



European Committee of the Regions

Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget

COTER

# REGI-COTER: Reinforcing Cohesion through Political Cooperation



European Committee of the Regions

Created in 1994, after the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty, the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's assembly of 350 regional and local representatives from all 28 Member States, representing over 507 million Europeans. Its mission is to involve regional and local authorities and the communities they represent in the EU's decision-making process and to inform them about EU policies. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council consult the Committee in policy areas affecting regions and cities. It can appeal to the Court of Justice of the European Union if its rights are infringed or it believes that EU law infringes the subsidiarity principle or fails to respect regional or local powers.

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The Committee on Regional Development (REGI) of the European Parliament and the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER) of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) have continued to actively cooperate throughout the mandate 2014-2019.

Through the close contacts between the CoR's rapporteurs and the rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs of the European Parliament and their converging positions, both institutions have significantly shaped the debate on the effective implementation of the current and the design of the future cohesion policy beyond 2020. This fruitful cooperation has also enabled the interests and demands of European citizens and local and regional authorities to be voiced in relation to the EU's place-based policies.

The Members of the European Parliament and the CoR have been regularly invited to present their opinions and reports at the meetings and public hearings respectively organised by both institutions. Furthermore, the annual REGI-COTER meetings represent one of the key political moments of every edition of the European Week of Regions and Cities. The regular presence of the Commissioner in charge of regional policy also shows the high political interest in these annual meetings.

This excellent cooperation between the REGI committee and the COTER commission has successfully filled with life the Cooperation agreement between the European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions, which was signed on 5 February 2014 by the Presidents of both institutions and which had a political focus on cooperation 'in order to reinforce the democratic legitimacy of the European Union and contribute to the Treaty objective of pursuing territorial, social and economic cohesion in the Union' as well as to 'ensure the respect of the subsidiarity principle'. It also served as a model for reinforcing the cooperation between the CoR COTER commission and other EP committees, as well as between other CoR commissions and their counterparts in the European Parliament.

The cooperation between REGI committee and the COTER commission was complemented by an intensive cooperation between the COTER secretariat and the European Parliamentary Research Service, which resulted in the provision of high-quality background information and expertise on the key policy areas of both committees, contributing to both a well-informed debate and an increased visibility of the work of both committees.

In terms of content, the primary focus of the debates over the last four years has been on the simplification of Cohesion policy, the discussions on the upcoming programming period 2021-2027 and the launch and implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU. On these matters, the CoR and the European Parliament have joined forces to improve the quality of EU regulations and policies.

Concerning the negotiations on the new Cohesion policy package 2021-2027, COTER and REGI rapporteurs have consistently exchanged views in order to **improve the legislative proposals**. The positions of REGI and COTER were convergent on many similar issues, such as:



- **The Common Provisions Regulation:**
  - The EAFRD should be reintroduced into the CPR architecture.
  - Strong emphasis on the principles of partnership and multilevel governance.
  - Both institutions called for a financial allocation for the whole 2021-2027 period, higher co-financing rates, the maintenance of the n+3 rule, and the introduction of a safety net that would also apply to the regional level.
  - The CoR and the EP are firmly against the idea of macro-economic conditionality.
- **European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg):**
  - The CoR and the EP supported a significantly higher budget for the ETC than initially proposed by the EC.
  - They also have similar views on co-financing rates, and on increased levels of pre-financing.
  - Both the CoR and the EP demand that the cross-border cooperation component keeps supporting both land and maritime cooperation.
  - Both the EP and CoR support the creation of interregional innovation investments (III) with specific budget allocation. Nevertheless, they both ask that this new initiative is kept separate from the ETC traditional components.
- **ERDF/Cohesion Fund:**
  - The ERDF thematic concentration should focus on categories of regions classified according to their GDP per capita.
  - The necessity to implement a multi-fund approach with the ESF+ and, where appropriate, with the EAFRD and the EMFF.
  - Increased focus on sustainable urban development, reaching outermost regions and dedication to climate objectives.
  - Including in the ERDF/CF regulation a new article referring to areas covered by Article 174 of the TFEU, as well as other areas with severe and permanent natural or demographic disadvantages.
- **Cross Border Mechanism:**
  - The views of the CoR and EP are globally convergent on the Cross Border Mechanism. In particular the clarification on the scope of the proposal.
  - They also call for the inclusion of maritime borders and the need for proper dissemination of information.
  - Both institutions supported amendments to the text explicitly indicating that not only Member states, but also those territorial entities with legislative powers, should be involved in the concrete application of the Mechanism.



