

Elinkeinoministeri Katri Kulmuni**Alueiden komitean työvaliokunnan 192. kokous****Logomo Conference Centre, os. Köydenpunojankatu 14, 20100 Turku****13.9.2019, klo 9:00-13:00****Opening speech by Minister of Economic Affairs, Katri Kulmuni**

Honourable President (Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ), honourable Members of the Committee of the Regions, Ladies and Gentlemen

- It is a great pleasure for me to be here in Turku today. Thank you for inviting me to join you this morning to this meeting of the Bureau. Active partnership with the Committee of the Regions has always been highly valued by the Finnish Presidency.
- You are the voice of local and regional authorities and have been trusted with the responsibilities under the Treaty as the guardian of the interests of regions. In addition to this, I believe the local and regional authorities have an important role in stepping up the use of latest knowledge and experience on the ground. The complexity of today's challenges requires common solutions. They require joint efforts with all relevant actors at different levels of governance. No region should be left behind in this dialogue. The unity of European Union is more important than ever.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I will take this opportunity to present very briefly **the priorities of the Finland's Presidency** of the Council of the European Union. Bearing in mind the special tasks and mandate of this Committee, I try to put special emphasis on issues most relevant from the regional and local perspectives.

- For the 3rd term of the Finland's Presidency, we have set an ambitious objective that the European Union becomes **the most competitive and socially inclusive** climate neutral economy globally. Our objective is to strengthen the EU's position as **a global leader in climate action**.
- Strengthening **common values** - such as freedom and equality - is also a key priority for this Presidency. The European success story is anchored in democratic institutions, human rights and **the rule of law**. Upholding these values protects European citizens as well as our economy. In addition, we should also meet other challenges in protecting the **security of citizens comprehensively**.

Distinguished audience,

- Challenges related to unemployment, competitiveness, demographic change, accessibility and climate change are common to all Member States, regions and local communities.
- Encouraging the efforts of the regions in building their future is close to my heart, having witnessed the vital role **EU Cohesion policy** has played in supporting the development of my home constituency in the sparsely populated northernmost corner of the EU.
- By fostering regional and social fairness, union will create sustainable growth and wellbeing for its citizens. Here, Cohesion Policy can significantly stimulate sustainable and inclusive growth in all EU regions and **reduce disparities** between different regions.

- It is also important to strengthen **cross-border cooperation** on EU's internal and external borders. It is a common EU interest to promote sustainable economic development in the border regions. In addition, external border programmes contribute to secure and functioning EU borders.
- The EU should tap into the economic potential and employment opportunities offered by the **Arctic region** while protecting its fragile natural environment. It is in the interest of all Member States to strengthen the presence of the union in the region. Increased investments in the Arctic will bring added value through innovations in sustainable development and can help achieve climate-neutral union in line with the Paris Agreement.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Tackling climate change is a must – and it is also an economic opportunity. Research and innovation play an important role as key-drivers to turn those opportunities towards sustainable economic growth. Investments in **low-carbon energy** technologies and **bio and circular economy** solutions will have a central role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving Europe's competitiveness. The increased Climate goal -earmarking of 25 % for Cohesion policy is an important step in supporting this strategy.
- At the same time, the **transition** to a climate neutral society needs to be **fair** and just. Nevertheless, I believe we can manage this transition and create new industry & new work opportunities. I hope that in the future there isn't even a word for waste.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Fast technological development is changing our lives. Increasing resilience of our regions and local communities becomes ever more important. Here, **smart specialization** provides a solid strategic framework for the innovation-driven **economic transformation of European regions** – based on individual strengths and comparative advantages.
- Finland believes **a modern industrial policy** should include the objective of **Europe becoming a global leader in the digital economy**. Digitalisation, artificial intelligence, data and platform economy are key drivers for the EU's success in the global market. The fierce global competition should be addressed with **economically and socially sustainable measures**. The need for balanced development of European societies and of social equality must be taken seriously. Europe should be as unified and strong as possible to tackle the emerging global challenges.
- May I also add that these challenges cannot be met without an ambitious, open and multilateral rules based **Trade Policy**. Nor should we underestimate the value of forward-looking **Single market** policies. The focus should be on strengthening services, particularly digital services as an integral part of the EU single market.

Distinguished audience, let me say a few words on the EU Budget:

- **Finalising the next multiannual financial framework** is one of the most important political targets during Finland's Presidency. In autumn, we will seek to finalise the Council negotiations on it. In addition, we will seek the greatest possible progress in the MFF-related sectoral proposals. We are aiming at a balanced financial framework that delivers on both new priorities and traditional policies.
- As for **Cohesion Policy**, the Finnish Presidency stands ready to re-start inter-institutional negotiations with the European Parliament. We will prioritize issues most relevant for programming and **prompt start of the next generation programmes** in 2021.
- I have taken note of the concerns expressed by you as members of the Committee of Regions with regard to Commission proposals. Based on my discussions with colleagues of the European Parliament's REGI Committee in July, I am confident of their support in working **swiftly towards an acceptable compromise between the co-legislators**.

Dear Mr Chairman, Honourable Members of the Committee of the Regions - to conclude my remarks: economic growth is needed - and it must be environmentally and socially sustainable.

- I am committed to work constructively with all of our partner institutions to make **as much progress as possible** on the variety of crucial issues at stake this autumn. Together our joint efforts will translate union's political priorities into visible results and wellbeing of the citizens of Europe.

- I look forward to the work ahead full of hope and ambition. With the right choices we can live up to the expectations of the European citizens of all regions. Thank you.+++
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