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European Union

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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	How can we achieve development aligned with common objectives while allowing for greater integration of the solutions that local actors have developed to meet them? = Exchange of views

At the meeting of the General Affairs Council on cohesion policy to be held on 2 June 2022, ministers responsible for cohesion policy are invited to exchange views on the question of ‘How can we achieve development aligned with common objectives while allowing for greater integration of the solutions that local actors have developed to meet them?’, on the basis of the Presidency document set out in the annex to this note.

General Affairs Council (Cohesion) meeting on 2 June 2022**Discussion note**

The European Union's motto – 'United in diversity' – has never been so topical, as the dramatic events unfolding at our borders have reminded us of the extent to which peace remains one of the fundamental core objectives of the European Union. Recognising the richness of our Union's cultures and languages also means recognising the diversity of its regions and its local and regional authorities. In a world facing the consequences of major climate, digital and social transitions, it is precisely the different components of our common heritage and their harmonious and balanced development that makes us stronger together.

Since its inception, European cohesion policy has provided a foundation on which to build common pathways for development and growth in order to seek more opportunities for sustainable development, reduce the risk of tensions arising from excessive disparities, and improve the quality of life of all Europeans.

The most recent Cohesion Report confirms that convergence between Member States and the EU's regions is progressing and that the level of development in the EU has improved.

However, it also identifies new challenges and risks for cohesion that need to be prepared for now, based on jointly defined strategies and objectives, in particular to put forward sustainable responses to:

- the disengagement of certain regions, (rural regions, outlying regions, regions in industrial transition, etc.) and their populations which feel left behind and sidelined from the main economic and social developments, thus fuelling the geography of discontent;

- the difficulties faced by many regions which, despite the assistance they receive, are still seeing their levels of development stagnate or even regress in comparison to the European average and are struggling to set themselves on a path of sustainable growth. These development traps can be found in all geographical areas of the Union and at all levels of development.

These findings also lead us to consider:

- the validity, for the post-2027 period, of the methods used in three generations of programmes to guide the development paths for these regions; and
- the way in which cohesion policy priorities can be adapted to enable the regions to reflect their needs and take into account their endogenous development capacities, which are not and cannot be uniform across the European Union.

On the basis of these findings, the Presidency submits the following question for discussion:

Should the method be revised?

European regional policy sets common European guidance for all regions, regardless of their characteristics. However, it is generally recognised that local actors are best placed to identify their needs and that not all situations require the same response (one size does not fit all).

How can we achieve development aligned with common objectives while allowing for more differentiation in order to take account of heterogeneous starting points?

How can we simplify implementation of the policy while maintaining ownership by local actors and the partnership principle, so as to promote differentiated paths that converge towards the attainment of broad European strategic goals?