



DEBATING AND COMMUNICATING EUROPEAN COHESION IN SOUTHERN EUROPE

ADDRESSING CITIZENS' CONCERNS WITH DIALOGUES



Edited by the **Radio Agora Project**

Project Partners:

- Asociación de Emisoras Municipales y Ciudadanas de Andalucía de Radio y TV (EMA-RTV) – Spain / www.emartv.es
- Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation ERT – Greece / www.ert.gr
- Radio Popolare – Italy / www.radiopopolare.it
- Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) – Belgium / www.ceps.eu

For more information please visit: **www.radioagora.org**

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I. PREAMBLE

In today's particularly unstable and worrying European context, underpinned by a growing lack of empathy for the lives and rights of disadvantaged populations and a rise in xenophobic and Eurosceptic discourse, the partners of the Radio Agora project have been working together to contribute to the communicative construction of new collective visions.

Radio Agora is being developed on four fundamental pillars:

Promote and foster a better understanding of the role of cohesion policy in southern European Community regions

Raise Awareness of the impact that projects financed by the European Commission have on society through its cohesion funds.

Disseminate information based on the establishment of an open and reflective dialogue on the objectives, priorities and results of cohesion strategies.

Encourage CITIZENS to take an active part in drawing up future European plans for economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The project is promoted and coordinated by the Andalusian Association of Municipal and Community Broadcasters for Radio and Television (EMA-RTV) and executed at the European level by the Greek Public Radio and Television (ERT), Radio Popolare in Italy and the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) in Belgium.

In 2019 the three media-based partners of the project, with support and guidance from CEPS, have carried out a total of twelve public radio events called "Radio Agora" in Spain, Greece and Italy. The discussions have covered the impact of European cohesion policy on these countries.

This document aims to synthesize the contributions of the more than 70 experts who have participated in these debates.

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II. INTRODUCTION

Territorial Cohesion is part of the founding principles of the Treaty establishing what the European Union is today. While specific policies have changed, the aim to have economic convergence between all regions of the European Union remains and is one of the core principles and policies. Since differences in comparative advantage and endowments favour some regions more than others, the EU has established as a core value the need of transnational and regional solidarity. The European Cohesion Policy, which comprises a number of funds dedicated to promote the development of poorer regions at supranational level, is unique in the world, as it focuses on offering poorer regions in the EU assistance regardless of their national location, and involves local authorities directly in programming and management.

Over time this policy has become a hallmark of the European Union, but is also increasingly linked to other financial programmes at the EU level, which can complement the cohesion policy actions, such as the European Funds for Strategic Investment (EFSI).

While these EU funds have been supporting regions for decades, influencing the strategies of local authorities, creating new opportunities, and supporting the creation of new businesses, citizens are overall unaware of their size, scope and influence. National governments have often neglected to inform the citizens of the interlinkages between national and EU policies, and to explain the real size and impact of the operations. Often the EU is presented in terms of net financial transfers between countries, as if the EU were a net zero sum game without the transfers benefitting the EU including the countries contribution to projects in other member states.

Radio Agora has launched a series of events and programmes aiming at bringing the EU programmes closer to the citizen by explaining the connection of EU policies to actual impacts at local level, in order to increase citizens' awareness of the ways in which the European Union is part of their daily life. The EU has created many infrastructures, processes and rights that are taken for granted, but that are the results of decades of common work and solidarity. For the countries covered by this study cohesion policy has been and remains an important part of the development process of many regions.

The work presented in this document is the result of the debates between experts and citizens involved in the Radio Agora project. The

programmes did not only provide facts on policies, but also debates on perceptions, perspectives, concerns and needs that affect the regions covered by this project. It was also clear from the start that the debates had to cover more than the EU cohesion policy instruments, but also the influence of the EU in the related fields of innovation, climate change and migration. Cohesion policy is an important tool in those, but it is important to communicate all other related EU actions.

The debates have been recorded and have been aired categorised by theme in the subject areas covered by the stations.

A key finding of the project is the large extent of the lack of information that citizens have on the operations of the EU, and consequently the need to bring information and thus Europe closer to the citizens.

The report presents an overview by subject, but does not categorise the outcomes by country. In many areas the concerns converge sufficiently not to do so. Yet regional specificities are also taken into account.

THE SUPPORT TOOLS BY THE EU FOR TERRITORIAL COHESION



III. THE SUPPORT TOOLS BY THE EU FOR TERRITORIAL COHESION

Formally, the EU Cohesion policy is composed by the Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF). These are funds jointly managed by the member states and regions together with the European Commission. Other important sectoral funds that are under shared management and have a structural and cohesion aspect are the European Agricultural and Rural Development Fund (EARDF) and the Maritime and Fisheries Fund (MFF). However, limiting the discussions on cohesion to those policies would be a mistake, as over the last two decades important reforms have been undertaken. The European Union has expanded the reach of centrally managed funds (i.e. directly financed to the beneficiaries from the European institutions), such as the research and innovation funds, the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) offering financial instruments deployed through the European Investment Bank (EIF) and the European Investment Fund (EIF). These support instruments also offer important opportunities for regions in development, but are not pre-allocated to specific regions or sectors.

The support of the EU budget is targeted but limited. The overall expenditure by the EU is equal to 1% of EU GDP or 2% of public expenditure, less than half is dedicated for cohesion policy, although the poorer regions also benefit from the agricultural or fisheries policies support and may also be able to be eligible for other funds, such as those for innovation.

Territorial cohesion has been an objective since the founding of the European Community in 1958, seeking to avoid income disparities and an unbalanced development. It started with the European Social Funds as a response to post war poverty and then expanded with the European Regional Development Funds. Ironically, these Regional Development Funds were created for the poorer areas of Italy and the United Kingdom, the latter being the poorest of the member states at the time it joined. However, the reforms in 1988 that established the cohesion policy multiannual programmes under Commission President Jacques Delors are the ones that have shaped the principles of today's policy and support.

The tools since then have been evolving significantly. They have become more complex and also more targeted following the developments in an

increasingly interconnected world. The funds have been particularly important for the Southern countries of the EU and the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe.

The regional development funds were important in fostering regional decision-making and focused strongly on infrastructures through EU co-financing support. With time and changing needs the policy has been and is undergoing significant reforms. The changes have also been spurred by the impact of the financial crisis, which revealed fundamental structural weaknesses in regions that were prime targets of the funds, raising criticisms by Northern net contributing member states. The cohesion policy today has a multiplicity of objectives and is very different even from what it was in the 1990s. It is linked to the need to develop the bases for a resilient economy and to target key European objectives, such as energy and transport, innovation, digitalisation etc. It has also started to integrate financial instruments that are not direct subsidies and are often linked to the European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund, and also involving national financial institutions. It is increasingly connected to other EU funds for research and innovation and trans-European networks.

Cohesion policy focuses on providing new opportunities for EU citizen by reducing economic disparities between regions, and establishing similar endowments in infrastructures, services, education, and expanding the access to employment.

Initially cohesion policy focused primarily on infrastructure development, but has evolved into a more complex and holistic policy encompassing numerous elements that influence regional development, such as technological competitiveness, employability (especially regarding youth unemployment), raising the educational level, social inclusion, preservation of the environment, fight against climate change, and actions to help manage the increasing migratory flows.

The following sections summarise the results of the debates in the Radio Agora programmes.

III.1. Lack of public knowledge on the actions of the EU to promote cohesion

Citizens of Spain, Italy & Greece have traditionally been favourable to European integration, yet there is a lack of knowledge of the role the European Union plays in the day-to-day life of citizens on decision-making, role of EU institutions and even the action of the national and

regional authorities. Many European contributions are not seen by the public, partly due to the lack of interest by the authorities to acknowledge the support of the EU in many activities of the local and national authorities.

