

Speaking points for Mr. Pasca-Raymondo

Launch of CORINE Land Cover 2000

17th November 10:00 to 13:00
Charlemagne Building
Rue de la Loi, 170

Topic title: The quest for territorial indicators to serve the next phase of cohesion policy

- ***Introductory greeting***

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure for me to participate in this launch event of CORINE 2000. The launch comes towards the end of a year of other important landmark events – enlargement, the signing of the new European Constitutional Treaty and the Commission's own endeavours in launching the next generation of legislation governing the Structural Funds, backbone of our Cohesion Policy. This new streamlined system, better aligned with the objectives of Lisbon and Gothenburg will, as you know, be applied from 2007, but preparatory work with the Parliament, the Council, the Member States and the regions themselves will already provide us with a full agenda during the forthcoming 2 years.

Just a few words therefore to offer you an outline of how my DG has been involved in the stages that have lead up to the launch of the new CORINE Land Cover database, what our interests are in using land cover and territorial data.

- *New challenges - Territorial Cohesion*

Social and economic cohesion, from the point of view of fundamental, on-going regional analysis, has been well served in the past by the smooth functioning of the European Statistical System. Close collaboration with Eurostat, over many years, has ensured that the classical indicators of regional performance provide ample and reliable raw material for the analysis and debate which must underpin the policy process.

This process, blending the regionalised information researched and synthesised in the Cohesion Report with feedback on the experiences of the regions themselves, culminates regularly, every 3 years in a major Forum (held in Brussels, last May), bringing together 1,500 regional and national actors from 28 countries. The debate and conclusions encapsulated in this event provide an important driver for shaping the evolution of Regional Policy, regarding its future scope, its priorities and its delivery mechanisms. Naturally, during 2004, this process has

been dominated by the challenges of enlargement, with virtually the entirety of the territory of the new Member States entering into priority status for Structural Fund programming.

Via sound information flows, Regional Policy is in a better position to anticipate and prepare for important events such as enlargement or any other emerging trends. Indeed, stepping back a few years, Regional Policy was already engaged in contemplating the prospects for a range of wider territorial development issues, from the changing roles and functions of urban areas and their rural hinterlands, to attempting to assess the spatial impacts of a broad range of sectoral issues such as the impacts of the Common Agricultural Policy or the Trans-European transport Networks. In this framework, in its actions to arrive at a prospective outline of spatial development trends in Europe, the Directorate General for Regional Policy recognised the vision and potential usefulness of the work being done by the CORINE Land Cover team and joined the long road to getting this huge programme implemented and delivered.

From the *Europe2000* programme where we first used some CORINE Land Cover maps, to the most recent initiative in developing a more rigorous and scientific approach to information-gathering – *ESPON*, (or the Interreg Community

Initiative setting up a European Spatial Planning Observatory Network) – the environmental perspective, sustainable development and territorial imbalances, these have gradually emerged as issues which, to one extent or another, would need to be addressed through a more “enlightened” Regional Policy response at the start of the 21st century. As European integration gathers pace the Member States and the regions recognise that a range of common, territory-wide issues emanating from social, demographic, economic and technological change require closer, more cooperative approaches if they are to be efficiently managed.

Moreover, the Third Cohesion Report concerns not only economic and social cohesion (as well as regional competitiveness), but that it also introduces the concept of territorial cohesion. A central aim of the European Union, as set out in Article 2 of the Treaty, is to achieve balanced and sustainable development, through the strengthening of economic and social cohesion. This implies development that takes full account of the geographical diversity of the regions which make up the European Union.

Territorial disparities manifest themselves at all scales of analysis, from the continental, centre-periphery perspective as I mentioned a few moments ago, to the inter and intra-regional

scale, between urban areas and their less-developed hinterlands, to the local scale, within and between city districts, as exemplified in the work of the Urban Audit. In the absence of adequate policy responses, it is conceivable that the diversity of these territories may lead to growing disparities, often cumulative, in their physical and human capital endowment. Ultimately this might result in significant divergences in terms of relative wealth, demographic balance and general quality of life. Furthermore, particular geographical features such as remoteness, relief, insularity, as well as population sparsity, themselves represent constraints which may contribute to specific handicaps.

- *Operational realities and territorial specificities*

In this sense, the Commission's proposals for the new European Regional Development Fund pay particular attention to territorial specificities (like peripherality, mountains, islands and the outermost regions). The regulation will allow, during the planning phase of programmes, to modulate the menu of actions to take account of the particular situation of urban areas and rural areas, areas dependent on the fisheries industry, areas with natural handicaps as well as addressing the particular problems of the outermost regions.

