Dear Commissioner,

I believe that the public consultation and discussion process is a very important tool to shape together the better and more performing Europe. The consultations on the future of the European Cohesion Policy launched by the Commission and Member States have focused the contents of the discussion into a more concrete direction and have underlined the fact that it is essential to discuss the goals and objectives of the policy first. I feel that it is very important that we formulate our common goals together on the level of the European Union as it will be our common responsibility to reach them.

The Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of Slovak Republic has organised a public consultation process on the future of the Cohesion Policy with our long-established partners within the well functioning expert group on regional policy, which is consulted in all issues related to the regional policy in Slovakia. In this respect, I must state that further time will be needed to enhance and deepen our common reflections.

Slovak Republic appreciates the Fourth report on Economic and Social Cohesion submitted by the Commission in May 2007. As the report correctly states, the positive effects of Cohesion Policy are not to be doubted. The implementation of Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund is already bringing about tangible effects in Slovakia and its regions in the economic, social but also institutional fields. Yet, it is essential to state that Cohesion Policy contributes in a very substantial way to the development and of the EU as a whole. As the European Union is an entity founded on the principles of solidarity, regional policy is the very backbone of the Union.

First of all, EU regional policy supports convergence within the EU, which is of crucial importance if we are to be globally competitive and strong in the near future. Second, regional policy contributes not only to limit the discrepancies in development in the EU, but also to enhance the EU’s overall competitive potential. Third, by providing the necessary financial leverage for large infrastructure projects such as trans-European networks, EU regional policy helps to improve the competitive advantages of all regions on a European and global scale. In this context, I believe it is important to further discuss the concept of public goods and its accessibility to EU citizens as the basic factor contributing to the overall growth and competitiveness. Last but not least, the indirect effect of EU funds is that the Cohesion Policy has encouraged institutional innovation and legislation reform, financial management and evaluation culture and economic development policies better adapted to local circumstances, which is to the benefit of the citizens.
The challenge in the future is to find a right balance between supporting growth and competitiveness and convergence and cohesion of the European Union. We believe that the integrated approach, as a coordinated action of all actors of regional development in a given Member State, to create and implement the long-term development strategies is the key to success. The strategies have to reflect the specificities of regions and Member States building upon their endogenous potential to ensure a sustainable growth.

While I am pleased to provide you with my preliminary ideas on the Cohesion Policy, I can also inform you that the official position of the Slovak Government on the future of the Cohesion Policy will be submitted to the Commission by April 15th in the context of the EU budget revision consultation process.

I wish to thank you, dear Commissioner, for the opportunity to express my preliminary opinion on the future of the European Cohesion Policy which you have provided by opening this consultative web page to every citizen and every government and non-government official as well as all interested parties and stakeholders in the European Union. Let me conclude by expressing the hope that together we shall be able to build even better and even more coherent Europe.

Yours faithfully,

Ms Danuta Hübner
Commissioner in charge of Regional Policy
European Commission
Brussels
Belgium

Cc:
Mr Maroš Šefčovič
Ambassador of the SR to the EU
Permanent Representation of SR to EU
Brussels
Belgium