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CPMR POLICY POSITION

OPINION OF THE CPMR POLITICAL BUREAU

(As amended and approved by the CPMR Political Bureau on 11 June 2010 in Troms, Norway)

ACHIEVING THE EU 2020 OBJECTIVES ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: A REGIONALLY DIFFERENTIATED EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND AT THE HEART OF REGIONAL POLICY AFTER 2013

1. CPMR contributed to the discussion on EU policies after 2013, in a context of emergence from the crisis, by publishing, on the occasion of its General Assembly in Göteborg in October 2009, a set of proposals concerning the priorities for regional policy as a whole and the European Social Fund (ESF) in particular¹.

On 26 March this year, the European Council endorsed the general outlines of the Europe 2020 Strategy, which lays the foundations for Europe's recovery. On this basis, the European Commission is preparing for publication, firstly, a set of reflections on economic, social, and territorial cohesion and on the future of the EU budget, and, secondly, regulatory proposals which are to be the subject of negotiations.

In view of this context, and to further develop its position on the Europe 2020 Strategy, the CPMR Political Bureau, meeting in Troms on 11 June 2010, wishes to add the following elements to its initial reflections and proposals on the future of the ESF:

2. The members of the Political Bureau wish first of all to restate that:

- Since each region's productive fabric is unique, the economic and social repercussions of the crisis have varied widely from one European territory to another. More often than not, the result has been an acceleration of already-existing trends moving the European regional systems towards the knowledge economy. The emergency measures introduced by the Regions, with the support from the ESF, have helped to limit the adverse effects of the crisis and, specifically, to find solutions to the problems of the hardest-hit groups in society.
- The slow pace of developments can be attributed in part to the failure to deliver on the Lisbon Strategy. The evaluation of the Lisbon Strategy highlights two main causes of this failure: the insufficient involvement of the regional level in the implementation of the strategy, and the lack of coordination between different policies, especially between the strategy and regional policy;
- Whilst CPMR approves the guidelines and priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy in general, and those concerning employment in particular, it nonetheless points out that for the most part these correspond to the guidelines that already underpin the action of regional governments in the areas of education, life-long learning, and pro-active policies on employment and social inclusion. It is essential to emphasise the role and value added of the ESF in these fields, especially with regard to the inclusion of disadvantaged population groups and, with regard to the convergence Regions, its contribution to the development of education and training systems;

¹CPMR, "Territories at the heart of medium-term European policies". On the ESF, see pp.16-19

- CPMR does, however, have concerns; firstly about the absence of a territorial approach in the Europe 2020 Strategy in general and in relation to questions linked to employment, training, and social inclusion in particular, and secondly about the general nature of the provisions regarding the involvement of regional partners in the implementation of the Strategy;
- Because their scope of action is the local and regional level and because they have the capacity to mobilise regional partnerships capable of providing solutions tailored to specific local needs and challenges in the fields of employment, training, and social inclusion, the Regions are in fact the ideal level at which innovative solutions can and should be exploited to greater advantage in implementing the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

3. Consequently, the Peripheral Maritime Regions, concerned at first hand by the challenges relating to employment, training, and social inclusion and their importance with regard to regional development policies, are of the opinion that the objectives set out in the strategic guidelines on employment in the EU 2020 Strategy can only be achieved if the following conditions are fulfilled:

- maintenance of the ESF as a key instrument and an integral part of a regional policy covering the whole of the European territory;
- decentralised – or at least regionally differentiated – delivery of the ESF, so as to ensure that the results are tailored as closely as possible to the needs of the territories. This approach implies, concretely:
 - enhanced participation by the Regions in the design of the future ESF Operational Programmes, in partnership with the European Commission and Member States. Aside from certain aspects in the field of education, such as Europe-wide recognition of diplomas and qualifications and the European framework for youth and teachers' mobility, which should be dealt with uniformly at the European level, Regional participation should be the rule. If life-long learning and pro-active employment and social inclusion policies are to be dealt with adequately and efficiently, a territorial approach is essential. The balance between the sectoral and territorial approaches in the ESF should be maintained in what will be a demanding context of financial restrictions dominating the next programming period;
 - a system of global grants, because these guarantee the flexibility and efficiency of the ESF's application and facilitate the mobilisation and involvement of local stakeholders;
 - the setting-up of Local Action Groups to deliver the ESF. As with the EAFRD's Leader initiative, this kind of tool would encourage the innovative initiatives that abound in the territories and thus enhance the strategic efficiency of the ESF programmes;
 - increased transnational cooperation within the ESF could lead to added value. Transnational cooperation gives many new contacts, new ideas and is a driver for development.
- a stronger focus on a limited number of priorities to avoid resources being spread too thinly. However, the priorities must remain flexible enough to allow the Regions to tackle their specific problems. In this framework, it would be up to the Regions to define their action priorities;
- an approach that focuses on innovation: in local governance, content and teaching methods, projects, etc.;
- better coordination between ESF, ERDF and EAFRD and the EFF, so as to ensure synchronicity and coordination of the actions carried out locally supported by these different funds;
- lastly, CPMR urges European and national institutions to review the ESF's management system so as to reduce the "red tape" that currently hinders its efficient application.