

UBC position paper on the

European Commission's proposal for structural funds' regulations 2014-2020.

The Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) is the leading city network in Northern Europe, mobilizing the shared potential of over 100 member cities for democratic, economic, social, cultural and environmentally sustainable development of the Baltic Sea Region.

The Union of Baltic Cities

1. Welcomes focusing of the future cohesion policy on the Europe 2020 strategy and special emphasis addressed to cities and urban policies, since the role of cities, as regional engines, is crucial for the achievement of 2020 goals. Urban policies should include cities of all sizes.
2. Supports the notion that EU's structural funds, which are tools for implementing the cohesion policy, should be addressed to all regions in the EU.
3. Stresses a stronger involvement of competent local and regional authorities in shaping and implementing structural programmes. Competent city authorities should be treated as equal partners with the managing authorities when preparing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating the Structural Funds programmes. It is necessary to ensure a real introduction and implementation of the principle of subsidiarity.
4. Supports the approach that all regions can choose amongst different thematic priorities those ones that corresponds best to their situation, strengths and weaknesses (Convergence, Transition or Competitiveness). Furthermore, it must be avoided that prescribing fixed-priorities on EU-level for ERDF-programmes does not limit local and regional authorities too much to target their actions towards needs and opportunities that are particular to a specific city.
5. Welcomes the principle of multilevel governance and stresses that city authorities must be involved directly in the process nationally and regionally to define, develop and implement the partnership contracts. This is of utmost importance for effective multi-level governance, effective use of resources and ensuring more value for money.

The partnership contracts should specifically confirm the role city authorities, their public mandate as well as democratic legitimacy in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes. The role of city authorities as equal partners to regions should be emphasized.

6. Highly appreciates that the relevance of the European Social Fund has been acknowledged by the increase of its financial basis. Challenges related to unemployment, obstacles to the labour market and social exclusion are visible especially in cities.
7. Strongly supports all measures cutting the red tape and decrease of bureaucratic burden
8. Welcomes the increase in funding for European Territorial Cooperation and strongly recommends that this financial resource is maintained. Urges all national, regional and local decision makers to allocate increased funds for the effective implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, including through the forthcoming Baltic Sea Region Programme.
9. Pledges to continue working as a reliable partner together with the European authorities in promoting and implementing common goals.