

**"The Territorial Dimension in the National Strategies and the
Operational Programmes (2007-2013)"**

**Speech of Prof. Danuta Hübner, Commissioner in charge of
Regional Policy,**

at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Territorial Development

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Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues,

Yesterday I presented to you our preliminary analysis on how the urban dimension has been taken into account in the National Strategic Reference Frameworks and some Operational Programmes.

Let me now complement that presentation with a more general overview of the territorial dimension in those documents.

Our analysis was mainly rooted in the requirements of the Regulations as well as more specific territorial references in the Community Strategic Guidelines. This analysis focused on 3 issues (1) on the way in which Member States have addressed territorial characteristics in their socio-economic analysis; (2) on the main strategic objectives and priorities, and (3) on the treatment of the different types of territories and of territorial cooperation in the National Strategies.

We carried out our analysis on the basis of 27 National Strategic Reference Frameworks and only a sample of Operational Programmes.

All National Strategies (NSRFs) address territorial aspects of development. There are however, significant differences in the approaches chosen by Member States.

The first difference concerns the level of analysis: most of the Member States present a basic account of territorial disparities distinguishing in particular urban and rural areas. Others go further and provide an in-depth territorial analysis as a basis for determining territorial priorities and interventions. We welcome this more detailed approach since it may help to better address local needs at the level of programming and implementation.

The second difference is the extent to which Member States define territorial priorities explicitly. Some Member States do so and the priorities range from developing attractive regions and cities to balanced territorial development or territorial cooperation. In other Member States territorial issues are addressed in a more horizontal way. So even if the territorial dimension is not identified as a specific priority, the strategies make clear that it must be taken into account in all sector specific investments. A good example of this is investment in transport networks to improve accessibility and thus contribute to more territorial cohesion.

As regards the content of the national strategies, in most cases they set out growth pole strategies. Issues of rural development including accessibility and effective service provision are addressed in the majority of the strategic documents though less

emphasis and detail is given than for urban issues. Relations between urban and rural areas are also dealt with as is the role of towns in more remote rural areas as well as the city-suburban relationship.

Finally few comments on what we consider to be particularly important to ensure maximum impact of cohesion investments:

The first issue is setting up an effective multi-level governance system

I mentioned this aspect yesterday, but given its overall importance let me say that in taking forward the territorial agenda, possibly the most important observation emerging from our analysis concerns the necessity to ensure strong coordination between the different levels of government (national, regional and local level) and a clear definition of competencies and responsibilities. Setting up an effective multi-level governance system is a key for implementing a successful strategy aiming at integrated rural, urban and metropolitan development.

The second area of specific concern is the consistency between actions to promote competitiveness and actions to promote territorial cohesion

This requires the formulation of a tailor-made development strategy according to the individual needs and the potential of a given territory. This means that innovative growth poles need to be developed with a view to ensuring balanced development of the hinterland. We have to look more closely at links between any pole and its hinterland as well as the links between poles. This will help

regions to maximise their development potential instead of only compensating handicaps of lagging areas. Poles should measure their strengths against both the European background as well as against global competition.

The third challenge is ensuring consistency between the National Strategies and the Operational Programmes

Thematic programmes covering key territorial matters such as for example accessibility should be consistent with the territorial cohesion objectives set in the National Strategy. This requires cross-sector as well as interregional coordination since different programmes may have different or even conflicting impact on territories and thus on territorial cohesion.

The fourth issue focuses on strengthening the link between urban and rural areas

Although the urban-rural relationship is a key aspect for territorial cohesion, Member States in general do not provide concrete indications on how more effective links between urban and rural areas can be promoted. I would therefore encourage Member States and regions to reinforce the urban-rural link and to pay special attention to new forms of governance based on a partnership approach at operational level.

Fifth issue is the need to ensure consistency of interventions in rural areas

As I mentioned yesterday, most National Strategies foresee an urban development strategy. Unfortunately, a similarly strategic approach is less clear in the case of rural development. Further

work is still needed in this context. One particular aspect that needs to be addressed is the consistency of interventions in rural areas supported by different Community instruments, in particular the European Regional Development Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, with a view to improving overall effectiveness and avoiding overlaps.

I firmly believe that that our joint efforts to better utilise the territorial potentials throughout Europe will be rewarded and we will be able to strongly contribute to a more competitive and cohesive Europe. I look forward to your remarks on this analysis as well as to your perception of the territorial dimension of the NRSF in your own country.

Thank you for your attention!