



Brussels, 24 February 2005

### Work programme for 2005 of the COTER Commission

The Commission for Territorial Cohesion policy (COTER) is responsible for the following areas:

- Economic and social cohesion, territorial cohesion
- Structural Funds
- Trans-European cooperation
- Spatial planning
- Urban policy
- Transport and trans-European transport networks
- Tourism.

#### 1. CONSULTATIVE WORK

Among the key priorities identified by the European Commission for 2005, the following two objectives concern the COTER Commission and will be the strategic points of reference for its work:

- Enhancing **prosperity** through a new momentum for growth and employment, based on stronger competitiveness.
- The separate objective of **solidarity**, which will be pursued as an essential complement to prosperity.

The COTER Commission will contribute to achieving these two priorities through a wide-ranging discussion of cohesion policy reform, with a view to achieving the greatest possible coherence between European sectoral policies with a strong territorial impact and the objective of cohesion. In 2005 we should witness the culmination of this reform.

The priorities of this discussion within the COTER Commission's consultative activity will be as follows:

1) **Review of the Structural Funds**

Given that Article III-220 of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe strengthens the cohesion objective by introducing a territorial dimension, the COTER Commission will be closely monitoring the **decision-making process for the new regulations on the Structural Funds** for the 2007-2013 period, with particular attention paid to the **financial proposals** submitted by the European Commission for funding cohesion policy.

The new regulations should be adopted before the end of the year.

Any delays to the start of the programming period as a result of protracted negotiations on the financial perspectives or the Structural Funds will lead to financial disruption and instability across the local and regional authorities of the EU.

In this context the COTER Commission will re-emphasise its message that an effective European-wide regional policy and the implementation of the Lisbon-Gothenborg agenda are inextricably linked. Future EU growth and competitiveness across all regions of Europe will be promoted by a continuation of EU cohesion policy involving all the regions, rather by a “re-nationalisation” of this policy; EU competitiveness depends on the competitiveness of each region.

The COTER Commission will be observing closely how the European Commission formulates its **strategic guidelines** for economic, social and territorial cohesion and revision of the **Stability and Growth Pact**.

In this context we will also devote considerable attention to the question of balanced, coordinated and sustainable development of urban, rural, island and remote areas.

2) **State aid**

The COTER Commission will reflect on the opportunity to provide a supportive framework for **territorial differentiation in the regional State Aid rules** and regulations, to allow for targeted public investment where this can correct real market failure in order to achieve the territorial cohesion objective.

An opinion on this subject is in the process of being drawn up, in close cooperation with the European Parliament (the REGI Committee) and the European Commission (with the involvement of two Commissioners, Ms Kroes and Ms Hübner), which is expected to adopt a communication on state aids, prior to submitting proposals for legislation; this communication is likely to be adopted in April.

The subject of state aids will also be approached from the crucial angle of sectoral aid, especially aid in the various transport sectors. The COTER Commission will draft an opinion on the very sensitive and controversial issue of **state aid in the aviation sector**, with particular attention to the case of regional airports and their role in territorial development. In the same context, the COTER

Commission will also review the communication from the European Commission on state aid in the **rail sector**.

3) **Implementation of the European territorial cooperation objective**

In the case of support programmes administered on both sides of borders, the COTER Commission advocates making considerable efforts to simplify administrative formalities, since highly complex EU legal and administrative provisions have considerably hampered cross-border cooperation on the ground thus far.

On the basis of the *Mid-Term Evaluations of INTERREG Programmes* for the Programming Period 2000-2006, the COTER commission will work towards strengthening the efficiency of interregional cooperation in the future. The issues of eligibility, financing and simplification of the procedures will be at the core of the consultative work in this domain.

4) **The development of TEN-Ts and the implementation of a European transport policy**

The COTER Commission's underlying belief is that the development of transport infrastructure is an important tool in European integration as it facilitates trade, which is a source of economic growth, contributes to territorial cohesion and builds a Europe that is close to the people. Finding a new balance between different forms of transport is an essential condition for the sustainable development of TEN-Ts.

Balanced territorial development requires remote and landlocked regions to be taken into account, besides the protection of sensitive areas, improved accessibility, and the creation of a Europe close to the people.

The COTER Commission shares the EC vision of the need to build the **Trans-European Network on the Growth Initiative** by ensuring that significant extra resources are matched by new measures to make the networks more operational and more coordinated.

