

Closing Speech at the Regions for Economic Change conference

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our conference comes now to an end after two intensive days. "Networking for results" was not only its title but also its objective. In preparing the programme for you we sought to showcase good practices and innovative ideas and to underline the need to share and transfer ideas more intensively. We have heard many good and inspiring ideas during these two days and also during the award of the RegioStars 2009 yesterday evening.

I hope that you share my impressions and that you take the best of it home with you and into your regions and cities. I hope that the conference also motivates you to look again at how you can network with your counterparts in other regions and municipalities.

The range of topics covered in these two days was designed to give you the opportunity to exchange and to learn of good experiences from all over Europe. Innovation & creativity, climate change & sustainable development and urban adaptation were the three main topics. I hope that the networking opportunities at the conference were intensively used.

My great hope is that now you will make the time and take the opportunity to implement some of the ideas that you have picked up in these two days. You should also deepen the contacts initiated during the networking sessions in line with the spirit of "Networking for results" our conference title this year.

[Major challenges for the future of Europe]

Cohesion policy has achieved a great deal. It has the capacity to evolve in order to fulfil its function as one of the pillars of European integration. I have launched a process of reflection to explore with our key stakeholders the future directions for our policy. A first step is to look forward to the challenges that lie ahead and assess the extent to which they impact on our core business of competitiveness and cohesion.

Our first analysis – set out in the report "Regions 2020" - shows that the key challenges ahead will have a strong territorial dimension. I am talking here about globalisation, demographic trends, climate change and energy security.

All European regions will be affected by the new challenges, but their impact will vary significantly. This can result in losses of competitiveness, employment and social cohesion.

These trends can consolidate patterns of territorial disparities and create new ones. Some regions can experience combined challenges, which would create complex problems at regional level. Development challenges will therefore vary at regional level both in terms of magnitude and nature. This emphasized the need for tailor made responses to turn these challenges into opportunities.

To be effective in meeting these challenges we need comprehensive and integrated solutions that bring EU, national and regional levels together. These solutions should also reflect the specific circumstances of individual regions.

In my view cohesion policy is an excellent instrument to help Europe face these new challenges. It is the only Community policy which operates through an integrated approach. This allows public authorities to exploit synergies and to address themselves possible conflicts between interventions. In addition, through our system of multi-level governance, investments are designed and implemented by those who know local strengths and weaknesses best. Both aspects are crucial in a globalised world where economic development depends on the complex coordination of different policies. This coordination requires geographical proximity among actors involved

II

[Future cohesion policy]

As you know, we are already working on the preparation of future cohesion policy. This process started with the publication of the 4th Cohesion Report in May 2007 and subsequent launch of the public consultation at the Cohesion Forum in September 2007. The results of this consultation were published in the 5th progress report on economic and social cohesion in June 2008.

In 2008, we also made an analysis of the challenges facing the regions of Europe: 'Regions 2020'. This was published as a Commission staff working paper in December 2008. It provides a first prospective analysis

of the likely regional impact of four of the biggest challenges facing Europe: globalisation, demographic trends, climate change, and energy use and supply. The paper concludes that the European policy framework must be adapted to help regions meet the challenges of 2020, and that all regions will need to find local solutions, tailored to meet the combination of challenges which they face.

Work on the preparation of future cohesion policy continues during 2009. I would like to mention in particular three developments that will take place this spring: the completion of Barca report on the economic rationale and future ideas for Cohesion policy, our intermediate report on the results of the consultation on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion and the publication of my orientation paper setting out some first ideas for future cohesion policy.

- Firstly, I last year asked Fabrizio Barca to undertake an independent review of Cohesion policy. In this context, several meetings of academics and practitioners have taken place during 2008 to assess Cohesion policy achievements to date and discuss the policy's rationale, models, objectives and governance. Barca is currently finalising his review which will be published and launched in Brussels at the end of March or in early April.
- Secondly, we will soon start work on an intermediate report on the results of the consultation on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion. The consultation is still open until 28th February – please send us your comments and contributions if you have not yet done so! I will present a first summary of the replies at the Committee of the Regions summit in Prague on 5-6 March. The full report will be published later in 2009.

- Thirdly, we have started work on an orientation paper setting out first ideas for future cohesion policy. This will look at the rationale for cohesion policy, the relationship with other Community policies and policy delivery. I plan to present these ideas at the Informal Ministerial Council of 23-24 April.

The networking activities of Regions for Economic Change take place under the Territorial Cooperation Objective. In the context of this 2009 Regions for Economic Change conference, I therefore think it is also important to say a few words about the possible place of territorial cooperation in future Cohesion policy.

