
'THINKING GLOBALLY, ACTING LOCALLY' - EURONEWS DISCUSSES 30 YEARS OF THE EU'S COHESION POLICY

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Marking 30 years of the European Unions Cohesion Policy, Euronews hosted a unique talk show focused on the policys achievements and challenges.

European Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Crețu, President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani and Portugals Prime Minister António Costa were among the guests on the panel at the Ateliers de Tanneurs in Brussels.

Being the EUs main tool to reduce disparities, this policy aims at promoting and supporting the overall development of the blocs members states and regions. It is targeting not only the unions poorer countries but also the poorer regions of its richer countries.

You might not hear the term Cohesion Policy that much on an everyday basis. But to get to the essence of it, think of how much you hear the terms employment, investment, research, innovation and infrastructure.

An independent review which looked at the value of EU investments from the period 2007-2013 highlighted the added value of Cohesion Policy. All member states have benefited from Cohesion Policy. It has meant a forecasted additional 1.1 trillion in GDP growth by the end of 2023. During the surveyed period, one million jobs were created by the policy, and it had invested in 400,000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

30 years of EU Cohesion Policy

European Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Crețu said the anniversary is a moment of celebration. However, she added: It is important to show that this policy, which is most visible in the life of the people, should continue to help not only poor regions.

Crețu said: Its a very strong political sign, just before the adoption of the next budget for post-2020, to show that this policy, which is most visible in the life of the people, should continue to help not only poor regions as you said but also rich regions. You know very well that they have still pockets of poverty and unemployment. So we have to be more solid.

Portugals Prime Minister António Costa, meanwhile, brought up the examples from his own country, saying Cohesion Policy has been crucial for the transformation of Portugal into a more

developed and more harmonious country.

Costa said: Cohesion policy produced some tangible results. Like infant mortality. When we joined the European Union, in 1986, our infant mortality rate was 20 percent above the European average and, today, we stand below the European average for that matter. The economic differences between our richest and poorest regions was cut by 70 percent. And we had this structural educational deficit in our country, a deficit of training and technical skills. Weve improved that, even during times of crisis and austerity. Between 2004 and 2016, weve managed to reduce the rates of early school dropouts from 35 percent to 12,6percent.

President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani points at Eastern European countries who were new entries in Europe and he also sends a message to other countries.

He told the panel: I want to be very clear, cohesion funds is a symbol of solidarity. But solidarity is not also to use the solidarity. Its also to help the other countries, when we need solidarity in these countries. When a country such as Italy, as Germany, as Greece needs help on immigration, we need solidarity from the countries using the cohesion funds. We Italians, we pay a lot of money for the cohesion funds in other countries, and now we need solidarity on the refugees. It is unacceptable to have money coming from Italy, from Greece, form Germany and to be against solidarity on the refugees.

30Cohesion Policy current and future challenges

President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker sent a video message, focusing on the European Budget for the post-2020 period.

In it he said: This is a highly political exercise and not an accounting one. It is about choosing what kind of Europe we want and equipping ourselves with the resources we need to build it. The budget must be ambitious, flexible of course and focused on areas where European funds can have real added value. That means that when it comes to regions, we must ask ourselves some tough questions.

Do we want to maintain support for all countries and all regions? Or do we want to focus only on less developed regions or cohesion countries where needs are more acute? Such a shift may come cheap, but in practice, would mean that many regions and countries like Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland and elsewhere lose funding. Each option has a pricetag and has implications for the overall European budget and for local economies and communities.

The Commission will unveil its Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) proposal (beyond 2020) on 2 May.

Tajani, however, said there was still much work to be done.

He said: Of course, we need to work against illegal immigration, in favour of security inside and outside the European Union. We need to work against youth unemployment. If we want to stop the populism, we need to decide on these three most important political points. We need to use the money for achieving this goal and the cohesion policy is an instrument for achieving this goal. For this we need to put money for the cohesion policy but we need also rules because the cohesion policy is not a gift.

Personally I believe in cohesion policy. We have to promote it, we have to support it but we also have to say to those who receive money what they have to do, what are the political goals. Because its not private money, its the money of our fellow European citizens.

Michel Barnier linked his experience as European Commissioner for Regional policy between 1999 and 2004, as European Commissioner for Internal Market and Services between 2010 and 2014 and now with his current position as European Chief Negotiator for the United Kingdom exiting the EU.

He said: I have one memory, which is close to my current mission to manage wisely the Brexit, this is the peace fund for Northern Ireland. My predecessor initiated this program to encourage dialogue, peace and cooperation between North and South, between communities that have suffered terrible hostilities. What I have done is to start the second generation of this peace program, to put it in the mainstream European budget and save it. All my successors have continued until today. We can ask themselves the question, with British people who want to leave common market and European Union, leave our policies, personally I want that the peace fund continue as a tool.

Kaynak/Source: