



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

**SPEECH BY THE COR PRESIDENT, KARL-HEINZ LAMBERTZ**  
**PANEL: MORE EFFICIENT USE OF SCARCE FINANCIAL RESOURCES**  
**SESSION: BALANCING TRADITIONAL POLICIES AND NEW CHALLENGES**  
**CONFERENCE: "SHAPING OUR FUTURE: DESIGNING THE NEXT MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL  
FRAMEWORK"**  
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Minister, Director-General, colleagues,

June 2018 will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the cohesion policy. For this reason, I would like to begin by challenging certain preconceived ideas implied by the structure of this session entitled "Balancing Traditional Policies and New Challenges".

First of all, since 2014, the cohesion policy has invested EUR 15 billion in research and innovation projects, 3.5 billion in digital projects, 26.3 billion in the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, 11 billion in measures promoting a low-carbon economy and 16.5 billion in projects supporting adaptation to climate change.

If employment, competitiveness and climate change are not the key challenges for the future, then the public - and me too - need to know why!

Next, we still talk about cohesion as though it were a traditional policy, but it underwent a complete transformation in 2014. All stakeholders, whether they be here in Brussels or on the ground, agree that major changes have taken place: thematic concentration, a results-oriented approach, ex-ante conditionalities, performance reserve, etc. These changes have not yet delivered results because of the delay in programming. This delay is not attributable to the policy itself but to the late approval of texts and to an overcomplex approach. This should not happen again.

The cohesion policy is not a traditional policy. On the contrary, it is an innovative policy that is envied by others, including the sub-state level in the United States.

That being said, I also recognise that it is a policy that must be further improved, as one can and must always do better.

I don't have much time, so I would like get my message across at this forum where there may still be some people to convince.

Cohesion policy is a policy which meets its objectives. This is clear from the Seventh Cohesion Report, as well as the European Commission's figures which I have already mentioned.

It is the European Union's main investment and solidarity policy. What would budget cuts mean? Less training for the unemployed? Fewer km of railways for a sustainable European transport system? Less housing insulated against the cold, which at the same time reduces the poverty experienced by those living there and helps limit greenhouse gas emissions? The list goes on.

Is this really the Europe we want? There are certainly valid challenges which could be funded through cuts to the cohesion policy. But at what cost for the daily lives of European citizens?

Yet this is what the European Commission is seeking to do in its communication on Economic and Monetary Union. The communication aims to take away from regions the performance reserve they were promised if they achieved certain results, with a view to enabling Member States to finance structural reforms developed who knows where and, in any case, without any democratic oversight for the time being.

This is not the Europe I want. The EU budget does not cost much: one cup of coffee per citizen each day. If we want to finance new challenges, then new funding will be required. We need to break the glass ceiling of 1 % of GNI and mobilise new own resources.

It is not us at the European Committee of the Regions who have the power to do this. Nor is it the European Parliament and the European Commission. It is up to the Member States to take action to save our Union.

I reiterate, dismantling the convergence tool that is the cohesion policy would probably mark the end of the European venture. We therefore need to be careful not to go down the wrong path.

Thank you for your attention.

**(654 words)**