The potential of this support to create convergence is wide and varied, not only in economic terms as a factor of cohesion with the rest of the European regions, but also at the social and cultural levels. Cohesion and its funds are not only a matter of money; it is the representation of what it means to be part of Europe and to be a European citizen in your own tangible environment. The funds are a way to promote Europe as a common space, generate an identity and identification from these shared resources.

Everyone working on issues related to the European Union shares in the responsibility for the disconnection of citizens and subsequent disaffection. The media also plays an important role and should also be more involved in dissemination and visibility of EU actions in the territory for cohesion, innovation, environmental protections and so forth.

The process of cohesion goes far beyond the reductionist concept of economic development, it is a common aspiration towards equal opportunities between regions and cities. These are convincing arguments that should serve to break down any tendency to promote Euroscepticism from “populist” messages and speeches of any ideological nature.

III.2. The wider challenges of climate change, immigration and climate change

One area of strong concern for Southern European countries are the consequences of climate change, because it is particularly at risk of serious impacts on all social and economic sectors, with repercussions ranging from drought to the health of citizens.

Studies presented in the programme in Italy indicated that for the average +1°C increase globally, the impact in Italy has been +3°C.

In addition, due to the instability in the countries of the Mediterranean, these member states are also the first port of call for immigration. There is also a risk of further pressure from caused by climate impacts in Africa and the Middle East.

The EU cohesion policy and other funds such as the Common Agricultural Policy need to focus on these fundamental aspects in Southern Europe, with a particular emphasis on the environmental risks. This was a focus of discussion in the events organised in Andalusia, as this region is at particular risk.

Thirty percent of the Andalusian territory is protected by the Natura 2000 Network and agriculture is a key economic sector threatened by climate change. Climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies should be a priority for this European region and other regions in the Southern member states facing similar challenges.

This requires also reconsidering further the way funds are attributed. The use of a region's Gross Domestic Product per capita as the key variable in the allocation of EU assistance should be further reviewed, since factors such as demographics, migration and the environment have been gaining in relevance.

Presently, the EU Cohesion Policy includes eleven thematic objectives of intervention in order to ensure that priorities and measures are in line with EU objectives. For the next programming period there will be less - but wider - objectives to take into account the interdependencies between many areas of intervention, but it is important that the programming of development plans should further reduce the socio-economic differences not only between North and South, but also between centre and periphery at national and regional level. New models of polycentrism and decentralisation should be created.

III.3. Regions as functional units of participatory development

The development of regions should further explore the use of innovative collaborative bottom up models seeking also to create synergies between the metropolitan, urban and rural areas. There is also a need to foster the collaboration across regional and national borders.

Cross border collaboration and the creation of functional regions is important by clustering already established social and economic links rather than limiting developing strategies to administrative borders.

It is important for the municipalities to collaborate and create networks developing innovative solutions for the regions. The setting up of associations and bringing the so called "smart city" solutions also to the rural areas should prove very useful for ensuring a balanced territorial development and cohesion not only between regions but within regions. This means moving towards a modern approach to cohesion that focuses

more on the local opportunities and draws on local knowledge and strategies.

This approach has already been adopted with positive results in many places, in the form of rural development groups, local fishing action groups or sustainable urban development associations. Many local initiatives have been presented in the programmes as examples of EU interventions directly involving and helping citizens, using soil remediation and the reconversion of land to productive and recreational use, re-establishing local production centres and business hubs, and so forth. These examples are essential to bring the citizens close to the EU, understand it better and discover how many aspects which are taken for granted actually have a strong element of European solidarity and/or have been influenced by European policies.

This place based approach has benefited from the political support of the EU and the importance that the European Parliament has placed since 2009 on investments in this field. The presence in the parliament of representatives of regions have increased their voice in Europe.

The Committee of the Regions also is increasing in influence. EU regional policy already increasingly shifted the strategic planning of regional policy to regional authorities. Today it is thus no longer just the task of national governments represented in the European Council to develop the new strategies from the centre down.

Place based approaches allow for the cohesion policy to reduce inequalities, yet without breaking the diversity of local resources and the variety of regional identities. It should promote the existing endogenous development opportunities in addition to bringing new ideas and methods. This contributes to creating new social and economic ecosystems that are more sustainable and promote social cohesion at local level, which is key.

The policy has to take into account better the wider socio economic implications of the single market and globalisation with more targeted and effective support to adapt to the new realities and also be able to take advantage of new opportunities, which requires an emphasis on new skills while adapting them to the existing local characteristics. Some of the speakers in the events have indicated that they would want to see institutional reform at all levels, from the EU to the local to adapt to the new economic realities, the social demands and the transformative needs locally.

One size fits all solutions does not work, and new necessities imposed by the new challenges and realities require a more flexible and dynamic approach to territorial cohesion. There is a clear demand by citizens and other actors to be better connected and represented. In fact, trust in governmental institutions fell with the different waves of crisis hitting our societies. There is a call across member states for a better, more inclusive multi-level governance mechanism.

III.4. The increasing role of public and private partnerships

Public private partnerships are seen today as a key approach to ensure that the economies of member states and its regions develop, ensuring private investment increases while addressing socio-economic needs. In several areas the market does not cover the need of society, either because the returns are too low or the risks too high. The public sector's participation can make these investments more attractive for private financiers and entrepreneurs. The financial crisis paralysed private investments and exacerbated the existing under-investment in areas of public importance (for example transport, ICT in less populated areas etc.) which often form the foundations for future private investments.

In a risky economic environment with complex social and economic challenges, public-private partnerships seem to be essential to develop the local economies and achieve EU objectives. The need for a stronger collaboration between the private and public sector is also leading to a transformation of the public sector. An enhanced Local Government requires for the public servants to develop more entrepreneurial skills and improve their communication skills with the citizens, entrepreneurs and the financiers. The European governance model is changing leading to enhanced decentralisation in all stages of decision-making and implementation.

Cohesion policy already allows and calls on the Local Government to develop local development strategies involving urban, local or other regional authorities. Increasingly, the local actors will take responsibility for the design, selection and implementation of EU-funded projects, involving local authorities, civil society and business partners.

According to some experts, it seems that local communities should focus on local endogenous economic potential and economies of scale which can form the backbone of a region's export potential. Local communities need to reinvent themselves focusing on new opportunities leveraging

capital from either external or internal investments. Developing such an approach needs support and will not happen automatically.

In Greece, for example, specific training, planning and interventions are necessary with the support of the Local Government, KEDE (Association of Municipalities), the ENPE (Association of Regions) and each municipality need to develop a credible strategy to create regions that become competitive and sustainable.

III.5. The uncertain future of Cohesion policy in the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027

The negotiation on the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework are concerning for the local actors due to the uncertainties that the future entails and the seismic political developments experienced. The participants were concerned about the future financial allocations to cohesion now that Brexit leads to the departure of the second-largest net contributor to the EU budget. Debates on the future of cohesion support show that the size policy is being put into question.

The programmes included experts in the funds from academia, local authorities and the European Commission itself. They explained the challenges ahead for the European Commission and how a number of cuts to the classical cohesion policies will be necessary. Also assistance to farmers and fisheries will be reduced. Due to the global challenges more funding is also required in favour of the strengthening of border policies and dealing with the impacts arising from integrating migrants in society.

