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**THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME.  
LOOKING FOR A VISION IN THE  
EUROPEAN COHESION POLICY.**

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1. Looking for a vision in the European Union economic, social and territorial cohesion policy

In February 2022, the Commission published «Cohesion in Europe Towards 2050», the eighth report on the EU cohesion policy. Every three years, in accordance with Article 175 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Commission publishes a Report «on the progress made towards achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion and on the manner in which the various means provided for in this Article have contributed to it».

The 2022 report shows that Cohesion policy has helped less developed regions to increase their growth rate. In the 2014-2020 period, the GDP per capita of less developed regions is expected to increase by up to 5% by 2023<sup>1</sup>.

The picture sketched by the Report shows that whereas less developed Eastern EU regions have been catching up with the rest of the Union, many others, in Southern and South-western Europe are still in a situation which can be described as stagnation

The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion has dropped between 2012 and 2019 by 17 million, but the coronavirus pandemic put an additional 5 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion. As the EU emerges from the pandemic crisis, efforts must be made to continue the previous trend of poverty reduction.

Of course, it is not for the report to go into other questions, such as issues of competence sharing between the Union and the Member States

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/information-sources/cohesion-report\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/cohesion-report_en) In March 2024 the Commission published her ninth report on the EU Cohesion policy [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/reports/cohesion9/9CR\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/reports/cohesion9/9CR_Report_FINAL.pdf)

(hereinafter MS) or, ultimately, the problem of what the Cohesion policy is or should be.

Let us start with a simple, though path-breaking, question: what in the end is this thing that we call the European Union economic, social and territorial cohesion policy?<sup>2</sup>

To understand what the EU economic, social and territorial policy is, it is wise to address to the Treaties. A thorough discipline of the matter is to be found in the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, where Article 174 states that

«In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion.

In particular, the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions.

Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions».

Whereas Article 175 adds

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<sup>2</sup> The European economic, social and territorial cohesion policy has been one of the major concerns for the European Union through the years. See, among others, R. LEONARDI, *Cohesion Policy in the European Union. The Building of Europe*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005; J. BACHTLER, *EU Cohesion Policy and European Integration: The Dynamics of EU Budget and Regional Policy Reform*, Routledge 2013; L. POLVERARI, S. PIATTONI (edds.), *Handbook on cohesion policy in the EU*, Elgar 2016; I. OTTAVIANO (ed.) *Legal perspectives of the EU Cohesion Policy*, Giappichelli 2024

«Member States shall conduct their economic policies and shall coordinate them in such a way as, in addition, to attain the objectives set out in Article 174. The formulation and implementation of the Union's policies and actions and the implementation of the internal market shall take into account the objectives set out in Article 174 and shall contribute to their achievement. The Union shall also support the achievement of these objectives by the action it takes through the Structural Funds (European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, Guidance Section; European Social Fund; European Regional Development Fund), the European Investment Bank and the other existing Financial Instruments.

The Commission shall submit a report to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions every three years on the progress made towards achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion and on the manner in which the various means provided for in this Article have contributed to it. This report shall, if necessary, be accompanied by appropriate proposals.

If specific actions prove necessary outside the Funds and without prejudice to the measures decided upon within the framework of the other Union policies, such actions may be adopted by the European Parliament and the Council acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions».

Reading these articles, we get several information on the object and the aims and the making of the policy, but nothing that can help us to understand in depth what this policy is.

To get more information one should revert to the first articles of the Treaties, where normally general issues are dealt with. Now, from Article 4 of

the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, we gather that economic, social and territorial cohesion is one of the areas in which the Union shares competence with Member States, whereas Article 3 of the Treaty establishing a European Union states that

«The Union promotes economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity between the Member States»

This Article may look of some help for us. Because, provided that the word “solidarity” has a meaning of its own, referring to a specific European value, this quotation seems to imply that the cohesion policy may have something to do with solidarity.

