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**Introduction of “transition regions”**

One of the central goals of Cohesion funds is to ensure that developing regions that do not meet average standards of growth receive the constructive funding that they need to effectively prosper. The Presidency supports the proposal of the European Commission to introduce the new category of ‘transition region’ to replace the current phasing-in and phasing- out system. This new category will include all regions with a GDP per capita between 75 percent and 90 percent of the EU-27 average. 38.9 billion Euros will be made available to foster growth and employment in these regions on their way to full economic potential. Without introducing the new category, the old ‘convergence regions’ would lose Cohesion funding in the next budget cycle. As transition regions these areas will receive less money than in their previous category, but they could still count as continued support from the structural funds.

**Country Stance-Austria**

Austria supports the introduction of Transition Regions to replace the expiring Convergence Regions as all regions with a GDP per capita between 75 percent and 90 percent of the EU average. Austria also supports the budget of €38.9 billion for the 2014-2020 to foster growth and increased employment across all regions, leading to greater EU cohesion.

Austria represents only one region that would be defined as Transitional under this new proposition. If Burgenland, the region to be defined as transitional, acquires this status, it will be able to continue to develop into a competitive region which can benefit the whole of the EU rather than being stagnant in a transitional phase, or worse falling back into needing greater amounts of Cohesion funds to maintain even the most basic levels of development. Many regions are concerned that they may begin to receive less funding that previously under the category of Convergence Regions, but this category will be eliminated along with the funding that comes with it in the next budget cycle.

Austria’s position is that the Phasing-In and Phasing-Out regional definitions are no longer effectively distinguishing regions for funding purposes and the proposed definition of transitional regions is more effective in almost every case. It is also Austria’s position that eliminating extra funding for regions who are not yet at 90% average GDP would prove detrimental, not only to those regions but also to the neighboring regions who would also feel the effects. The EU has proposed a budget of €38.9 billion for the 2014-2020 cycle for these transition regions. It is Austria’s position that the category of transitional regions is in the best interest of EU cohesion, and that the budgeted funding will benefit all the Member States.

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**Country Stance-Czech Republic**

The Presidency currently supports the new transition region, which will replace the current phasing-in and phasing-out system used presently. The Czech Republic is not in favor of this new category. The creation of this new region will give regions with a per capita GDP of 75% to 90% of the EU average further funding, and will replace the current phasing-in and phasing-out system. This will take funding away from less developed regions within the EU, and will debilitate the objective to support the poorest areas within the Czech Republic. This will effect all regions in the Czech Republic except Prague, and will impact the most important areas that are still in the continuation of developing greater economic potential. The Czech Republic has seen areas within the Convergence Objective in Cohesion Policy to successfully exceed the 75% GDP average for the EU, and believes that because areas have been able to loose their convergence eligibility, more funding should go to those that have not yet been able to do so. The new transition regions should not receive funding if the area is more economically sound.

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**Country Stance-France**

Compared to other European nations, France has a fairly advanced industrial economy. However in recent years, France has seen de-industrialization and a shrinkage in exportation leading to a loss of jobs. The deficit has deepened and many industrial plants have closed due to the lack of international competitiveness. As a result, France was left with a very high unemployment rate of 10.3% for 2012. In order to eliminate labor market segmentation, the focus in France now is to shift taxation and to include older and younger people as well as the long-term unemployed in the work environment.

France agrees with the Commission's proposal to replace "phasing-in", "phasing-out" regions with a more effective category of "transition regions" for those regions neither part of the "less developed regions" category nor the "more developed regions" category. Regions having a GDP per capita between 75 and 90 % of the EU average need continued support in order to firmly establish their economy and further the progress that has already begun via the Cohesion Policy objectives. The neediest countries will still receive the most aid but transition regions will have access to funds to innovate, to compete, and to continue energy efficiency and social cohesion.