Also territorial co-operation will assume a considerably enhanced position under the new ERDF. Here too, the management and integration of cross-border planning information will come to the fore, where networks for local development projects will have to be established. I can see the CORINE data playing its part here, maybe alongside some INSPIRE-induced possibilities.

- *Information, a fundamental pre-requisite for policy work*

As the European Union continues with its preparations to put in place, from 2007, this new round of regional development programmes with Structural Funds investments approaching some €50 billion per year, we have to ask ourselves to what extent will we be able to meet the challenges to be posed by new competences in the territorial ambit. What strategies do we have which will enable the DG to gather and assimilate fundamental information on territorial issues? Will these structures be sufficient to enable the DG to lead the debate on issues such as the polycentric urban development model, or regarding inter-regional accessibility, or on mitigating the impacts of flooding and fires in the context of global climatic change? Themes such as these, themes representing spatially

complex phenomena, do not fit well into the traditional domain of regional statistics.

Take the ESPON programme: We are currently digesting the final reports from the first round of 15 research themes, covering among others the polycentricity theme, urban-rural relationships, demographic trends, natural hazards and natural heritage, as well as a set of “policy impact studies”, by sector. The results are providing a very rich insight into the most important development trends shaping this re-united continent.

ESPON addresses from the outset many of the difficulties which are inevitably to be encountered when dealing with spatial data. Data not simply describing the physical environment but data and information which describe man’s activities in that environment. The research teams involved in this undertaking have met the challenges of dealing with material, not just harmonised data from Eurostat, but data from hundreds of sources across 30 European countries. They have succeeded in presenting their findings in a comprehensible fashion and their efforts are appreciated. Their experience highlights once again the importance of the INSPIRE initiative presented to you earlier this morning by my colleague from the Joint Research Centre.

As we have heard, the CORINE Land Cover database is a unique resource, a detailed and exhaustive inventory of the biophysical components making up the territorial surface of the EU. The updated information, with all its possibilities for quantifying and informing on land cover change, will constitute a data source of even greater significance. Even if it was conceived for use in the environmental domain, the data are nevertheless of major relevance for spatial planning and regional studies and, potentially, should make a real contribution in Regional or Cohesion Policy. CLC2000 is set to provide a valuable insight into territorial development patterns, indicating where, how, why, when and to what extent human activities are shaping Europe. Is development following the nodes of the high-speed transport networks and airports? What is happening away from these hot-spots – is there a polarization phenomenon which might be quantified? What are the prospects for coastal areas still subject to *bétonisation systématique*, or other pressures? What will we see from the perspective of the debate on polycentrism? How are land cover changes impacting on or mitigating the effects of climate change related flooding events and other natural hazards?

As has been amply demonstrated in the work of ESPON, at the Environment Agency and its Topic Centres, and in the work of the JRC, meaningful information, capable of serving the policy

process, depends on the intelligent integration of complementary data sources, statistical, spatial, remotely-sensed imagery also. In Regional Policy, I am convinced that the CORINE Land Cover datasets and derived information systems will provide a fundamental building block to meet some of the knowledge challenges we will be faced with. I am convinced that, in the 5th Cohesion Report – whatever its title by then, will be enriched with analysis based on CORINE Land Cover data.

- *Concluding remarks*

The framework for the development of indicators to monitor territorial development, or to report on disparities in territorial development and the EU's policy response to them, is only likely to become clear once the new Treaty has been ratified by all Member States. The new programming period, 2007 to 2013, by then will already have taken form. It is likely to be only at that seemingly far-off stage that we will start to have a concrete idea of what information we will need as a basis for dealing with our new responsibilities. However, the time to prepare for these unclear needs, is already upon us. Important decisions are now being made which can even build on the CORINE experience and provide additional scope, depth and timeliness to that which we already enjoy with CORINE.

We have heard about GMES also this morning, and the new possibilities for territorial information which this joint initiative wishes to promote. At a time when Regional Policy is mainstreaming the urban dimension of its development activities, it may be opportune to assess to what extent CORINE's environmental "holes", that is, the important urban and metropolitan parts of the landscape necessarily over-generalised by CORINE, might be filled via these new systems.

With these "promises" in the pipeline, I believe that an important foundation can be built which will further contribute to our goal of reaching the Lisbon and Gothenburg objectives through a ever-strengthening knowledge-based approach to policy conception in regional issues.

Thank you.