

**Vice-President of the European Parliament Mairead Mc  
Guinness for President**

**Antonio Tajani**

*Prime Minister Muscat,*

*President Juncker,*

Promoting greater economic and social cohesion between our regions has been a task which the European Union has set itself ever since its inception.

As long ago as at the Messina Conference, in 1955, this topic was one of those discussed by the founding fathers. They recognised that the success of the fledgling Union hinged on greater cohesion between its territories and its regions.

As Robert Schuman said, *‘Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built*

*through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity'.*

Cohesion policy has been the most concrete manifestation of that European solidarity. It is the instrument we have used to bring about economic and social progress throughout Europe, from the capital cities to the most isolated villages, without leaving anyone in any of the almost 300 regions of the European Union behind.

Cohesion policy is the result of a broad partnership, involving national governments, regions and municipalities; in other words, those who know better than anyone what people need.

And cohesion is precisely what we need, today more than ever. We need instruments and policies which enable us to overcome the sense of disillusion with the Union which many of our citizens feel.

We need to bring the European institutions closer to the people once again and show the people that we are

listening to them. That is the first priority of the term of Antonio Tajani as President of the European Parliament.

The EU must reach out to its peoples and come up with practical answers to their concerns, starting with unemployment, security, illegal immigration and climate change.

On 25 March, in Rome, the leaders of the EU institutions and the Heads of State or Government of 27 countries signed a Solemn Declaration to revitalise political Europe.

At the European Parliament, the only elected EU institution, we have undertaken to ensure that the pledges made in that declaration are honoured.

May I remind you that in the third of its four points the declaration urges all of us to work to create a Europe which *'promotes economic and social progress as well as cohesion and convergence, while upholding the integrity of the internal market'*.

Taking our lead from the founding fathers, therefore, we have reaffirmed the importance of cohesion and with it the importance of solidarity, which, along with freedom and the dignity of the individual, form the basis for our society, for our European identity.

Cohesion policy has made a significant contribution to that sense of European identity, thanks to the many projects throughout Europe which bear the stamp of European endorsement in the form of the flag with 12 stars.

That policy has funded schools, roads and infrastructure, generated economic growth and social progress. It has helped young people and women, supported innovative projects, enhanced energy efficiency and boosted the green economy and firms large and small.

### ***Cohesion and the budget***

Brexit and the pressures on national budgets are giving rise to doubts on the future financing of cohesion policy.

In a resolution on building blocks for a post-2020 EU cohesion policy, adopted at its last part-session, Parliament made it very clear: We will not accept any weakening of cohesion policy.

The economic and social disparities between our regions are still too wide. Although the economies of all the Member States are growing once again after 10 years of stagnation, in many parts of Europe unemployment, in particular among young people, is still at unacceptable levels.

The differences in competitiveness between different parts of our Union are still marked. The convergence process seems to have slowed down, jeopardising the future of the single currency and of the Union itself.

Today we need more cohesion, not less.

We need to make cohesion policy ever more effective, easier to use, flexible and non-bureaucratic. We must tailor it to the requirements of our territories and gear it

more closely to the strategic investments needed to help safeguard the future of coming generations.

We can take more effective action to that end by using resources and making far-reaching changes, including to the European Union's budget.

To be credible, we have to equip ourselves with sufficient resources to generate added value which is greater than the sum of the benefits yielded by the Member States acting alone.

We need a system of own resources, as proposed by the European Parliament in line with the Monti report.

It is time for a paradigm shift: first we must set the political objectives, with a view to addressing the problems that exist. Only then we should allocate the resources required on that basis.

### ***Fresh challenges***

The crisis has left deep wounds, which we have not yet managed to heal fully. It has drawn attention to the

shortcomings in our monetary arrangements and in our markets for capital, goods and services.

Our citizens still believe in Europe, however. Recent election results and many opinion polls are pointing to a clear shift in public opinion on the European Union.

One reason for this can be found in the economic recovery Europe is experiencing, but it is not the only reason. Brexit, the crises inside and outside our borders and the fears engendered by globalisation are prompting more and more people to turn to seek protection in a united Europe.

We cannot ignore this yearning for protection. If we fail to come up with solutions to the problems of security, immigration, unemployment and climate change, the populists will rush in to fill the void left behind.

We cannot go on leaving people traffickers to manage migration. We must guarantee the right of asylum, which is among our founding values. But at the same time we must act firmly to combat illegal immigration.

We must tighten up external border controls, which will mean providing the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency with the resources it needs to do its job. And we must build a strong partnership with Africa which focuses not only on the challenges we face, but also on the major opportunities that exist on that continent.

Now that attacks have become an almost daily occurrence, terrorism is more than ever the main concern of ordinary Europeans. If we are to safeguard our great area of freedom, we need to strengthen security inside and outside that area.

Our security depends on our ability to cooperate, to trust one another, to share databases, information, technologies and best practices; to coordinate the work of European intelligence agencies and their counterparts in third countries. Strengthening Europol must be a priority.

We must also develop a genuine response capacity and a European defence fund. This is also the prerequisite

for the development of a European defence industry and market, with open procurement, economies of scale, interoperability and common standards.

Climate change is a terrifying reality which is disrupting the lives of millions of people affected by drought and other extreme weather events. In addition to generating massive costs, including in human lives, this phenomenon is increasingly one of the causes of migration.

In the coming years, energy efficiency, renewables, the circular economy and smart grids will be key factors in generating new investment and jobs.

This is another reason why one weapon in the fight against climate change must be a technological alliance between firms in the EU and around the world. Research and industrial innovation offer the best means of limiting the impact of environmental disasters.

## ***Conclusions***

Citizens want a Europe that is present in their regions. For this, we need an EU cohesion policy that is adequately financed to support growth and be able to react to new challenges. Cohesion is the best way to bring people closer to Europe and regain their trust.

We need a Europe that creates jobs, in particular for young people. To this end, we need to (i) complete the work of establishing the single market in services, the digital single market, the single capital market and the single energy market; (ii) implement a coherent industrial policy; (iii) promote access to international markets on equal terms.

The European Union has been a success when it has managed to realise this dream of freedom, prosperity, peace and human rights inside and outside its borders.

Nearly 70 years ago, our founding fathers set out together to offer greater protection to the peoples of Europe and brighter prospects to future generations.

That course was also based on solidarity and cohesion among the peoples of Europe and convergence between their economies, job opportunities and social standards.

We must continue on the same course.