

Territorial Cohesion: A Bridging Concept

Biljana Sekulovska Gaber, Marijana Sekulovska

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an insight on the concept of territorial cohesion in the direction of its enhancing the EU Cohesion Policy. In order to present that territorial cooperation as a new way of overcoming the problems of the EU regions, especially with regard to the current economic crisis, the paper will at first refer to the evolution of economic and social cohesion into a territorial cohesion which if it were to be appropriately implemented could lead to a maximum usage of the so called territorial capital and potential of the urban regions defined as urban systems. Furthermore, the paper will shed a critical reflection on the issue of “Whether [or not] there is a need to reconsider/revise EU Cohesion Policy by actively implementing the concept of territorial cohesion?”, Therefore the paper shall try to answer whether territorial cohesion could actually become a ‘bridging concept’, by explaining the functionality of this concept in practice, due to the very fact that it represents a combination of territorial cooperation policy and EU Cohesion Policy. Finally, the paper will present the process of how to build EU territorial cohesion policy perceived through the EU institutions (also referring to the Territorial Agenda 2020 and the Territorial State and Perspectives 2020), and will further reflect on the capacity of this instrument to turn territorial diversities into strength. It is expected that the conclusions that shall be drawn in this paper will demonstrate that it is the territorial cohesion concept that will represent a driving force for both the successful realization of the agenda Europe 2020 as well the overcoming of the existing disparities among the EU regions.

Keywords: territorial cooperation, territorial cohesion, cohesion policy

Introduction: Territorial Cohesion – A Bridging Concept Chronology

Since its creation, the European Union has aimed at promoting the harmonious development of the economy by reducing regional disparities. But only until recently (starting with the Lisbon Agenda did it introduce a new way of overcoming the problems of the EU regions, known as territorial cooperation. The proposals of the Commission as presented in the Lisbon Agenda placed a strong emphasis on regional development by dedicating a third objective of the Structural Funds to territorial cooperation, especially cross-border and transnational cooperation with the mainstream programs of the ‘Convergence’ and ‘Competitiveness’ objectives.

Up to the present date, territorial cooperation has been supported by the Structural Funds mainly through the Interreg Community Initiative (Interreg CI). Interreg CI was introduced in 1990 and since then it supports projects of regional cooperation at different scales in different fields to enhance overall territorial cohesion. Following the phases of expansion and diversification, the program is currently in its fourth round (Interreg IV C), for which the Operational Program was approved in 2007 and will provide for the period 2007-2013. This initiative consists of three strands, and each of these strands refers to a different geographical as well as thematic scope (Mirwaldt, K., McMaster, I. & Bahtler J., 2009):

1. Cross-border cooperation (strand A) supports the development strategies in adjacent regions;

2. Transnational cooperation (strand B) covers larger groupings of European regions setting up more strategic and conceptual initiatives; and,

3. Interregional cooperation (strand C) launched in 2000 for the purpose of focusing on the generation of policy by learning through the exchange of information and experience within the networks of non-contiguous regions.

With reference to these Interreg strands, it is important to emphasize that the topic of urban development is given a priority in all the three of them (A: Promotion of urban development; B: Development strategies at transnational level including cooperation between towns

or urban and rural areas; C: Exchange on interregional cooperation in the field of urban development).

The above mentioned shows that territorial cooperation provides a new way of overcoming regional problems; and, as means of enhancing territorial cohesion, it makes territorial cohesion a bridging concept between economic growth and balanced development. Thus, it becomes obvious that Cohesion policy needs to be reconsidered and to be included in any approach to territorial cohesion in order to enable the development of regions, through a European territorial cooperation that is especially focused on cooperation between structurally weaker regions and the stronger ones. It should be reconsidered because of its integrating character and cross-sector nature which make this policy an instrument for implementing territorial cohesion.

In order to understand how this bridging concept has been achieved, a closer look at the actual evolution of economic and social cohesion into territorial cohesion has been given in the first place (Part I). After that, we give a notion to the added value of a territorial approach (Part II) as well as to the new role of the cities as urban systems (Part III), and a place-based approach (Part IV). At the end we give final conclusions and remarks.

I. Economic and Social Cohesion - Evolution into Territorial Cohesion

Cohesion policy with its overall purpose of contributing to European integration by promoting economic and social progress and a high level of employment, seeks to achieve this in such a way that will ensure the consistency, effectiveness and continuity of EU policies and actions by applying principles of good governance.

