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Open Days 2011: Investing in Europe's future: Regions and cities delivering smart, sustainable and inclusive growth

Opening Ceremony in the European Parliament

Closing remarks

11th October 2011, European Parliament, Brussels

Thank you for demonstrating such a strong feeling of responsibility and commitment to work together on the framework for cohesion policy 2014-2020.

Clearly, growth will come from below, from strong engagement of local and regional authorities, local businesses and from innovation resulting from cooperation of research and business communities. Our task here, in the European Parliament, and I believe I can say that on behalf of all European institution, is to put in place, by the end of 2012, a legal framework for an effective and efficient cohesion policy. There is a good proposal on the table. And please be assured that we will work hard on setting the framework for growth on time.

But we are also convinced that Europe needs structural reforms and a conducive macroeconomic policy that would take our economies out of debt crisis and towards governance solutions that would minimize the risk of future crises. Cohesion policy, as an investment policy, can achieve its full impact only in an adequate macroeconomic and financial framework.

In the years to come, cohesion policy will be supporting across Europe a deep economic restructuring, innovation and knowledge-based growth, while exploiting fully the potential of networking and cooperation. The role of European territorial cooperation will be more precious than ever.

Without any doubt, this policy should continue to do more where catching up is a challenge but it should also put its finger on territories where a new generation of investment in new competitive advantages is needed. All regions and cities have to increase their strength against global context. We have to link more effectively the locomotives with those that are catching up.

Territorial cohesion and the role of multilevel governance has come strongly in the debate. It is not only a goal to achieve, it is indeed a tool to have more and better growth.

Focusing 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. We, the cohesion policy stakeholders, will certainly make our part.

I am convinced we have a very good proposal on the table. New regulations will take us further towards result oriented policy, harnessing all levels of European governance, based on a comprehensive future oriented investment strategies, within a common European political and regulatory framework covering all European structural funds, based on incentives but also on conditionality working towards more effective interventions, focused on priorities of European importance but leaving the space for their adjustment to territorial specificities.

I hope you would agree with me that we do not want to build Europe's future on a foundation of strict punishments. Macroeconomic conditionalities can be counterproductive and can be unfair. Suspending funding will have the most direct impact in regions, whereas it is to punish misbehaviour on the national level. We consider that conditionality measures should be directly linked to areas linked to cohesion policy implementation and they should be determined in dialog with Member States and regions.

We have to spare no efforts as legislators to ensure that the new regulatory framework delivers on the simplification agenda, that beneficiaries and managing authorities have to deal with less red tape, that the careful tracking of results does not in fact lead to more efforts being invested in reporting on results than delivering on them.

Even though we welcome the alignment of the policy with the EU2020 goals, and the concentration of resources on a limited number of priorities, we are concerned about the territorial sensitivity of the proposal. This concentration must not be implemented to the detriment of the integrated place-tailored approach.

Hopefully, in the years to come, structural and institutional reforms, contributing both to the macroeconomic stability, growth and restructuring will be taking place in Europe. Cohesion policy and its instruments should be both enhancing those reforms and benefitting from them. We need a better coordination between all European policies and between European and national ones.

European multiannual financial framework should play an active role in supporting this coordination and making it efficient. We need a decent funding. And we should also be clear on this.

With the new regulatory framework, we have a chance to make bold steps towards a simple delivery mechanism. Previous reforms have paved the way, there is no reason not to be bolder.

And last but not least. I would like to propose that as of next year our debates in the European Parliament on the budgetary discharge take place together with the presentation by the European Commission of the evaluation of the cohesion policy performance results.