To start with, and though it may look strange, the word solidarity doesn't appear in Articles 174 to 178 TFEU relating to the cohesion policy, so that one may think that the recital of solidarity in connection with cohesion policies in Article 3 TEU should be interpreted as a mere juxtaposition of two different items. In the sense that the Union would promote “economic, social and territorial cohesion” and “solidarity between the Member States”, as two different strategies.

Nevertheless, this seems not to be the case, because cohesion and solidarity are referred as a single objective in Protocol no. 28 and, what is more, were consistently linked in policy planning documents and reports relating to cohesion strategies.

In the first report on Cohesion, solidarity between States appears as a fundamental principle in the establishment of sound cohesion policies, though the idea of a European inter-state solidarity may sometimes shift to the one of a European solidarity policy, in the sense of a structural action by the compact Institutions-Member States

«At the political level, cohesion policies are an expression of mutual support between Member States.

They underpin the notion of European solidarity, creating a new framework of opportunity which is both additional and complementary to the national one.

This is not simply a matter of resource transfer, but a Community approach, or method, which seeks to make the fullest use of the potential of the Union economy as a whole by implementing best-practice techniques and taking decisions as close to the grassroots as possible. By involving a wide range of people and organisations at regional and local level, Community cohesion policies give the most concrete expression to the principle of subsidiarity...The starting point for the Union's structural policies must be to guarantee long-term support for the poorest regions, in view of the profound disparities which persist between the lagging regions (Objective 1) and the rest.

Solidarity with these regions is an important basis for progress not just for social reasons, but in order to increase the economic potential of the Union as a whole.

Catching-up tends to be a slow process, necessitating a long-term commitment»<sup>3</sup>.

Strangely enough, though, the second cohesion report from 2001 was entitled 'Unity, solidarity, diversity for Europe, its people and its territory', the word solidarity did not appear in the report itself<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The quotes are taken from European Commission, *First Report on Economic and Social Cohesion 1996*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1996, p. 118 and p. 130

And since then the word solidarity will practically disappear from the lexicon of cohesion. Maybe, because the two terms may look synonyms, in the sense that cohesion policy will be understood as a practical expression of the European solidarity. Or perhaps because it may seem useless to speak of solidarity considered the fact that the Cohesion Strategies and apparatuses were already well established. And what is more, the Juncker Commission will definitely leave aside the theme of solidarity to focus on competitiveness.

But, generally speaking, solidarity can be deemed in this context simply to mean action for cohesion, or rather the reasons for which a cohesion policy was established. Meanings, all of them, which should be considered peculiar to this context.

So, it may reveal useful to adopt a different strategy, trying to go to an historical approach.

## 2. An historical sketch of the evolution of the policy through the years.

The idea of a European cohesion policy was introduced into the European Economic Community Treaty by the Single European Act (hereinafter SEA) in 1987, though considerable, mainly prodromic, developments had taken place in the period 1957-1975<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> European Commission, *Unity, solidarity, diversity for Europe, its people and its territory. Second report on Economic and Social Cohesion*, Luxembourg Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2001

<sup>5</sup> See M. BRUNAZZO, *The History and Evolution of Cohesion Policy*, in L. POLVERARI, S. PIATTONI (edds.), *Handbook on the Cohesion Policy*, p. 17 ff.; R. SAPIENZA, *The EU economic, social and territorial Cohesion Policy. Historical evolution and legal bases*, in I. OTTAVIANO (ed.) *Legal perspectives of the EU Cohesion Policy*, pp. 1 ff.

Article 23 of the SEA added a new TITLE V to Part Three of the Treaty devoted to Economic and Social Cohesion. The new Title consisted of five new articles from article 130 a) to article 130 e). Article 130 a) read as follows

«In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Community shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic and social cohesion

In particular the Community shall aim at reducing disparities between the various regions and the backwardness of the least-favored regions»

This freshly established new policy was articulated in detail through five new Regulations adopted in 1988<sup>6</sup>.

The new Regulations were aimed at reaching six policy objectives:

Objective 1 Promoting the development and adjustment of the regions whose development is lagging behind.

