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A Cohesion Policy post-2027 for Upwards Social Convergence Declaration of PES Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy

Cohesion Policy Matters

Economic, social and territorial cohesion is one of the central aims of the EU and enshrined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. In practical terms, it is Cohesion Policy that delivers on upwards convergence, constituting the main investment policy of the Union and covering almost a third of the total EU budget in the 2021-2027 period.

The Policy is the most visible manifestation of European solidarity and one of the most successful EU policies: during the 2014-2020 period, it created 1.2 million jobs, helped 5 million households in energy savings, provided 63 million people with better access to healthcare, and supported 4.4 million businesses. Thanks to the contribution of Cohesion Policy, citizens furthermore experienced an increase in GDP/capita from 52% of the EU average (2004) to almost 80% (2021) in Member States joining the EU in 2004.

Cohesion Policy is therefore vital for the wellbeing of our citizens and the stability of our societies, the functioning of the Single Market and Europe's competitiveness. We must underline that its positive impact goes far beyond economic factors only. It helps preventing the feeling of being abandoned and a "geography of discontent", driving citizens in the arms of populists.

This Policy brings territorially equal development and benefits all our citizens, regions, Member States, and our Union as a whole. **It is an asset for everyone in Europe and must be preserved.**

Our Demands for the Future of Cohesion Policy post-2027

As socialists and social democrats, we are committed to leave nobody behind. We defend the values of our Union and fight for upwards social convergence, from the biggest city to rural areas and the most remote regions.

To achieve this effectively, Cohesion Policy requires a **clear and future-fit mandate, maintaining its key principles.** With the new European legislature and the negotiations of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) ahead, we, PES Ministers responsible for cohesion, put forward the following demands to shape Cohesion Policy post-2027.

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We call for:

- **A Cohesion Policy based on decentralization, including:**
 - **A place-based approach**, adapted to the specific needs of a region and refraining from a one-size-fits-all approach.
 - **A bottom-up approach, multi-level governance, the partnership principle and shared management**, strengthening the involvement of local and regional governments in Cohesion Policy. We, as PES Ministers, want to empower them and civil society, as they are closest to our citizens.
- **Respect for regional upwards convergence and multi-level governance for the disbursement of cohesion funds.** Regions must not be held hostage to deficiencies at national level.
- **A strong financial commitment to Cohesion Policy in the next MFF**, dedicated to social, economic and territorial cohesion. We furthermore welcome the new fiscal rules' exclusion of co-financing of EU programmes from the definition of net expenditure that creates more incentives to invest and should be fully exploited.
- **A Policy available to all regions in the EU, including the most isolated and outermost regions, prioritizing those most in need.**
- **A Cohesion Policy that provides long-term regional upwards convergence.** It must remain a permanent tool and not turn into an emergency mechanism.
- **The possibility for flexibility of the Policy** in cases of unforeseen events.
- **The application of social, environmental, demographic, innovation and investment gap criteria when allocating resources**, while keeping GDP as the main criterion. Cohesion Policy must also effectively contribute to real-life matters such as reducing housing and energy costs, affordable access to public services, fostering workers' rights and the integration of migrants. We want social conditionality to ensure that every euro spent fights inequality and strengthens our social model, including in public procurement.
- **A Cohesion Policy that continues delivering on a successful and just transition.** For us as socialists and social democrats, both are inseparable: by investments in the green, digital and social transition, the Policy contributes to a future-oriented Europe and helps to reverse brain drain and development traps.
- **Greater emphasis on tools for territorial development in Cohesion Policy.** We ask for a focus on both urban and non-urban areas, especially less developed ones. Our political family underlines that everyone has a right to quality public services, regardless of where they live.
- **Administrative simplification of Cohesion Policy.** This implies a more transparent, understandable and manageable Policy, while maintaining the level of requirements and high-quality standards.

Cohesion Policy brings results for everyone in the EU, thanks to the principles mentioned above. Delivering on the European project also requires committing to the Policy. As PES Ministers, we are therefore determined to ensure an ambitious Cohesion Policy post-2027.

Signed by:

- **Piret Hartman**, Minister of Regional Affairs and Agriculture, Estonia
- **Michael Falzon**, Minister for Social Policy and Children's Rights, Malta
- **Adrian Căciu**, Minister for Investments and European Projects, Romania
- **Ángel Víctor Torres**, Minister of Territorial Policy and Democratic Memory, Spain
- **Aleksander Jevšek**, Minister for Cohesion and Regional Development, Slovenia
- **Iratxe García Pérez**, President of the S&D Group in the European Parliament
- **Vasco Alves Cordeiro**, President of the European Committee of the Regions
- **Christophe Rouillon**, President of the PES Group in the European Committee of the Regions