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Chair of the Committee on Regional Development in the European Parliament
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Commissioners, Colleagues,

Three years ago a major reform of European cohesion policy has been introduced taking into account the unprecedented enlargement of the Union and new emerging challenges.

It was not by chance that already in 2005 and 2006 European cohesion policy put on the top of its agenda innovation and competitiveness, climate change, energy security and efficiency, water efficiency, investment in new skills, attractiveness of territories for young people, quality of life.

We could put on cohesion policy agenda for 2007-2013 all those priorities which today we see in the Commission's agenda Europe 2020 because we understood that the mission of cohesion policy is to anticipate change not to follow it.

That is why more than 2 years ago the Regions 2020 analytical report was published. The purpose was to know what should be cohesion policy priorities after 2013. Today, we are well prepared to face the future.

The 2006 reform involved the cohesion policy in European Lisbon agenda, providing the then missing link between European priorities on growth, jobs and competitiveness

and local and regional development potential and the engagement of subnational level of European governance in the pursuit of common European objectives.

A year ago the policy has put all its assets at the disposal of European recovery package, providing also the essential link between real economy crisis exit strategy and long term sustainable growth and structural transformation.

But our oral question is about the future.

In the years to come, Europe we live in, will be in need of a strong collective action to respond to expectations of its citizens who are today informed citizens, fully aware of how much depends on choices made by policy makers. Those expectations are linked to and fuelled by challenges that have mushroomed over last years and their importance for citizens is confirmed by public opinion polls.

Jacques Delors once said that European single market is about competition that stimulates, and make us creative, about cooperation that makes us stronger and about solidarity that makes us united. European cohesion is delivered by European regional policy which is today based exactly on this triple foundation: competitiveness, cooperation and solidarity. This triangle is fundamental for Europe's future, so what is at stake in our debate on cohesion policy is indeed Europe's future.

For years we have talked about the need to unlock, to mobilize development potential of all European regions and cities. The experience and logic clearly shows that this mobilization turns out to be most effective and efficient if pursued through direct engagement of subnational levels of European governance. The European regional policy has already passed the subsidiarity test. Subsidiarity works for Europe.

The 2006 reform of cohesion policy has made it a modern place-based policy founded on a balance between equity and efficiency, between bottom-up and top-down approach, between common strategic European objectives and local flexibility. There

is a need to move further on those issues, to continue the reform of policy governance but certain principles should not be abandoned.

The new Treaty has cemented the new understanding of European subsidiarity already deeply rooted in the cohesion policy, i.e. subsidiarity extended to local and regional level of governance. We can do more on it, especially with regard to local level. Those who suggest that cohesion policy can be limited to Brussels and national level either do not know the European reality or do not understand that excluding local and regional Europe from the pursuit of common European objectives is economically at best unwise and politically dangerous.

Cohesion is a notion that excludes exclusion. Cohesion policy must not be divisive. For political, economic, social and legitimacy reasons it should be a policy for all. As internal market is, as common currency is. All elements of this integration triangle: common market, common currency, cohesion are mutually strengthening and interdependent. They are our common European public good.

We, policy makers, have raised the stakes by promising to deliver. The challenges are well known, the “EU 2020” strategy has been opened to public consultations. Development policy with clear targets and tools is needed. Cohesion policy is a policy for development that engages all levels of European governance working in concert for European citizens.

Europe needs new energy to take care of its future, to renew itself, to renew itself in an assertive way. A legitimate question is where this energy could and should come from. For me the answer is clear. Today this energy should come from below. Today this energy can be released through direct engagement of local and regional levels of European governance in the pursuit of common European objectives.