

Speech of Professor Danuta HÜBNER

EU Commissioner for Regional Policy

"Territorial cohesion as objective for Community: A European policy and strategic guidance for the EU and Member States, its regions and larger territories requires evidence with a territorial dimension"

Conference

Knowledge for Territorial Cohesion and Regional Policy

The ESPON 2013 Programme

Brussels, 28 November 2006

Dear Minister,

Dear Members of the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A central aim of the Union, as set out in Article 2 of the Treaty, is *"to promote throughout the Community a harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of economic activities."* Europe's citizens shall not be disadvantaged by wherever they happen to live or work in the Union. Territorial cohesion has therefore been included in the draft Constitution (Article 3), to complement the Union's objectives on economic and social cohesion.

We still far from balanced development of the European economy that would give all our citizens an equal access to economic and social opportunities, sustainable in the long-term. Mr. Mehlbye has

just given us an overview of territorial disparities, opportunities and challenges.

Let me just strengthen one issue – the link between territorial development and the Lisbon strategy. Today we agree that an important new aspect of territorial development is the Lisbon strategy. Today, we do not have to convince anybody. We all know that without taking into account the territorial potential, the role of cities and regions, without the involvement of metropolitan, but also rural areas we will not be able to deliver growth, jobs, innovation. Territory matters!

All European institutions – European Parliament, Member States, Committee of the Regions, Economic and Social Committee – have agreed to take Lisbon down to regions, cities and rural areas. And European networks of regions and cities are with us.

The new, reformed cohesion policy has been designed in such a way that it will be contributing to achieving a more territorially balanced European economy. But let me also emphasize that the process of achieving a more territorially balanced Europe has its value added. How we achieve it also matters!

These were the main objectives which paved the way for the reinforced importance of territorial cohesion in the new policy for 2007-2013:

First of all, through a greater emphasis on territorial cohesion in the next generation of cohesion programmes:

Both the new legislation (Art. 27 of general regulation) and the Community Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion ask Member States to address the question of territorial disparities in their National

Strategic Reference Frameworks. The new legal framework (Art. 52 of the General Regulation) also provides for the possibility to grant higher EU co-financing rates to projects located in areas suffering from geographical or natural handicaps.

Territorial co-operation has attained the status of "Objective", in contrast to its role as a "Community Initiative" for the past 15 years. This is an important political signal, placing co-operation on the same level as Convergence and Competitiveness programmes. In order to facilitate all forms of territorial cooperation (i.e. cross-border, transnational and interregional), we have created a new instrument – the European Grouping of Territorial Co-operation (EGTC). And we have doubled the financial support.

Secondly, through promotion of exchange of experience, best practice, bench marking and analytical work on territorial cohesion:

The Commission has just launched a new initiative called "Regions for Economic Change" to strengthen networking and mutual learning between Member States, regions and cities. This initiative which has been endorsed by the Ministers for Regional Policy a week ago in Brussels will boost the dissemination of best practice in economic modernisation across the Union.

We have also a better understanding of the territorial dimension. We will build on what ESPON has already achieved. Thanks to the ESPON (European Spatial Planning Observation Network) research programme we have accumulated considerable knowledge and experience. We better understand territorial trends and the territorial impact of sectoral policies in the enlarged EU. The Commission has exploited ESPON results in the Third Cohesion

Report and we will continue to make use of ESPON outputs in the Fourth Cohesion Report to be adopted in May 2007.

Priorities for the ESPON 2007-2013 programme

Still, with regard to the next programming period, we need to be more ambitious. The ESPON Programme should become an important and strategic tool for policy makers by providing the necessary knowledge on the development of the European territory. We need an approach to your work programme that would increase the immediate applicability of the results.

Consequently, as regards financial aspects of the ESPON programme, the Commission has decided to increase considerably its future budget. The Community's contribution will almost be 5 times higher than today with a budget of 34 million EUR instead of 7.2 million EUR. Altogether, including national co-financing, 44 million EUR will be available for the new ESPON programme.

Regarding its strategic orientation, ESPON needs to be more closely linked to the political cycle of cohesion policy and its territorial dimension. European policy development will reach important milestones in 2007-2013 such as the review of the Community budget in 2008/2009, the mid-term review of the Community Strategic Guidelines for cohesion and the 5th Cohesion Report. The new ESPON 2013 Programme must play a strategic role in supporting this policy process with analytical evidence and information. This will require a more active role of the Commission in guiding the work of the ESPON programme.

The new ESPON Programme needs to be demand-driven. It must respond to the needs of policy makers dealing with development of regions and larger territories by providing analytical information on territorial development as well as on long-term evolutions and perspectives. I am thinking not only of policy makers from European institutions and Member States, but also from regions or groups of regions, such as transnational cooperation areas. Governance should be part of it.

This implies the development of territorial indicators which are easily accessible and digestible and which can be used for immediate application in terms of policy planning. We need progress in the area of measuring growth and change. We need harmonized statistics, comparable across regions.

In terms of programme management, it is important to strengthen complementarity between ESPON and other cohesion programmes, especially Objective 3, a coordinating mechanism under the new Objective on Territorial Cooperation. Close cooperation and coordination is also essential regarding other networks such as the Information and Communication Network set up under the INTERREG Programme (INTERACT) or networks of regions and cities related to the Regions for Economic Change initiative.

Finally, there is a need to reinforce the dissemination of the results of ESPON programme to a wider audience in a user-friendly way. In other words, we need better communication. Awareness raising and closer links with policy makers and practitioners are therefore very important elements in the ESPON 2013 Programme. Organisation of stakeholder meetings from all administrative levels has to be an important part of programme implementation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Commission is currently negotiating the new ESPON 2013 Programme with the Member States. I highly appreciate our close cooperation with Minister Jean-Marie Halsdorf and his services that are responsible for the management of the ESPON programme. I am confident that we can agree on a more coherent and strategic ESPON programme in early 2007 which will enrich the development strategies, project ideas and cooperation arrangements of Europe's regions and thus promote territorial cohesion throughout Europe.

Thank you very much for your attention.