Objective 2 Converting the regions, frontier regions or parts of regions (including employment areas and urban communities) seriously affected by industrial decline

Objective 3 Combating long-term unemployment

Objective 4 Facilitating the occupational integration of young people

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<sup>6</sup> They were Council Regulation (EEC) No 2052/88 of 24 June 1988 in *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 185, 15 July 1988, p. 9 ff.; Council Regulation (EEC) No 4253/88 of 19 December 1988, Council Regulation (EEC) No 4254/88 of 19 December 1988, Council Regulation (EEC) No 4255/88 of 19 December 1988, Council Regulation (EEC) No 4256/88 of 19 December 1988, in *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 374, 31 December 1988, p. 1 ff.

Objective 5(a) Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy by adapting production, processing and marketing structures in agriculture and forestry.

Objective 5(b) Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy by promoting the development of rural areas.

In short, the 1988 reform promoted the creation of a truly European regional policy, transforming it «from an essentially budgetary transfer to . . . a genuine regional development tool with the potential to provide effective solutions to the problems faced by the Community's regions»<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, a new approach was consolidated, based on the principles of:

concentration (on less developed regions);

programming (through multi-annual strategies in line with the Multi-annual Financial Framework);

partnership (to involve subnational governments and economic and social stakeholders); and

additionality (to ensure EU funding did not substitute for national funding).

States were required to adopt a programming instrument and the Commission was to examine it and approve it, by adopting a Community Support Framework. State programs were to be only partially funded by the Community, whereas the State was expected to find elsewhere other funding.

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<sup>7</sup> G.P. MANZELLA, C. MENDEZ, *The turning points of EU Cohesion Policy. Report* Working Paper, European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde, January 2009.

After the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty, a new reform of the Cohesion Policy was necessary. Therefore, new regulations were adopted in 1993<sup>8</sup>. The Objectives were consequently updated and revised and a new regulation was added regarding the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG).

This reform is not to be underestimated, because important provisions were introduced. For instance, the new text of article 12 of Regulation 4254/88 as modified by Regulation 2083/93 reads as follows

«Those portions of the sums committed for the granting of assistance in respect of projects decided on by the Commission before 1 January 1989 under the ERDF which have not been the subject of a request for final payment to the Commission by 31 March 1995 shall be automatically released by the Commission by 30 September 1995 at the latest, without prejudice to those projects which are subject to suspension for judicial reasons»

Now, this power relating to the automatic release, vested with the Commission, will contribute to put the Commission itself in a position to govern the whole financial system of the Cohesion policy, making the cohesion policy subject to the ... absolute power of the Commission<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2080/93 of 20 July 1993, Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2081/93 of 20 July 1993, Council Regulation (EEC) 2082/93 of 20 July 1993, Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2083/93 of 20 July 1993, Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2084/93 of 20 July 1993, Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2085/93 of 20 July 1993 in *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 193, 31 July 1993, p. 1 ff.

<sup>9</sup> See an analysis of the first ten years in ECJ case law relating to these issues in R. SAPIENZA, *La politica comunitaria di coesione economica e sociale*, Il Mulino-SVIMEZ, Bologna-Roma 2000, at p. 82 ff.

Further reforms took place in 1999, aimed at supporting the accession of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, and the introduction of EMU. Enlargement, in particular, prompted changes to regional policy, allowing for the accommodation of new members whose levels of wealth were considerably lower than those of the EU other MS. Again, new Regulations were adopted<sup>10</sup>, whereas the objectives were reduced to only three

Objective 1, promoting the development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind;

Objective 2, supporting the economic and social conversion of areas facing structural difficulties; and

Objective 3, supporting the adaptation and modernization of policies and systems of education, training and employment.

