It is a real pressure to be together with you at this Annual Meeting. I am thrilled to see so many Interreg enthusiasts gathered here today. And actually when you think about it: Interreg is one of these rare brands that is linked to EU programmes and which is known also to a broader public. Well, of course Erasmus comes to your mind. Unfortunately we have not had a movie yet like L'Auberge Espagnole, but maybe it will come to give us another push for this fantastic brand Interreg which is actually quite well established: next year Interreg will celebrate its 25th anniversary.

**Interreg** started rather modestly as a community initiative. Now we have it as one of the two goals of EU cohesion policy. We have our own Regulation. So Interreg has become something like a premium brand, also a brand with a lot of financial clout- 10 billion Euro for the new period 2014-2020. That is a very substantial amount of money. And what is more, the amount for Interreg, unlike the rest of the cohesion budget, has not been affected by the general downward trend. This is very unusual but it shows the political importance of Interreg when the whole cohesion budget has to go down because of budget rigor. The only part that remains stable is the budget for Interreg. Of course you could say 'well it's only 3 % of the overall envelope', but it is a bit like 'small is beautiful'. It is I think the most European part of our policy because it is about cooperation beyond borders and that is the essence of the European Union: working together beyond borders which brings in many many areas a benefit to everybody. When you look into more detail you can see a lot of activities going on.

Just taking the Cross-Border Cooperation part of Interreg, which is of course the biggest part (now come a lot of sixes): we have over 60 internal borders in the 2007-2013 period, over 6 billion Euro for that, and these are over 6000 projects. Very impressive figures, and they concern as much as 1/3 of the EU population in total. Indeed these are very impressive figures but of course they are slightly abstract. So I am very happy that after my talk there will be 4 projects show-cased where you can see very concretely what it actually means, where we will have beneficiaries, where we will see concretely what this notion of European value added actually means.

But also the Trans-national and the Interregional strands have become more and more important. And this is also because the European Union has become bigger and bigger. As you know we have expanded enormously over the last years. It is actually this year that we celebrate the 10th anniversary of what you could call the Eastern enlargement. And now, with a European Union that is bigger and bigger, it is also more and more diverse and heterogeneous. There are many problems, very concrete problems, for which the region or the Member State is too small but for which the Union is too big. And it is actually in this in-between where the transnational programmes and the interregional programmes find their place and show how useful they are.

And then of course in this context we have -and I think that is the major innovation in the European territorial cooperation- we have the **Macro-Regional Strategies**. 2009 the Baltic Sea region strategy; 2011 the Danube region strategy. And I am sure in the history books of European regional policy the macro-regional strategies will figure very prominently in the entry for the 2007-2013 period and also for the mandate of our Commissioner Johannes Hahn, who has championed these macro-regional strategies with so much commitment and so much skill. And what is also very interesting when you think about these macro-regional strategies: they get very high political profile; they are very politically attractive. There are not many concrete initiatives in the area of EU regional policy that make it up to the European Council. But the macro-regional strategies are very high on the agenda of
the European Council including up to 2015. This year we will have the Adriatic-Ionian Strategy and next year we will have the Alpine Strategy.

So you see there is a lot of activity, of programming going on, that we can be very proud of. We have a great brand, but as with every brand you have to look after it, you have to take care that it develops, you have to make sure that the trust in the brand -and that is the most important asset of a brand- is confirmed and re-gained time and again. That means concretely for us that the most important thing is that we demonstrate time and again the real results of the Interreg programmes: value for money and value for the citizens. That is why actually very practically we asked you, in the Annual Implementation Report that you are about to finalize for the end of June, that you add one page, a very simple page, with clear and precise answers, convincing answers, to three questions.

The first one is: what are the main achievements of my programme?
The second question is: who has benefited from my programme?
And the third one is: what evidence do I have for these achievements?

So facts and figures, indicators, references to evaluations, etc. This Annual Implementation Report for 2013 and then also the next one for 2014 will not be mere bureaucratic exercises, they will be very important because they will be an input for the ex post evaluation and then they will also feed in into the discussion of the next period 2020+, that is to say very important exercises on the substance but also on communication.

