



**Comité européen
des régions**

SPEECH BY COR PRESIDENT KARL-HEINZ LAMBERTZ

**OPENING OF THE FIRST ROUND TABLE ON “STRUCTURAL FUNDS AND OBLIGATION OF RESULTS:
WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR MUNICIPALITIES?”**

100TH CONGRESS OF MAYORS, 21 NOVEMBER 2017, PARIS

Mr Decoster,
colleagues,
ladies and gentlemen,

I am particularly pleased that my first engagement as president of the European Committee of the Regions should be at the 100th Congress of Mayors, which marks the 110th anniversary of your association.

I read in the press recently that the association was expecting 15 000 mayors to attend. Since there are just under 100 000 municipalities in Europe, this means you will be welcoming a sixth of the European Union’s mayors in just three days!

This is quite staggering and I am very honoured to be here.

Every time I come to France I see the progress that this historically very centralised country is making on devolution and local self-government.

These changes can be seen across the European Union and particularly at our committee.

However, this progress on devolution must not be called into question on the pretext that the management of public policies by local and regional authorities leaves something to be desired.

This is a bogus argument often used by the state level, which thinks that centralisation equates with efficacy. This is quite simply wrong.

The proof is that it is local politicians that the French, and most Europeans, trust the most.

You are very well aware of the issues, because it is you, in the municipalities, that are most in touch with the people; you are in the first line when it comes to land-use planning and managing the relationship between urban and rural areas – at the very heart, for example, of your new metropolitan areas.

You are the first to be affected, then, by what is now at issue in Europe: the future of cohesion policy.

I would like firstly to stress the danger this policy is facing.



**Comité européen
des régions**

Secondly, I would like to get a discussion going on the role of municipalities in cohesion policy after 2020.

Cohesion policy is in danger.

As you know, the discussions on the next Multiannual Financial Framework are in full swing in the various European Commission Directorates-General.

These discussions are worrying in more ways than one. Two out of the three scenarios envisage an end to Europe's regions as a whole being covered by cohesion policy.

In other words, your municipalities – whether they are part of a large city, a disadvantaged suburb or a rural area – could cease – tomorrow – to get European funds (be that ERDF or ESF).

I also know that some in the European Union want to put up the national co-financing rates or tighten the conditionalities related to cohesion policy implementation.

Now, we can cope with some increase in national co-financing rates, but we need to be very wary about conditionalities.

At the European Committee of the Regions we are in favour of ex-ante conditionalities that support the transformation efforts of Europe's regions via the implementation of democratically adopted legislation.

We reject, on the other hand, all external conditionalities (on the rule of law, linkage with the European Semester or taking in refugees), because these water down the goals assigned to cohesion policy and sap its efficacy.

What are these goals?

- Solidarity by reducing the economic, social and geographical inequalities in the European Union.
- Implementing the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

It is on these results that we must be judged.

Now, cohesion policy *is* delivering results. It is working well.

I cannot repeat enough these particularly important figures:

Between 2014-and 2020, cohesion policy has meant:



**Comité européen
des régions**

- 1.1. Million SMEs supported;
- 420 000 new jobs;
- 7.4 million unemployed people getting help to find work;
- 4 600 km of railway track upgraded;
- 14.5 million people connected to broadband;
- 17 million people connected to drinking water, etc.

And I could go on for much longer.

What are the consequences for France's municipalities?

The first is that you have to stand up and champion a strong, effective and visible cohesion policy for beyond 2020.

And here I would invite you to join the #CohesionAlliance that the European Committee of the Regions has launched with Europe's main associations of regions and cities.

This initiative will give us a strong voice in the negotiations on the next EU budget.

Later on, it will also give us a say on the substance of the policy: for example, the position of towns and cities in choosing the projects that affect them, the partnership agreements or simplification of the Integrated Territorial Development Instruments.

Regarding the substance and structure of the policy, I would also draw your attention to the wish of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment to re-centralise the European Social Fund (ESF) by incorporating it into an umbrella programme for human capital for employment, social inclusion and skills (involving particularly the Erasmus+ programme).

This would mean the end of the territorial approach and the end of the integrated strategies that are the basis for taking effective action – especially in urban policy – on the structural and cyclical factors bearing on poverty, exclusion and unemployment.

The European Committee of the Regions is your representative in Brussels, there to defend your positions.

Help us to help you on the future of cohesion policy by joining our #CohesionAlliance. We shall only get results by working together.

Thank you.

(950 words)