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Commissioner for Regional Policy  
**2008 RegioStars Awards Speech**  
Brussels, 25 February 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you all for coming to our first RegioStars event.

I would particularly like to welcome the representatives of the RegioStars applicants, without whom these awards would not exist and would not be a success. Allow me to also extend a special welcome and my thanks to the members of the RegioStars jury - led by Mr Pasqual Maragall, former President of Catalonia - who have given up their valuable time and who have deliberated and debated in order to choose the winners. You will have the opportunity to meet them shortly.

I would also like to welcome President Luc Van den Brande (Committee of the Regions), Minister Laszlo Borbely (Romania), Jan Olbrycht (MEP) and Adrien Zeller (President of Alsace Region). Rt. Hon. Rhodri Morgan (First Minister of Wales) will join us later. Thank you for being with us tonight.

We are here to congratulate and applaud our winners. However, we also wish to thank those who have taken the time and effort to submit applications to RegioStars 2008 – the awards for innovative projects supported by Cohesion Policy Programmes.

To the managing authorities and the managers of these projects I would like to say: well done. You have already greatly contributed to the

success of this event. Your willingness to share your experiences with us is highly commendable and very much appreciated. I thank you all, indeed.

It is true that although all 26 projects are shining stars, some shone more brightly for the Jury. The results will be announced shortly, but I would like to take a moment to reflect upon these awards.

Tonight is the culmination of a year-long journey which has seen the launch of RegioStars 2008, the submission of 71 eligible applications from 18 Member States, the short-listing of 26 applications, the deliberations of the jury and the eventual selection of the winners.

Why did we begin this journey, this celebration of innovative projects? I knew that there were good innovative practices in regional development which were tested and developed. I have had the great privilege over the last years to visit many such projects in the regions. Seeing so many regions and projects submitting applications reinforces my belief that there is a strong desire to share experiences and to also learn from shared experiences.

I believe that there is a need for such awards, awards that recognise good ideas and the enthusiastic people in the regions who are making a difference in Europe. I am sure that the awards provoke reflection and debate on what is good practice in regional policy.

Finally, the reason I want us to highlight good innovative practices is because I believe that to stay ahead in a globalised economy Europe needs to constantly innovate. Regional policy is particularly suited to promoting an economic model for Europe based on innovation. I spoke at this morning's opening session of the importance of sharing

excellence. We are here to communicate the results of the innovative work being done in the regions and to learn from these results. The short listed projects are proof that local and regional players, supported by European regional policy, are the real catalysts for innovation through supporting innovative approaches.

This should not be a surprise to us. The resources essential for innovation - innovative SMEs, universities, research and technology centres and appropriate funding sources, talents and commitment – all that can be found within the regions. It is these partners that we want to work with in our programmes. It is also at the level of the regions and municipalities that indispensable local knowledge and expertise can be mobilised to address, most appropriately, local and regional development challenges and opportunities.

I hoped – when launching RegioStars – that one year on we would be celebrating innovative projects supported by our policy and I am delighted today that this is what we have achieved. The regions are our valued partners in this. RegioStars is a perfect example of how all regions, no matter what their size or location, can be innovative. We have had applications also from the newer Member State regions and I can only hope that this trend will intensify in the future – and that all regions will see themselves as active and worthy participants in contributing to Europe's growth and competitiveness.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It only remains for me to wish you an enjoyable evening.