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"Communication: do better, do more, telling the story together"

Conference "**Telling the Story: Communicating Cohesion Policy together**"

26 November 2007 (time of speech: 10:10 - 10:25)

Charlemagne building, Salle "GASP "

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

- **Do better, do more**

I am happy to see so many of you here today and to welcome you to this conference, which marks the starting point of a **new era** in communicating together the good story cohesion policy can tell. Indeed, in view of the new requirements and enhanced transparency, we have to do more and better communication but also exchange our views on it. That's why we are here today and tomorrow and I hope that you will be inspired to share and take away as many good ideas and contacts as possible.

As Commissioner for Regional Policy, I have a special responsibility for **engaging with citizens**. From the beginning of my service, I have put great emphasis on visiting regions and projects and meeting the people, who manage, take part in and benefit from Cohesion Policy.

I am therefore in constant contact with public authorities and stakeholders at the regional and local level where most of the key decisions and investments are made when it comes to promoting jobs

and growth, social cohesion and environmental sustainability in Europe. It is also here that a prime responsibility for informing both beneficiaries and the general public lies. So I feel that those of you who have come here today are the **ambassadors of the policy on the ground**, and I am delighted to have this opportunity to meet you. I am also delighted that we are joined here by 12 regional journalists who will participate in the discussions and debates during the two days.

What is very important to have in mind is that whether informing about the Cohesion Policy in general or on a single project, we put the European Union label or brand on it. Over this financial period we will be responsible for the biggest part of the Union's budget. We will also be responsible for the main instrument that directly serves the citizen. Indeed, Cohesion Policy is the perfect tool to demonstrate that the European Union is both **serious and effective** in creating growth and jobs, in improving the quality of people's life.

To be effective, communicating cannot be done in isolation. In other words, we need to cooperate, exchange information, network and support each other in our common goal: to engage people in the policy which is essential to the progress of the Union and which delivers visible results in the regions.

Transmitting the message about EU's role in the citizens' life through the delivery of the cohesion policy should be our main pre-occupation. This is all the more important in the context of Plan D: Democracy, Dialogue, Debate, which was launched by the Commission some time ago. It has been recently spelled out in more detail at the beginning of

October in the Commission's Communication "Communicating Europe in Partnership".

The objective is also to **involve citizens** in policy substance and to increase ownership by generating debate and providing a channel for citizens' concerns. That is why regional policy is tailor-made to help meet the challenge of improving communication within the EU. It is very close to the citizens and their concerns and it is implemented with the direct involvement of local people. Cohesion policy projects in the regions are among the most visible benefits of EU membership and you hold the key to making sure that the citizens actually get this vital piece of information.

- **What is at stake?**

I know perfectly well that your job can be challenging and that it is often strongly politicized but I also believe that it is stimulating, rewarding and fun. I am grateful for your efforts in the regions.

As you know, the policy has evolved over time. In the last three years, the **policy has been re-positioned** as one of the main engines in the pursuit of the economic modernisation of the Union, through which we can enhance the competitiveness of our territories and businesses. If we can help our businesses to become more competitive, they will grow and they will employ more people. And if they do so, then the European Union's economy will grow faster and will face up to the challenges we expect to see from the globalising world.

The Commission must rely on, and cooperate with colleagues in the Member States working in the regional authorities in order to present an engaging story about the cohesion policy. But it is the people on the

ground that will help to distil the story and tell it. Working together is indeed a precondition for a successful communication.

- **What is different and new in this period**

Let me now turn to what is different and new in this period. Cohesion Policy now touches **all regions** in the EU, which are covered either by the Convergence or the Competitiveness and Employment Objective. In addition, many are covered by the third objective, European Territorial Cooperation. Remember that this was not the case in the previous period when eligibility was far more geographically specific. This has created a new communication opportunity, to present Cohesion Policy as a policy for all regions as well as being the main vehicle for the growth and jobs agenda.

For 2007-2013, communication is not only a key factor in the **success of programmes** but it is also **an integral part** of their management. It is not by chance that the Court of Auditors stressed to us five years ago that a programme with good information is most likely to be a well managed programme. This takes on a particular resonance in the light of their recent comments on the effectiveness of some Managing Authorities and I would like to stress it again here. Information and Communication must be designed into programmes from their outset. Well-designed communication in this context means that the potential beneficiaries are informed about possibilities of developing their projects within the framework of the cohesion policy. This improves the quality and influx of projects and, in turn, the full use of the funds.

- **The transparency issue**

New emphasis in this period is also on **transparency** issues concerning the use of the European Funds. For the first time there is a regulatory requirement that complete **lists of beneficiaries** must be published in the Member States. In my view, it is one of the most important information and publicity issues in the new period. We have to reflect together on how to make this requirement practicable, so that presentation of beneficiaries becomes a useful tool for citizens, professionals, journalists and even us at the Commission. One of today's workshops will be devoted to that topic.

