

**Follow-up to the European Parliament non-legislative
resolution on the ninth report on economic and social
cohesion**

- 1. Rapporteur :** Jacek PROTAS (EPP / PL)
- 2. References:** 2024/2107(INI) / A10-0066/2025 / P10_TA(2025)0098
- 3. Date of adoption of the resolution:** 8 May 2025
- 4. Competent Parliamentary Committee:** Committee on Regional Development (REGI)
- 5. Brief analysis/ assessment of the resolution and requests made in it:**

Building on the Commission's report on economic, social, and territorial cohesion published in March 2024, the resolution underscores the key role of cohesion policy in promoting convergence, reducing regional disparities, and addressing the challenges of the green, digital, and demographic transitions. It puts forward policy recommendations after 2027, with a strong focus on preserving its core principles: a bottom-up approach, multi-level governance, decentralised programming, and the partnership principle. The resolution calls for a more ambitious cohesion policy envelope under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), stronger enforcement of the rule of law, a more flexible programming framework tailored to territorial needs, enhanced synergies between funds at all levels, greater alignment with the rules governing the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), improved link with the EU's economic governance, and tailored support for regions along the EU's eastern borders. It opposes any centralisation of cohesion policy governance and expresses caution towards adopting a one-size-fits-all, performance-based model for fund disbursement – particularly if applied to reforms that fall outside the remit of regional competences.

- 6. Response to requests and overview of actions taken, or intended to be taken, by the Commission:**

The Commission welcomes the European Parliament's resolution on the 9th Cohesion Report, adopted on 8 May.

The Commission shares the European Parliament's view that a stronger focus on performance-based delivery could enhance the effectiveness of future cohesion policy (§2). It further considers that such an approach could accelerate fund absorption by triggering faster payments to Member States, while ensuring better value for money. In the Commission's view, extending this approach more broadly would contribute to simplification –

particularly in terms of reporting – and create financial incentives for Member States to implement reforms essential for growth and cohesion, all while respecting national institutional frameworks and the specific competences of regional authorities.

The Commission considers that thematic concentration requirements have contributed towards the alignment of cohesion policy funds with the EU strategic priorities. However, their design and implementation need to find the appropriate balance between Member State and regional specificity, the need for flexibility and predictability. In this context, the Commission welcomes the Parliament's support for greater flexibility in fund programming beyond 2027 (§11), as this would enable faster responses to unforeseen challenges and better alignment with territorial needs.

The Better Regulation guidelines require an assessment of territorial impacts, including on outermost regions, in a proportionate manner when such impacts are potentially significant. The Commission recognises the outermost regions' specificities, as defined under Article 349 TFEU and highlighted in its 2022 Communication¹, and the need for tailored and place-based approaches (§18). The Commission considers possible impacts of legislative proposals on outermost regions when these are deemed significant, under the principle of proportionality. The Commission welcomes the participation of Member States and of the outermost regions to its consultation activities and the support with data that could point to significant asymmetric impacts.

The Commission remains firmly committed to supporting Member States and regions impacted by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, with particular attention to the EU's eastern border regions. It shares the European Parliament's view on the importance of providing these regions with tailored support (§21), given the dual challenge they face in strengthening security and revitalising their economic and social fabric.

Several initiatives have already been undertaken. Over EUR 1.4 billion have been mobilised for accommodation, healthcare, employment orientation, medical, social and psychological support in the context of the so-called CARE (Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe) package under 2014-2020 cohesion policy programmes². It allowed Member States to reprogramme cohesion

¹ European Commission, Communication on Putting people first, securing sustainable and inclusive growth, unlocking the potential of the EU's outermost regions, 2022

² The so-called 'CARE package' is composed of CARE, CARE-PLUS and FAST-CARE (Flexible Assistance to Territories). Regulation (EU) 2022/2039 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) 2021/1060 as regards additional flexibility to address the

policy funds (including the ERDF and the ESF+) to address the situation of people who fled Ukraine because of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Furthermore, EUR 150 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), originally allocated to planned Interreg programmes with Russia and Belarus, was redirected to internal cross-border cooperation programmes. This ensured that all EU regions bordering Russia and Belarus now participate in at least one internal Interreg programme and have more opportunities for cooperation with other EU regions. Targeted calls, dedicated information sessions, and technical assistance were also provided to maximise the uptake of this additional funding by local beneficiaries. To further reinforce cooperation with Ukraine and Moldova, an additional EUR 135 million, originally earmarked for programmes with Russia and Belarus, was reallocated to cross-border programmes with these countries. This funding supports key infrastructure projects, including those linked to the EU's Solidarity Lanes Initiative, and Ukraine's economic recovery.