In order to promote territorial cohesion, Cohesion Policy requires specific problems and opportunities of particular territories (such as urban and rural areas) to be addressed through a territorial approach. It was the Lisbon Treaty which introduced the idea of territorial cohesion as a new common objective of the European community and made it explicit that space or territory is relevant to promoting competitiveness and to addressing regional and social inequities. This is something that

EU policy seeks to address in the balanced way which is in fact the essence of the 'European model of society' advocated by Jacques Delors (Faludi ed. 2007). The message is: (1) that inevitably relevant policies take shape in territories: cities and regions, (2) that success is conditional upon the active participation of public and private stakeholders there, and (3) that the configuration in these territories and their governance – what Barca calls 'integrated bundles of public goods' – play an essential role.

However it was the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (COM, 2008, 616 final) and the public debate in 2008 that followed which brought the topic into focus, due to the existing economic crisis. According to the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion- Turning territorial diversity into strong territorial cohesion has the main function of working towards a harmonious development of all types of places, at the same time ensuring that the citizens of these places are making the best of the inherent features of their territories. Thus, territorial cohesion represents an approach that aims at transforming territorial diversity into strength as a that aims at achieving harmonious, balanced, efficient and sustainable territorial structure, where different territories (regions, cities, macro-regions), wherever they are, can make the most of their territorial potentials and reach their optimal long-term development. The main justification of the notion of territorial cohesion is its integrative character because it represents a tool to build networks of functional areas thus strengthening the interdependence of the regions and consequently stressing the need for networking between the cities, as well as enhancing the cooperation and integration between various territories of EU at all territorial levels.

All the above mentioned resulted in territorial cohesion being closely analyzed and reported about by Fabricio Barca (2009) in the Barca Report, prepared upon the European Commission's request, and published in April 2009. It is in this report that Barca advocates the "place-based approach", a notion that had been previously explored by the Organization for Economic Development (OECD), and which had been further referred to in the Territorial Agenda 2020 adopted by the ministers responsible for spatial planning and territorial development in the EU member states. It was more than obvious that EU Cohesion Policy needed reconsideration where territory especially matters.

Thus the Europe 2020 Strategy, which is a joint strategy for EU27 and a follow-up of the Lisbon Strategy, showed that the EU can be turned into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. It also showed that if the territoriality of this Strategy is respected by considering the fact that the development opportunities of the diverse regions are different in all dimensions of the defined targets, then the success of Europe 2020 Strategy can be achieved.

II. The Added Value of Territorial Approach

One of the definitions of economics is that it concerns the functioning of a variety of processes of a social, economic, ecological and political nature, and when talking about these processes one has to consider that they have a specific territorial dimension (in other words, that they are located in a concrete place, they interact with neighbors, generate flows of goods, people and ideas, and support concentration). With regard to economic growth, it takes place in distinct territories, so the overall economic performance in Europe is an aggregate of a range of actions undertaken by firms scattered across the continent, and the firms, during their operation partially depend on territorial assets such as transport connections or the quality of the labor force. The actions of the public bodies lay grounds for development and growth. In this direction, the decisions about functioning urban areas – FUAs directly influence the competitiveness of enterprises; to be more precise these are the kinds of decisions where the territorial dimension of EU policies and the Territorial Agenda 2020 (Bohme, K., Doucet, Ph., Komornicki, T., Zaucha, J., Swaitek, D., 2011) could contribute to a richer and broader understanding of the concept.

The territorial context is extremely important for growth, and this is widely recognized not only by planners but also by those responsible for various policies that impact on economic development. If there is improvement in the settlement pattern and other aspects of the spatial structure, it is then when it shall result in significant agglomeration economies and lower costs of moving goods, people and ideas. As pointed out in the Territorial Agenda 2020 (EC, 2011), with low

trade barriers and the acceleration of economic globalization, local non-movable assets come into focus. In this case it is critically important that the ability of local institutions to deliver solutions for the proper exploitation of those assets and for the external agents (national and regional governments) to help develop the capacity of such institutions in that direction.

If considering the recent years' results (see Figure 1) it becomes visible that for the period from 2000-2006 there were 213 billion Euros allocated to the structural funds for the EU15, and an additional 22 billion Euros were made available to the new member states for the period 2004-2006; this amount represented one third of the total budget of EU.

