
**PORTUGUESE PRESIDENCY OF THE EU COUNCIL
INFORMAL MINISTERIAL MEETING ON TERRITORIAL COHESION AND
REGIONAL POLICY,**

PONTA DELGADA, AZORES, 23 AND 24 NOVEMBER 2007
Part 2 – Session on Regional Policy (24 November)

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PRESIDENCY

At the invitation of the Portuguese Presidency of the EU Council, an Informal Ministerial Meeting on Territorial Cohesion and Regional Policy took place in Ponta Delgada, Azores, on 23 and 24 November 2007.

On 24 November the Ministers of the European Union responsible for Regional Policy, representing the Member States, met to discuss issues related to EU Cohesion Policy. Representatives of European Union institutions also took part in the meeting, as well as other international institutions. The Presidency was also pleased to welcome Ministerial representatives of the candidate countries to the EU, as well as Ministerial representatives from Member States of the European Free Trade Area.

The delegations took note of yesterday's Presidency conclusions on Territorial Cohesion, Part 1 of this Informal Ministerial Meeting, and the adoption of the First Action Programme for the implementation of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union, designed for the period 2007-2011, as well as the pertinence to deepen the discussions on the concept of "Territorial Cohesion", as defined in the Lisbon Treaty.

The Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion and the debate held on the occasion of the Fourth European Forum on Cohesion, held on 27 and 28 September 2007 in Brussels, identified a number of issues on the present and future EU Cohesion Policy. On the basis of the Presidency issues paper, the Ministers responsible for Regional Policy discussed the new contributions that EU Cohesion Policy can provide to foster growth and development.

The delegations also took note of the Commission Staff Working Document "*Regions Delivering Innovation Through Cohesion Policy*", drafted as a follow-up to the discussions held at the last Informal Ministerial Meeting on Regional Policy, in Brussels on 21 November 2006, under the Finnish Presidency and thanked the Commission for sharing its findings on Innovation in the 2007-2013 Programming cycle of EU Cohesion Policy.

The Presidency underlines the following:

1. European Union Cohesion Policy is widely recognized as the most practical demonstration of European solidarity, as well as a central element of European integration, enshrined in the Treaty as a fundamental goal of the EU. Furthermore, the Lisbon Treaty, expected to be signed on 13 December 2007, adds the territorial dimension to economic and social cohesion.
2. Cohesion Policy has recognisably contributed to the functioning and expansion of the internal market, namely by raising economic opportunities throughout the Union, and enabling all European regions to fully participate in economic development, by stimulating innovation in firms, promoting the roll-out of the European network of transport and communications infrastructure and supporting networking between regions and local authorities.
3. The Member States, as well as their Regions and Cities, have undertaken their best efforts, with the continuing support of the European Commission, to align the Cohesion Policy priorities, goals and results with the overall development strategy of the Union, materialized at the present in the renewed Lisbon and Gothenburg Agendas. In this context, the Presidency acknowledges the effective implementation of the 2007-2013 Operational Programmes according to the above orientation.
4. The conclusions of the Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion stressed that the EU as a whole has not reached yet a sufficiently harmonious development of all its territories, in spite of the significant progress achieved. Disparities in economic performances, social indicators and education levels persist. These are remaining challenges both to the development of the EU territories and to its Cohesion Policy.
5. The Fourth Cohesion Forum launched a public consultation on the future of EU Cohesion Policy, based on the European Commission's Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion. This public consultation represents an excellent opportunity for the citizens to become involved in shaping the future of Cohesion Policy. The European Commission will present the results of this public consultation in spring 2008, together with the Fifth Progress Report on Economic and Social Cohesion.

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6. As a contribution to ongoing debates, the Portuguese Presidency considers that future discussions could reflect, among other themes, a set of issues mentioned below. This set of issues takes into account some ideas on Cohesion Policy that were debated at the Cohesion Forum, like strategic integration, coherence and effectiveness, multi-level governance, visibility to the European citizens and contributions from Cohesion Policy to ongoing challenges such as globalisation, energy, climate change and demography.
- a. The importance of strengthening the relation between economic growth and economic, social and territorial cohesion. In this respect, the renewal of the Cohesion Policy, as defined in the Treaties, could continue to secure its connection to the European Union's renewed Lisbon Agenda.
 - b. A more strategic and integrated approach aiming to boost and integrate growth strategies at European, regional and local levels, taking account of regional specificities and based on reinforced multi-level governance. This approach should ensure that each sector is developed not in isolation but in the context of a coherent vision for the socio-economic development of Member States' territories. This calls for a deeper integration of public policies with territorial impact.
 - c. The need for better targeting interventions with a view to raise the efficiency and effectiveness of Cohesion Policy, in particular enhancing the institutional and business environment, among others, by improving public goods provision.
 - d. The need to develop governance mechanisms which increase the flexibility in the implementation of Cohesion Policy, in order to adapt to a rapidly changing economic context, as well as to the specific characteristics of the Member States and their territories, while reinforcing its orientation towards results and performance and ensuring coherence with the EU development strategy;
 - e. The increasing need for cooperation in order to promote the networks and exchanges among territories, people and activities, as well as improving and developing methods for best-practice sharing. In this respect, a reflection is needed on how European Territorial Cooperation can be made more adaptable to ever changing circumstances, in the EU territory, or in a more global context.
7. The outcomes of the ongoing public consultations will certainly provide important contributions for the present debate. Its follow up will occur during the next Presidency, to be held by Slovenia, who expressed their intention to further stimulate the exchange of views at the future of Cohesion Policy on a sub-ministerial level. The French presidency will resume the discussions at Ministerial level.