The financial crisis also changed the landscape of needs in the regions. Some regions which were wealthier saw important relative falls in income. In Italy, the regions that have seen their industrial base hit harder and have lost more ground in terms of competitiveness compared to the European average are in the Centre-North (Lombardia, Piemonte, Veneto, Emilia Romagna) followed by Marche, Umbria, Lazio, Trentino and Bolzano. They remain richer areas in Italian terms, yet they have seen a strong loss in relative terms in relation with the rest of Europe. The regions' industrial structure has decreased in terms of competitiveness in recent years and there's a standstill in investments in research and diversification.

Some concern was expressed on the EU's focus on aggregate growth and while it is still early to judge the 2014-2020 interventions, there has

perhaps been an excessive trend towards a more urban focus of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The internal migration from rural and smaller urban canters to larger cities was in all three countries a matter of concern.

Overall the participants are looking for less bureaucracy and more effectiveness in EU support. There have been also complaints on the bureaucracy at national level and this was a matter of particular complaint in the Italian programme and Greek Agora events..

III.6. An example of policy targeting in Andalusia and Greece

In the next decade, Andalusia is aiming to develop a transition towards a “bioeconomy”, seeking to develop a versatile system capable of simultaneously handling environment protection and sustainable management of natural resources, energy resources and also human capital to develop environmentally friendly productive activities.

The strategy aims to use this commitment to eco-innovation to improve people's living conditions and quality of life. Andalusia is leading in cutting-edge sectors and must harness this advantage to generate dynamics that encourage talent and innovation in many sectors. In fact, a draft of a future strategic and comprehensive Andalusian circular bioeconomy law is already being drawn up.

In Greece, the programmes stressed the excellent innovation work in Crete in the areas of climate change adaptation, circular economy, blue economy and other initiatives building up from the natural advantages of the region.

THE EU SUPPORT POLICIES IN THE AREA OF CLIMATE CHANGE



IV. THE EU SUPPORT POLICIES IN THE AREA OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Specialist speakers in the radio discussions stressed that there is significant if not overwhelming evidence that global warming has accelerated due to the impacts of manmade activities, a number of greenhouse gases released by human activities, including carbon dioxide, increase the greenhouse gas effect and therefore the global temperatures. Scientists have verified data already available in science: back in 2007, the UN Intergovernmental Committee identified the irrevocable and abnormal global warming trends.

The Southern European countries are particularly exposed to the impacts of climate change, as well as having to face important challenges to implement the energy transition and decarbonisation of the economy. While the energy transition and decarbonisation are often presented not only as necessities, but also as opportunities for a more sustainable future, many fear the cost implications and the perceived behavioural changes that this transition would entail.

The invited experts to the radio programme dialogue emphasized that the European Union has important competencies in the area of climate change and offers support under the different programmes for mitigation and adaptation. For instance, the discussants indicated that a share of the European Structural and Investment Funds are allocated to climate objectives. At the same time, funds for research, innovation and agriculture, as well as support by the European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund, are linked to climate goals. Nevertheless, the discussion also brought to light that, according to data by such organisations like the International Energy Agency (IEA), the EU is not investing enough and is not leading innovation in the field of climate change - those who do are the United States of America and China. The discussants presented figures by the IEA that showed that global energy production from fossil fuels has increased more than the energy production for low-carbon sources. Also, energy from coal use alone, has increased twice as much than the energy from renewable.

Acknowledging that climate change is global while the solutions are mostly local, the experts on the radio programmes addressed key questions that the new Commission and also local politicians need to address, such as: How can the EU support schemes be used more efficiently to achieve the 2050 climate objectives? How can the EU

financial support be better aligned with national and local efforts? More importantly, how can the local citizens be involved and even inspired?

In this respect, the experts affirmed that the European policy concerning environmental protection and the fight against climate change in terms of co-financing investments made at the local level has been substantial in the last fifteen years. However, when looking towards the more immediate future, the discussants concurred that the new multiannual financial framework of the EU should be revised upwards for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Likewise, the radio debate consented that these multiannual programmes must be reinforced in vulnerable regions to ensure that structural funds have qualitative transformative leverage, putting citizens at the centre of local actions and establishing particular priorities of each action area. The prevailing sentiment from the discussions was that operational programs must be more flexible in favour of a more agile and dynamic implementation.

The overall impression from the radio deliberation was that the cohesion policy has not managed to support rural and urban areas in effectively implementing the EU climate and energy policies. Also, the low budgets of national and regional governments have not allowed for an optimal use of the funds. The experts at the radio debates added that more decisive action could have been taken by local authorities to mitigate urban air pollution, which according to the European Environment Agency, causes up to half a million premature deaths annually in European Union.

A starting consideration for the radio talk on climate change was that crises can become turning points for change if the opportunity is seized, and that our consumption patterns are unsustainable and are affecting our natural environment. The discussion lingered on the example on the oceans no longer being able to act as sufficient natural sinks for slowing down the anthropogenic global warming. Despite this, the discussants acknowledged that the natural environment is a key element in mitigating climate change, and technological solutions can provide the necessary support to address this challenge.

The radio dialogue pointed out that an increasingly aware and connected global civil society is already asking the right questions on the action needed to address climate change. The experts and the radio audience had the belief that we are still on time, but more capacity for action, reaction and leadership is needed. The impression was that the question

is no longer about “what” and “why”, but rather about “when” and “how fast” to act. In this regard, it was noted by the discussant that the Green New Deal promoted by the new presidency of the European Commission must serve as a “reset” that introduces a new, more decisive and forceful community commitment.

The experts guiding the radio conversation presented figures from the European Union and the United Nations acknowledging that around seventy per cent of the world's total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions come from urban activity. Therefore, the inference was that intervening effectively on limiting emissions should be considered an ecological priority. Also, the discussants argued that, since around seventy-five per cent of the EU's population lives in cities, the specific weight that urban living has on the environment must be valued. Improving urban areas (small, mid-sized and large) in an environmentally-sustainable way was perceived as potentially influencing positively the health and quality of life of residence in urban areas, their suburb and the regions in general.

IV.1. Increased role of local businesses and authorities

Participants in the radio debates stressed that legislative and administrative authorities should be capable of permitting local businesses to play a much larger role in shaping the programmes supported by the European Cohesion Policy in the area of climate change.

The participants deplored the depth of the austerity drive in all areas of public spending which severely restricted the capacity of local authorities to act. In addition the austerity drive even curtailed the ability of these authorities to participate EU funding opportunities to address climate change locally. Moreover, for Greece and Italy participants deplored the centralisation of power in the hands of central government that has been felt over the last years. The concentration of decision-making power in the capital city can result in a decline of initiatives from local authorities.

On the positive side, experts taking part in the radio programmes acknowledged also successes, mentioning the Covenant of Mayors launched in 2008 for cities. Helping cities to develop urban Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans aimed at increasing energy efficiency and reducing emissions. The initiative now brings together nearly seven thousand municipalities that have benefited from adhering to a common methodology in the execution of action plans and the monitoring of their results.

In Spain, the programme discussants indicated that there are objectives related to climate in 173 Spanish municipalities, most of which are Andalusian, are established based on an Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategy (ISUDS). The conferred message was that such a strategy should balance its climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts and follow the best practices developed in other EU countries.

IV.2. Promoting human-centred policies in cities

The debates in the radio programmes addressed the need to focus on citizens, their welfare and their involvement in the development of local solutions.

Participants stressed the need for increasing the number and quality of public spaces to be extended for the benefit urban dwellers. A centre of concern is the enhancing of accessibility and mobility services for an increasingly ageing urban population. Too much focus has been placed in historical centres in Southern European cities on the commercial and touristic services. There is a need for more human or citizen-centred policies that retain the places of transit, exchange and coexistence for residents. Solutions and guidelines in this respect have been demanded by the audience particularly in vulnerable or disadvantaged neighbourhoods to achieve socio-economic and environmental objectives.

