

Jobs and Growth: Can innovative structural reforms help the EU shift into a higher gear?

Written by Lambert van Nistelrooij MEP on 27 April 2017 in Opinion
Opinion

New EU wide programme will support member states in implementing structural reforms, writes Lambert van Nistelrooij.



Lambert van Nistelrooij | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

A smoothly functioning economy that increases competitiveness, provides for a strong investment ecosystem, job creation and high standards of living is what all EU member states aim for.

Getting there is where the real challenge kicks in. In the aftermath of the financial crisis and as a result of non-or delayed implementation of structural reforms, many member states, regions and cities are struggling with high unemployment rates and marginal economic growth. They still have hurdles to overcome when it comes to getting the right speed in creating growth and jobs.

In that context, the European Commission came with a proposal for a unique new Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) for the period 2017 to 2020, which has now also been adopted by the European Parliament. It is an extension of the programme that the EU has offered to Greece and Cyprus in supporting the economic adjustments in these countries that were heavily hit by the financial crisis.

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This new EU wide support programme will support member states with the structural reforms needed to boost growth and jobs. The budget of the programme is set at €142.8m and is taken from the European Structural and Investment Funds. It is partly for that reason that I and my co-rapporteur Constanze Krehl (S&D), decided to integrate core principles of cohesion policy, like the partnerships principle, into the new programme.

The EU's Cohesion funds already contribute around three quarters of the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs). The new SRSP instrument has a broader scope and touches the fiscal sector and other related legal questions. This programme is not a standalone programme, but a welcome instrument that connects to existing support coming from European Structural and Investment Funds. It does not only implement CSRs but also enlarges the effects of existing funds. It thereby contributes to shifting the EU into a higher gear.

This support can take the form of many different actions and activities, for example facilitating the exchange of expertise and good practices between member states.

Take the Netherlands for example, one of the country specific recommendations recommends tackling barriers to hiring employees on a permanent contract basis to smooth the transition from temporary employment contracts to permanent ones. To achieve that, the Netherlands could request the Structural Reform Support Service, which is executing this programme, to arrange an expert from another EU member state which has already achieved that transition. This example shows that even for a well-performing country like the Netherlands this programme could be beneficial.

With the introduction of this instrument we have a better balance between the carrot and stick approaches: We should not just be punishing member states when they do not achieve targets set under the Stability and Growth Pact, but also supporting them in bringing about the required reforms.

Truly, a positive step forward.

About the author

Lambert van Nistelrooij is co-rapporteur on the European Parliament's report on the establishment of a Structural Reform Support Programme for the period 2017 to 2020

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