But now at this juncture we are very much at the start of the new programming period. Just a very short status report: by the end of April we got all the Partnership Agreements drafts in -well most of them or many of them at the last minute but they are there. And we also got already quite a substantial amount of operational programmes in. So it is going all right, always considering that we had only the legislation adopted late December last year. Some programmes for Interreg are also already coming in, I think the first one I noted here Germany-Netherlands arrived on the 3rd of April. This time around in the Commission we will pay a lot of attention to the link between the mainstreaming programmes and the cross-border dimension because mainstream programmes have to take into account also the cross-border and the transnational dimension.

It is not only the start of a new programming period, it is also the start of a reform of EU Regional policy. A rather fundamental reform, so no way, there is no business as usual. And that applies also for Interreg. Any brand has to be developed: the brand has to adjust to changes in society, to economic changes, demographic changes, technological changes and what have you. It is time now also for Interreg to change, but that does not mean that the reform of the mainstream is transposed one to one to Interreg. No, because you know for instance that one of the big ingredients of the reform are the conditionalities. But the conditionalities, be they macro-economic or be they the ex-ante conditionalities, apply to Member States, so they are not relevant in the ETC context. But there are other key elements of the reform that are very pertinent also for the ETC or the Interreg programmes: strategy, result-orientation and concentration. So every programme has to be based on a strategy. It has to be clear from the programme where one wants to be in 7 or 10 years. What is the difference that the programme makes for the next 7 or 10 years? And this should not be only words. This should be very concrete. Also defining objectives, defining indicators, so that one can really see whether one is achieving the objectives initially set. That is a challenge but it is important and each programme has to have a performance framework this time around. Programmes have to be more than collections of projects. The projects have to follow the strategy that is in the programme. That is probably relatively easy, for instance, for those transnational programmes that relate to the macro-regional strategies because now as you know the maps are the same and the macro-regional strategies provide a kind of umbrella that can also inspire the strategy for the
programme. And the last point on the reform that is relevant also for the Interreg programmes is concentration. We have to have critical mass. All the evaluations show that if you just spread the means thinly, if you have what the French call 'saupoudrage', you will do a lot but you will not have the maximum, the optimal tangible impact. It is slightly easier for the Interreg programmes because in the mainstream we tell you what the four thematic objectives to concentrate on are. Here in the Interreg programmes you have the choice but you still have to concentrate.

So much on substance for the future, but to come back to this idea of the brand, as with a normal brand of course the most important thing is the product, and I have been talking about the product, which for us is the programme, but it is also very important that the product is well known and that it is trusted. So communication is key. Just to mention two things: the one is the logo and the other one is the video contest. On the logo, we very much encourage the use of a joint logo that is supported by Interact. I think that is a very important initiative so that everybody who wants uses the logo, then of course combined with the name of the programme. That would really strengthen the brand and it would give a lot of visibility to the individual programmes. As I said this is voluntary but of course the more participate, the better it is.

We will also launch a video contest. It is a kind of a joint communication exercise. It is not about producing a movie, it is clips, less than 3 minutes. As I understand there will be two selections: one public voting and one section through an expert jury and the award ceremony will take place during the European Cooperation Days mid-September in Milano. You will get more details both on the logo and on the video contest later.

We are working very successfully and very dynamically together for this great brand: Interreg. Let’s continue to work together and try to make sure that this brand gets even more muscles when it is approaching the 25th anniversary. And we can do two things in that direction: this first one is -and that is the most important one- make sure that the programmes that you are setting up now, and that will shape the future 7 to 10 years of your regions, are of the highest possible quality and the keywords are clear: strategy, result-orientation and concentration. And second that we together step up our communication activities and there the keywords are: communicating on results, common logo and the video contest.

Thanks a lot for your commitment, thanks a lot for your attention. I wish you a very successful meeting, and also enjoy. Thank you very much.