Dear Mrs Hübner

The future of the Cohesion Policy

I am writing on the occasion of the public consultation on the future of the Cohesion Policy.

Let me first say that Estonia has benefited from the Cohesion Policy significantly during the period since we joined the European Union. The contribution from the Funds has been an important part of the fast development of Estonia. The Cohesion Policy has a central role to play in Europe’s activities and we should make sure the positive effect is maximised. I believe we can make this very important policy work even better.

Estonia has now four years of experience from implementing the Structural and Cohesion Funds. While we observe the importance of investments from these funds into the Estonian economy, we also note that a bigger effect could be possible to achieve by further simplifying the implementation mechanisms and cutting back unnecessary bureaucracy. Having signed with you the Contract of Confidence for Estonia just a few days ago, I know you share my hopes to cut back administrative burden where possible without losing accountability and to concentrate more on maximising the impact of the Cohesion Policy.

While the position of the Estonia government on the future of the EU Cohesion Policy is being finalised, I would like to draw your attention to the main suggestions that we have:

- While planning the next phase of the Cohesion Policy, it is unavoidable to tackle the emerging challenges of globalisation, climate change, demographic change and energy security. We need to take these into account and joint efforts are needed, but the main focus of the Cohesion Policy should remain the reduction of disparities between regions.

- We also believe there is room within the Cohesion Policy to further concentrate the resources for maximum effect. The possibilities for concentration lay both in not spreading the resources too thinly, but also in assessing more critically the specific needs and previous performance of benefiting regions.

- We see room for further simplification of the implementation of the Cohesion Policy. We propose exploring together the possibility to leave more room for the best performing regions to
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use the funds by supporting their already existing regional development plans, instead of setting up parallel ones, relaying on the existing implementation mechanisms and rules in those regions while respecting the EU legislation. This option, naturally, has to be based on confidence and an excellent track record of the regions while ensuring that the financial interests of the European Union are secured.

- Last, but not least, we hope to see an increase in the Commission’s role in advising the regions and in distributing more widely the horizontal knowledge it has, especially in terms of achieving a greater impact of the expenditure from the funds. We believe that an augmented joint effort will lead to increasing even more the impact of the Cohesion Policy.

I am confident that these suggestions will contribute to a constructive discussion over the years to come to ensure the future of the Cohesion Policy is set on a strong foundation.

Yours sincerely

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Minister

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