

Honourable Chair Boc,
Honourable Chair Benea,
Honourable members – of both committees,

Thank you for this invitation.

It is a pleasure for me to be here today,
for the first time in my capacity as Executive Vice-President of the European
Commission.

This is also my first public appearance in my new role, and I am proud to do it
here, in front of you, since we will work together over the next five years to find
the best solutions so that cohesion policy can truly be an added value for our
citizens.

As you know, I was a member, both of the REGI committee for three mandates,
and of the European Committee of the Regions from 2000 to 2005.

I was also Chairman of this COTER committee from 2002 to 2004.

During those years I recall that I was the rapporteur for the report on
“Governance and simplification of structural funds after 2006”.

Almost 20 years later, a topic that is still relevant today.

Throughout my political journey, I have served for 13 years as a councillor in my
city, I have been regional councillor, and then President of my Region, which led
to my membership in the European Committee of the Regions.

I am well aware of the role and importance of all the players involved in the cohesion policy.

I am familiar with the fundamental role of regions and local authorities.

President von der Leyen, in her guidelines, highlighted the central role of the regions, emphasizing that they will remain at the centre of our work.

To achieve the priorities outlined in my mission letter from the President, regions, cities, and the people of Europe will be at the forefront of this mission.

Assigning the cohesion and reforms portfolio to the Vice-Presidency sends a strong signal in this regard.

In fact, for the first time, the portfolio of Cohesion and Reforms has been given to an Executive Vice President.

For me, this is a recognition.

A recognition, that Europe cannot go forward without a strong cohesion.

For the first time, Cohesion and Reforms will be under the same guidance as other crucial policies like agriculture, transport, tourism, fisheries and the blue economy.

In this context, in the coming five years your support will be crucial, as we work together, making cohesion policy future-proof.

I am conscious of the responsibility of our joint work.

I have listened to your concerns, expressed in our meetings together and in the hearing.

And I am ready to dedicate my extensive first-hand experience to make our joint work successful.

Many aspects of this work will have to be discussed in detail in the coming months and years.

The first discussion will be on the mid-term review of the 2021-2027 programming period, that will help to accelerate the implementation of the current programmes and will contribute to the design of the future policy.

We need a modernised cohesion and growth policy, where regions will be at the centre.

The Cohesion policy has to maintain a central role in the next MFF and be properly funded.

It needs to be better aligned with the Union's priorities while preserving its core principles of a place-based approach, multi-level governance and partnership.

In addition, let me also underline some key priorities:

First:

Let's fulfill the commitment of cohesion policy: ensuring that every European has access to opportunities and a bright future – no matter where he lives!

The Cohesion policy has already delivered this in so many ways.

But there is still much to do.

Many regions that are still stuck in a development trap and present different needs.

Cohesion policy must be there for all of them, with tailor-made solutions.

This is my commitment to you and to the regions of Europe.

To the cities, and the rural areas.

To the regions facing depopulation and brain drain.

To the outermost regions.

To the islands.

To the border regions, especially eastern border regions.

Let's also work together for the "**right to stay**":

The freedom of every European to stay in the place they call home.

Because the freedom to stay, depends on good reasons to stay.

And these reasons are high-quality jobs, affordable housing, skills and training.

As well as high-quality public services such as education and health, transport and local government.

For example, President Von der Leyen has committed to inject liquidity into the **housing** sector.

The Cohesion policy will contribute to that, facilitating Member States to double the planned cohesion investments in **affordable housing**.

I will also support implementation of the RESTORE initiative, when it will be adopted by the co-legislators.

The devastating natural disasters of recent times require a European answer.

I will support the fastest use of the funds available for reprogramming.

But all these ambitious objectives bring me to my second point:

The cohesion policy must be reinforced and modernised.

The Cohesion policy is called upon to do more than ever before.

Not just in terms of reducing disparities, but also in support of European priorities.

Green and digital transition.

Geopolitical security and strategic industries.

Competitiveness.

Preparing for future enlargement.

In order to do that, the Union's cohesion policy must evolve.

So I welcome the recommendations of the 9th Cohesion Report.

Many of you have expressed support for these recommendations.

And I can only agree with you.

Recommendations such as **simplifying** the delivery mechanism, focusing more on **performance**, allowing regional and local Authorities to manage the funds more effectively.

Remembering the key role of the administrations that implement the funds.

Building their **administrative capacity** and giving them the tools to carry out the job.

And of course, building in more **flexibility**, to better react to new situations and unexpected crises, while still maintaining the stable, long-term framework.

We will start to develop concrete proposals next year and I will count on the input and contributions of these two committees.

In all these reforms, let us maintain the heart of the policy.

Which is my third point:

the crucial role of regions, cities, and local areas.

As President von der Leyen said just two weeks ago:

we “want regions and communities to be in control of their own destiny.

And to help shape our policies”.

This is the task that the President has entrusted me with and which I intend to achieve.

We all agree that each region has its specific context, its different investment needs.

So regional and local ownership is the key to effective development.

But more than that, it is a core value of our European democracy.

So, as I have already said, I am committed to shared management, with a key role for regions and cities and I am committed to multi-level governance and the partnership principle, because local partners are the best guides to local needs.

In this regard, one of my key priorities will be presence on the ground.

We must make Europe more visible in the regions and the regions more visible in Europe.

And I commit to talking regularly with you.

My door is open for discussion.

And this brings me to my conclusion.

I had the opportunity to read your reports on the future of cohesion policy: both the opinion of the Committee of the Regions by Presidents Cordero and Boc and the Novakov report on Cohesion Policy 2014 2020, which also offers important contributions on the future of this policy after 2027.

I am aware that your two committees, have always played a key role in cohesion policy and **you will continue to play such a role in the coming years.**

We have work to do. Together.

I look forward to the next 5 years!

Thank you.