

GENERAL AFFAIRS Council (Cohesion)

Tuesday 25 April in Luxembourg

The General Affairs Council will be dedicated to cohesion policy.

Starting at 10.30, the Council will be briefed by the presidency on the state of play on a legislative proposal **simplifying the rules governing the European structural and investment (ESI) funds** – a part of the so-called omnibus proposal. Ministers will also take note of the negotiating mandate provided by the Council to the presidency enabling discussions with the European Parliament on a proposal to **enhance EU support for member states affected by natural disasters**.

The Council will be invited to adopt conclusions on making cohesion policy more effective, relevant and visible to the citizens. Ministers will also have a political exchange of views on **how cohesion policy can be brought closer to the citizens**.

Finally, ministers will be invited to adopt conclusions on the **implementation of EU macro-regional strategies**.

Over lunch, ministers will exchange views on the **role of cohesion policy after 2020**.

Without discussion the Council will adopt

- a regulation **putting an end to retail mobile roaming charges** in the EU on 15 June 2017
- a decision improving mobile connectivity by **opening the 700 MHz frequency band for mobile broadband**
- a directive on the **control of the firearms**
- a directive **protecting the EU budget against fraud**
- the **North Sea multi-annual fisheries plan**

A presidency press conference will be held at the end of the meeting (+/- 14.30).

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Press conferences and public events by video streaming: <http://video.consilium.europa.eu/en/webcasts>
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¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

Omnibus-regulation

The presidency will update ministers on the state of play of a legislative proposal **simplifying the rules governing the European structural and investment funds**. Work on the cohesion part of the so-called omnibus legislative proposal has been concluded at the Council's technical level. Member states in general support the adjustments proposed by the Commission to make the life of both managing authorities and beneficiaries easier. Once technical work on the other parts of the omnibus legislative proposal has been finalised the Council's Permanent Representatives Committee will be invited to provide the presidency a negotiating mandate for the discussions with the European Parliament.

The presidency will also inform ministers on the agreement reached within the Council on 29 March 2017 to **enhance EU support to member states affected by natural disasters**. (www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/29-natural-disasters)

Bringing cohesion policy closer to the citizens

The Council will be invited to adopt conclusions on making cohesion policy more effective, relevant and visible to the citizens. Ministers will also have a political exchange views on how the results of cohesion policy can be made more visible to the citizens and how the cohesion policy can bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens.

The draft [conclusions](#) recall the tangible results of the cohesion policy programmes covering the years 2007-2013: they provided financial support to 121 400 start-ups and around 400 000 SMEs, supported 94 955 research projects, helped to build 4 900 km of roads and to upgrade 1 500 km of railway and to connect 6 million people to new or improved drinking water networks. To increase the visibility of cohesion policy and to show how it improves European citizens daily life and working conditions the draft conclusions consider that further efforts of member states and the Commission are needed. With regard to the time after 2020 the draft conclusions call to continue simplifying cohesion policy for both beneficiaries and managing authorities. They also emphasize the importance of cohesion policy to continue providing a stable and predictable investment and cooperation framework to reduce the disparities between the levels of development of the various regions.

EU macro-regional strategies

The presidency will inform ministers on the work carried out in the Council following the report by the Commission on the implementation of the EU macro-regional strategies. The Council will be invited to adopt conclusions on this topic.

The draft [conclusions](#) welcome the first results of the four current EU macro-regional strategies. The existing strategies cover the Baltic sea region, the Danube region, the Adriatic and Ionian region and the Alpine region. A macro-regional strategy is a cooperation framework through which a region that extends over several member states and third countries addresses common challenges.

The draft conclusions call for a further development of the four existing macro-regional strategies with regards to governance, result-orientation, funding, communication and cooperation. Governance could be strengthened by an improved cooperation of the participating countries and regions, an increased ownership of the involved ministries and the network building of regions, cities and other key actors. Result-orientation could be improved by setting clear targets and adequate indicators. To ensure that adequate funding is available to implement the strategies and achieve the expected results all relevant EU and national funding sources should be mobilised. Communicating the results achieved as broadly as possible could help to increase the strategies' visibility.