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**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



18720/11

PRESSE 502  
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## **PRESS RELEASE**

3138th Council meeting

### **General Affairs**

Brussels, 16 December 2011

President

**Elzbieta BIENKOWSKA**  
Minister for Regional Development of Poland.

# **P R E S S**

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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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### **OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

*none*

<sup>1</sup>

- 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.

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Mr Johannes HAHN

Member

**Croatia**

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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

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