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COHESION AND REFORMS

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Dear Minister,

I am pleased to share with you a printed version of the 9th Cohesion Report, which the Commission adopted and published on 27 March 2024.

As required by the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, the 9th Cohesion Report presents a comprehensive overview of Europe's economic, social, and territorial cohesion across regions and territories¹. This Report demonstrates the remarkable convergence achieved in the past 20 years, notably for Member States having joined the EU since 2004. The average GDP per capita of these 13 Member States increased from 52% of the EU average in 2004 to nearly 80% in 2023, while their unemployment rate dropped from 13% to 4% over the same period. This impressive improvement was enabled, among other factors, by the direct support to investments from Cohesion Policy.

Moreover, the Report highlights that the support received over the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 periods is expected to increase EU GDP by around 1% by 2030. Overall, in the long term, each euro invested through Cohesion Policy is expected to generate 3 euros of additional GDP. This demonstrates that Cohesion Policy delivers balanced economic growth that benefits the whole Union, while fostering a level playing field in the Single Market.

The Report underlines the capacity of Cohesion Policy to mobilise resources swiftly, in conjunction with other EU initiatives and instruments, as shown in the context of recent crises, contributing to alleviating their social and economic impacts and to the rebound of the EU economy.

¹ All the information on the 9th Cohesion Report can be found here:
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/cohesion-report_en

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The Report also shows that the overall process of national convergence is sometimes overshadowed by sub-national disparities, notably between metropolitan areas and other regions, including those that stagnate or decline – caught in a ‘development trap’.

More broadly, the Report analyses the impact of the profound transformations taking place in our continent, including the green transition, climate change, globalisation, innovation and technological transformation, demographic decline and changes in the geopolitical landscape. Certainly, some of these changes bring opportunities, but they may also contribute to widening disparities in the absence of adequate policies. Therefore, tailor-made and place-based policy responses are crucial to address each region’s specific needs. However, Cohesion Policy alone cannot address all the cohesion and development challenges ahead. This is a common responsibility and there is a need to ensure that horizontal and national policies also concur to cohesion objectives.

The Commission Communication accompanying the Report identifies some directions for further strengthening and modernising Cohesion Policy. This builds on the many contributions from Member States, regions and stakeholders, including from your country, as well as from the independent report of the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy and the 9th Cohesion Forum.

As the mandate of this Commission comes towards the end, I count on your continuous commitment to economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe with a strong Cohesion Policy at its heart. Cohesion Policy objectives will be even more relevant in a context of widening and deepening of the Union. I trust you will make your voice heard.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elisa Ferreira', with a stylized, flowing script.

Elisa Ferreira