In the financial framework 2007-2013 there were 354 billion Euros allocated to the Cohesion policy which represented 35.7% of the total budget of EU, and for the next financial perspective 2014-2020 there has been a proposed amount of 325 billion Euros to be allocated to the Cohesion Policy which shall represent around 34% of the total budget of EU. Thus, no matter the fact that according to the proposed 2014-20 financial framework the expenditure for Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion (Structural Policy) declined for 8.4% in comparison with the 2007-13 financial perspective (see Figure 2), it represents a decline of only 1.7% (as a percentage of the total budgets).

Cohesion Policy has made a positive contribution to the reduction of disparities across EU Member States and regions by promoting economic growth, employment and competitiveness. Nevertheless, disparities across EU regions remained high, and considering the continuing existence of pressures towards regionally imbalanced development – especially during the crisis – the need of maintaining an active Cohesion Policy at the EU level is clearly and widely considered. Furthermore, there is a recognition that the economic benefits of Cohesion Policy do not accumulate solely to the poorer regions and Member States of the EU, but they also spread to the more prosperous parts of the Union contributing to economic growth and employment throughout all the Member States. Finally, besides contributing to EU level objectives and goals, it is recognized that Cohesion Policy has had important positive influences, as indirect impacts, among other things on cross-border cooperation, urban regeneration, improving access of

services in rural areas, environment protection and last but not least on a range of domestic institutions, processes and policies.

Thus, we can conclude that the EU Cohesion Policy in the programming period 2007-2013 has made a significant contribution to the sustainable growth and development of the EU regions, and in order to pursue its active contribution, for the upcoming Financial perspective 2014-20 it is recommended that it “has to maintain its integrated approach as it ensures the harmonized coordination of different development aspects, taking into account real territorial needs, urban-rural relations, flows and networks between territories” and “according to the place-based approach that has to be supported at all scales and in all types of regions in Europe, better tailored territorial messages are needed for regions, cities and other functional territorial units within the interventions of Cohesion Policy (e.g. allowing greater flexibility in organizing operational programs).”

III. Territorial Cohesion – with Territorial Capital and Potential to Polycentric Regions (the New Role of the Cities as Urban Systems)

Putting emphasis on the ‘territorial capital’ of the regions implies shifting policy from equity alone to equity and efficiency at the same time (i.e. putting more emphasis on areas of potential rather than areas of need) and shifting efforts from ‘reactive’ measures that deal with the improvement of the social, economic and environmental situation of the cities, to more ‘proactive’ measures which aim at creating conditions for the full exploitation of the cities’ true economic potential.

The new concept of the role of cities as engines for growth together with the need for more such engines across the territory of Europe is the concept of polycentric development. This concept interprets the role of the cities in relational terms by transcending the role of individual cities and advocating the possibilities of creating synergies and networking between them, all for the purpose of strengthening the overall competitive standing of the ‘polycentric regions’.

Polycentric development aims at describing an ideal development path based on an interacting network of specialized urban centers (or

Functional Urban Areas- FUAs) distributed evenly across the European, national and regional territories. The concept of polycentric spatial development has often been described as a 'bridging concept' between two not always congruent policy aims covered in ESDP i.e. 'economic growth' and 'balanced development'. This concept was mentioned in ESDP (European Spatial and Development Perspective) and examined in the research carried out under the framework of ESPON programme (European Spatial Planning Observatory Network) (EC, 2004)

The concept applies to three levels:

- European/transnational - where the goal is the stimulation of 'global integration zones', beyond the pentagon, able to compete in the global economy;
- National/cross-border/interregional – which implies shifting from a dominant city to a system of cities, by improving economic performance and service provision through networks of neighboring cities;
- Regional/local - at this level the main goal of polycentric development is to shift from one or two main regional centers to a number of small medium centers that can provide services (e.g. through strategic alliances between towns and /or common projects).

Polycentric territorial development can be a key element for achieving territorial cohesion, where the most developed cities and regions are distributed in a balanced way within Europe, and cooperate as parts of a polycentric pattern. In this way added value can be achieved and the strong centers can contribute to the development of their wider regions. Cities are encouraged to form networks in an innovative manner to improve their performance in European and global competition. Urban development policies can have a significant role in strengthening territorial development, thereby imposing the need to foster the territorial competitiveness of EU territory outside the core 'Pentagon area' in order to connect other areas into the main European and global flows. However, polarization between capital or primary cities and secondary, medium-sized cities on a national scale should be avoided, while still strengthening metropolitan areas outside the Pentagon. Policy efforts should aim at reducing strong territorial polarization of economic performance and high regional disparities

within the European territory. In this respect, small and medium-sized towns have a crucial role at regional level.