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**Country Stance-Germany**

Germany agrees with the proposals put forward by the Irish Presidency regarding Cohesion Policy Reform, including the creation of the “transition regions” funding category and making Cohesion aid conditional upon keeping the obligations made by EU member countries regarding the Stability and Growth Pact. Germany would also commend the Presidency in its proposal to introduce a new category of “transition region” in order to replace the problematic ‘phasing in and out’ system currently in place. Germany feels that it is essential that all regions within the EU receive proper attention in terms of Cohesion funding, to ensure economic competitiveness and long term European stability. This new region would include all regions with a GDP per capita between 75 percent and 90 percent of the EU average. These regions would receive 38.9 billion Euros through the 2014-2020 period. If such a category were not introduced, these regions (called “convergence regions”) would lose crucial funding necessary to give them one last push towards fulfilling their socio-economic potential.

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**Country Stance-Greece**

Transition Regions acknowledging regions ranging from 75% to 90% of the EU average are being proposed and Greece supports this proposal. Greece would like to emphasize that it has one of the lowest per capita GDPs in the EU at $25,570. (OECD Economic Surveys: Greece 2007) With the implementation of the Euro currency, the Greek credit rating rose to AAA status for the purposes of borrowing on the global market. The strength of the Euro lies in the stability of the member states and as such it is indeed essential to ensure low deficits and total debt ratios. The European Community must realize that financial emergency can require increased debt. Therefore, there must be guidelines for Transition Regions that may breach SGP requirements but such guidelines should not infringe upon the Cohesion funding already allocated to that member state.

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**Country Stance-Ireland**

The primary purpose of the Cohesion Policy and a long standing goal of the European Union has always been to strengthen the European Union’s (EU) membership’s economic, social and territorial unity reducing disparities across the region. In the two most recent time frames, 2000-2006 and 2007-2013 €521 b were allocated to assist in the alleviation of economic disparities and the convergence of the EU’s different regions. Historically the vast majority of this funding has gone to the poorest regions with 80% earmarked for regions with a GDP per capita at less than 75% of the EU’s average as a whole. The current framework tied to the Renewed Lisbon Strategy is set to expire this year and the European Commission has already set out a potential framework that would link the new Cohesion Policy to “Europe 2020” goals.

Ireland has outlined three priorities for our upcoming presidency that the Republic of Ireland views as being of the utmost importance: Jobs and Growth, economic governance and budget structure; which Ireland sees as key discussion points for the recovery of the EU and its future growth. No country understands the importance of the Cohesion Policy as much as Ireland. As the greatest success story of convergence within the EU, Ireland feels obligated to support to the utmost what it views as a keystone for the EU’s economic policy including transition regions. Ireland recognizes the need that for both a regional set of goals and allowance for the differentiation within different countries and regions expectations to allow for a more favorable Cohesion Fund for the regions that are most in need of the resources it provides.

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**Country Stance-Italy**

The Irish Presidency also supports the European Commission proposal to create three categories of funding based on the Member States GDP levels which are: less developed regions, more developed region, and the transition region. The transition region, a new category, would replace the current phasing-in and phasing-out system, and would include those regions whose GDP per capita is between 75% and 90% of the EU- 27 average. The cohesion policies have already helped to improve economic, social and environmental conditions within the EU. However, these same evaluations concluded that focusing on a few key priorities, especially in the more developed regions, would be more effective. Therefore, cohesion policy reform is very much needed, so that it should become more selective. Future programs should concentrate on only a few priorities closely linked to the Europe 2020 strategy so that each priority receives enough funding to deliver a real impact. Ireland does not support the creation of these new transition regions because it believes the more developed countries should be the central focus of improvement. Once they have reached their full potential they will have the ability to help improve the less developed ones.

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**Country Stance-Luxembourg**

Luxembourg supports the idea of transition regions but as a great supporter of the Europe 2020 Lisbon goals would like to see the majority of transition region funding to be spent on these goals. While we recognize that some regions may, in the short run, lose out during this new classification, side payments can be made to them to help aid the transition. It is Luxemburg’s hope that they the most underdeveloped countries will be able to begin making their way towards equal footing in development.

