



Belgium : Deal on voluntary EU help scheme for growth-enhancing reforms

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An EU scheme offering member states technical help such as expertise, studies, and working visits - with structural reforms needed to boost growth and jobs was informally agreed upon by MEPs and Council negotiators on Wednesday. The 142.8 million Structural Reform Support Programme would run until 2020. The deal still needs to be endorsed by Parliament as a whole.

The Structural Reform Support Programme would provide technical assistance, at the request of member states and subject to a Commission decision, to improve national institutional and administrative capacities to carry out structural reforms, with a total budget of almost 142.8 million until 2020.

Co-rapporteur Constanze Krehl (S&D, DE) said Despite resistance from the Council, we included references to the core principle of cohesion policy, namely that actions and activities under the new programme should be also able to contribute to social, economic and territorial cohesion. We also included cohesion as an area eligible for support, even though this was not originally proposed by the Commission. Finally, we struck a deal with the Council on involving regional and local players in member states reform processes. Funding for the technical assistance will come from the European Structural Investment Funds allocations.

Co-rapporteur **Lambert van Nistelrooij** (EPP, NL) said Member states still have hurdles to clear when it comes to getting the right speed in creating growth and jobs. Many member states can do better when the EU gives them support. This will result in more growth and jobs. A member state can, for example, be given technical support to achieve more effective and efficient use of EU regional funds or assistance with reforms that can enhance competitiveness. We also increased scrutiny by the European Parliament, and hence transparency. Parliament will receive the cooperation and support plan containing all information relating to the request and measures for support, thus enabling it to assess the programmes added value.

Regional Development Committee Chair Iskra Mihaylova (ALDE, BG) said: I am pleased we have concluded the three-way talks in such a short time on this new tool which will help strengthen member states capacity to prepare and implement structural and administrative reforms.

Requesting support

Member states would need to submit their requests by 31 October of each calendar year. The Commission would analyse each request and agree with the member state on the priority areas for support, the objectives, an indicative timeline and an estimate of the financial contribution needed, all of which would be set out in a cooperation and support plan.

Policy areas eligible for support

Technical support for member states and their national, regional and local authorities would be provided in policy areas such as public financial management, administration, labour markets, education and training, social security systems, cohesion, migration and agriculture.

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