- **The Communication plans**

In the new period, the links between information and publicity and the overall management of the programmes need to grow stronger. Indeed, this is the reason for putting a strong emphasis on the **communication plans** and their links with the operational programmes. Since we believe they are very important, my services are closely involved in monitoring the communication plans, to make sure that sufficient information measures are foreseen for each programme.

Communication plans are not intended to be a bureaucratic burden and should not be treated as such. They are meant to give you a strong tool, with sufficient budget and human resources, to enable efficient communication activities. I am happy to say that the quality of some documents we have seen recently is very high and promises indeed excellent communication activities, with innovative approaches and ideas.

Another novelty is that managing authorities must guarantee **major information activity** at least once a year. In this way citizens will be kept informed about the outcomes of the programmes and they will know what improvements the European Cohesion Policy has brought into their neighbourhoods and lives.

Formally, the global **outcome** of operational programmes must be communicated as well. At all those stages it is essential to stress the role of the European Union in the process – in the development of ideas, and in the funding. All in all, including the budgetary means to be set aside for all programmes, I am convinced that we now have all the necessary elements at our disposal to make the task of "Communicating Cohesion Policy" a success story, insisting on the added value of the policy. And your presence here means that we also have your commitment.

- **Networking is essential**

Of course we need to do this together. Networking is, in this context, essential. Since the beginnings of the previous programming period we have been promoting networking as being an extremely **important element** of the communication officers' work. Exchange of information, fresh ideas, fruitful discussions have been encouraged by the Commission partly through conferences, similar to the one today. As an outcome from the first conference in 2002, an informal network was set up by yourselves, which in its final stage had well above 100 participants, meeting twice a year in Brussels. And as you will see in one of the presentations, it truly helped to exchange ideas, so we are not starting from scratch. In this period, we would like to build on your good work and continue with the Community network but perhaps in a more structured way, not to make it heavier but to give it a stronger voice. It is also a very

useful tool to receive information from you but also to transfer information to you.

For even more efficient information exchange, my hope is that this Community network is linked with the national networks of information officers which I know already exist in several Member States. And this brings me to the question of possible cooperation with the Commission Representations.

I wanted also to use today as an opportunity to stress the role the **Commission Representations** can play in information activities about Cohesion Policy. One of tomorrow's workshops is focusing on these issues. As you are aware, the representations are offices focusing on relations with the media and journalists. There is a big potential for linking your knowledge and resources with the knowledge and resources of the Representations. We are open for your comments as to what could be useful for you, what you may need, and also, what kind of information and knowledge you could offer to the Representation offices.

- **Challenges lying ahead of Regional Policy**

Let me briefly mention some of the challenges ahead of Cohesion Policy which we need to bear in mind for our communication activities. The European territory is currently at the **crossroads** of numerous factors of change. Many of them are exogenous such as accelerating globalisation, rising energy prices, stronger external immigration pressure or emerging climate change. Other factors are endogenous such as population ageing or the struggle to promote competitiveness and to improve the living environment. These challenges do not take any account of

national, institutional or policy borders and they impact directly on regional and local communities.

Against this background, the main **issues at stake for cohesion policy** beyond 2013 were set out in the fourth Cohesion Report, a policy document that I'm sure you know and which is published every 3 years by the European Commission. At the time of its publication, I announced a wide ranging public consultation about the future of Cohesion Policy after 2013. Some of the key questions which we have to address are:

- How to make the policy more performance based in order to achieve more with the available budget?
- How to allocate optimally responsibilities between the Community, national and regional levels within a multi-level governance system?
- How to strengthen the relationship between Cohesion Policy and other Community and National policies? Which also includes the question of giving other policies a more territorial focus.
- How to design delivery mechanisms that improve the responsiveness of the Policy to a rapidly changing environment?
- What are the new opportunities for co-operation between regions, both within and outside the EU?

In all, quite substantial challenges for the future but let us bear in mind that the communication efforts of today will actually strengthen our hand when we discuss the future of the policy.

- **Conclusions**

Let me end by saying that we count very much on your readiness, professionalism and creativity to make, together, the most out of the opportunities of the policy. In my view, communication does not always have the priority it should but managing public money must always be accompanied by serious communication efforts.

This is also the kind of tool where enthusiasm matters greatly. We need your enthusiasm and I extend my thanks to you for supporting this event today and tomorrow and also invite you to share ideas and participate actively in the discussions.

I think you can be in no doubt of my commitment to this cause and with your co-operation I am in no doubt as to the successful outcome.

Let us tell the story well, together. Thank you for your attention.