



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SPEECH BY COR PRESIDENT, KARL-HEINZ LAMBERTZ

"NEXT MFF: DISTRIBUTIVE, ALLOCATIVE AND STABILISATION FUNCTIONS" – HIGH LEVEL

CONFERENCE OF THE BULGARIAN PRESIDENCY

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Dear President, Dear Ministers, Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Given the time constraints, I shall come straight to the point regarding what regions and cities expect of the next EU budget.

Some of you have just spoken about your ambition for Europe's future. I fully share this ambition, but I would like to remind you that none of this can be accomplished without financial means. The European Committee of the Regions is therefore asking for the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) to represent 1.3% of the EU-27's GNI.

The European Council and Commission have openly and repeatedly acknowledged the positive impact that cohesion policy has had in the past and its potential for the future. At an important moment for Europe, when we also have to deal with Euroscepticism, we must show coherence in our choices.

For this reason, the #CohesionAlliance – which is supported by local and regional governments representing more than 80% of the European population and by organised civil society and the private sector – wants cohesion policy to be preserved for all European regions.

Its European added value is clear: convergence in the internal market, a contra-cyclical instrument to foster public investments for growth, particularly at a time of crisis, territorial cooperation and, particularly, shared management of the policy.

Innovation, industrial policy, education and training, and social inclusion and social policies cannot be addressed from Brussels. Cohesion policy is where European, national, regional and local priorities meet and converge.

The cohesion budget is a people's budget for Europe's citizens in the places where they live.

The MFF proposal will be presented by the European Commission on 2 May. After the meeting of Europe's leaders on 23 February, Mr Tusk said that the idea of an increase in the EU budget and in cohesion policy funding was supported by a large number of Member States. In this situation, it would be unbelievable if the European Commission made a proposal



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which failed to match these ambitions. Nevertheless, there was some talk of cuts of between 5% and 10% in cohesion policy funding.

I would like to remind you that the promotion of economic, social and territorial cohesion is one of the Treaty objectives. We therefore expect the Commission to come up with a proposal that safeguards the future of cohesion policy.

For this reason, the #CohesionAlliance is requesting that one third of the budget should be maintained for cohesion policy. We can do better and more if we are given the same share of the budget. But it is impossible to do more with less.

Cohesion policy is a modern policy that is already addressing the new challenges facing Europe: migration, digitalisation, climate change and security.

It was thoroughly reformed in 2014, and no other European policy is so well-monitored and controlled. We can improve this policy further through simplification and differentiation, and even by enhancing the link between cohesion policy and the structural reforms, a link which already exists due to the requirement of ex-ante conditionalities.

This would, however, be conditional on continuing to observe strict respect for the competences of the EU and those of the regions. To preserve the European project, we have to work together at all levels. In Rome last year, the Member States pledged to "allow for the necessary room for manoeuvre at the various [governance] levels to strengthen Europe's innovation and growth potential".

Cohesion is an essential precondition for regions and cities to deliver the results of the European project on the ground, for the citizens.

Thank you for your attention.

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