The crucial role of cities in balanced and polycentric territorial development should be strengthened. Cities need to become efficient motors of development and attractive places for living. To move in this direction urban development and regeneration policies need an integrated and multi-level approach. The cooperation and networking of cities could contribute in the long term to the smart development of city regions at varying scales. All the actors involved in the planning and management of urban settlements should look over their administrative borders and focus on functional regions that include their periurban neighborhood. Growing urban regions should seek a better integration of migrants and ways to best restructure their regions to accommodate their increasing population. In line with these territorial challenges and potentials, the objectives and concerns set by Ministers responsible for urban development in the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities (2007) and the Marseille (2008) and the Toledo Declaration on Urban Development (2010) should be taken into account.

IV. Cohesion Policy – The Notion of Territorial Cohesion and a Place-Based Approach in One Place

Currently the Commission seems to use territorial cohesion to transform Cohesion Policy towards a place-based development policy simultaneously with the emergence of the concept of the “place-based approach”. It is this place – based approach that promotes the territorial logic behind the cohesion-type interventions that may prevent the regions from uneven development.

When observing it on the strategic level, we can see that Cohesion Policy is being further fine-tuned in the context of EU enlargement, the economic crisis and global challenges such as climate change and poverty reduction. Although, the central features of the policy are based upon solidarity and a redistributive rationale, yet the competitiveness and efficiency aspects of the policy may be presumed to have gained increasing importance. The fact that intensifying global challenges have asymmetric territorial impacts, there may appear a

necessity for the Cohesion Policy to respond in compliance with the Europe 2020 Strategy's main objectives for smart, green and inclusive growth, by putting more emphasis on some territorial aspects such as cities, macro-regions, territorial co-operations and the environment.

In order to ensure the success of Europe 2020 it is perfectly sensible to reassess whether a headline target of 40% of the younger generation with a tertiary degree should be pushed forward mainly in the metropolitan rather than the rural peripheral areas, or to consider the acceptability of making a combination between both areas. Similarly, for the 20/20/20 climate energy targets (20/20/20 means reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% compared to the 1990 levels or by 30%, if the conditions are right; increasing the share of renewable energy resources in the final energy consumption of 20%; and a 20% increase in energy efficiency) it makes perfect sense to think again about how in the long run to maintain the specific territorial "strengths" of "green" EU territories that offer climate-friendly services but fail in terms of prosperity indicators. Considering the abovementioned, smart, sustainable and inclusive growth can only be achieved if policy making takes into account the territorial diversity of development potentials and challenges within Europe.

With regard to the abovementioned, there are two complementary and mutually reinforcing territorial principles that are emerging as the cornerstones of Cohesion Policy: (1) flexible territorial programming and (2) strategic territorial cooperation. Flexible territorial programming emphasizes the need to utilize territorial capital by making use of a results-oriented approach, which is in line with EU objectives and is also flexible enough to address the specificities of the regions; whereas strategic territorial cooperation recognizes the importance and the added value of territorial networks with a thematic focus.

Regarding the recent programming period, Cohesion Policy has still supported polycentric development and is also orientated to the specific problems of the urban areas. Vast amounts of resources became available for the new Member States to develop their infrastructure in order to reach the EU average development level (COM, 2011, 17 final). Namely, according to a proposed budget for the period 2014-20 (see Figure 3), the Community intends to allocate 34% of its Budget to the

cohesion policy instruments and to distribute this amount between the different areas as follows:

- a. EUR 162.6 billion for convergence regions;
- b. EUR 38.9 billion for transition regions;
- c. EUR 53.1 billion for competitiveness regions;
- d. EUR 11.7 billion for territorial cooperation;
- e. EUR 68.7 billion for the Cohesion Fund.

Conclusion

As a conclusion to the above mentioned, the wider context of EU Cohesion policy is changing, with global challenges receiving increasing attention. After putting the concept of territorial cohesion under scrutiny, both chronologically and from an evolutionary aspect reflecting on its evolution from economic and social cohesion to territorial cohesion and consequently to territorial cooperation among the regions, we came to a conclusion that territorial cohesion really represents a concept that through polycentric spatial development manages to 'bridge' economic growth and balanced development, thus contributing to the more effective consideration of the territorial dimension in the policy making.