The debates stressed that the local administration is best placed to address the impacts of climate change and other global challenges in their territory. Local leaders should be able to act independently, even by taking steps ahead of the policy developments at national or EU level. The discussants expected the EU institutions to continue to develop ambitious and innovative urban initiatives, which, are increasingly involving the use of co-creation techniques. In this field, the proactivity of local public institutions, private sector and citizens was considered to be essential.

Overall, there was a shared sentiment during the radio dialogues is that the role of the European Union in the energy transition has been highly positive in laying the foundations of its implementation. The discussants concurred that the EU has done so with efficient directives and guidelines on renewable quotas, having thus partly offset the negative effects of the moratoriums applied by the Member States for not meeting the deadlines for reducing GHG emissions.

IV.3. The challenges of greenhouse gas emissions reduction

The discussants of the radio programme recognized that the first major European "checkpoint" in the area of the energy transition will come in 2020 with the revision of the EU-wide objective of reducing emission by 20% compared to 1990. The EU is complying with this target on average (23 per cent), but the experts guiding the radio dialogue indicated that countries like Spain are at 17.3 per cent reduction compared to 1990. However, the global volume of emissions has increased in these three decades by 17.5 per cent. The experts were also concerned on the lack of will of some states to move ahead with stricter targets for 2030.

The impression of the audience on this topic was that this will be the last generation capable of taking action to avoid irreversible events, and the technology and necessary tools to generate clean energy at a lower cost today than the price from the fossil fuel-generated energy are already available. On this matter, it was recognized that the commitment of the media to educate, raise awareness and popularise clean energy production or clean transport, is crucial for the public opinion.

The common viewpoint of the discussants was that the technology is already available and that incumbent infrastructures and systems should not be retained. The experts taking part in the radio conversation consented that three disruptive factors are already met: cheaper electricity generation costs for individuals, storage capacity and autonomy for electric traction vehicles, and well as the easy access to new information and communication technologies.

In the case of Spain, the discussants admitted that the Spanish government's commitment in the Integrated Energy and Climate Plan to cover forty-two per cent of the energy demand with renewable resources in ten years cannot remain in a ministerial document or electoral programme. The experts further acknowledged that this case in Spain must be endorsed by a regulatory regime according to the urgency of the objective, since it makes no sense to set abstract goals, however ambitious they may seem for the 2050 horizon, if there is a failure to plan and comply with the concrete proposals for 2040, 2030 and 2020.

The radio programme discussion on this topic shed light on several regions in Greece (Crete, for instance) which have adopted a new agenda for the coming years that has at its core the following concepts: energy storage, blue economy and circular economy. The origin of these new objectives is to be found in the guidance received from European policies, European networks and research networks. Therefore, the

discussants affirmed that the exchanges of good practices with other European regions have had a positive impact on the development of these objectives.

IV.4. Electrification of energy supply as a key solution

The radio discussions with expert and citizens revealed that many see the electrification of energy demand as the most appropriate way to a zero-emission provision economy. Many considered that the green energy revolution lies in the hands of the aggregated behaviour of individual energy consumers and prosumers and also in decentralised systems.

Many participants to the radio debate argued that there is no time to wait for the large fossil-fuel companies (oil, gas and coal) and also for nuclear thermal fission installations to shift towards the green energy transition. Rather, the impression was that the time has come to end the use of polluting and non-renewable sources in power generation. In addition, many expressed that it was no longer defensible to protect sectors dependant on fossil fuel for the reason of protecting employment, which in the end would lead to worse impacts in the future.

The radio programme discussions also exposed the impression that the abuse of freshwater as a finite natural resource does not occupy such prevalent public attention as the change in the energy sector. However, the risks linked to the unsustainable use of water and its depletion pose some of the greatest ecological and environmental threats facing many parts of the world in a not so distant future. South East Europe being is one of the regions under risk.

Many expressed concerns on the future of the water management asking for better scrutiny and the protection of the environment while covering the fundamental needs of citizens. They expressed mistrust in the private sector as guarantor for such rights and needs.

IV.5. Lack of coordination in the actions to tackle climate change

The radio debates raised the necessity for a coherent approach to climate change in Europe, given that climate change is a global phenomenon, and that Southern Europe needs to have a coordinated voice.

The discussion indicated that for Europe to play a leading role in tackling climate change, it must be at the forefront of technology, research and

implementation. The participants showed concern that while philosophically the EU is at the forefront in some areas, it is not leading in the area of innovation.

Moreover, the radio audience highlighted the fragmentation of decision-making among many state actors and the lack of communication between them as a serious problem. This issue was perceived to result in large number of assessments and evaluations and the large array of potential but untested possibilities. Additionally, the expert participants recognised that in many countries (theirs is not an exception), national central bodies are not connected to universities and research centres to provide the support necessary for the development and pilot implementation of innovative ideas. Not enough is done in evaluating and promoting actions to tackle climate change. And this was understood to have led to lead an uncoordinated and thus inefficient implementation. The participants understood that many interventions are being done with the European Union's funding and by research centres, but that there is little coordination or communications amongst them.

IV.6. Lack of citizen awareness

The southern European Countries have a common problem: the lack of information for the citizens about the problems & challenges, as well as about the opportunities provided to tackle those with environmental protection actions.

One of the difficulties lies in how to redirect people's behaviour in their daily lives towards an "environmentally friendly" lifestyle. This could be addressed through:

- Education programmes from early school, in order to change the minds of children for future generations
- Communication campaigns about climate change challenges, including information of innovative solutions by the private sector, public authorities and civil society at local level. The communication strategies have to be focussed on local needs too.

When concluding on the topic of citizen engagement, the participants affirmed that serious political decisions must be taken in this respect with strict objectives and the latest communication technologies. However, the discussants recognized that if the climate crisis is to be tackled in time, European citizens themselves have to get involved actively, change attitude and cooperate.

INNOVATION AND COHESION



V. INNOVATION AND COHESION

The Southern European countries face important challenges in the area of research and innovation. Research and innovation from the educational institutions as well as private businesses are one of the main drivers for economic development. Weaknesses in this area leads to considerable economic losses and a lack of a good basis for the future. This in turn has implications on brain drain and quality of employment. Some of those challenges are old, such as the upgrade of the research capacities to the levels of leading centres in northern Europe, but beyond that the level of investment in research and innovation by the private sector is low and the lingering financial crisis has certainly not helped. Companies lag behind in innovation, including business model innovation.

The EU has a number of programmes to support innovation. There is the Horizon 2020 research programme funding excellence across the EU where research institutions and businesses institutions can join. ESI Funds have a number of programmes to increase the innovation capacity of public educational institutes and private business. These may be in the form of grants, but also through specialised loans or equity for innovation to companies or by providing support to banks to expand lending at low interest rates to small and medium enterprises. It is a large, complex and mainly unseen support, as funds channelled together national promotional banks or other private banks appear to many beneficiaries as normal bank services.

The challenge for the EU and the national authorities is to ensure that the investments do generate a positive social and economic return. In this respect there are many efforts ongoing to increase the quality of interventions. Citizens are unfortunately unaware of the numerous programmes and opportunities created by EU policies, which made the pedagogical value of the programmes even more important.

V.1. A new approach to innovation

The European Union's policy for innovation has seen an important shift in direction since 2007 when it linked its research and development programmes to an industrial strategy. Applied research took an important position while a new body, the European Research Council, took on to promote bottom up frontier research proposals.

