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Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Senato della Repubblica for its Opinion on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund covered by the Common Strategic Framework and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, {COM(2011) 610_ 611_ 612_ 614_ 615 final}, forming the "cohesion package".

The Opinion of the Senato feeds into the work of the Commission, European Parliament and Council in preparing the next cohesion policy regulatory framework for the period 2014-2020.

The Commission is convinced that structural funds can and should be mobilised to address youth and female unemployment, as well as to increase support to small and medium-size enterprises. The gravity of the current crisis demands that we take full advantage of all available resources to stimulate the economy, in particular those innovative branches of the private sector which are likely to create sustainable jobs.

The achievement of the growth and jobs related objectives of cohesion policy depends on sound fiscal and economic policies carried out by Member States. Past experience suggests that in their absence, investments funded by cohesion policy do not have the expected impact. The achievement of cohesion policy objectives is closely linked to compliance with economic and budgetary obligations under the Stability and Growth Pact. This is why the Commission has proposed to further align cohesion policy with the EU's system of economic governance, making the policy more responsive to structural reform needs and emerging economic imbalances. Conditionality therefore form an integral part of the Commission's approach to the next multi-annual financial framework.

The Commission would also like to highlight that instruments such as the performance reserve and the principles of sound financial management are keystones of the future cohesion policy. The Commission believes that they could decisively contribute to ensuring successful delivery of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

*Mr. Renato SCHIFANI
President
Senato della Repubblica
Piazza Madama, 1
IT – 00186 ROMA*

The Commission agrees that partnership is an essential factor for the successful implementation of cohesion policy. This is why the Commission has tabled a draft Code of Conduct on Partnership, the aim of which is to enable the close involvement of all partners in the preparation, programming and implementation of the policy. The modalities for the involvement of partners would vary from one Member State to another. The Regulations have been drafted in a flexible manner, so as to leave sufficient room for manoeuvre to take national specificities into account.

Finally, the Commission considers that the proposal to set up a new transition objective is the best way of guaranteeing smooth phasing-out for regions leaving the Convergence Objective, while ensuring fair treatment for regions for which GDP per capita is below 90% of the EU average.

I hope these explanations serve to clarify the issues raised in your Opinion and I look forward to continuing the political dialogue with the Senato della Repubblica in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*