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In English

What are the most important aspects of Cohesion policy?

The most important aspects of Cohesion policy relate to the fact that all the differences in Europe are manifested much more in terms of regions than sectors. So Europe is becoming more different, but this is a phenomenon related to globalization, it is not a European phenomenon. It's true in every country in the world. But when you look at almost every indicator, what you see is that the differences are increasing between regions. So even though countries are in some sense becoming more similar, countries inside themselves are actually becoming more different. And of course, if you think of the world in that sense; then Europe is made up of a series of over 200 what we call "NUTS 2"- regions and those variations are what are changing. And this is very, very important because in a sense it doesn't matter which industry or sector you're in, it's the place that counts. The variations between regions are much more important than the variations between industries and sectors, and that's true across Europe. So, for example, you have a buoyant region if I take the South-East of England, Ile de France, places like that, pretty much all industries on those places are doing very well, they are buoyant, they are strong, they are optimistic. Whereas you take weaker parts of the European Union, parts of the North of England, for example, parts of the South of Italy, all sectors tend to be struggling in those localities. And this is very, very important for people to understand, because, of course, it is also about social and political issues. Place matters! Educational status, social status and so on, but geographical status is the one variable that pulls everything together in terms of differentiating between the winners and the losers.

So I think for Cohesion policy, this is the issue that we'd really have to deal with at the centre. It's about integration in terms of the single market, but there are winners and losers. And we have to find ways to smooth that transition process to the real single integrated market.

What about the future?

So what we need is to reform Cohesion policy, and that's precisely the process that we're undertaking at the moment, reflecting on this, in order to develop a policy which is precisely more flexible, it can be tailored to the needs of particular localities and also it can be sharp. And what I mean here is the ability to impose sanctions if things are not done correctly, if policies are not implemented properly, or the outcomes, which is stated are not sought. At the same time, what we also want is a policy that promotes experimentalism and innovation in governance systems, because you have to allow localities to take risks to respond to their own new realities. So you want something, that has, in English we would say, a "carrot and a stick" aspect.

All Member States contribute to the Regional policy budget. Why should they accept sanctions?

Of course all states are paying and some are benefiting more than others, but the point is you want a policy which works. It has to be feasible, reasonable and also has to be just and that has to refer to everybody. So, one of the things you want is transparency, you want all different parts of Europe to be able to

see what is going on in the other parts of Europe: What kind of innovative governance solutions the different localities are adopting, what kind of experiment in terms of relationships between the public and private sector, different stakeholder groups, different social groupings such, for example, NGOs, non-profit organizations. All these different groups have roles to play. But you have to make this public So everyone is part of a dialogue, and of course, the more you have a dialogue between the centre, the Commission, the Member States and the regions, the more you get engagement, the more you get best practice. So actually, the legitimacy comes from a bottom-up approach, not a top-down approach.

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