

Complexity of *European Union aid* and visibility of its action

CATHERINE LION AND CATHERINE PAJARES Y SANCHEZ

Addressing the effectiveness and visibility of European aid raises a democratic issue. Its complexity, whether real or perceived, and a lack of understanding of its impact on everyday life, fuel misunderstanding of European action and even mistrust within the EU.

The complexity of accessing European aid

During the deliberative day organised at the ESEC, project leaders identified five obstacles:

- Complexity of the systems: multiple levels of management, poorly coordinated responsibilities;
- Difficulty in accessing information: timetable, eligibility criteria, exclusive use of English, relevant contacts; proliferation of platforms;
- Administrative, legal and financial uncertainty: lengthy procedures, retroactive rules, multiple checks and lack of clear guidelines on the supporting documents required, problematic co-financing;
- Need for engineering and operational support: lack of support for small structures, lack of human resources, educational tools, appropriate training and cash flow;
- Low involvement of beneficiaries and citizens in the design of European programmes and the formulation of public policies.

Project leaders point out that support mechanisms are sometimes disconnected from the needs and specificities of the field of action. The difficulty of putting together and monitoring applications can discourage initiatives.

How can we make the Union's actions more visible and strengthen citizens' support for the European project?

Despite the €15 billion that flows into French regions and economic sectors, the EU's actions are little known. For the ESEC, this low visibility is a collective responsibility that concerns the EU as well as national leaders and elected representatives, local authorities and, of course, local actors.

Raising the profile of European policies will help to boost citizens' confidence in the EU institutions.

€15,4 billion received by France from the European Union in 2023, including €9.6 billion for the common agricultural policy, €2.3 billion for cohesion and territorial development policies, and €2.5 billion for humanitarian action, research and infrastructure.

Complexity of European Union aid and visibility of its action

OPINION

1 BETTER INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS IN EXPRESSING NEEDS IN THE EARLY STAGES OF AID

How ?

→ **Strengthen regular dialogue with stakeholders** in the development of programmes and calls for projects, and involve citizens more closely in their implementation in the regions.

2 FACILITATING THE ENGINEERING AND ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT OF FILES

How ?

→ Have **a single French-language portal** at national level, bringing together information on all funds (under direct or shared management);

→ **Promote the most uniform rules possible** in the deployment and financial execution of European aid programmes through administrative simplification and **prioritise stability in management rules** by prohibiting retroactive revisions that penalise beneficiaries on projects already underway.

3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION: STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN SUBSIDIARITY OF CONTROLS AND GOOD USE OF PUBLIC FUNDS

How ?

→ **Initiate a comprehensive review** at EU and Member State level **of the subsidiarity of controls on European funds** in order to optimise controls and avoid duplication of checks on beneficiaries on the same issues, while ensuring the proper use of public money.

4 A BETTER COMMUNICATION ON RESULTS

How ?

→ **Harmonise regional communication policy** by creating a common single reference framework in order to optimise the visibility of projects funded by the European Union. Communication efforts must be carried out as close as possible to the people in order to raise awareness of the EU's actions.

REFORM OF THE MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK 2028-2034: an opportunity for simplification, but not at the expense of European ambition and the loss of meaning of joint action

The ESEC has reservations about the introduction of a single national plan for each EU Member State. It rejects any weakening of action, which would result in two major risks:

- piling up 27 national strategies that would distort economic, social and environmental competition within the EU;
- sacrificing major policies such as territorial and social cohesion.

THE RAPPORTEURS

Catherine Lion

catherine.lion@lecese.fr • (33)1 44 43 64 01

Catherine Lion was Director General of the National Federation of Farmers' Unions (FNSEA) and is an associate member of the Île-de-France Regional Chamber of Agriculture. She sits on the ESEC as a member of the Agriculture Group within the Territories, Agriculture and Food, European and International Affairs committees and the temporary committees on Democratic Participation, End of Life and Artificial Intelligence.

Catherine Pajares Y Sanchez

catherine.pajares@lecese.fr • (33)1 44 43 64 07

Catherine Pajares Y Sanchez is a policy officer at the CFDT confederation. She chairs the CFDT group at the ESEC and sits on the European and International Affairs Committee, the Social Affairs and Health Committee, and the temporary committees on cannabis and cross-cutting opinions.