

Extract:

Nadège Chambon (Notre Europe), Alin Cristian Mituța and Neculai-Cristian Șurubar (Europuls),
"The Common Strategic Framework and its Impact on Rural Development",
Policy Paper Nr. 50, Notre Europe, December 2011.

Summary

The Common Strategic Framework (CSF) proposed on 5 October 2011 by the Commission aims to foster the coordination of five funds that will cover 42.2% of the EU budget 2014-2020 (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the future European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). This Policy Paper – that benefited from the outcomes of a conference organised by Notre Europe and Europuls¹ in the European Parliament – gives an overview of the coordination of EU rural development instruments and funds until now, explains the innovative architecture of the CSF and analyses the added value and uncertainties it implies for rural development policy.

1. 22 November 2011 conference, "The Common Strategic Framework: adding value to rural development?

Bridging the gap between the CAP and the cohesion policy" with the participation of Dacian Cioloș, Commissioner for agriculture and rural development; Dirk Ahner, Director General of DG Regio; Britta Reimers, MEP; and Stefanos Loukapoulos, ELARD representative. Cf. Programme in annex 1.

1. How did the coordination of rural development funds work until the CSF? *(page 9 to 16)*

The CSF, characterised by a coordination effort between funds, is the fourth noticeable change in rural development policy of the EU.

- First from 1964 to the mid-80s, the EU only proposed some isolated measures for rural areas.
- Second, from 1986, the cohesion policy that had been initiated by the Single European Act launched a socio-structural policy for the rural areas.
- Third, rural development moved from cohesion policy to the 2nd pillar of the CAP within the MacSharry reform (1992). This was the first design of rural development policy in favour of a balanced development of these areas, under the agricultural policy.
- Fourth, from 2014 the CSF might prevent rural development instruments from a lack of consistency thanks to a better coordination of structural funds, EAFRD and EMFF. It seems to be a new instrument with the potential of creating a tool for an integrated rural development policy instead of sector-based policies, as described in the new rural paradigm.

2. The architecture of the Common Strategic Framework and its impact on rural development *(page 17 to 21)*

- The EU 2020 Strategy for a “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” is the general objective of the CSF, translated through a set of 11 thematic objectives. Each of the CSF funds divide them into specific objectives related to their own specificities.
- The main innovation of the CSF mainly consists in the new coordination, evaluation and monitoring of funds.
- The key mechanism of the coordination within the Common Strategic Framework is the Partnership Contract (PC) elaborated by each Member State, at national or regional level.

- The Commission has the power to sanction or reward the Member States according to the *ex-ante* evaluation as well as a performance – with quantifiable objectives – to be attained, chosen by each Member State (*ex-post* conditionality).
- Concerning the rural development and the CSF policy setting, EAFRD retains its autonomy as an integrated policy under the CAP heading. Member States identify their needs and establish their priorities in the area, taking into account the European objectives, when they draw their national strategic plans for rural development. Six EU-wide priorities steer the future EU rural development policy² instead of four axis.

3. The added value and uncertainties of a Common Strategic Framework for rural development (page 23 to 31)

Added value...

- On the one hand, the future CSF will have the potential to improve the way in which European funds are spent and targeted. On the other hand, the CSF may increase the efficiency of these funds which will now be pooled together, more coordinated, in order to serve common priorities and objectives, investment priorities and major challenges, in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy.
- Considering these improvements, the CSF might promote the visibility of rural development contribution to the EU growth strategy.
- As the CSF aims to improve the overall transparency in using EU funds at national, regional and local levels, it will imply management of all the funds, guided by simplified procedures, common principles and eligibility rules.

2. COM(2011) 627 final/2, Regulation of the EP and of the Council on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD): http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/com627/627_en.pdf

... but also uncertainties around the CSF proposal.

- These uncertainties mainly concern the definition of project priorities that could lead to a competition between urban and rural areas projects and a rising administrative burden for the beneficiaries due to the launch of a new institutional system.
- Debates confirm the key role national administrations will play in enacting the CSF priorities, adapting them to the local, regional and national needs and, on top of that, coordinating their ministries and administrations to implement the CSF. The uncertainties concerning the level of readiness of national institutions and their capacity to coordinate the funds and manage the new framework raises concerns among various stakeholders.
- Long discussions are expected in order to clarify many concrete details before the implementation of the CSF.