The European economy will never reach full potential if it is hamstrung by bottlenecks in transport, telecom and energy networks. Targeting such weaknesses on a cross-border scale is the only way to connect the enlarged Europe and improve territorial cohesion.

The COTER Commission supports the European Commission's view that there is a particular need of an all-embracing **maritime policy** aimed at developing a thriving maritime economy which needs to be environmentally sustainable and supported by excellence in marine scientific research, technology and innovation.

There will be a thorough and specific consultation procedure on the **Third Package for Maritime Safety**.

Finally, **transport infrastructure charges**, especially charges for the use of airports and sea ports, will be one of the key legislative issues in this field.

## 2. **ACTIVITIES COMPLEMENTARY TO CONSULTATIVE WORK**

### 2.1 **Organisation of seminars and conferences**

#### **Brussels, 6 April 2005: joint COTER-REGI Conference on "The financing of European Cohesion".**

As part of the inter-institutional cooperation which the CoR is currently working to consolidate, joint debates on key issues are being organised between the CoR COTER Commission and the EP Committee on Regional Development.

A joint conference on "The financing of European Cohesion" will be held in Brussels on 6 April 2005 in the presence, among others, of the Commissioner in charge of regional policy, Ms Hübner, and a representative of the Luxembourg presidency of the European Union.

This topic is one of the CoR's political priorities for 2005 and the years to come. The aim is to achieve one of the key objectives of the new European Constitution – cohesion – with the support of all the other Community policies and the involvement of all the institutional players responsible for the new governance of the Europe of 25 (or 28).

The purpose of the conference will be to pass on to Member State governments the views of both bodies (the CoR's COTER Commission and the EP's REGI Committee) on the future of the Structural Funds and the financial resources needed to strengthen solidarity, cohesion and competitiveness in an enlarged Union.

The main European associations of local and regional authorities are involved in organising this event.

The conference is scheduled to take place on 6 April, shortly after adoption of the CoR's opinion on the financial perspective (February plenary session) and during the ongoing work for the package of opinions on the Structural Funds (April plenary session), in the final negotiation phase in the Member States, and under the Luxembourg presidency.

The 6 April conference will be used to set the seal on the synergy between the CoR and the EP on the financial challenges of Community policies, not least cohesion policy, and it will be an ideal opportunity to highlight the CoR's main recommendations on this subject.

## **Brussels, 10-14 October 2005, Third Open Days 2005**

Following the great success of 2004, the 2005 "**European Week of Regions and Cities**" will be held in cooperation with DG REGIO and will involve regional offices and actors. It will focus on the main developments of the new cohesion policy.

Finally, in the second half of the year a seminar away from Brussels is planned, on the subject of the priorities of our programme, such as implementing territorial cooperation. The seminar will be held in Krakow (Poland) in October.

### **2.2 Studies**

With regard to the studies that the CoR will be undertaking, three titles are of particular interest to the COTER Commission and will be monitored closely:

- *Sustainable tourism as a factor of cohesion*: this study will provide new material for developing the views expressed by the CoR in its opinion on orientations for the sustainability of European tourism.
- *Natural barriers and the transport of goods within the common European area*: this study should discuss the problems arising from borders in terms of access, and examine the possibility of local and regional authorities playing a role in the re-launch of the trans-European transport networks.
- *"Optimum shaping of a Euro Region"*: regional cooperation is a tool used to overcome certain problems of scale that cannot be solved at regional level. The optimal size of a "Euro-region" is a question that can shed some light on the elements needed for regional cooperation.

### **2.3 Inter-institutional cooperation**

#### **With the European Parliament.**

At the end of 2004, the REGI Committee (European Parliament) and COTER Commission (CoR) agreed to reinforce their cooperation and to establish an Action Plan. 2005 will be the crucial year to implement this cooperation, which involves the following actions:

#### a) Consultation procedure (Action 1)

Within the framework of its relationship with the Committee of the Regions, the REGI Committee is entitled regularly to consult the COTER Commission as part of its legislative work. Article 265 of the TEC and Article 118 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament provide the legal basis for the consultation of the Committee of the Regions by Parliament.