Bearing in mind that Cohesion policy is so far the only substantive policy that is explicitly targeted spatially, we can conclude that there are grounds for its being reconsidered in the direction of fully encompassing the territorial cohesion as a means of turning territorial diversity into potential and challenge. But, in order to avoid 'Europe 2020' reproducing the Lisbon strategy failure, it is of the utmost importance that due attention is paid to the territorial dimension and potential for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

It then becomes clear that the common agreement that economic cohesion that aims to improve competitiveness and add to a better balance between Member States and NUTS2 regions, and the social cohesion aims at more labor market participation and equity, should be balanced, and perceived from a new and beneficial perspective, the territorial one, because "geography really matters". Finally, even though 'Europe 2020' headline targets are broad and universal, yet, their

implementation should be place –based. If perceived and taken into consideration, this territorial dimension can contribute towards having ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ as defined in Europe 2020.

By doing so, this paper to a certain extent has succeeded in shedding a new light on the Cohesion policy pointing out the need of its being reconsidered with the more active implementation of the territorial cohesion concept, and all for the purpose of enabling smart, sustainable and inclusive growth across Europe, in line with the latest strategic documents i.e. Europe 2020 and the Territorial Agenda 2020.

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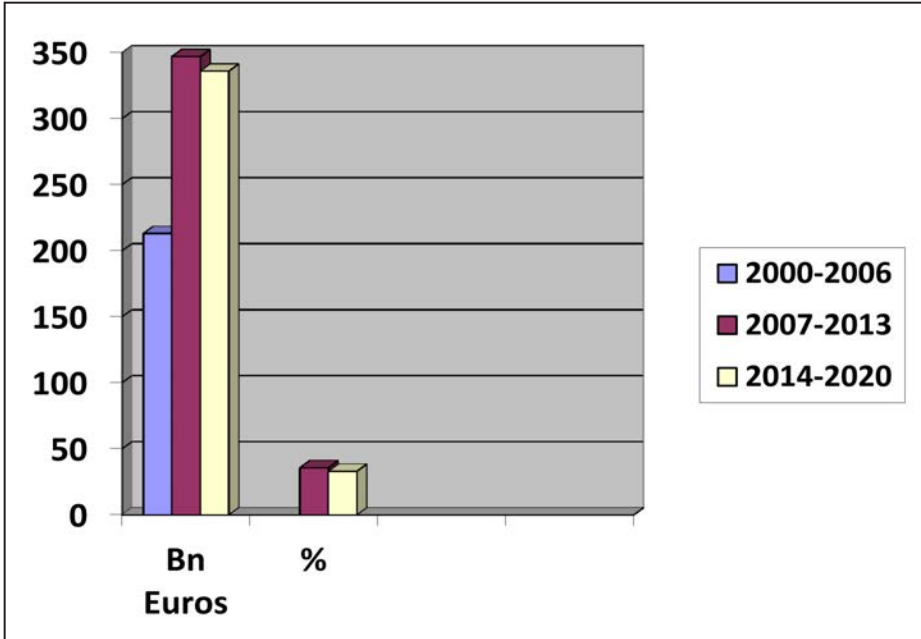
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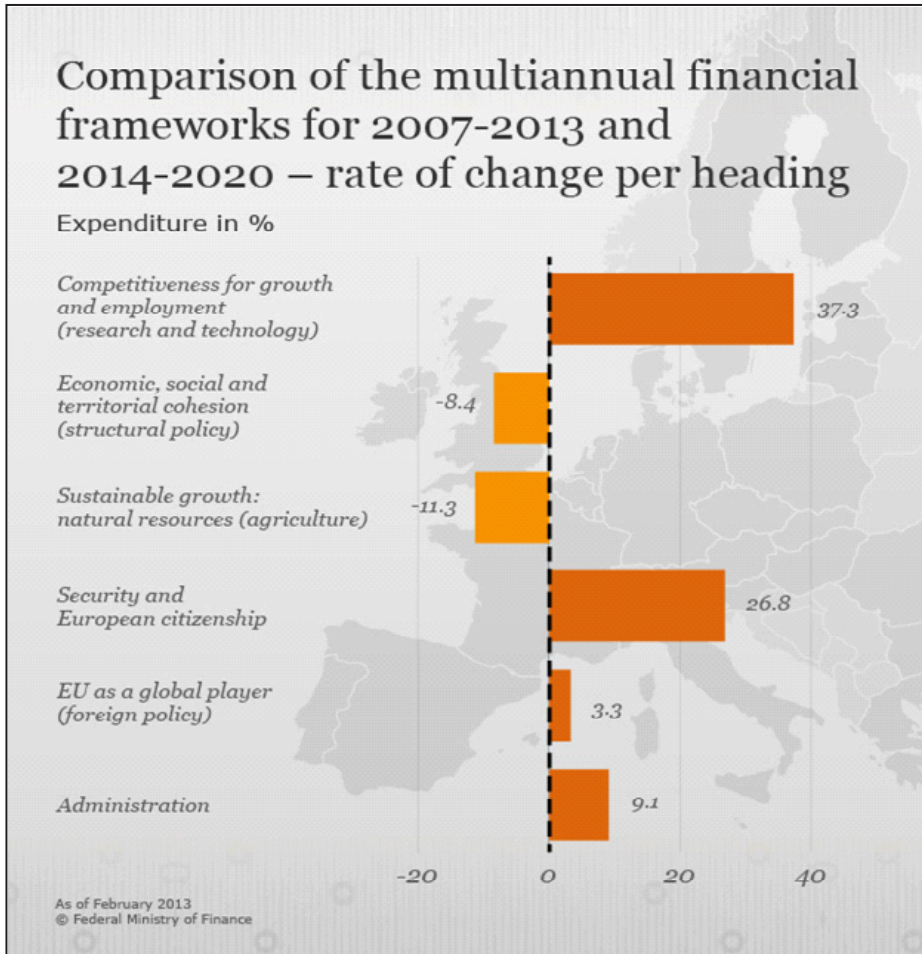
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Figure 1: EU Cohesion Policy funding over the multiannual financial frameworks for 2000-2006, 2007-2013 and 2014-2020



