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THE FUTURE OF REGIONAL POLICY ¹– A VIEW FROM THE ERRIN NETWORK

ERRIN is a Brussels-based network whose aim is to improve regional capacities in research and innovation by exploiting European funding opportunities in research and innovation, developing projects amongst member regions, shaping research and innovation policy at the European level and raising the profile of regions in Europe.

Founded in 2001 as an informal network, ERRIN is now a dynamic and respected subscription based network comprising over 90 regions most having a representational office in Brussels. ERRIN members collaborate on a regular basis via nine thematic working groups led by regions and two working groups dealing with policy and projects.

ERRIN TEN KEY POINTS

1. **Regional policy for all regions.** ERRIN agrees that future regional policy must develop a balance between cohesion and competitiveness. While the main focus of the policy should aim at reducing disparities and enhancing economic, social and territorial cohesion, **all regions** must be given the opportunity to develop their competitive advantages in order to promote the overall harmonious development of the Union.
2. **Regional policy should strongly support the Europe 2020 Strategy.** ERRIN welcomes the conclusions of the Belgian Presidency (following the Informal Meeting of the Ministers in charge of Cohesion Policy²) in favour of ‘maintaining an ambitious Cohesion Policy covering all European regions and strongly geared towards the objectives of Europe 2020 Strategy its flagships and its integrated guidelines’. However, because it has its own specific objectives of economic, territorial and social cohesion, regional policy should not exclusively be linked to Europe 2020 targets.
3. **Ambitious funding for an ambitious programme.** ‘Cohesion policy should become the standard bearer for the objectives of smart, inclusive and sustainable growth of the Europe 2020 strategy in all regions’³. Cohesion policy can only play a key role in supporting the above objectives if it has the resources to deliver. Resources need to be focused (smart specialization, priorities, societal challenges) and made available to regional stakeholders with adequate levels of co-financing.
4. **Effective governance based on a system that involves all levels of actors from the EU level to the local level.** Multilevel governance and a true partnership approach are necessary to improve the effectiveness of the overall strategy, improve and speed up processes. Regions and local authorities should therefore be involved in both the shaping and implementing of future common strategic frameworks and programming documents.

¹ In response to the Conclusions of the fifth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion: the future of cohesion policy COM (2010) 642 final

² Liège 22-23rd November 2010

³ The EU Budget Review COM(2010)700 final

5. **Regional policy should concentrate on key priorities.** ERRIN supports the use of regional funding on a limited number of priorities linked to regional development and the Europe 2020 Strategy with particular reference to competitiveness and innovation, but also taking into account the societal challenges facing Europe such as health, ageing, environment and climate change. All challenges demand complementarity between measures financed under EU instruments and structural funds in the field of research of innovation. The choice of priorities must involve a bottom up approach where each region can choose its key priorities based on a menu of priorities decided in partnership with EU, national, regional and local actors.
6. **Regions should embrace smart specialization if...** smart specialization involves local and regional partners analyzing their sectors of competitive advantage from a bottom up perspective taking into account regional specificities so that it contributes to European competitiveness. Smart specialization should involve regions comparing their respective competences and gaining knowledge of regional strengths and weaknesses and developing dialogues with partner regions.
7. **Territorial cooperation should be strengthened.** ERRIN welcomes more funding for territorial cooperation, for cross-border, transnational and interregional projects where regions could develop functional alliances (rather than predetermined cooperation areas) possibly linked to finding partners regions for innovation supply chains or for the development of international clusters in specialized sectors. ERRIN welcomes the transfer of good practices between regions and helping mainstream these practices within mainstream programmes.
8. **Stronger links between ESF and ERDF.** While respecting the need for ESF to reduce social inequality and improve social inclusion, ESF should pay more attention to regional priorities and have more regional and local involvement in setting priorities. The allocation of ESF should be based on regional needs and a more integrated approach adopted to ESF and ERDF priorities and funding.
9. **Funding for innovative actions should be available.** Funding should be available to all regions to implement projects that are innovative and allow testing new ideas. Innovative projects by their nature involve risk and thus the funding and auditing regime should be adapted concerning measurement of impact and expected results.
10. **Reduce administrative burdens across all EU funding programmes.** The European Commission should pay more attention to developing harmonization in application procedures where appropriate, thereby allowing more synergies between funds. Administrative processes should be made more rapid by introducing embracing proportionality, accepting a greater tolerance of error and greater coordination between relevant Directorate Generals.

The above points are the first draft of a future ERRIN reflection paper that to be prepared by the ERRIN Policy Working Group and submitted to the consultation on the future of Cohesion Policy in January 2011. The above points should therefore be seen as working document that may not entirely reflect the individual positions of ERRIN members and regions. Find out more about ERRIN and its activities at www.errin.eu or contact ERRIN on +32 2 230 4441.