

**15th meeting of DG REGIO Transnational Network (TN) on
Simplification**

19 - 20 October 2023 ó Limassol

Welcoming Speech by

Permanent Secretary of the DG Growth, Ministry of Finance,

Mr. Andreas Zachariades

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all of you at this important 15th meeting of DG REGIO Transnational Network on Simplification of Cohesion Policy. We are greatly honored by your presence, involving multiple stakeholders and representing the European Commission, Member States, Ministries, Managing, Certifying and Audit Authorities.

Our gathering today underscores the importance of working together, exchanging experiences and learning from each other's successes and challenges which is extremely vital in today's globalized world where challenges are complex and require collective efforts that surpass borders.

Before we get started, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the European Commission for having given us the opportunity to host this meeting and special thanks to Mr. Luca Santin, for the overall responsibility of the event's organization. Allow me also to thank the Treasury of the Republic of Cyprus, and Ms. Stavri Ttofa and her team, as well as the colleagues from the Managing Authority, Ms. Anthi Philippidou and her team for their support.

Dear Colleagues,

Simplification remains a main challenge to EU Cohesion Policy, which is the Union's main investment instrument for addressing economic, social and territorial disparities across regions and Member States. However, these very policies and investments designed to foster growth and jobs have unintentionally created administrative burden and complexities.

As National Coordination Authority and Managing Authority for EU Cohesion Policy Funds for the last twenty years, we have experienced ourselves the complexity of rules and procedures involved on a daily basis.

Hence, our target is clear: harmonize administrative procedures, use as extensively as possible the simplification tools available within the regulatory framework and reduce bureaucracy. **The result?** Cohesion Policy Funds will be used more efficiently and effectively having a greater impact on the development and the quality of the life of our citizens. Furthermore, it will create a more positive image of Cohesion Policy and reduce the risk of the "geography of discontent" that has been identified in the last 8th Cohesion Policy Report.

Being a small country and having a small administration, simplification is of outmost importance. The Managing Authority, based on the lessons learned during the previous programming period, made the greatest possible effort to simplify the procedures for the current one. Towards this aim we have proceeded with the preparation of a Single Programme, named "Thalia 2021-2027" for all Cohesion Policy Funds, including the Just Transition Fund, in order to expand and strengthen the synergies between them and to further streamline their management.

In regard to the take-up of the simplified rules for the “Thalia” Programme we are at the stage of designing an ambitious plan and this transnational network meeting will further assist us in its development and improvement.

Dear colleagues,

In the last informal Ministerial Meeting on Cohesion Policy held in Spain, the mandate by all Member States was **loud and clear**: simplification can contribute profoundly to the overall success of EU Cohesion Policy by making it more accessible, efficient and responsive to the needs of the regions it aims to support.

Let us therefore seize this opportunity to share solutions and build furthermore our capacity but also use this opportunity as a platform in advocating policy changes at EU level and creating a more effective policy framework.

Thank you for being here today, as your dedication and expertise are invaluable assets to this network and look forward to inspiring and fruitful discussions over the course of this event.