In addition, the European Commission included in the cohesion policy the obligations to draft smart specialisation strategies to present

pathways to strengthen the capacity of regions to develop innovative solutions. 125 smart specialisation strategies have been drafted in the EU and there is an expectation that the EU support to those (over €67 billion) will lead to 15000 new products, 140000 new start-ups and 350000 new jobs.

By seeking more applied research and developing the local research infrastructure, there is an expectation that more economic resilience and diversification will be achieved, having also a more diffuse territorial development. In addition, local authorities and universities have increased their collaboration.

Today, there are a plethora of technological facilities available with access to information and knowledge. We certainly must harness them to improve the conditions in which we live in and the opportunities to communicate with our professional and personal contacts, but it is important to also seize the opportunity to expand our boundaries by partnering as networks and building links with external groups facing sometimes similar, but also very different challenges. We should enrich ourselves from the different visions and different ways ultimately to find shared solutions to common problems, with an awareness of different viewpoints. While European research and innovation markers excel at the global level in terms of basic research indicators and scientific publications, Europe still trails behind in harnessing the knowledge to move from the demonstration and start-up level to scale. The objective is to ensure the direct and indirect creation of qualified jobs, strengthening of the industrial fabric and, ultimately, the sustainable generation of wealth.

V.2. The added value of excellence in RDI

Discussions centred on the value of excellence in RDI and the need to develop the capacity of innovating and the benefits of innovation beyond the centres of excellence. First, investments in innovation have to look beyond basic research and practical demonstrations, but also beyond the usual economic centres. Further investments should be made in those projects that can generate an *added value to local products* so that they are capable of standing out commercially in larger markets including at international level. European funds should dedicate an important part of their scientific and technological budget to develop solutions that also strengthen the link between science and society, addressing daily needs across the EU. It is important, however, that spread does not mean a fall in quality. The innovation capacity in the southern European countries should be developed to compete at the level of excellence within the

framework of European research at the highest level. Excellence is the virtue that should precede leadership in any innovative sector and is also the condition that must establish the bases of all development.

Many aspects that hamper the innovative capacity in innovation are often to be found in inappropriate policy structures at national level. Debates in the programmes in Milan stressed the bureaucratic barriers to research and criticised the inflexibility of the state national research council, as well as the lack of national founding. The discussions in the three countries revealed needs for reform nationally which are a precondition to enter the excellence driven approach by the EU research frameworks. In the Italian case, some centres, such as Milan, have managed to find systems to overcome the bureaucratic barriers, but this should not be the way to go ahead and many institutes across the countries have not managed to build the capacity to pierce through the complexities.

In the programmes in Andalusia, Spain (where education falls largely on the control regional autonomous authorities) examples of success were presented, such as the successful emergence of an important science and innovation hub applied to avant-garde sectors such as biotechnology, medical and pharmaceutical research, agri-food, wind and solar energy, aeronautics, construction, eco-textile, industrial engineering, robotics, telecommunications and even audio-visual technologies. The latent problem remains the lack of an effective strategy when converting all that talent flow into a robust and interconnected productive fabric capable of not only exporting their goods and knowhow, but also overcoming the subject silos. Interdisciplinary collaboration could increase the value of their output and also allow a better ability to concentrate better and more successfully the resources that Europe provides to Andalusia on innovation and research.

Improvements in the ability to compete for funds and overcome barriers have also been presented by panellists in Greece, where a number of institutions have managed to develop the level of excellence necessary to access EU support and apply results to the challenges faced locally. Examples of numerous projects were presented and the case of Crete was highlighted as a rising centre of excellence with many projects applying solutions in the island, in particular to address the adaptation challenges from climate change. The panellists, however, expressed their concern on the capacity to address in practice crisis response actions. The government apparatus is slow in successfully applying solutions and responding to crisis, such as immediate crisis situations

due to adverse weather events. These bureaucratic malfunctions cannot be addressed at the level of research and innovation.

At European level, the collaborative spirit between researchers and professionals from different sectors and different countries in RDI was praised. Such synergies must also be incorporated by other economic actors and social agents, both from the public and private sectors. This collaboration should thus serve to create scientific ecosystems conducive to an adequate advance in all areas of knowledge. European funds and community policy in scientific matters should further promote the mobility of research professionals. However, there is a need to also avoid this to become a motor for brain drain, and also help the development and the capacity to retain human resources in territories under development. Other policies should be refined to fight job insecurity and precariousness. This is also valid in the research centres where contracts are unstable and without continuity and security at medium and long terms, it is difficult to retain the researchers and innovators leading to a brain drain.

V.3. Wider integration of innovation into the overall development programmes

The European Commission has already pointed out the obvious benefits of strengthening the integration of the innovation capacity with its regional funds and territorial cohesion policy. This is one of the reasons that EU cohesion policy includes the need to develop smart specialisation strategies. Research centres and intermediary administrations operating in the regions are able to better define their own needs and improve the dynamics of cooperative work. This sum of initiatives protects the identity of each territory while generating a wider range of objectives and enriches in the transfer of knowledge.

Participants in the radio events highlighted the need to demand a greater commitment by private capital to promote scientific development that include principles of solidarity. To consider in innovations the social impact and the distribution of wealth. Without a social component in the participation and involvement of companies, the public sector efforts alone cannot lead to a sustainable distribution of wealth.

The panellists and public stressed their concerns of rising inequalities and want the measurements of economic growth to include the social and human development indicators. The notion of progress should go hand in hand with collective wellbeing. In that context, the scientific and technological progress has to incorporate the socio-economic impacts,

ensuring that progress does not lead to irreparable damage to the environment, depleting natural resources, or jeopardising the integrity and living conditions of future generations.

V.4. Ethical education vs. knowledge accumulation

Discussions on the quality of education stressed the need to move away from rigid systems of knowledge accumulation to teach critical and logical thinking. Some panellists saw the need for more ethical education helping students to understand societal needs and the tensions with private objectives. Some stressed that the balance between innovation and privacy, social needs and individual liberties needs to be analysed in education and professional training programmes. Education and training lack a certain level of meaning if not accompanied by a sense of individual responsibility and reflection, such as the role of the individual in society and how the actions reflect not only on one's own personal future but also of others.

Another aspect that presented in the events was the value of information and its accuracy. Information that knowledge provides must be verifiable at all times. There has to be a level of scientific rigour that provides a defence against vested interests and information manipulation. There should be a focus on information sources to halt the current dangerous trend of using disinformation and demonstrably fake news as a mainstream activity. The participants considered that more engagement is needed by teachers, disseminators and leaders in scientific fields. They are considered to have a responsibility to help stopping the trend, not only as street educators but also good listeners so they can adopt more effective methods to communicate knowledge.

V.5. Increasing the involvement of citizens to create a paradigm shift

There has been a loss of trust in the political institutions and science, partially due to the number of asymmetric crisis which have hit the livelihoods and expectations of citizens, from the financial crisis, to immigration, but also due to tensions and conflictual information on climate change. The mistrust and political confusion require a reform in the political institutions and a better link of the citizens to rebuild trust.

The debates included a strong concern about the influence on politics of lobbies by large companies, the ownership structures of traditional media and the influence of private financial interests on scientific results. Other concerns include misinformation discrediting scientific reports or promoting pseudo-scientific work presenting misleading information, and

breaking the social contract between the citizens, the private sector, the public administration and political groups.

There were calls to address the failures in addressing the malfunctions of the financial system and political structures, in order too adapt to today's challenges of fast information, global trade of goods, people across borders. The trust of the citizens needs to be regained with better communication of scientific facts and involving the citizens with reinforced democratic institutions.

