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**in the European Parliament**

**THE MEETING WITH THE SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND MANAGEMENT BOARD**

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Ladies and gentlemen, I remember my first visit to the South West of England, our first discussion on your ambitious plans, your grand project of the Combined Universities in Cornwall, my visits to your Brussels office. Innovation has always been a central point of our debates.

Now, more than two years after my first trip to the South West, not only does innovation occupy a central position in European regional policy implementation but it is destined to play an ever increasing role in developing the post crisis economies.

We can see today how visionary it has been to make innovation, energy efficiency, climate change, energy concerns so strongly present among priorities of the European cohesion policy for 2007-2013. How important it has been to make European regions engaged in responding to global challenges and opportunities, to encourage them to measure their strengths and weaknesses against global background.

The unprecedented challenges at global level require regional and local responses.

I think here of the need to:

- Master the financial crisis and economic downturn;
- Diversify our sources of energy away from fossil fuels and towards renewable or cleaner fuels;
- Revolutionise our means of transport,
- Develop advanced technologies for agriculture without damaging further the environment;
- Manage water supplies in an efficient and resource effective way;
- Alleviate the harsh effects of outsourcing, worker displacement, and the displacement of production.
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These are only a few of the tasks we are all having to tackle now, not only globally but at all levels of governance. For us Europeans the challenge is not only to ensure that Europe and its citizens have a sustainable future. The challenge is to maintain a top ranking position in the world economy.

Looking at these tasks through the European cohesion policy perspective , I would say that solidarity and innovation in all its aspects will be the keys to our success. Equally vital to our success is a good harmony between local, regional, national and European actions in order to maximise results.

As you know I have often lauded the active engagement of the South West in a variety of European Policies and programmes ranging from rural, through energy, environment and research to education and culture which have seen the region develop a diverse economic base constructed around advanced

techniques of management of natural resources, strong centres of excellence in its cities and universities and a well developed tourist industry built on the outstanding beauty of its coastal resorts and national parks.

Your operational programme under the Regional Competitiveness and employment objective with its well structured investment plan, aimed at creating 10.000 new jobs is even more critical in difficult times. The European Parliament is more than interested to find out how the economic downturn has affected your operations and how, if at all, your programmes and our policies need to be adjusted to meet the new conditions and contingencies.

That is where the committee I have the honour to Chair has a major role to play, in understanding your concerns, fielding your requests and in fine tuning the legislation and operation of the policy to ensure optimal performance.

Of course whilst continuous simplification of procedures, measures to accelerate implementation and temporary adjustments to meet the needs of those most affected by the present situation, are indispensable and indeed show the dynamic flexibility of our policy, it is also up to all of us and Parliament in particular, to plan and design, together with the European Commission, Member States, local authorities and other stake holders, the Cohesion policy for the post 2013 period.

It is now nearly a year since in my role as European Commissioner for Regional Policy; I presented the report "Regions2020" which gave us a first assessment of the new regional disparities to be created by globalisation, climate change, demographic adjustment, and energy supply in the medium term. Integrated place-

based policies will be central to a new approach to policy design exploiting the full spectrum of each individual territory's characteristics and resources.

I would like to take this opportunity to stress Parliament's insistence, which I make mine, that cohesion policy can only succeed if all can contribute and all can benefit. The crisis and capacities of individual regions to respond to it will most likely draw a new regional map of Europe. Even economically advanced regions need to stimulate research and innovation, to face economic and social change, to adapt to fast changing conditions taking into account local constraints and necessities and their comparative advantages. If the European regional policy incorporated into its framework only the poorest regions we would defeat our aim of making Europe the most competitive economy in the world. We need both investment to facilitate the catching up and investment in enhancing creating of centres of excellence.

The transition to an economy based on high performance sustainable activities, environmentally friendly means of transport, renewable energy, energy and water efficient technologies and processes is taking place now. Now is the time that our universities, technical institutes, and SMEs throughout Europe must be encouraged to invest, to develop new ideas and to successfully transmit and transform those ideas into reality for the market place. Many of old and newly emerging centres of excellence are found in advanced regions such as yours. I know that you are pro-active in stimulating your local businesses. You encourage them to take advantage of our policy and financial tools in order to overcome the present crisis and adapt to meet the challenges and possibilities

of the future. With your help and echo, we in Parliament will ensure that the policy meets your expectations.

Thank you for listening.