
Interregional cooperation needs to be at the core of smart specialisation strategies

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Strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) can serve as powerful instrument to help tackle social challenges and promote innovation, investment and competitiveness based on socio-economic and territorial specificities. However, a draft opinion adopted at the meeting of the SEDEC Commission -the CoR's Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture - on 31 January points out that the current regulatory framework is inadequate and constrains cooperation between European regions.

The opinion prepared by Mikel Irujo Amezaga (ES/EA), Head of Navarra Delegation in Brussels, is also calling for more precision in the definition of the RIS3 concept and harmonised focus for monitoring and evaluation. It identifies substantial barriers that hinder interregional cooperation: these include lack of resources or administrative capacity, vagueness about objectives, asymmetric levels of political competence and the absence of a financial framework. Consequently it recommends a reform of the current regulatory framework to develop synergies between financial instruments and regional policies, as well as to advance towards harmonization in the design, drafting, implementation, monitoring and follow-up of strategies. It's also calling for appropriate ad hoc financing instruments to foster interregional cooperation.

"Regions are appropriate location for addressing innovative ecosystems, forging the necessary links between EU policies, industry, research centres, higher education institutions and citizens. Interregional cooperation, based on priorities identified in the RIS3, enables the creation of value chains throughout the EU and can prevent duplication in investment", said rapporteur Irujo, whose opinion will be discussed at the CoR plenary session on 22-23 March.

MEP **Lambert van Nistelrooij** (NL/EPP) echoed the call for reform, stating that smart specialisation strategies can be seen in two ways: not only as a smart approach to find opportunities in a given city or region but also in connection with other partners in Europe. "Interregional cooperation is crucial and smart specialisation strategies should become a model for the implementation of future cohesion policy", he emphasized.

In Tuesday's meeting, SEDEC members also had a preliminary discussion on two other opinions. With the lead of Katrin Budde (DE/PES), the SEDEC Commission wants to contribute to the review of European Commission's Bioeconomy Action Plan expected in 2017. Meanwhile, an opinion to be drafted by Marcelle Hendrickx (NL/ALDE) aims to create a more attractive environment for social innovation. Both opinions are set to be adopted at the next meeting of the SEDEC Commission on 31 March.

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