



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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General Affairs

Brussels, 16 December 2011

President

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Minister for Regional Development of Poland.

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Main results of the Council

The meeting provided a first opportunity for ministers in charge of the EU's cohesion policy to discuss issues related to cohesion policy. Ministers agreed that meeting in this format within the General Affairs Council is both valuable and worth continuing, as it contributes to raising the political visibility of cohesion policy.

*The meeting was dedicated to discussion of the EU's **cohesion policy** for the 2014-20 period. The Council took note of a presidency progress report and held a policy debate on the issues of strategic programming and thematic concentration.*

Broad consensus was reached on the status of strategic policy documents, and a common understanding achieved on the level and scope of flexibility for the thematic concentration of interventions.

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¹ Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks. Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>). Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

PARTICIPANTS

Belgium:

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Minister-President of the French-speaking Community

Bulgaria:

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Minister for Management of EU Funds

Czech Republic:

Mr Daniel BRAUN

First Deputy-Minister, Ministry for Regional Development

Denmark:

Mr Nicolai Halby WAMMEN

Minister for European Affairs

Germany:

Mr Bernhard HEITZER

State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and
Technology

Estonia:

Mr Siim Valmar KIISLER

Minister for Regional Affairs, Head of Delegation

Ireland:

Mr Brendan HOWLIN

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

Greece:

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Special Secretary of NSRF, Ministry of Development,
Competitiveness and Maritime Affairs

Spain:

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State Secretary for the European Union

France:

Mr Bruno LE MAIRE

Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, the
Countryside and Land Use Planning

Italy:

Mr Fabrizio BARCA

Minister for Territorial Cohesion

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Mr Andreas MAVROYIANNIS

Deputy Minister to the President of the Republic of
Cyprus for European Affairs

Latvia:

Mr Andris VILKS

Minister for Finance

Lithuania:

Mr Rolandas KRISCIUNAS

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Luxembourg:

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Ms Enikő GYŐRI

State Secretary of Foreign Affairs

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Permanent Secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister in
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State Secretary for Economic Affairs, Agriculture and
Innovation

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State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Finance

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Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Regional
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Mr Leonard ORBAN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Bojan SUVOROV

State Secretary responsible for Local Government and Regional Policy

Slovakia:

Mr Jan FIGEL

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications

Finland:

Mr Jyri HÄKÄMIES

Minister of Economic Affairs

Sweden:

Ms Annie LÖÖF

Minister for Enterprise and Regional Affairs

United Kingdom:

Mr Mark PRISK

Minister of State for Business and Enterprise

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Commission:

Mr László ANDOR

Member

Mr Johannes HAHN

Member

.....

Croatia

Ms Ivana MALETIĆ

State Secretary, Ministry of Finance

ITEMS DEBATED

COHESION POLICY

The Council took note of a presidency progress report on work undertaken on a package of legislative proposals for the EU's cohesion policy for the 2014-20 period ([18097/11](#)).

It held a policy debate on the issues of strategic programming and thematic concentration, providing guidance for negotiations on the Commission's proposals. Over lunch, ministers also discussed conditionality.

The presidency informed the Council of progress made since mid-October in negotiations on the package. On the basis of the a questionnaire prepared by the presidency, ministers commented on the following issues related to strategic programming and thematic concentration:

- options for the status of the common strategic framework and for its adoption;
- proposed use of country-specific recommendations as an instrument for aligning cohesion policy with the broader Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs;
- balance between thematic concentration and flexibility for member states and regions in implementing cohesion policy.

The Council reached broad consensus in this regard, thereby facilitating early conclusion to negotiations on these issues by the incoming presidency.

First, broad consensus was reached on both the status of the common strategic framework and the procedure for its adoption. There was general acceptance that this strategic policy document should be approved by the European Parliament and the Council, and a majority expressed a willingness to adopt it as an annex to the proposed regulation establishing common provisions for the EU's structural and cohesion funds.

Second, there was broad agreement on the desirability of linking cohesion policy objectives with the Europe 2020 strategy, whilst making sure to reflect the specific circumstances of individual regions and territories. here, a vast majority of delegations proposed that this be achieved by using national reform programmes (NRPs) as a reference instead of country-specific recommendations (CSRs) as proposed by the Commission. The rationale invoked by a majority of ministers was that existing mechanisms should be used to the extent possible, rather than instruments with a shorter time horizon requiring annual to review strategic documents, thereby causing an unnecessary administrative burden. Ministers also considered that NRPs reflect better the specific circumstances within each member state than do the CSRs.

Third, all delegations agreed on the need to concentrate the cohesion policy's intervention areas thematically, and accepted the concept of a thematic "menu" of intervention types. However, a broad majority expressed scepticism about the mechanisms proposed by the Commission in this respect. A large number of delegations wanted to extend the limits for minimal allocations for specific types of interventions; others proposed leaving to member states to choose specific intervention types from the proposed menu. There was broad agreement that greater flexibility geared regional specificities and differences would increase the adequacy and effectiveness of results obtained, and that this could not be achieved by an automatic approach providing minimal allocations at EU level, nor by imposing a small number of intervention types for all member states.

Some delegations raised further issues related to cohesion policy, such as the "capping" of interventions, macroeconomic conditionality, the "Connecting Europe" facility for transport, energy and information/communication technologies and "RAL" (*reste à liquider* or unspent commitments). These issues are related to the EU's multiannual financial framework for the 2014-20 which is due to be discussed during the next two presidencies.

Ministers continued the discussion over lunch, also touching upon the modes of conditionality proposed by the Commission, i.e. positive and negative incentives for ensuring a high-quality performance for cohesion policy.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

NONE