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**Country Stance-Malta**

Malta supports the Commission’s proposed requirements to qualify as a transition region and must continue to collect structural funds under the Commission’s proposal as it previously did under Convergence status. As of 2011, Malta’s GDP per capita was 83 percent of the EU average and therefore qualifies. (Eurostat 20 June 2012: 2). By continuing to provide Malta with the funds necessary for further development, the EU ultimately works together in order to reduce debt in underdeveloped regions by speeding along their development and achieving the ultimate goal of an equitable union.

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**Country Stance-Portugal**

Portugal has been an active member committed to EU objectives since 1986.
Out of the founding EMU members, it has one of the lowest GDPs at €233 billion. Until 1974 Portugal existed under an oppressive authoritarian regime *Estado Novo* and therefore lags developmentally behind other western European Countries. With the help of structural funding since its admittance into the Union, the Portuguese economy grew at a rate above EU average for much of the 1990s. The last decade has seen the ebb and flow of economic growth and contraction, but Cohesion funding is consistently present to ensure swift recovery. The retraction of capital inflow to the Portuguese economy threatens to sabotage the current administration’s efforts to implement austerity measures. This was exemplified in 2011 when Portugal, under pressure form the EU and IMF, implemented several austerity measures, for example cutting public salary by 5%. Efforts were counterproductive and economic growth ceased and actually fell back the following year. Portugal has a youth unemployment rate of 11.7% and could use Cohesion funds for investing in the environment and in prospective research that would make the economy more completive and create thousands of jobs.

Portugal feels that transition regions should be created in order to assure that no region is denied their necessary aid due to the statistical effect of the big-bang enlargement. The continuance of Cohesion inflow to Portugal is essential in order for measures of austerity to be implemented successfully. The creation of Transition Regions would ensure that all necessitating members continue to receive EU support. Countries with GDP per capita between 75%-90% of EU average will be labeled transition regions.

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**Country Stance- Spain**

Transition regions would allow regions with GDP per capita between 75-90% of the EU average to receive funds from the Cohesion Policy. The creation of transition regions would be beneficial in Spain, especially in the areas that have improved due to Cohesion Policy funding, and those that would continue to receive some funding until they were within 10% of the average GDP of the whole EU. On the other hand, implementing conditional funding in SGP limits would create a certain amount of difficulty for Spain and the other 16 countries that have a deficit over the 3% benchmark. Spain is in favor of the creation of transition regions as it recognizes the positive impact this new category would have on it’s most underdeveloped regions as they are funded and supported to help reach the same levels of development as the rest of Europe.

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**Country Stance-Sweden**

In a time that economic challenges may be felt in every Member State, it is essential that we remain focused on the most disadvantaged among us and support their success, for it naturally becomes our own. This is why Sweden is strongly opposed to the creation of a new category, ‘transition region’, for the allocation of Cohesion funds. The creation of such a category would enhance opportunities for misuse of allocated funds as it would cease to target the regions among us that are most in need. Those close to 90% of the EU GDP are already on the borderline of the ‘more developed region’ category and this can make all the difference in the outcomes of our mutual investments. It is vital that Cohesion funds are allocated to responsible regions that are in most need of harvesting economic health, for we cannot move forward as a Union into an economically strong and stable future if we do not aggressively address our most pressing challenges. Sweden opposes the creation of a new category—“Transition Region”—for we must continue to focus on regions that are in higher need of assistance.

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**Country Stance - UK**

The United Kingdom takes a similar view to the Presidency’s proposal to introduce a “transition” category extending 2007-2013 benefits to those within the 75%-90% average GDP range. While it is indeed desirable to simplify the ‘phasing-in”, “phasing out” system, this modest move does not address wider issues of responsible and efficient spending of Cohesion Funding. The United Kingdom seeks a stronger version of the Presidency’s proposal, one that solidifies Cohesion Fund categories and relieves the funding ambiguity of former ‘convergence’ regions. It therefore suggests lowering the GDP range to 70% so as to include a wider number of regions who are already well on their way to development.