After a new reform in 2006<sup>11</sup>, the Lisbon Treaty came into force with important changes. Article 174 was modified and the cohesion policy was to be named not only “economic and social”, but also “territorial”

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<sup>10</sup> Council Regulations (EC) No. 1260/1999 to No. 1267/99 of 21 June 1999 in *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 161, 26 June 1999 p. 1 ff.; Regulations (EC) No. 1783/1999 and No. 1784/ 99 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 July 1999 in *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 213, 13 August 1999, p. 1 ff.; Council Regulation (EC) No. 1257/1999 of 17 May 1999 in *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 160, 26 June 1999, p. 80 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Regulations (EC) No. 1080/2006 to 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006; Council Regulations (EC) No. 1083/2006, No. 1084/2006 of 11 July 2006; Council Regulation (EC) No. 1085/2006 of 17 July 2006 in *Official Journal of the European Union* L 210, 31 July 2006, p. 1 ff.

So in 2014 a new season for the cohesion policy was opened which consisted in the approval of a new set of Regulations<sup>12</sup> providing for new, more specific objectives<sup>13</sup> and a new tool in the cohesion policy, a system of conditionalities, which soon appeared to be a dramatically important weapon in the hands of the Commission to curb reluctant States to align with European *desiderata* in the field of the policy.

The use of conditionalities was in fact due to the desire of the Commission to gain further control on MS economic and monetary policies, using the leverage of funding allocated under Cohesion Policy<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Regulation (EU) No. 1299/2013 to No. 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 in *Official Journal of the European Union, L 347, 20 December 2013*, p. 259 ff.

<sup>13</sup> The objectives were:

1. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation.
2. Enhancing access to, and use and quality of, information and communication technologies.
3. Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs.
4. Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy.
5. Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management.
6. Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency.
7. Promoting sustainable transport and improving network infrastructures.
8. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility
9. Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination.
10. Investing in education, training and lifelong learning.
11. Improving the efficiency of public administration.

<sup>14</sup> J. BACHTLER, C. MENDEZ, R. COMAN, A. CRESPI, V.A. SCHMIDT, (eds.) *Cohesion and the EU's budget: is conditionality undermining solidarity?* In: *Governance and politics in the post-crisis European Union*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020, pp. 121-139

And, in a way, modified the balance of shared competences between MS and the Commission, which was now completely in charge of the new cohesion system.

The evolution had thus led to a point of arrival which was implicit in the whole strategy, almost since the first set of Regulations: the Commission was in charge of all the cohesion strategy<sup>15</sup>.

The last (for the moment being) reform took place in 2021, and seems to have crystallized a new approach to the cohesion policy, having, especially through the reinforced conditionality approach, a new dimension, going further the traditional solidaristic approach.

In a few words, for next years, five objectives have been defined within the Policy supporting and complementing the EU objectives:

- a more competitive and smarter Europe
- a greener, low carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy
- a more connected Europe by enhancing mobility
- a more social and inclusive Europe
- Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories.

The policy is still implemented by national and regional bodies in partnership with the European Commission, but the set of conditionalities has been more articulated through the introduction of a rule of law conditionality linked to breaches of fundamental EU values.

In response to EU criticism of the independence of judiciaries in Hungary and Poland, the Commission's 2021-27 MFF proposals introduced rule of law conditionality in relation to EU budgetary procedures and policies. In

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<sup>15</sup> This is an opinion I put forward for the first time in 2000. See R. SAPIENZA, *La politica comunitaria di coesione economica e sociale*, op. cit., at p. 91 ff.

the case of shared management funds, financial sanctions are envisaged to protect the EU budget where there is a risk of a generalized deficiency in the rule of law in a member state.

These would take the form of a suspension, reduction or restriction of EU funding and would be applied where the rule of law deficiency risks affecting the principles of sound financial management or the protection of EU financial interests. The decision-making procedure would involve the Commission proposing measures to the Council, which would lead to a decision based on a reversed qualified majority vote.

Moreover, this reform was approved in 2021, in the mid of the COVID 19 pandemic, which brought new recovery regulations, the well-known Next Generation EU (hereinafter NGEU) and some commentators have noted that further problems may arise from the overlapping of cohesion strategies with the action of the Next Generation EU instruments<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. Problems for the days to come: the conditionality approach

It is undeniable that the conditionalities approach has brought some changes in the original solidaristic approach traditionally underpinning the cohesion policy.