Moreover, it may ask for a consultation, outside of any current legislative procedure, on one of the key topics of the cohesion policy, with the objective of hearing the positions of regional and local authorities on policies which are of direct interest to them and which could be the subject of future Union legislative activity.

b) Debates with the Commissioner in charge of regional policy (Action 2)

Members of the COTER Commission may attend debates with the Commissioner in charge of regional policy held by Parliament's Committee on Regional Development on dossiers of mutual interest. The chairman of REGI, could, at his discretion, invite the chairman (or one of the vice-chairmen) to take the floor.

On a reciprocal basis, should COTER organise an exchange of views with the Commissioner, a representative of REGI could be invited to participate.

At the request of REGI, COTER could also hear other key figures on specific issues of particular importance for local and regional authorities.

c) Current work program (Action 3)

The chairmen or a representative of REGI/COTER could make an oral presentation, once a year, during their respective Committee/Commission meetings, in order to inform the other body of the work in progress.

d) REGI and COTER meetings (Action 4)

The respective chairmen of REGI/COTER and/or the rapporteurs of dossiers of a major interest could be regularly invited to REGI/COTER meetings, to explain the positions of their Committee/Commission.

Members of COTER/REGI could have direct access to REGI/COTER meeting rooms as well as a fixed seat.

For the preparation of reports/opinions to be adopted within COTER or REGI, the respective rapporteurs could be invited, at the initiative of their chairman, to meet regularly and to discuss points of common interest.

e) Seminars and debates (Action 5)

Should the timetable of the Committee and Commission so permit, it may be useful to invite their members to seminars dealing with the reform of European cohesion policy. In this context, particular attention could be paid to the adoption of the new regulations on the Structural Funds.

Such an occasion will arise in March 2005 for the European Parliament's Committee which intends to hold a public hearing on "Cohesion Policy in the enlarged Europe and the Lisbon and Gothenburg objectives after 2007".

The joint conference of 6 April on "Cohesion policy and its financing" will be the first big event in this cooperation framework.

f) REGI/COTER informal working group (Action 6)

On the initiative of rapporteurs of both bodies, an informal working group could be set up to manage and further develop co-operation between REGI and COTER.

**With the Council of Ministers.**

The COTER Commission will be closely observing the work of the Luxembourg presidency during the key phase of negotiations on the financial perspectives. A representative of the presidency will attend the conference on 6 April.

Contacts will also be established with the British presidency during the second half of the year, depending on the schedule of activities and the priorities of the programme on the agenda.

There will be regular, informal exchanges of views with the permanent representations of the 25 Member States on the key aspects of cohesion policy reform.

**With the European Commission.**

Representatives of various DGs of the European Commission are regularly invited to COTER Commission meetings to participate in the debate on specific issues.

A special relationship will be developed with the new commissioner for regional policy, Ms Hübner.

**2.4 Cooperation with representative organisations**

As part of the debate on the reform of cohesion policy, the COTER Commission has made a point of cooperating closely with the main European and national associations of local and regional authorities. Cooperation with the presidents of these associations will continue over the year, starting with the conference of 6 April.

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N.B.: Appendix overleaf.

**APPENDIX:**

Indicative list of the main legislative and non-legislative proposals that fit in with the COTER Commission's political priorities for 2005<sup>1</sup>

Priority area 1: **Review of the Structural Funds**

2005/ECFIN/022	Proposal for an amendment to Regulation No. 1467/97 and/or 1466/97 on the Stability and Growth Pact	Legislative Proposal
2005/REGIO+/013	Proposal for a Council Decision laying down strategic guidelines for the Community on cohesion	Legislative Proposal/Decision

Priority area 2: **State aid.**

	Commission Communication on the future of State aid policy	Non-legislative action/Other
2005/TREN/063	Communication from the Commission on the application of Articles 87 and 88 of the EC Treaty to state aids in the railway sector	Non-legislative action/Commission Communication

Priority area 4: **The development of TEN-Ts and the implementation of a European transport policy**

2005/COMP/001	Proposal to repeal the currently applicable provisions of Council Regulation 4056/86, applying the EC competition rules to the maritime transport sector	Legislative Proposal/Regulation
2005/TREN/039	Transport infrastructure package	Non-legislative action/Other
2005/TREN/011	Global mid-term report on implementation of the measures advocated in the White Paper on <i>European transport policy for 2010: time to decide</i>	Non-legislative action/Commission Communication
2004/TREN/057	Third package for maritime safety (eight legislative proposals)	Legislative Proposal/Regulation

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<sup>1</sup>

This table is based on the document appended to the Work Programme of the European Commission for 2005 (COM(2005) 15).