

Professor Danuta HÜBNER

European Commissioner for Regional Policy

Closing Session of the OPEN DAYS 2007

11 October 2007 (time: 14:30-16:30)

European Parliament, rue Wiertz 60, Hemicycle

**"Regions and cities in the global economy:
Challenges and issues for a modern regional policy"**

Mister President, Members of the European Parliament, ladies and gentlemen,

For the second consecutive time we close European Week of Regions and Cities in the European Parliament. Never before that many regions and cities and so many participants have shared the OPEN DAYS experience. This shows that cohesion policy is the one about which people care; which is and will remain everybody's business.

As OPEN DAYS come to an end it is the last occasion for me to share with you some messages, which I take from OPEN DAYS and which I consider important.

First, this year Open Days were much based on what we have achieved over the last 12 months, namely on turning new cohesion policy into the language of national strategies and the regional programmes for 2007 -

2013. In many workshops, the exchange was based on this new design, on how to stimulate innovation, regional competitiveness and sustainable development. We have a lot of examples of a new policy which has made quite a move. This is very encouraging and shows that **new cohesion policy is already leaving its imprint.**

Second, in today's world **regions and cities shall not wait until globalisation knocks at their door.** It does not matter how remote a region or city is, it cannot develop without thinking how to plug in to the external world. Globalisation alters the very meaning of catching-up - we are no longer just to help regions catch up to Union's average and reaffirm themselves within their own territory, but also to find their place in global world markets. The new generation of cohesion programmes allows regions to act now, anticipating needs imposed by the global context with the mix of policies that can make them effective players in the foreseeable future.

Thirdly, my impression is that **fluidity and pace of global changes is such that the resources and flexibility necessary to match and accommodate them can be found predominantly on local and regional level.** In other words, globalisation moves regional and local economies into the core of economic development. Some years ago, one could have designed development strategy with a time horizon of 15-20 years and implemented it undisturbed throughout this period. Today a change may happen overnight. It will be increasingly difficult to anticipate, react and benefit from those changes through comprehensive strategies designed far away in the capitals. Command chains will have to be shortened; strategies made more versatile, flexible and sophisticated. This can be done only at the regional and local levels.

Fourth, competitive Europe needs **better governance structures**. Europe's competitiveness cannot be achieved by the Union, individual member states or by regions on their own. Economic success requires close co-operation among all of them. But we also have to expand the meaning of governance beyond traditional administrative structures. We need partnerships that cut across institutional boundaries and transcend divisions between actors of economic development.

Fifth, we **have to co-operate, within and outside Europe**. We can see already today a growing web of clusters, exchanges and networks linking our cities and regions. This means more experience, more knowledge, more new ideas which can be quickly shared. And this means one more good reason for which cohesion policy should remain available to all our regions.

And, finally, we have to be innovative. In a way, regional policy is a development laboratory with a global mission. We hope to mobilise unexploited potential not merely to compensate for problems of the past, but to trigger a dynamic process that is forward-looking, well into the next decade. That is how cohesion policy can be most effective today.

As I spoke so much about the globalisation I cannot help noticing that for the first time, **OPEN DAYS have gone global**. We welcomed more than 200 experts from China, Russia, Brazil and Australia, as well as the OECD, UNDP and other institutions. Partnership, transparency, subsidiarity and local democracy make an essential asset of EU regional policy, and they are useful to implement any development strategy in any part of the world. This is a tribute to the success of EU cohesion policy,

for others now wish to learn more about the European experience, but this is not one-way traffic. We too can learn and benefit from our cooperation with these fast-developing partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finally, let me remind you that we are currently holding an online consultation to gather input for the shape of the policy beyond the current programming period, 2007-2013, to take us towards 2020, and we hope that you will contribute. You are better placed than anybody to underpin our messages by proven results, by testifying the policy's added value and by new ideas.

But, leaving alone delivery, programmes and reforms, I would like simply to thank you. Thank you for coming, for discussing, for bringing to Brussels your enthusiasm and dedication. Indeed, it is you who open the door and let the fresh air in.

I look forward to meet you again in between 6 and 9 October 2008!