The rise of conditionality can be explained by a functional imperative to improve Cohesion Policy performance, and external spill-over effects relating to economic governance and negotiations on the EU budget. The latter raises important implications for theoretical perspectives on EU decision-making and integration theory in the post-crisis context. First, EU budgetary and Cohesion policymaking has taken an intergovernmental turn as consequence of

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<sup>16</sup> See B. DE WITTE, *The European Union's COVID-19 Recovery Plan: the Legal Engineering of an Economic Policy Shift*, *Common Market Law Review* 2001, pp. 635 ff.

the increased politicisation of the EU budget and alignment between Cohesion Policy and economic governance.

This is manifested in a stronger role for the European Council in determining the regulatory framework than previously by issuing conclusions on the MFF that impinged directly on the competence of the co-legislators (Council and Parliament) in negotiating Cohesion Policy regulations, notably in the areas of macroeconomic conditionality.

Second, the institutionalisation of conditionality provides support for post-functional theories of European integration stressing the increasing importance of public opinion and politicisation for the direction of EU institutional and policy outcomes.

Cohesion Policy decision-making and debate has become more politicised, especially in relation to macro-economic, rule of law and migration conditionality debates, and public opinion is playing a more important role in policy-making deliberations.

At the moment, it seems that the benefits of conditionality are at least controversial, while the dreaded side effects have been mainly softened due to the Commission's attitude of relying essentially on voluntary compliance by the Member States, leaving the exercise of sanctioning powers only as a very last resort.

The EU's experience with spending conditionality so far appears to reflect the ambiguous nature of the EU budget, which is still stuck between an essentially bargaining tool and a fully-fledged policy instrument.

To some extent, the recourse to conditionality mirrors the changing patterns towards the creation of a genuinely supranational growth and development policy.

However, especially when spending conditionality acts as an alternative enforcement mechanism for other EU policies, the EU budget and the solidarity transfers vehiculated through ESI funds are essentially used as bargaining

tools for the achievement of different objectives, sometimes at the sacrifice of their primary solidarity goals.

#### 4. A synergy between cohesion policy and the Next Generation EU RRF

The provisions governing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (hereinafter RRF), one of the main instruments of the NGEU, are different from cohesion policy, though having the same legal basis in Article 175 TFEU.

Cohesion policy funds are typically subject to stringent requirements and intricate procedures to ensure an efficient spending. The resulting administrative burden on implementing bodies and beneficiaries is often cited as a major cause for implementing delays. Simplification measures introduced under the post-2020 framework are intended to tackle this historical flaw, but substantial challenges will remain into the new period.

By contrast, the RRF will rely on a much more agile and flexible set of rules on spending. To be sure, numerous conditions would have to be fulfilled when preparing the recovery and resilience plans. The assessment of the plans and the monitoring of their implementation is also expected to be very thorough. The political pressure to spend efficiently the recovery funding will make MS face strong scrutiny from their peers in the Council and the Commission services.

Having said that, MS would have to cope with far less obligations and controls than cohesion policy as regards both planning and spending the RRF resources. For instance, the disbursement of RRF money will be linked to the achievement of general targets whilst cohesion policy payments will continue to be largely based on real costs incurred which entails a much bigger administrative burden.

This makes the RRF more appealing to several national governments vis-à-vis cohesion policy. All the more considering that the RRF has a EU co-

financing rate of 100% whereas national co-funding (as high as 60% in more developed regions) is required under cohesion policy.

Furthermore, it is important to say that the Cohesion policy, though being led by the Commission is operated through a complex framework of multilevel governance, whereas the RRF is adopted in a political and administrative vacuum.

Nevertheless, it is possible

## 5. Wrapping it up. The evolving strategy of a partnership led by the Commission

We tried till now to get some information about what the Cohesion Policy is or ought to be. These are the main answers we found through our historical sketch.

