

Introduction

As representative of the interests of local and regional authorities (LRAs) in the EU policy-making process, the CoR is actively committed to targeted simplification, drawing on the experiences of its members in the implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI). The CoR's expertise in this area has been recognised notably by the Council, with a series of joint technical workshops organised in 2016 and 2017. Focussing on such key aspects as auditing and reporting, state aid and public procurement rules, the use of financial instruments and the specific requirements of ETC (European Territorial Cooperation), the results of the workshops have been taken up in a series of CoR opinions*.

As the post-2020 legislative framework starts to take shape, the CoR highlights the important contribution that effective simplification could make to a future-oriented Cohesion Policy.

By empowering LRAs and facilitating the implementation of targeted investments in key priority areas of the EU's strategic agenda, we can deliver more tailored responses to citizens' requirements and encourage administrative best practice.

Our recent opinions presented in this leaflet place the spotlight on the benefits of closer partnership between EU authorities and national, local and regional authorities and the importance of appropriate flexibility to take account of diverse local requirements.

* Opinion on the Simplification of ESIF from the perspective of Local and Regional Authorities (COR-08-2016); Opinion on the Future of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020 (COR-01814/2016); Opinion on the Outcome of the negotiations on the partnership agreements and operational programmes (COR-06248-2014)

European Committee of the Regions in a nutshell

The European Committee of the Regions is the voice of regions and cities in the European Union.

350 members - regional and locally elected representatives from the 28 EU countries.

6 commissions covering competences in the following policy areas based on the EU Treaties:

Employment, vocational training, economic and social cohesion, social policy, health. Education and culture.

Environment, climate change, energy.

Transport and trans-European networks.

Civil protection and services of general interests.

The secretariat of the COTER commission (Territorial cohesion policy, transport and EU Budget): coter@cor.europa.eu



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FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON SIMPLIFICATION POST-2020

RAPPEUR OLDŘICH VLASÁK (CS/ECR)

(COR-2017-04842)

THE FINANCIAL RULES APPLICABLE TO THE GENERAL BUDGET OF THE UNION

RAPPEUR MICHEL RIJSBERMAN (NL/ALDE)

(COR-2016-05838)

INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL INVESTMENTS – A CHALLENGE FOR EU COHESION POLICY AFTER 2020

RAPPEUR PETR OSVALD (CS/PES)

(COR-2017-03554)

HLG Opinion summary



“Bold simplification putting local and regional beneficiaries at the heart of the post-2020 structural investments will help ensure that the European Union’s next long-term budget better responds to the challenges facing regions and cities.”

Oldřich Vlasák (CS/ECR)

Councillor of the City of Hradec Králové and member of the CoR

Main objectives of the Opinion

The High Level Group on Simplification (HLG) set out a series of important recommendations for simplification of the ESI funds post-2020. The CoR reiterates the key messages set out by the HLG and puts forward a number of proposals based on the experiences of LRAs, including:

- the significant benefits of the shared management model – for local ownership of EU objectives and exchange of best practice in administrative procedures – and the need to strengthen the partnership principle;
- the need for common rules and provisions post-2020, to facilitate combined use of the different ESI funds – only when used together can these complementary funds fulfil the Treaty objectives of economic, social and territorial cohesion;
- strong support for more harmonised rules on state aid and public procurement for different types of EU funding (‘level playing field’);
- developing the One Stop Shop concept at national or regional level to support beneficiaries in combined use of funds.

Omnibus Opinion summary



“A number of the CoR’s simplification proposals were taken up in the Omnibus proposal, while other areas could have been developed in more detail. The simplified calculation of staff costs will make a real difference for Managing Authorities. The proposed improvements to combined use of EFSI and ESI Funds are welcome, while the differentiated status with regard to state aid continues to create administrative burden and undermine synergies. Effective simplification of audit and more tailored recognition of existing certification systems at national level remain key priorities for the post-2020 period.”

Michiel RIJSBERMAN (NL/ALDE)

Regional Minister of the Province of Flevoland and member of the CoR

Main objectives of the Opinion

In its opinion on the ‘Omnibus Regulation’, the CoR addresses the measures proposed to achieve simplification and flexibility in the implementation of the EU budget. The technical aspects we focus on include:

- making better use of existing national procedures and systems for audit, for a more proportional approach;
- improving the clarity and legal certainty of certain provisions, so that streamlined audit and reporting rules can be applied with confidence by beneficiaries (‘conditional financing’);
- increasing operational flexibility in relation to some of the new provisions, for example by clarifying the rules on eligibility of expenditure and simplified calculation of staff costs;
- further progress towards facilitating combined use of the ESI funds with financing from EFSI (European Fund for Strategic Investments).

ITI Opinion summary



“As we have emphasised in the CoR’s opinions during the current programming period, effective simplification and a territorial approach are essential for delivering the EU’s policy objectives, creating European added value and improving social and economic conditions for EU citizens. It is essential to optimise the potential of the integrated approach in reinforcing cohesion and creating new thematic links within and between regions. With the right simplification measures going forward, the ITI tool could deliver important synergies as part of a future-oriented Cohesion Policy.”

Petr Osvald (CS/PES)

Member of Plzeň City Council and Chairman of the CoR COTER commission

Main objectives of the Opinion

Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) enable a more integrated, place-based approach to the delivery of Cohesion Policy. The CoR has taken stock of the experiences of LRAs in implementing ITIs to date and makes the following main recommendations for optimising this tool post-2020:

- provide greater flexibility so that the tool can be better adapted to different local needs and circumstances and to changing socio-economic contexts;
- simplify the implementation of ITIs, for example by concentrating all resources in one multi-fund operational programme where possible;
- develop specific indicators with LRAs for assessing the progress and results of ITIs;
- facilitate combination of ITI resources with other sources of funding, for example by using global grants with clear implementation responsibilities;
- call on all Member States to facilitate implementation of ITIs post-2020, recalling the specific potential of this tool in addressing subregional disparities.