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Cohesion policy 2007-2013: Hübner and Špidla welcome shift in priorities set to boost jobs and growth

Cohesion Policy programmes for 2007-2013 are set to boost jobs and growth throughout the EU's Member States and regions, thanks to intensive negotiations that have succeeded in formulating tailor-made solutions to challenges ahead. That is the message from Commissioners Danuta Hübner (Regional Policy) and Vladimír Špidla (Employment, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities), who presented the results of negotiations today.

They unveiled a Communication on the results of negotiations on cohesion policy strategies and programmes for 2007-2013. This analyses the 450 programmes, and concludes that Member States and regions have radically shifted their priorities, earmarking significant investment for competitiveness, jobs and growth in line with the Lisbon Strategy.

Commissioner Hübner said: "Cohesion policy will support flagship projects to advance the growth and jobs agenda across the Union, complementing other Community policies. All Member States have taken up the aims of the Lisbon Strategy in their programmes, and they will tackle new challenges such as accelerating globalisation, emerging climate change, Europe's ageing population or migration problems."

She welcomed the way in which this round of negotiations has yielded programmes that are well targeted, thanks to improvements in the way talks were conducted. This time, negotiations involved a far wider range of actors – social and economic partners, as well as civil society. Wider ownership of programmes by local actors will support their implementation, she added.

Commenting on support for employment, Vladimír Špidla, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities said: "The European Social Fund, as our main instrument to invest in employment and human potential, will continue its success over the next years, transforming the principle of social cohesion into tangible benefits for millions of people." He added, "Boosting jobs and growth is one of the areas that matters most to people in Europe and today the ESF is more important than ever in achieving just that. Everyone must have the opportunity to contribute to a prosperous European Union: women and men, young and old, people of different origins and ethnic groups, disabled people and other disadvantaged groups."

The EU is investing a total of €347.4 billion through Cohesion Policy for the 2007-2013 cycle. Member States have defined clear targets:

Research and innovation are now major priorities. Over € 86 billion, or 25% of cohesion policy resources, are available to move closer to the Lisbon target of increasing R&D expenditure to 3% of GDP. In the case of Spain, even though investment has decreased compared to the 2000-2006 period, R&D expenditure is set to more than double in absolute terms to about €8 billion or 23% of the total budget.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are recognised as important drivers to boost regional development. Cohesion Policy investment in ICT services and infrastructure is expected to more than double compared to the previous programming period (2000-2006), and to reach €15.3 billion with Poland, Italy, Greece, Slovakia and Spain pledging the largest budgets.

Support for business, particularly small and medium enterprises, accounts for some €27 billion (8% of cohesion policy resources). For example, Finland will support business start-ups with €343 million, while Poland will direct cohesion policy investments to facilitate business creation by cutting the number of days required to set up a business from 60 to 7.

Nearly €26 billion will be invested in improving the quality and availability of education and training. There will be support for projects to facilitate lifelong learning and to prevent students leaving school early, especially in Portugal, Greece and Italy). There will be €19 billion to remove barriers to employment, especially for women, young people, older and lower-skilled workers, migrants and ethnic minorities; €10 billion to help those facing poverty and social exclusion and having the biggest difficulties in returning to the job market. And €2 billion will be invested in improving public administration and services.

To improve the quality of the environment, there will be investment worth €105 billion. In many of the EU-12 Member States, the policy finances heavy basic investment to improve the environmental infrastructure and to help countries comply with EU legislation. Latvia plans to increase from 9% to 62% the percentage of inhabitants benefiting from waste-water management services. The need to mitigate the impact of climate change, has become central to the European policy agenda. There will be investment worth €48 billion to address this new challenge.

These are the commitments Member States and regions have made. Now they move on to selecting the best projects on the ground. Clear objectives will enable all parties involved to monitor implementation over the programming period.

More information on the new cohesion programmes is available:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas2007/fiche_index_en.htm (ERDF and Cohesion Fund)

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/index_en.htm (ESF programmes)