awards to announce the winners of the national editions. The European Commission, Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament to provide support as appropriate in each Member State, from logistic support to provision of graphic material or promotion of the national awards.

6. The 60 years' anniversary of the EU, celebrated in 2017, should provide Member States authorities the opportunity to showcase 60 projects funded through cohesion policy in each EU Member State. The **'60 ways the EU helped YOU'** campaign should highlight projects that resonate with local audiences' aspirations and concerns.

These projects would be presented in the most appropriate way depending on the local context and on the adequate channel for reaching out to people. This could include a travelling exhibition, a social media campaign disseminating 60 short video-documentaries, a series of newspaper feuillets or TV reportages. The projects could be chosen either by the management authorities or following a selection or vote from among proposals submitted by the public, including by beneficiaries of the projects – business people who launched their project with the support from cohesion policy.

The European Commission could gather all projects showcased through the national campaigns to create a catalogue representing achievements of cohesion policy over the past six decades.

NEXT STEPS: Member States willing to join to launch the campaign rapidly, with a view to completing it before the end of the year. The European Commission, through its representations in particular, as well as the European Parliament, to provide all appropriate support. The European Commission could gather all projects showcased in the Member States in a virtual catalogue illustrating 60 years of EU support to the people.

7. Regional authorities should seek to organise **a debate about cohesion policy in each region** until the end of 2017. The aim would be to listen to the people and discuss with them what cohesion policy could fund in their region in the future. And to raise their awareness of what cohesion policy has already delivered. The debates should take place

in the appropriate format for each region, as town hall meetings, for instance, or talk-show debates with participation from the public. They would complement the Citizens' Dialogues that the Commission organises with all Commissioners across the EU. During most of these Dialogues Members of the Commission and senior civil servants highlight the tangible benefits of the cohesion policy for the hosting town and region.

European Commission representatives, ranging from commissioners to the representations in the Member States, as well as Members of the European Parliament, could participate to such debates, where appropriate, to listen to the people and discuss with them about the future priorities of cohesion policy, and of the EU.

Representatives of the regions should share the ideas that were presented by the people in these debates during a session of the Committee of the Regions at the beginning of 2018.

NEXT STEPS: Regional authorities to launch preparations for the debates. European Commission, European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions to support such preparations in all appropriate ways – from participation to the debates, to logistical support or promotion of the debates.

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The way forward

The actions proposed should start being implemented rapidly and regular exchanges should take place to assess progress. While these actions are mainly for the EU Member States' authorities to implement at the appropriate level – national, regional or local – the European Commission, in particular through its representations in the Member States, will provide all appropriate support. It will also explore possibilities to fund certain joint communication actions, if appropriate. In parallel, the Commission will fully deploy its wide-ranging campaign showing the concrete ways in which the EU provides opportunities and protection to people around the EU, as well as communicating specifically on the benefits of cohesion policy.

To monitor the implementation of the actions proposed and to share experience on innovative ways to reach out to the people, regular exchanges will take place between representatives of Member States and the European Commission, at technical level (through the meetings of the INFORM and INIO network), as well as political level. Progress towards the objective set by the Council Conclusions to increase the visibility of cohesion policy could also be assessed once a year at political level.