Speakers called for reforms to ensure that the local needs are taken into account, giving the citizens a stronger sense of being a valuable part of society. The process of globalisation and the constant flows of conflicting information on large scale global challenges has disenfranchised many citizens and created resentment on a global structure that indicator show as increasing income inequalities even as global wealth increases. While expert consensus that climate change is a growing threat, the political leadership does not appear to be able to react in accordance. This increases social tensions between those concerned of the climate impacts and those worried of their way of life and incomes. This requires a new social contract that bridges divisions taking into account the concerns and developing new more inclusive solutions which increase the overall economic and social welfare.

Speakers stressed that to achieve the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change it is necessary to set limits to financial speculation and the pursuit of aggregate economic growth as presently calculates. New methods to measure social welfare need to be presented with technologies which focus on social challenges and progress. Some presenters expressed the need to change the present financial model which has let to large conglomerates focusing on shareholder value without proper consideration of social impacts. There is a need for an economic paradigm shift.

According to some participants technological advances are giving a stronger voice to citizens. The advances in the increasing involvement of women at all levels have been praised, but the call to involve the younger generations on matters affecting their future is also becoming more strident.

V.6. The brain drain challenge

Amongst the many concerned voices, the SEDEC Committee of the European Committee of the Regions sounded the alarm about the future

consequences to the European Union if serious decisions are not taken on medium to long-term measures to limit brain drain in the regions of Europe.

Speakers attributed brain drain to the regional inequalities and the lack of strong cohesion policies. Where support to regional cohesion exists from the EU or national funding, investment in employment, education, innovation, social inclusion and, above all, in regions with open economies building on economies of scale, brain drain falls or is reversed. The European Union's policies are considered to help talented people stay in their own country and regions, even attract talent (brain gain). This is done by a close cooperation with national, regional and local authorities to address the underlying issues of brain drain and employment creation. The digital economy was also presented as a key enabler opening the door to opportunities to facilitate new business opportunities avoiding delocalisation. Stopping brain drain enhances the attractiveness of each region, reinforcing the retention of a skilled workforce.

The issue of brain drain was a central topic in the case of the Greek Agora meetings, leading to a heated debate. During the financial crisis Greece faced a strong brain drain, which now results into a development hurdle. According to the data presented in Radio Agora's special broadcast, in the period 2007-2017, approximately 500.000 Greek people, young and fully capacitated, left the country, i.e. 4,6% of its total population. They come from the most productive part of Greek society, with 51,4% being in the "critical" age category 25-44, and almost 70%, higher education graduates.

A variety of views were presented on how to halt brain drain or attract people back. The meeting also involved a doctor that returned to Greece and explained the difficulties of reintegration into the Greek system. The point raised was the comparatively lower level of professionalism compared to the country the doctor worked. One of the aspects with the need to modernise the way staff is recruited and treated, seeking to recruit and develop careers based on meritocracy and not bureaucracy or connections. But this negative view was also criticised as often being overstated, as if other countries were so much better than Greece, which some participants questioned. However, a large survey of Greeks that emigrated pinpoints that the main factors for emigration were in order of importance: a) 60% due to lack of opportunities, b) 60% due to lack of correct working conditions (particularly a system based on meritocracy in both, the private and public sectors), c) 46% because they found better

opportunities in other countries from the start. The wish to experience other countries was limited to only 25% of those surveyed.

While the debate in Greece was more heated, the other Mediterranean countries face very similar problems. Nevertheless, overall there was consensus that the focus has to be on attracting investment and facilitating the set-up of businesses and the creation of rewarding jobs with good prospects.

However, it was also stressed that brain drain in Greece, but also in the other member states has been a problem prior to the financial crisis and that tensions are not only arising from drain to other countries, but also from internal migration, which depopulates less developed regions from the younger generations.

The internal migration was also looming large in the discussions in Milan, due to the exodus to the city and the pressure on the property supply side. In addition, there was a serious shortage of accommodation for the increasing number of students moving into Milan, the situation is being exacerbated by the convenience for homeowners of renting out properties to tourists using the online platforms, such as Airbnb.

The policies of the EU to slow down brain drain are various: the cohesion policy and rural development support, the support for start-ups and businesses, or the research programmes. Member states also implement a number of policies, such as tax incentives for companies or tax exemptions for young workers. However, the debates consider that the measures are not sufficient to retain skilled people. There is a call for an overhaul of policies and the introduction of real change not only in the legal aspects, but also how businesses operate. There is a need for better approaches to meritocracy, transparency and social structures that support employment (such as affordable day-care centres for children).

The European Union is also working on the creation of an EU minimum wage legislation that ensures that all workers have a guaranteed income level that guarantees a decent standard of living in line the economic and social conditions of each country.

One of the discussions highlighted the approach to create a virtuous cycle for creating and retaining high-skilled human resources involving all stakeholders: businesses, the State and the educational community. Actions should cover the following 4 axes:

- Halting the outflow of skilled workers (brain retention)
- Attracting back those that left (Brain Regaining/ Wisdom Gain)
- Connecting the those that migrated abroad with domestic businesses and the research community (Brain Circulation)
- Promotion of southern European countries as a hub to attract highly skilled workers from all over the world with attractive conditions in terms of economic opportunities, living standards and employment friendly taxation

V.7. Protecting and reinforcing the core values of the European Project

It is a feeling shared by many that core values of the European Union as Robert Schumann conceived them have been partially forgotten. These are important cornerstones of the reason for the EU to exist. It is important to keep in mind that in terms of population size the European Union is not large in comparison to China or India. However, in terms of social values, democratic values, welfare policies and upholding human rights, the European Union model has always been a world reference. A position that has been eroded in recent times, but should be recovered.

The discussions stressed on the need to protect the values that led to the construction of the European common project, those are equal opportunities, freedom of expression, tolerance, protection of minorities, solidarity with the disadvantaged, support for those who come to Europe to escape danger and oppression. In several panels there was a call for real common united approaches, such as a common policy to welcome and support refugees. The divisions promoted by some nationalistic and political groups should be counteracted by multilateral solutions and dialogue.

The discussion led to the need also of reassessing and redefining cohesion to make it more relevant for citizens today, combining it with the need for a more socially cohesive and environmentally sustainable society. Addressing the need to improve the environmental sustainability and creating better mitigation and adaptation policies is a way ahead. A European construction based on social values and a drive to modernise using culture and science is needed. Technologies should be used to restore the environment and bring together people, improve living conditions and preserve the social fabric.

MODERNISING THE ECONOMY AND CREATING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES



VI. MODERNISING THE ECONOMY AND CREATING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Employment has always been a central problem in Southern Europe. With the financial crisis the most severe and lingering consequences on employment have been experienced in the Southern European countries. Many citizens that lost their employment blamed the unemployment impacts to the Eurozone and its macroeconomic conditionalities, and the resulting austerity policy. But the austerity approach was a policy choice based on the economic thought of the moment, it was also chosen by the non-Eurozone members, such as the UK and the approaches and impacts have been very different country by country.

However, what the financial crisis revealed is a serious weakness in the financial markets and their governance, as well as deeply anchored structural weaknesses in the “cohesion countries”, particularly in the Mediterranean countries. A lack of resilience during the crisis put into question their economic development model and the past use of EU funds. It is also clear that in all cases there is no “return to normality”, no return to a previous state, as it was unsustainable. We are facing deep socio-economic changes driven by rapid technological changes which are creating a new economic reality, and this will be a challenge for all countries.

