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OPEN DAYS 2010: European Week of Cities and Regions

**Europe 2020: Competitiveness, co-operation and cohesion for all
regions**

Opening Session, European Parliament

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Opening remarks

It is now a tradition that the European Parliament hosts the opening session of the Open Days. This year, we meet to talk about the future of Europe and how cohesion policy can make Europe better. The main theme of the week is "Europe 2020: Competitiveness, co-operation and cohesion for all regions".

Mercedes Bresso, President of the Committee of the Regions and Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for Regional Policy are here with me to welcome you. Let me also warmly welcome our keynote speakers:

- Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Vice-President of the European Parliament
- Rudy Demotte, Minister-President of the Walloon region, Belgian Presidency
- Philippe Maystadt, President of the European Investment Bank

President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, will address us through a video message.

We will have also a debate moderated by Mr. Mark Rogerson, Executive Director of Consilia Ltd. Please fill in the form for requesting the floor and give it to the ushers.

Thank you for coming.

I would like to use this opportunity to express my admiration for your strong involvement in the debate on the future cohesion policy.

I think I can say that we have never witnessed such a strong engagement of regions and cities, their networks, their offices here in Brussels and such a valuable contribution to the debate on the future shape of the policy.

I read it also as a strong commitment coming from local and regional level to take up your part of responsibility for the future of Europe.

You are offering the enthusiasm and energy that Europe needs and that can be found today first of all in European regions and cities.

Thank you for demonstrating such a strong feeling of responsibility and reenergizing Europe.

Here in the European Parliament, we have taken up our responsibility for putting in place an institutional macroeconomic framework that will facilitate growth, jobs creation and competitiveness of European economy. But we are also convinced that Europe needs structural reforms and development policy.

European cohesion policy is a development policy which in an adequate macroeconomic and financial framework can achieve its full impact.

Cohesion is, according to the Treaty, a basic principle of European integration. This principle makes cohesion policy a policy for all citizens of the Union. But, of course, cohesion policy should do more in regions where catching up is a challenge.

Focusing more efficiently on results is a challenge not only for cohesion policy, it is a must for all policies in Europe, designed and delivered at European, national, regional and local level.

The recent financial and economic crisis is drawing a new economic map of Europe. We must spare no efforts to see at the end of the day a better map.

To achieve this, disparities must be addressed through both mobilizing development potential in territories which lag behind and in territories where a new generation of investment in competitive advantages is needed.

Through networking and cooperation, we can link more effectively locomotives, growth and innovation centers with those that are catching up. But all regions and cities have to measure today their strength and competitiveness against the global context.

In the years to come, cohesion policy should support across Europe restructuring and innovation and knowledge-based growth as well as use better the potential of networking and cooperation. The role of European territorial cooperation will be more precious than ever.

By adding the third, territorial dimension to the European cohesion we have put our finger on a hugely untapped potential which is hidden behind national or even regional statistics. This potential can be unleashed by better adjustment of all European policies to territorial specificities and cooperation between cities and regions across Europe and beyond its borders.

A harmony in European development can be achieved if every territory across the Union makes most of its potential and cooperates with others in the pursuit of EU 2020 strategic objectives of the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Dear Friends,

We have debated publicly the future cohesion policy since the Cohesion Forum in September 2007. We will soon see the 5th Cohesion report in which the European Commission will present its ideas for the future inspired by ideas born during this lengthy period of consultations. European Parliament will debate the Resolution on the Future Cohesion Policy this week.

We must realize that growth in Europe will be supply driven in the years to come. Development, investment policies like the cohesion policy will be of utmost importance in putting Europe on long term path of structural change and growth for all.

Closing remarks

During the debate, ideas have mushroomed but a clear message has crystallised, a strong support for a strong Cohesion Policy in the future, a policy for all regions of the European Union allowing to achieve social, economic and territorial cohesion through investment in knowledge and innovation based, resource efficient growth that generates jobs and makes Europe more competitive.

The Treaty-based mission of the policy remains valid today, but there is a change as well. Regions and cities need not only to step up to challenges of the internal market and common currency, but also need to be able to deal with global competition.

The future policy architecture should take into account the post crisis territorial reality at the regional level. It seems justified to rethink the position of regions that graduate from their less advanced status and/or face restructuring challenges too deep to make them part of Obj. 2 . It seems also justify that transitional regime that would support effectively their efforts should be identified as a part of Convergence objective.

Territorial cohesion is not only a goal to achieve. It is also an instrument to achieve more and better growth. Responses to all major challenges Europe is facing have a territorial dimension. That is why we must take the territorial impact assessment seriously, take into account more effectively territorial specificities, adjust urban development axis of the policy to the current challenges and opportunities, reinforce local growth initiatives and invest more in the territorial cooperation taking barriers away.

I am convinced that proposed reforms of cohesion policy will take us further towards more result oriented policy, harnessing all levels of European governance and based on a comprehensive future oriented investment

strategy, policy operating within a common European framework covering all European structural funds, policy based on incentives but also on conditionality working towards more effective interventions, policy focused on priorities of European importance but leaving the space for their adjustment to territorial specificities.

Hopefully, in the years to come, structural and institutional reforms, contributing to the macroeconomic stability, growth and restructuring will be taking place in Europe.

Cohesion policy and its instruments should both enhance those reforms and benefit from them.

We will need in Europe a better coordination between all European policies and between European and national ones.

Post 2013 European multiannual financial framework should play an active role in supporting this coordination and making it efficient.

But Europe, to achieve its goals needs as well to move further towards new forms of finance for its investment.

Cohesion policy has already accumulated some experience in this field.

More financial engineering based funding will be needed with a view to strengthen leverage of public funding and promote risk taking.

And last, but not least, the next steps towards a simpler delivery mechanism must be taken.

The 2006 reform and 2008-09 simplification efforts have paved the way towards an easier and better policy. We must be bolder now.

Dear Colleagues,

Five years ago in Charlemagne we have made together the decision to take Lisbon down to regional and local level. Let me say that European regional policy is the only European policy that has taken Lisbon strategy with highest accountability, and today we can say that this strand of Lisbon strategy has been the only clearly successful. Today let's decide on taking EU2020 Flagship Initiative down to regions and cities. I am sure it will work and we will deliver. Territorial Pact could be our excellent platform to make EU2020 work for Europe.

Let us finally understand that extending Europe beyond European and national level of governance to regions, cities, local communities does not only take it closer to citizens but it makes Europe bigger. With this I would like to close this session and wish you a truly useful work and as Michel Delabarre has said: we have to go outside to talk to who do not know or do know but do not understand what cohesion policy is about.

Let us make Europe bigger.