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Commissioner for Regional Policy

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(09.00 – 10.45)

Norway

"Short opening statement on European Territorial Cooperation"

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here today and to discuss with you Norway's experiences in territorial cooperation. These are important times for Europe. The impact of increasing economic pressure from global competitors, the ageing of our societies, energy security and climate change as well as social polarisation are felt across Europe. All these changes overlap and create a new, complex map of economic, social and environmental challenges and opportunities.

Managing these challenges requires many skills, but in particular it requires a lot of cooperation between Europe's regions. Through cooperation we can pool our knowledge, talents and resources necessary for responding to the new challenges. By doing so, we will boost the key ingredients of Europe's competitiveness in a globalised world – knowledge, creativity and innovation.

This is the major reason why we have decided to strengthen cooperation in/ within the Union's regional policy 2007-2013. What used to be a

Community initiative it is now a fully fledged Objective of the EU Regional Policy. This is an important political signal, placing Cooperation on the same level as the Convergence and Competitiveness objectives. Its importance is also marked through the 50% increase of the Territorial Cooperation budget compared to the previous period (2000-2006), taking into account the increase of new border regions in the EU following enlargement, including maritime borders. But we are also putting greater emphasis on cooperation with third countries by setting aside financial resources and by establishing genuine cooperation programmes along the external borders of the Union.

New opportunities for cooperation in the future

I am very happy about Norway's commitment to European territorial cooperation. Many successful cross-border projects have been implemented for more than 10 years in the framework of the INTERREG initiative despite a challenging topography and extremely sparse population in Norway's border area to Sweden and Finland.

I am also very pleased that our opportunities for cooperation will increase in the future. Due to the extension of geographical eligibility to a large number of coastal regions, Norway will be able to join the new trilateral Danish-Swedish-Norwegian maritime cross-border cooperation programme "Öresund-Skagerrak-Kattegat". In total, the number of EU cooperation programmes with Norwegian participation will thus increase from 9 to 10 as from 2007.

Another novelty, which I hope is welcomed by Norway, is the fact that the entire Sámi population in Finland, Sweden and Norway will be covered by a single cooperation programme. The cross-border cooperation

programme "North" will contain a specific "Sámi" sub-programme managed by the Swedish Sámi Parliament. This sub-programme is based on the strong link between traditional Sámi industries and culture and offers support for SME development, competence development and preservation of the Sámi culture.

The new regulations for the period 2007-2013 provide for a strategic concentration on themes closely linked to the Lisbon agenda for jobs and growth and the Gothenburg agenda for sustainable development. I note with pleasure Norway's regional policy is very much in line with this orientation and that many cooperation projects in which Norway participates already fulfil these criteria.

Concerning the question of delivering more and better jobs, I would like to draw your attention to the project "GrenseTjänsten" (or "Border-Service") which was supported by the Interreg IIIA Sweden-Norway programme. It involves 22 authorities from both countries working together to improve business and employment opportunities in the border region. I would like to see an even more prominent role for similar projects in the years to come.

Concerning the question of sustainable development, I would draw your attention to our joint fight against the climate changes featured prominently in our Northern Periphery (transnational) programme. Global warming will impact on water resources, coastal areas, the risk of flooding, tourism, energy, agriculture, biodiversity and fisheries. These challenges require above all a joint European solution. The time has come to act by securing the future in terms of energy, combating climate change and promoting a competitive European economy and job creation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

we can look back with pride at our achievements. Cooperation programmes between the Union and Norway has contributed to make our regions more attractive, both for job creation and to live in. We must now look forward to the next seven years with determination and optimism and we must aim high to achieve our ambitious objectives.

I would like to encourage all of you to make full use of what is on offer in the next generation of European Territorial Cooperation programmes, and play an active role in initiating and generating joint projects of high quality and strategic relevance.

Thank you for your attention.