
12th meeting of the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER)

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Increasing investments with the aim to equalise development levels and to encourage regions and cities to create better conditions for their residents activities and to improve their quality of life should be the key response to the challenges that are currently faced by the European Union, also in the context of Brexit. This was the main message of the COTER Commission, of the European Commissioner for Regional Policy – Corina Crețu and of the ministers responsible for the realisation of cohesion policy in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia.

EU regions and cities are afraid that the essential objective concerning economic, social and territorial cohesion might lose its importance in the EU budget after 2020 which is to be proposed by the European Commission by the end of this year. Their concerns are related to the potential influence of Brexit on the available resources and to the attempts to centralise investment management in the EU, to replace subsidies with loans and to allocate funds to other priorities, such as migration, protection of external borders or supporting structural reforms.

These issues were discussed on March 2, 2017 in Warsaw by the participants of the 12th meeting of the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER). The assembly also accepted the opinion of the Committee of the Regions, “The Future of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020”, prepared by Michael Schneider.

On March 3, 2017, the participants of the “Future of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020” conference discussed, within 3 main panels, ways to make this policy more efficient and bring it closer to the citizens.

“Return to the roots or a new beginning – how to translate the objective of the Treaty concerning economic, social and territorial cohesion into an effective response to future challenges” was the topic of the first session. Its participants emphasised that cohesion policy is one of the main pillars supporting the single market and the European integration process. By focusing on



long-term regional development, it aims to ensure fair opportunities, so that all EU citizens can feel the benefits of European integration.

The second session focused on “Dialogue with science – new challenges for regions and cities and innovative approaches to confronting them”. Challenges that are currently faced by regions and cities include the economic and financial recession, global competition, digital transformation, development of breakthrough technologies, demographic transformations or migration.

“Cohesion in practice – examples of success in implementing the cohesion policy” provided an opportunity to present the importance and added value of cohesion policy for the development of regions and cities and to define key factors that contributed to the effective realisation of projects financed through this policy.

Cohesion policy, to which EUR 454 billion are to be allocated by the year 2020, is one of the main investment tools of the EU, aimed at supporting smart growth that fosters social inclusion in all the European regions. Members of the Committee of the Regions and the invited guests discussed the influence of cohesion policy on both stronger and weaker European regions and its importance for the European Union. Another important voice in the discussion presented this issue from the point of view of cities and regions.

The Marshal of Mazovia, Adam Struzik, once more emphasised the importance of cohesion policy as a key European tool that supports the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU. It is also the most noticeable strategy on the local and regional level. *“We are living in difficult times and these times require us to take firm action. The Community is struggling with terrorism, migration, increasing European scepticism and economic problems. The proposals to create a “two-speed Europe”, a separate budget for eurozone Member States or to limit the Schengen area are threatening the existence of the European Union that we currently know. The European community may survive only provided that its Member States solve the main problems together.”*

