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Commissioner for Regional Policy

2009 RegioStars Awards Speech

Brussels, 16 February 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you all for coming to this the second RegioStars awards ceremony. I am glad to say that it is an event that is becoming firmly established in the European Regional Policy calendar.

I would particularly like to welcome the representatives of the RegioStars 2009 applicants. They are the main reason these awards exist and the reason these awards can be called a success.

Allow me also to extend a special welcome to the members of the RegioStars jury – chaired by Mr. Job Cohen, Mayor of Amsterdam. I understand that several jury members are absent tonight due to illness and other engagements. To you all I acknowledge that you have given us your valuable time. You have deliberated and debated in order to choose the winners. I thank you for your expertise.

Before the results are announced and we reveal tonight's shining stars of Cohesion Policy, I would like to take a moment to reflect upon these awards.

In my 4 years as globetrotting Commissioner for Regional Policy I have visited numerous regions and seen a great deal of projects. I have been

extremely pleased with the quality of so many of these projects. I have the utmost regard for the people in the regions and cities that are crucial to delivering so many successful projects. I refer to the people in the Managing Authorities, the project managers and the many people who, with enthusiasm, energy and personal commitment, are involved in the running of projects on a day-to-day basis.

I am delighted that these awards afford me the opportunity to congratulate them. I congratulate not only the winners and the finalists but all those who have submitted applications for the 2009 awards and sought to share their experiences and success with us.

While celebrating the energy and commitment of the people involved, let me say that I also had another purpose in mind when we launched these awards two years ago. That purpose was to search for and to spread good ideas and good project examples. Highlighting the innovative practices to be found in our regions is important to me.

Last year I spoke about how Europe needs innovative projects and innovative ideas. I emphasised that we needed to spread innovation more widely to contribute to improving Europe's competitiveness and positive employment trends.

In one year, with the onset of the global financial crisis and economic slowdown, so much has changed in our localities, in our cities, in our regions, in Europe and in the world.

But I see one constant. The examples set by the projects submitted for the RegioStars Awards demonstrate how good innovative practice and regional policy have the potential to make a difference.

That potential to make the difference – to identify and deliver smart investment - in times of great challenge, in times of economic crisis is even more vital. I believe that the quality of our people and of our innovative ideas is at least as relevant today as it was last year. We need to learn from our partners and indeed learn to do better with the scarce public funds available.

The 2009 RegioStars Awards are a celebration of innovative projects under the themes of "Research, Technological Development and Innovation" and "Climate Change". I am also very pleased with the quality of the submissions under the category "Television spot or programme highlighting the contribution of Cohesion Policy". In this - the European Year of Creativity and Innovation - I am glad to see the creativity is being harnessed to communicate the contribution and added value of Cohesion Policy.

The RegioStars Awards is one vehicle to assist Europe's regions, cities and municipalities, in learning from each other. Finally, it also allows the regions and cities to demonstrate that they are the principal actors in mobilising Cohesion policy and contributing to Europe's economic and social well being.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before passing the floor to Mayor Cohen it only remains for me to wish you an enjoyable evening and to congratulate again all the finalists and the award winners that we will soon meet.