Many respondents to the consultation on the 4th Cohesion report, and others who have submitted their ideas regarding the future, recognise territorial cooperation as an essential part of cohesion policy and appreciate that it is now a "fully-fledged" objective. They underline that territorial cooperation is one of the best examples of the added value of European cohesion policy and, for this reason, should be strengthened.

Many interesting ideas have been put forward, including: more flexibility to increase the possibilities for regional cooperation with regions beyond the immediate neighbourhood, enhanced cooperation with regions and countries neighbouring the EU, further integration with mainstream programmes, a common set of European rules for cross-border programmes, more regional involvement, greater flexibility.

Another element of the current Cohesion policy construct which may play an increasingly important role in the future is the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation. The idea of the EGTC is that cooperation between stakeholders of different countries needs ideas, means and people in the same place. This place needs to be neutral – it should not

'belong' to any party. It needs to be secure – its legal existence accepted by the Member States and having an agreed decision making process. And, finally, it needs to be sustainable - to have long-term strategies, budgets and projects.

Four European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation have already been agreed: Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, Istar-Granum, Galicia-Norte de Portugal and Pyrenees-Mediterranee. And there are at least 14 more in the pipeline.

Also in the context of territorial cooperation, and at the request of the European Council in December 2007, we are intensively preparing the Baltic Sea Strategy. This is aimed at coordinating the efforts of the various actors (Member States, regions and other actors) to help enable the Baltic Sea Region to enjoy a sustainable environment and optimal economic and social development. The Strategy will be presented to the European Council in June 2009 and be one of the main priorities of the Swedish EU Presidency during the second half of 2009.

To achieve the aims of the Baltic Sea Strategy, the Commission will propose an indicative action plan, with actions and specific 'flagship' projects in some twenty areas. These actions and projects have been selected to address some of the most urgent challenges and opportunities, and should be able to show at least initial results at the time of the planned review of the strategy in 2011. They will be finalised in close consultation with the Member States and other partners.

Alongside these actions, the Commission will also make proposals for the governance and implementation of the strategy. These will cover the need for full political accountability, engaged co-ordination and

monitoring and effective facilitation and implementation of the necessary actions.

The Baltic Sea Strategy will provide all actors with a first experience of the preparation and implementation of a macro-regional cooperation strategy of this type. It will provide a valuable source of information for our work on the future.

As I conclude let me come back to the initiative that has brought us together during these days. The work under the Regions for Economic Change initiative gains in importance. Through Regions for Economic Change, experimentation and the mainstreaming of ideas across a range of themes can help in two ways. This work can lead to productivity gains and improve results in the current programmes and can test out and provide evidence on which future developments can be based.

III

[2010 RegioStars awards]

Finally, I already invite Europe's regions and cities to participate in the call for applications for the 2010 edition of the RegioStars awards including for the first time the CityStars themes.

Last night we celebrated the finalists and winners of the 2009 awards. The new prize categories for 2010 cover two awards for projects delivered in European cities, three categories for innovative projects in the field of information and communication technologies and one category linked to information and communication. In detail the categories are:

CityStar themes

- (1) Innovative use of brown field sites in an urban context
- (2) The integration of migrants and marginalised social and ethnic groups in urban areas

RegioStars ICT Themes

- (3) ICT applications for e-inclusion
- (4) ICT applications by or for SMEs
- (5) Broadband coverage and services in less developed regions or rural areas

RegioStars Information and Communication category

- (6) Website offering quality information and European added-value

The detailed arrangements for the 2010 awards are published today on the INFOREGIO website. As last year an online application form must be used and a deadline of 17 July 2009 is set for regions to submit their nominees. Hopefully there will be many candidates that match the quality of the nominees for this year's awards. I also wish that more regions and cities will take part.

Now that efforts are being made to close the Operational Programmes from the period 2000-2006 I hope that Managing Authorities are looking out for their good practice projects and that we will have a very high rate of applications for the 2010 awards. My hope is that the RegioStars

continues to develop as a prestigious awards event recognised throughout our 271 regions.

III

[Conclusions]

In the aftermath of this conference, we have to make the time and to take the opportunity to reflect on the good practices that have been highlighted. Beyond the task of identifying good practices, the real problem is to evaluate these good practices and translate them into action in our organisations. That is why we focussed on 'networking for results' this year and drew your attention to the work of the 'Fast Track Networks'.

We have to continually renew our efforts. The call for innovation and risk-taking is not only addressed to entrepreneurs and researchers. Public bodies and policy-makers must innovate. They have to modernise and improve policy and service delivery. This is because of the important role the public sector has in combating the economic downturn and finding cost effective ways to maintain our objectives.

I would like to thank you again for your participation and your support. Have a safe journey home.