First of all, Cohesion policy has always been influenced by major political or economic events and circumstances.

It is true that the key regulatory principles of the 1988 reform remained almost the same in the subsequent 1994, 1999, 2006 and 2013 reforms but each time making changes in objectives, spatial coverage and governance of the policy.

Moreover, several conditionalities have been introduced, with the aim of protecting the EU budget and to ensure sound financial management of European funding.

We have assisted to the succession of different schemes of intervention, with different political and economic objectives, so different sometimes that one is forced to wonder if it is possible to speak of the evolution of a single policy or, rather, of different schemes of intervention prompted by the necessity of coping with problems always different in nature and extension.

But it is easy to observe that, through the years and the different frames, a common philosophy has developed, based on a new vision of the territorial

dimension of the European Union, based on a partnership both between MS and the Commission, and within the MS between Central authorities and different local authorities.

As a matter of fact, the idea of an organization generally inspired to the principle of partnership may be detected since the 1999 reform.

But, from the 2006 reform, the word partnership is used both to describe the relationship of cooperation between the Commission and the MS and also to refer to the organization of a framework of consultation and cooperation within each MS, between the Central State Authorities and the Regional and Local Authorities as well as different stakeholders, both public and private.

What is more, the partnership formula appears as a way through which organize the interaction and cooperation between all the subjects present on a given territory. Most of them represented by the Committee of the Regions.

Through the years the Committee has in fact acquired new vital drift in this connection, claiming to be the institution representing the local level of that frame of multilevel governance which has been recognized more and more as one of the main features of a European Model of Governance, a way through which the idea of a subsidiary Union has received practical enforcement.

In April 2014, the Committee of the Regions adopted resolution 2014/C 174/01 the Charter of the Multilevel Governance in Europe, an important document describing a new framework of Governance in the European Union, but also within the Member States<sup>17</sup>.

The Multilevel Governance was defined as a strategy

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<sup>17</sup> Committee of the Regions resolution 2014/C 174/01 adopting the Charter of the Multilevel Governance in Europe <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/mlgcharter/Pages/default.aspx>

«based on coordinated action by the European Union, the Member States and regional and local authorities according to the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and partnership, taking the form of operational and institutional cooperation in the drawing up and implementation of the European Union's policies».

Thus, a new philosophy of action, the one developed by the Committee of the Regions, was adopted as a new picture of the European Model of Governance, and

«It is precisely through our commitment to the fundamental Values, Principles and Processes underpinning multilevel governance that we believe new modes of dialogue and partnership will emerge across public authorities in the European Union and beyond. Multilevel governance strengthens openness, participation, coordination and joint commitment to delivering targeted solutions. It allows us to harness Europe's diversity as a driver for capitalising on the assets of our local areas. Making full use of digital solutions, we are committed to increasing transparency and offering quality public services easily accessible to the citizens we represent.

Multilevel Governance helps us to learn from each other, experiment with innovative policy solutions, share best practices and further develop participatory democracy, bringing the European Union closer to the citizens. We believe that embracing multilevel governance contributes to deeper EU integration by further strengthening the ties between our territories and overcoming the administrative hurdles in regulation and policy implementation and the geographical frontiers that separate us».

And having elaborated on the concept of Multilevel Governance, it is no surprise that the Committee of the Regions has also played an important role

in the development of the European Cohesion Policy, which is, among all the European policies, the one with major territorial implications<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Thus, claiming a role of final supervisor of the territorial dimension of EU policies. In a joint venture with EURADA, a network of the Development Agencies throughout Europe and several Regional Powers Associations, the Committee has created the Cohesion Alliance, demanding that the post 2020 Cohesion Policy should be more effective and available for every region in Europe. But the CoR also has developed a Territorial Impact Strategy, a series of tools to monitor the impact of different European policies on the different European Territories. See, in this connection, the *Renewed Territorial Impact Strategy* COR-2015-05320-10-00-NB-TRA a document delivered at the 164<sup>th</sup> Mtg. of the CoR, 2 December 2015, at p. 4.

