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Dear readers,

I am pleased to contribute to this issue of the European Structural and Investment Funds Journal, which is a valuable platform for information exchange between the various stakeholders in this field.

Forty years after the creation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Regional Policy has become the European Union’s main investment policy: a smart, strategic investment policy and a pillar of the Investment Plan. My job is now to make sure that this policy has the expected and much-needed results in terms of growth and jobs, and that is what I am determined to do.

When I came into office in November 2014, my first priority was to ensure the success of the discussions on the new programmes which largely determine European public investments for the next seven years. With hard work and dedication we managed to adopt the vast majority of programmes before the summer and I am confident that by the end of the year, we will have adopted all remaining ones. I am proud of all the programmes adopted, because they are sound, consistent and forward-looking. They focus on key measures to bring back trust and growth in Europe’s cities and regions - connecting people, skills and jobs.

Yet, for our policy to have the most tangible impact on the ground, we need to ensure that the public administrations in Member States and regions are functioning smoothly. This is a key priority of my mandate and I have already taken concrete actions to help Member States fully exploit the potential of the five European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds), by setting up a Task Force for Better Implementation, as well as the PEER 2 PEER platform for the exchange of best practices.

Furthermore, in response to the pressing need for simplification in the management of our Funds, I also set up a High Level Group whose mandate is to assess the uptake by Member States of the simplification possibilities offered by the regulatory framework for 2014-2020, and to seek further concrete ways of reducing the administrative burden for beneficiaries. I hope we will not have to hear again that an SME is no longer interested in receiving our support because it finds it too lengthy, bureaucratic and cumbersome.

The urban dimension also became a very visible part of our policy. For the first time in the history of our regulations, a minimum of 5% of the ERDF resources allocated at national level shall be dedicated to integrated actions for sustainable urban development. Several countries have largely exceeded this level, resulting in a total of around 15 billion euros from the ERDF that will be directly allocated to such integrated strategies. In addition, cities have been given a clear role in implementation, as they will be fully responsible for the selection of projects.

The 2015 edition of the Open Days will be a great opportunity for EU’s Cities and Regions to showcase their capacity to create growth and jobs, implement European Union cohesion policy, and prove the importance of the local and regional level for good European governance.
This year’s event will take place from 12 to 15 October 2015 in Brussels and looks set to be the biggest yet. It will be held under the slogan ‘Europe’s regions and cities: partners for investment and growth’, and will be structured around three thematic priorities:

1. ‘Modernising Europe’: the regions in the Energy Union and the Digital Single Market
2. ‘Regions open for business’: SME development, innovation and job creation
3. ‘Places and spaces’: Urban and rural development; urban-rural integration

It is now the time for the national and regional authorities to start working on identifying and selecting high-quality projects, in order to let the Funds flow to the ground as soon as possible. We should not forget that this Policy will be judged on its ability to deliver growth and to create jobs, in particular in the many regions where it constitutes the primary, if not the only source of public investment.

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