## Start of the mandate, new CP period 2014-2020, new tools



1 2014

The beginning of the mandate 2014-2019 was significantly influenced by the five years of economic crisis, which heavily impacted on many regions and also coincided with the start of a new 7-year programming period for Cohesion Policy. The 2014 edition of the annual REGI-COTER meeting allowed a timely discussion on **the challenges for the implementation of Cohesion policy in 2014-2020 and on the need for the Structural and Investment Funds to deliver results as fast and effectively as possible.**

Against this background, Members of both institutions recalled the role of regions and cities as central policy actors in policy implementation, and the new available tools such as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), which allowed for a place-based approach to territorial development.

**Iskra Mihaylova**, Chair of the EP REGI committee stressed the importance of making use of these tools to deliver results quickly to citizens, to look into individual projects and to strengthen administrative capacity.

**Marek Woźniak**, Chair of the COTER commission (2012-2014), noted that the delays in the programming and the adherence to the principles of partnership and multilevel governance were the most pertinent issues at that time.

## Flexibility and simplifying cohesion policy



2 2015

On 13 October 2015, under the motto "Investing in partnership: how to best use the reformed Cohesion policy 2014-2020 for creating growth and jobs in Europe's regions", REGI and COTER Members jointly discussed the implementation of Cohesion policy with the Commissioner for regional policy, **Corina Crețu**.

During that meeting, REGI and COTER members stressed the importance of the principles of partnership and multilevel governance as a prerequisite for the successful implementation of Cohesion policy programmes. They highlighted the major challenges that local and regional authorities face in view of the refugee crisis.

Finally, Members expressed their readiness to **contribute to the political debate on measuring progress in territorial development that goes beyond GDP.**

## EU Urban Agenda #1



4 2016

Within the framework of the formal adoption of the Pact of Amsterdam establishing the **Urban Agenda for the EU**, on 30 May 2016, by the informal council of ministers on urban affairs, the REGI committee and the COTER commission adopted a joint political statement to accelerate the adoption of this Pact, while reinforcing the role of the regions and cities in the EU legislative process. In this respect, both institutions organized the first joint public hearing on the implementation of the Urban Agenda in 2016.

**Hella Dunger-Löper** and **Kerstin Westphal**, both rapporteurs on the Urban Agenda, stressed that

*"the EU Urban Agenda should go beyond the intergovernmental level and should closely be linked to the Better regulation Agenda of the European Commission, including within its framework the use of Territorial and Urban Impact Assessments."*

## Cohesion policy remains a crucial tool to attain the EU goals of solidarity and economic convergence

3 2016

Within the 2016 edition of the European Week of Regions and Cities, COTER Members expressed their conviction that prolonged periods of negative growth and low absorption of Structural and Cohesion Funds could be reversed. In particular, REGI and COTER worked together, to oppose especially in the possible **application of the macroeconomic conditionality in the cases of Spain and Portugal, which both institutions were formally opposed to.**

**Raffaele Cattaneo**, Chair of the COTER Commission (2015-2017) noted that

*"Cohesion policy improves the quality of citizens' lives and fosters EU solidarity, by tackling major global challenges from a local perspective."*

As a result of the discussions, the REGI and COTER members concluded on the need to effectively connect the next generation of the European Structural and Investments Funds to the actual challenges faced by regions and cities on the ground, in a bottom-up approach, as well as on the need to focus on results and to better communicate the positive impact of cohesion policy.