Moreover, on 1 April, the Commission adopted specific measures to address strategic challenges under the mid-term review, through amendments to the cohesion policy regulatory framework. Based on the Commission's proposal, Member States and regions are invited to adjust their cohesion policy programmes to align with the EU's strategic priorities, including amongst others, improving water resilience, boosting industrial capacities in the defence sector, enhancing military mobility and facilitate industrial adjustment linked to the decarbonisation of production processes and products, notably by providing lifelong opportunities to regularly upskill and reskill people. Co-legislators reached provisional agreement on the mid-term review proposal on the 15 July, including on the proposal's additionally proposed financial flexibilities. Co-legislators agreed that programmes covering eastern border regions would benefit from enhanced financial support: an additional 9.5% one-off pre-financing (instead of 1.5% for the rest of the programmes) in 2026, applied to the total support from the funds, and 100% EU financing, provided that at least 10% of programme resources are reallocated to the newly introduced priorities and those supporting the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP).

The Commission, through the Interreg programmes and in the spirit of shared management, actively encourages Member States to undertake awareness-raising activities in EU border regions, as part of the broader objective to strengthen cohesion and enhance the visibility and impact of EU support (§22). The Commission

supports this through networks such as InformEU, capacity-building activities, and dedicated platforms like Interreg.eu and KEEP.eu to showcase success stories and European solidarity in action. Sustained citizen engagement remains a priority – as shown by the recently published Harvesting report on post2027 Interreg, presenting the summary of 2024 EU-wide consultations of stakeholders and citizens carried out by Interreg programmes and involving over 10,000 participants. The report indicates a broad consensus around that Interreg adds value and brings about positive change in knowledge exchange and learning, durable connections between people and communities, capacity to address common and complex challenges, role in building resilience, and territorial relevance and sensitivity to territorial specificities. The implementation of the BRIDGEforEU Regulation will in addition help raise awareness of the persistence of cross-border legal and administrative obstacles and facilitate their resolution.

The Commission shares the European Parliament's view on the importance of ensuring greater coherence among EU policies in order to contribute to the Treaty objective of economic, social and territorial cohesion (§23). The Commission is exploring a more flexible approach for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), notably through the establishment of national and regional partnership plans for each Member State. The Commission underlines that regions would be fully associated with the preparation and implementation of these plans, in accordance with the principles of partnership and subsidiarity. As enshrined in the TFEU Article 174, the overarching objective of reducing regional disparities and fostering convergence should remain central to all EU policies. Therefore, the need for additional specific guidelines on the "cohesion support" principle, as proposed by the Parliament, might not be required. In addition, the Commission recalls that its Better Regulation framework already incorporates a methodology to identify important asymmetric effects of Commission legislative proposals to different EU territories, ensuring that local and regional effects are duly analysed when designing new policies and legislation. Finally, the Commission takes note of the Parliament's suggestion to further rely on innovative tools, such as RegHub, to gather data on the territorial impact of EU policies. At the same time, it stresses the importance of avoiding any unnecessary administrative burden stemming from additional reporting requirements.

The Commission confirms that it will uphold its ongoing efforts to communicate the impact and achievements of EU cohesion policy, and that it will, in close cooperation with Member States and regions, continue to promote the visibility of EU actions for citizens, including greater transparency (§23).

The Commission shares the Parliament's concerns regarding the growing internal disparities observed within certain Member States (§24). As highlighted in the 9th Cohesion Report, these divergences stem from structural differences across regions –

some suffer from geographical peripherality, others have been significantly affected by past economic and financial crises, while others are still coping with the impacts of industrial restructuring. Furthermore, national convergence is frequently accompanied by rising internal disparities, particularly between capital regions and other parts of the country. This dynamic creates multiple challenges, including congestion, social challenges, rising housing and labour costs, which can ultimately undermine the competitiveness of metropolitan areas. It may also jeopardise the balanced territorial development of the Member State as a whole.

Cohesion policy plays a key role in addressing these imbalances by promoting a more balanced and polycentric development model, with a strong focus on supporting less developed regions. In this context, small towns and medium-sized cities are essential drivers of regional development, stimulating growth in their surrounding territories.

The Commission agrees with the European Parliament that cohesion policy and national policies must be mutually reinforcing to ensure a more effective and integrated approach to regional development. The envisaged introduction of national and regional partnership plans could contribute to greater alignment and consistency between EU priorities and the actions taken at national and regional levels.