

THE COMMUNITY STRATEGIC GUIDELINES, 2007-2013

SPEECH BY

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I. Introductory remarks

Mr President, Honourable Members of Parliament,

Let me start by saying - on behalf of Commissioner Spidla and myself – that I very much welcome the report adopted by the REGI Committee on 11 September on Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion. In particular, I would like to thank Mrs Constanze Krehl for her hard work in drafting the report, and for the good cooperation we have enjoyed with her over the past year on this dossier.

I have been grateful for the support and ideas of the REGI Committee and the European Parliament during this period on what is, perhaps, the most important and innovative part of the new cohesion policy for 2007-2013. Through the Guidelines, we are seeking to ensure that Community priorities are more fully integrated into national and regional development programmes supported by the Union. The Guidelines seek to provide a clear and consistent approach in support of growth and jobs under the renewed Lisbon strategy.

I believe that the Guidelines have benefited considerably from the contribution of the Parliament. I would draw your attention to the recitals that have been added to the document since Parliament produced its draft report last May. These are important in the sense that they reveal the political orientation that lies behind the Guidelines.

The recitals draw heavily on the suggestions in the report drafted by Ms Krehl. For example, they draw attention to the importance of **partnership** (recital 16); to the contribution of **infrastructure** to convergence (recital 11); to **equality of opportunity** and the fight against discrimination (recital 15); to the importance of **development that is sustainable** in environmental terms (recital 14); to **territorial cohesion and to the urban dimension** (recital 12).

It is worth noting that in adopting these recitals, the Council - the Member States - are in effect writing a memo to themselves setting out the basic principles on how the next programmes should be run. This is clearly very important for us as we look forward to the programme negotiations.

In addition to the recitals, the text of the Guidelines has been reinforced in key areas of importance to Parliament. In particular, we have given more attention to **territorial cohesion**. This includes more on the **urban question**, while respecting the terms of the regulations, for example, on the voluntary nature of granting sub-delegated management to cities. We have also developed the text on the three initiatives **JASPERS**, **JEREMIE** and **JESSICA** which you have been so strongly supporting. These should, among other things, make a contribution to developing the use of **PPPs** in our programmes, which is one of the recommendations of your report on the Guidelines. And there are many other areas where I think you will find that the Commission has tried to accommodate Parliament's wishes.

I do not need to summarise for you once again the content of the document. But perhaps it is worthwhile to remind you of the underlying vision for the new cohesion policy which Strategic Guidelines can help us to realise. This vision is centred around economic development which is increasingly being driven by local and regional resources – be it innovative SMEs, local human skills or academic institutions. This vision is about developing our unique system of multi-level governance by taking policy closer to the local and regional levels, closer to the people and closer to the place where growth and jobs are created.

Mr President, Honourable Members of Parliament,

I know that some of you expressed the wish to have more debate on Strategic Guidelines so I am looking forward to hearing your views.

II. Concluding remarks

Mr President, Honourable Members of Parliament,

While I believe that the Guidelines now take on board the Parliament's main concerns, as you know, I was not in a position fully to accommodate all of them. I am thinking in particular of certain provisions that are now enshrined in the regulations, and which cannot by definition be contradicted in the Guidelines.

Earmarking is perhaps the principal example of such a provision, which Parliament has tended to oppose, although I think that sometimes the aim of earmarking has not been fully understood. Earmarking is not "anti-cohesion". It is a recognition that the world has changed and that we need to re-focus efforts towards new priorities in order to achieve sustainable cohesion.

At the same time, compared to the Commission's initial proposal, the final list of earmarked categories has been enlarged during the negotiations to include other expenditures, especially in the convergence regions.

In addition, the regulations now provide for the possibility, during the programme negotiations, for the national authorities and the Commission to agree to earmark other expenditure categories that do not appear on final list where these are held to be of national or regional importance in the drive to create growth and jobs.

Another example relates to housing where, to the regret of some of you, the regulations restrict direct expenditures in this field to the new

Member States. This reflects the very specific circumstances of the Member States that joined the Union in 2004, which are confronted with a situation without parallel in the other Member States. And we should not forget that there are many forms of housing-related expenditure that can be supported throughout the Union that contribute to the quality of residential areas: such as measures for energy efficiency, the management of open spaces, security and safety measures, and so on.

Mr President, Honourable Members of Parliament,

We are now on the home straight with regard to the implementation of EU cohesion policy. We have the regulations in place and by the beginning of October, assuming the assent today of Parliament, the Guidelines will be adopted as the first phase in the programming exercise. While it is the home straight, we should not underestimate the challenges that lie ahead in reaching the finishing line. But I can assure you that I will spare no effort to convince our partners in the Member States and regions to put in place ambitious and innovative programmes.

Today, we are removing together the last obstacle to the implementation of the policy on the ground. This, however, does not mean that our debates should end here! On the contrary, I am looking forward to our future discussions on the outcome of the programming exercise, including earmarking, on the results delivered by the policy and on the new initiatives which the Commission will be launching in the future, such as Regions for Economic Change, a programme encouraging networking

and providing the testing ground for innovative themes for economic modernisation.

Thank you for your attention