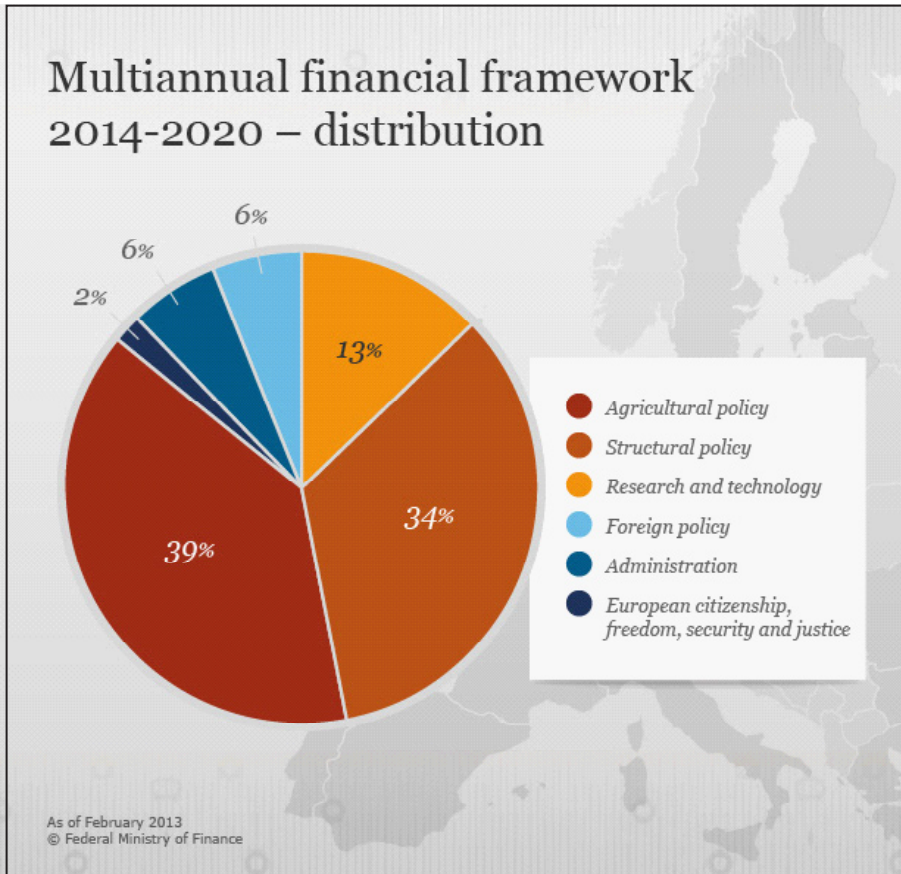
Note: Own figure made with data collected from http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/milestones/index_en.cfm#4 and http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/budget/bu0001_en.htm

Figure 2



Source: http://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/EN/Bilder/Media_Centre/Graphics/eu-finanzrahmen-04.jpg?__blob=normal&v=2

Figure 3:



Source: http://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/EN/Bilder/Media_Centre/Graphics/eu-finanzrahmen-03.jpg?__blob=normal&v=2