The European Union mobilised considerable funding to counteract the financial crisis, from redirecting EU budget funds to the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), advancing structural funds with less national co-finance and the mobilisation of investment with the “Junker Plan” (the European Fund for Strategic Investment). But the employment needs of the future need to be more flexible or may even be partially redundant. This may mean that we are facing a future of precarity unless we find new social contract and that is as much a national task than it is for the EU. Social and labour market policy is not an EU competence, but where do the responsibilities lie?

These are difficult questions which the Radio Agora sessions had to address.

VI.1. The labour market structures have changed

The debates addressed the changing nature of the labour market. The European cohesion policy was conceived to help strike the best levels of territorial balance for all countries, regions and cities in the European

Union, eliminating economic and social gaps. Innovation was an instrument of growth, with progress and development leading directly to job creation, but this the links between innovation and labour observed at the beginning of the mid-1980s seem to be outdated. Now that the 21st century is in full swing; the main policy philosophy is based on promote actions that enable all European citizens to have equal opportunities and tools to rights to become competitive in a global market. A global market that is digitalised and in fast transformation, but with the global environment threatened by climate change requiring a rethinking of the way the economic model is built.

EU cohesion policy is thus based on investment strategies to build sustainable activities, not on subsidies to sustain uncompetitive declining activities. It is based on integrated and comprehensive programmes that use the EU funds to reinforce and promote medium-term plans that are to be executed in seven-year operational periods under the multiannual financial framework of the European Commission. The objectives must be met following agreed measures based on sectoral and regional programmes, with the possibility of modifying them. The support actions have to be proportional to the needs, the funds are under the public control and further overseen by the European Commission.

The employment programmes seek to develop the skills for a more advanced society, developing technical skills for a more connected society. The programmes have to be in line with gender equality and inclusiveness seeking to develop entrepreneurship and a reinforcement of modern environmental standards.

Cohesion policy strategies require integrated programmes, and the employment programmes have to contribute to the development of professional skills, entrepreneurship and skill transferability.

VI.2. Adapting to new ways of working

Discussions pointed to the changes in in the working places caused by technological change. Eu resources have been conducive to public infrastructure over the past thirty years in most of the southern European countries, particularly in terms of communications, road and transport networks, matching the best in Europe. For instance, Spain is now capable of welcoming approximately eighty million tourists annually and has rural tourism accommodation that has driven the economic and employment dynamics of small municipalities and natural environments.

However, many of the funds and particular those for employment and business development were not deployed with a long-term perspective over these decades of support in southern European countries and are now bearing the consequences. The main job creation process that took place in the in Spain, Italy or Greece occurred substantially occurred in the field of tourism or construction, not in those sectors that could create the conditions for structural change and a diversified high value added society. Furthermore, the education system failed to match the real needs of the economy. There has been a lack of strategic planning in universities and the economy of these three countries does not seem to offer opportunities to these young people to be able to integrate the job market of their country.

Nevertheless, this situation has been changing over the years after the signature of the Lisbon treaty and programmes have been adapting to focus on quality and sustainability of programmes including a higher quality of education programmes. The concepts behind the use of the funds have been changing and a new philosophy is guiding the European regional convergence policies. These guidelines have been gradually steeping and penetrating cohesion strategies in terms of equality and also in employment.

VI.3. The unclear role of the rural development programmes

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) supports to a large extent farms for their development, but it has also some programmes for the structural transformation of rural areas. One of the programmes was the LEADER approach, which financed programmes for rural communities to plan and develop their own initiatives to foster new economic activities. LEADER has been capable of implementing, albeit modestly, initiatives and actions that are demonstrably useful. However, beyond the local community level, neither the public administrations nor farming organisations have been supportive its effectiveness, preferring either support to the farming sector or the use of regional funding for larger programmes. The panellists in the programmes presented another vision, declaring that there is human talent, natural resources and long-term experience in the rural communities to take advantage of these funds to create new opportunities and employment.

However, implementing programmes in rural communities is not easy. The weakness of the rural environment is that it has no organised social fabric and the administrative capacity to develop multistakeholder programmes. There is a general lack of knowledge of European

programmes that can create new opportunities and employment and that is why there is a need for greater and better dissemination of their functioning and rationale. There must be more public concern regarding the ongoing territorial transformation.

Territorial development policies must face the current problem of depopulation of small rural municipalities for example in the heart of Andalusia, the south of Italy or Greek rural areas and islands. Some provinces are threatened by depopulation, in some cases up to 90% of the population is expected to leave over the next years. Panellists blame this on the lack of a true agrarian reform with a vision on protecting and preserving those areas and develop their employment niches.

Failing to find decent employment options, the youth of these municipalities have to leave in search of professional opportunities in urban areas, not always leading to better living standards while losing their link with the territory and their cultural roots. This uprooting without real prospects, from rural poverty to urban poverty leads to dissatisfaction and disaffection.

Education and training are essential elements that need to be combined with comprehensive rural development programmes to regenerate the areas and create value. The panellists complained that agronomists do not know the situation in the ground, making a point that in the United Kingdom or Central America, they are trained by spending a year working as labourers on farms. The civil servants and officials who manage and administer the resources also never step on the fields or know the territory or its needs. Policy makers have to engage more with the rural communities and have their active participation in developing new coherent opportunities.

VI.4. Overarching messages from Radio Agora participants on employment creation

Financial investment from the European Union requires that state and regional agencies to commit their budgets in ambitious co-financing programmes that take into account the need to develop socially sustainable solutions to guarantee a decent livelihood for all its citizens through the protection of working conditions. At the same time, this synergy between the European, state, regional and local administrations have to stimulate the involvement of the private businesses through a stable climate of regulatory and financial security.

It is necessary to make policies that are not “politically-biased” but developed based on the situation in the ground. Funds must be managed with a vision for the future without partisan interests. Deep structural reforms are needed in the planning of the territory so that public resources are not lost or wasted due to a lack of planning or because they are not adequately applied. It is important that the employment generated is sustainable beyond the period of aid received.

We must debate and address opinions and ideas without political biases as the only way to resolve them. Local action groups modestly work towards encouraging this communication, though there is a need for more participation at all levels for managing European (and national) funds. Accountability and transparency vis-à-vis citizens must be permanent requirements. This openness must be assisted in the territory with pedagogical and educational elements. Progress on the ground should be disseminated thorough national representatives into the European institutions and other countries to promote the action and demonstrate their European value added.

VI.4.1. Solidarity as a principal value

The European Union as a framework for law and values was conceived under the principle of solidarity of its Member States and regions through cohesion. It was also born from the objective to provide a balanced economic development to all citizens of the European Community. While Southern European Countries have been growing and solidifying their position, they must nevertheless continue moving forward in this regard.

However, the European Union needs to become clearer in its core values for citizens, with clear fundamental messages capable of standing above the huge mass of acronyms and abbreviations that the European Union uses to reach public opinion. Symbols convey messages because what cannot be seen does not exist in the modern world. Even though we have yet to achieve the optimum level of convergence and development, we have nevertheless modernised and advanced more over the past thirty years than the entire previous century, a boost that we should maintain in spite of any setback and financial crisis.

The EU, as a symbol, is a reminder that we are part of a joint project, a Community commitment that already has solid foundations of experience insofar as being capable of addressing challenges, including labour-related ones, in a changing and competitive globalised world. This common heritage is where we find the cornerstones to revitalise European values and structures. The panellists stressed that creating

jobs is not enough, there is also a need for quality with employment policies also addressing the need to create rewarding opportunities. Presenters mentioned the need for “dignity” of employment. Cohesion projects must support the development of a European society that is ethically underpinned via employment policies that render dignity to the working population.