**Iskra Mihaylova** said that

*"In a time of economic uncertainty and doubts on the European project, cohesion policy remains a crucial tool to attain the EU goals of solidarity and economic convergence."*

## EU Urban Agenda #2



5 2017

The Pact of Amsterdam established that the Urban Agenda for the EU the partnerships should focus particularly on three pillars of EU policy-making and implementation: better regulation, better funding and better knowledge.

In the second public hearing in 2017, **Kieran McCarthy**, rapporteur of the Opinion on that matter and **Jan Olbrycht**, MEP and President of the URBAN Intergroup, underlined

*"the specific attention that should be given to cities, by promoting further synergies between the Urban Agenda for the EU and the sustainable urban strategies co-financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds."*

## 7th Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion



6 2017

The 2017 edition of the joint REGI-COTER meeting featured a presentation of the main findings of the **7th Cohesion report on economic, social and territorial cohesion** by Commissioner Corina Crețu, which demonstrated the tangible European added value of Cohesion policy in facilitating job creation, sustainable growth and modernising infrastructure.

However, it also made it clear that, in view of the challenges that Europe was facing, a strong and effective Cohesion policy was more needed than ever in the following years.

Both the European Parliament and the CoR joined forces to ensure a strong, effective and more visible Cohesion policy after 2020. Therefore, many parliamentarians welcomed and joined the 'Cohesion Alliance' policy campaign, in order to send a strong signal that Cohesion policy must continue to be an integral part of the European Union's future.

The objective of this alliance is to send a clear message to institutional decision-makers on the importance of securing a strong cohesion policy for all regions beyond 2020.

## An enhanced REGI-COTER cooperation



8 2019

On 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2019, REGI-COTER chairs and political coordinators met to showcase the excellent cooperation between both institutions. CoR's rapporteurs have maintained with the rapporteurs of the European Parliament regular contacts and both institutions have been able to significantly contribute to the debate on the effective implementation of the current and the design of the future cohesion policy beyond 2020.

In this context, working together, the Members of the COTER and the REGI have demonstrated that the regulations are better shaped and adapted to the regions, cities and final beneficiaries. Representatives from both institutions agreed on the need for a strong partnership principle to accelerate the implementation of the future Cohesion policy beyond 2020. Moreover, they also called to speed up the negotiations on the future multi-annual budget and the new regulations for cohesion policy in order to avoid any delay and start the implementation on 1 January 2021.

To conclude, the local and regional representatives and Members of the European Parliament expressed their wish to continue with the annual REGI-COTER meetings that represent one of the key political moments of every edition of the European Week of Regions and Cities.

## For a Strong Cohesion policy beyond 2020



7 2018

With regard to the next MFF period 2021-2027, the 2018 REGI-COTER meeting addressed the global wide issues but explicitly the regional concerns of migration flows, demographic change and natural disaster risks. REGI and COTER members asked for less complicated rules, flexibility between Union programmes and funding instruments, greater synergies and complementarities to obtain quicker results and added value of Cohesion policy investments.

REGI Chair **Iskra Mihaylova** concluded

*"It is clear there is a common vision for the future of Cohesion Policy. The message of this meeting today is there is an understanding of responsibilities to deliver the options of Cohesion policy to the European citizens as efficiently as possible and be simpler, flexible and closer to its citizens."*

**Petr Osvald**, Chair for the COTER Commission (2017-2018), said

*"Relaunching the EU requires a stronger cohesion policy for all regions, as defended by the CoR together with the EU associations of regions and cities, MEPs and all partners of the #CohesionAlliance. The Committee and the European Parliament are made of elected politicians, we know well that the EU has to deliver new answers to citizens' needs and that cohesion policy can make a difference in this effort. This way we work together to make it better and stronger"*

## Looking forward to 2021-2027



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