A number of panellists stressed that unlike the current populist wave seeking a catch-all solutions limited to closing borders, simple messages do not suffice to provide a response to complex issues. While we have no future outside Europe, we should also by creating strong partnerships with other disadvantaged regions around the globe through an unwavering foreign policy. The leadership for such actions should include countering the flood of extremist movements that systematically seek to undermine the European ideals in favour of exclusionist, autocratic and nationalist ideologies.

VI.4.2. Roadmap for the employment of the future

There cannot be a return to “old normality”, as Southern European Countries are not only recovering from the 2008 crisis, but facing a moment of historical importance, amid the 4th technological revolution. A new social & economic contract for a more sustainable and safe future should be promoted from the whole European Union.

Tackling the consequences of the crisis creates the obligation during the new programming period in Spain, Italy & Greece to orient strategic planning towards innovative actions and to new policies linked to strategic areas for the future (including better education and skills training and upgrading health sectors) and less towards infrastructures. This is how these countries will achieve the upgrading of the productive environment and the strengthening of investment initiatives and entrepreneurship. However, special attention must be paid to reducing unemployment and balancing regional disparities. Regional development needs as much participation as possible of the citizens in the territories. Women participation is a fundamental part of the process, and the design of regional strategies should also be done on the basis of gender equality.

Another key observation for exploiting the competitive advantages of our countries, at the level of regions and stakeholders, is the drawing up of investment opportunity plans, capable of attracting international investment interest.

The same objective also requires strengthening the education at all levels through European programmes in order to educate, in the near future, the people who will serve these objectives. Also, a new educational focus could address the issue of unemployed people with low educational qualifications. Reskilling is needed, by the provision of new specialisations and capacities. Universities should establish the foundation on which reskilling processes could lie, probably in cooperation and in relation to the market and industry.

In addition, as some speakers emphasized in Greece, there's an urgent need to reorganise the administrative mechanism of the central government, regions, municipalities and the public sector in general in order to facilitate regional governance. Procedures, bureaucracy & administrative acts should be simplified as well. This was also mentioned for Italy, where there is also a lack of a national strategy while regions that have many needs and objectives have yet too few public resources. Finally, there is a concern that European resources in lots of Italian regions are substitutes to but not additional investments to national funding, especially in the south. This is against the additionality principle and limits the potential for change.

It is the opinion of most panellists, that the existing approaches cannot survive in the new era. The objective of the new cohesion guidelines as well as the main institutional texts establishing European integration focus mainly on the axe of employment growth policies, thus, reducing unemployment. The fourth objective of the new programming period, particularly through the ESF, seems to specify a number of important measures. These measures cover the full range of the Europe 2020 development strategy to create more and better jobs across the Union. These major measures are:

- * improving access to employment for all jobseekers (especially young people and the long-term unemployed),
- * upgrading the quality and connection of the education and training systems with the labour market,
- * promoting lifelong learning,
- * strengthening women's participation in the labour market,
- * activating Union's institutions for the social inclusion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The Southern European countries should use those measures in a targeted and effective way to improve the quantitative indicators of employment and unemployment, especially.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The Radio Agora events highlighted the concerns in the societies of these countries and their expectations from membership in the European Union. It also highlighted needs in the area of communicating EU policies.

On the views expressed and the concerns in the regions, it is clear that the financial crisis and subsequent migration crisis have deeply affected trust of the citizens on all governing bodies, national and European. This problem of trust is generalised across member states and not a particularity the three involved in the Agora project. Nevertheless, the participants were overall positive on the European Union and overall had more misgivings on the way the national governments have handled the crisis situation.

There is in any case a growing mistrust towards the European Union's policies and the EU's distance from the problems on the ground. The austerity drive, the lack of European solidarity are eroding the positive views on the European project in those countries. A clear demand is made for the European Union to recall the fundamental principles of the EU on solidarity and equal opportunities for all citizens. For their own governments a call for better policies, which are more efficient and effective but clearly integrating the need for balanced economic growth and development, protecting the environment and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

A strong message was also given on the lack of proper communication of the European Union to the citizens. National governments may complain on policies of the EU they do not like, but also appropriate the positive results of policies which in fact originate in the EU and are part of the benefits of membership. This gives a biased negative view of the role of the EU experienced by the citizens an institutional setting of constraints rather than of liberties, protection and opportunities.

The democratic deficit was often a point of discussion with a clear request to be more transparent and have an inclusive decision making system at all levels of governance, from local to EU level.

All panellists in Radio Agora events were aware and concerned of the challenges ahead, from the economic crisis, migration, climate change and rapid changes due to globalisation and technological change. Generally, more and better EU integration was seen as necessary although the actions were not the same for all. The opinions on the

socio-economic model was not always the same, some stressed the need to focus on the competitiveness of the economy for others inclusiveness and equality. There was no clear consensus on how the economy could become sustainable and for some the present financial system had to be reformed at the core. For others the core is preparing for a competitive market with lower cost efficient competitors such as China.

Nevertheless, all participants the fundamental needs for the future are quality education, strong level of innovation, more skills training and better tools for entrepreneurs and the labour force. More fairness and meritocracy were often mentioned. In addition, economic and environmental sustainability were also viewed as essential, economic or environmental.

In all three countries, Europe was well regarded, but seen as too distant. A need was expressed to better communicate the EU aims and policies to the citizens through the media and with more dialogues with citizens. A clear wish was expressed for a greater presence or integration of the European institutions with the citizens.

While there are many common challenges and common views, several aspects differed between countries and so are their conclusions on the preferred ways forward, particularly in the main focus areas for the use EU cohesion policy support and other EU funding opportunities.

In Andalusia there appeared to be a greater conscience that traditional regional development policies protecting and fomenting business as usual can not to be pursued any longer. The various challenges ahead require more than continuity. A focus on innovation to transform the economic sectors such as agriculture is seen as necessary and the regions has as a key policy a bioeconomy strategy, which should make the environment more resilient to climate change while promoting a more circular economy. More focus on innovation is also present and for new business opportunities.

In the area of Milan and the adjacent regions innovation and business creation are also a focus, including the search of new solutions to social problems. For the region, maintaining and expanding their top class research and innovation rating is key, with a very diversified agenda. One of the key concerns is the lack of enabling conditions, such as the inefficient, layered and outdated bureaucracy which the city authorities, innovation institutions and private businesses need to learn to navigate in contorted ways to manage to move forward without breaching the law.

While Italy has overall the necessary capacity, means and potential to grow and develop, it is strapped into inflexible structures. As with the other countries, climate change looms large in the list of concerns and a number of initiatives are being pursued in the areas of adaptation and mitigation.

For the participants in the Milan events it was clear that a priority is an important administrative reform. Without an efficient, strategic and agile governance the challenges of the country cannot be addressed, and the opportunities offered by the EU support mechanisms cannot be realised.

In Greece, the impacts of the financial crisis are still felt very vividly, exacerbated by the large flow of immigrants. The discussions were strongly influenced by the impacts of the crisis. While the country has undertaken a large number of reforms, the participants pinpointed a lack of “good governance” as a key barrier towards development and the realisation of the full potential of the EU funds. Otherwise there were clear messages in regards of expecting authorities to develop better strategies and having focused use of funding to build a better base for a modern economy.

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INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION: Guillaume BUTEAU (EMA-RTV), Marco Dipuma (Radio Popolare), Eirini Giannara (ERT), Ioanna Niaoti (ERT), Jorge Nuñez (CEPS)

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In today's particularly unstable and worrying European context, underpinned by a growing lack of empathy for the rights of disadvantaged populations and a rise in xenophobic and Eurosceptic discourse, this document aims to contribute to the communicative construction of new collective visions.



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