

**'Intermediary Europe at the Heart of the Europe 2020 Strategy:
Bringing Europe Closer to Citizens'**

Speech by

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Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Check Against Delivery

Dear Minister
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to begin my presentation by warmly thanking the European Parliament for hosting us at their premises today. In fact, I feel very much at 'home', surrounded by representatives of three Economic and Social Councils, that of Luxembourg, of the Greater Region and of the EESC. For once, we are in the majority! On a more serious note, I am very pleased that we have received such a positive response from so many key actors who are supporting this event: the Luxembourg Presidency, the European Institutions, Regional and National ESCs, at a time when the high number of events taking place in Luxembourg makes organising a conference in this city rather a competitive exercise! But here we are, for the first external meeting of our Group after the renewal of the Committee. What could possibly be more fitting than to meet in Luxembourg, a country which has been a founding member not only of the EU, but also of the OECD, UN, NATO and Benelux. Indeed, Luxembourg has been at the centre of European politics for hundreds of years. Some of you may not be aware, but in the 14th and 15th centuries, not one, but three members of the House of Luxembourg reigned as Holy Roman Emperors. Today of course, the European panorama is very different, we strive for partnership rather than military domination. But Luxembourg is still at the centre, proud, prosperous and patriotic, with a cultural and rejuvenated capital city that quite frankly, makes us in Brussels feel rather jealous!

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to also remind you of where we are seated this morning, for there is both a historical and a symbolic significance. We are in the *Robert Schuman* meeting room of the European Parliament. Robert Schuman was of course the first President of what was then known as the *European Parliamentary Assembly*. Perhaps one of his least known quotations is the following: "*The European spirit signifies being conscious of belonging to a cultural family and to have a willingness to serve that community in the spirit of total mutuality*". I think you will agree with me that today, the EU is somewhat lacking in this spirit of 'community' and 'mutuality'. Unfortunately, we have to admit that as a result of the multiple crises over the last few years, Europe is now undergoing something of an 'existential crisis'. We don't have cohesion, but we do have mistrust. We don't concentrate on what unites us, but on what divides us. I think that we even question whether we belong to the same cultural family today. Certainly, fear is paralysing the political spectrum and it is precisely in this charged and confused environment that civil society must remain focussed and engaged. We must also help to build 'Trust'. For let us not forget that all human relations and relations between individuals and Institutions are based on trust. 'Trust' belongs to the realm of feelings and citizens will put their trust in systems of governance that they consider to be competent, honest and reliable. This brings me precisely to why we have chosen to dedicate this conference to the topic of macro-regional cooperation. For in our view, this is a pivotal instrument to both realise the objectives of the EU2020 Strategy and to bring citizens closer to Europe.

I have to admit that when we started this project, I had only vaguely heard of the Grande Région. But the more I have read about it, the more I have come to see it as a mini Single Market, a mini Schengen – only that here, it works! Six regions spread between four countries have engaged in an ambitious long-term project, which involves creating a multitude of networks that tightly knit together the

regions. Crucially, these networks matter to the *everyday lives of the citizens* of the six regions. For as we will hear from our speakers this morning, some 200,000 individuals cross these regional borders for employment purposes on a daily basis. There are labour, industrial, trade, environmental, educational, research, training, cultural, sporting and touristic networks. There is an inter-regional parliament and an inter-regional Economic and Social Council. There is even a bi-annual Summit of the Greater Region, currently presided by Wallonia and which in 2015 celebrates its 20-year anniversary. In short, this is *intermediary Europe*: a complementary model of governance involving economic, social and civil partners, successfully cooperating at the macro-regional level. This is a type of governance which to date has not been sufficiently engaged in European policy-making. Whereas by its very essence, macro-regional cooperation represents the values of partnership, proportionality and subsidiarity subscribed within the European Treaties. Moreover, as will be demonstrated by our speakers, it is precisely this 'intermediary Europe' which has a pivotal role to play in promoting the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Hence, the titles of our three panels, for a *smart, sustainable* and *inclusive* Europe.

I would like to end my presentation with a few words of thanks. Tomorrow the Luxembourg Presidency and Mr Schmidt in person, will open a very important conference on the subject of social enterprises, in which our members will be both speakers and participants. This conference is a continuation of a number of large-scale events on the social economy and social enterprises over the last 18 months to which our Group and the EESC at large have contributed significantly. So on behalf of the EESC, I would like to thank the Luxembourg Presidency and Mr Schmidt in particular, for his strong commitment to this key area of sustainable growth and social cohesion in Europe. As you will see on the programme for today's event, we will examine social economy cross-border cooperation which has contributed to inclusive growth. We still have a long way to go to raise the visibility and to ensure the effective functioning of this sector, but I remain hopeful that we will succeed in the end.

Ladies and gentlemen, in 2007 Luxembourg and the Greater Region were nominated collectively as 'European Capitals of Culture'. Your cooperation is the embodiment of the values of the EU and of the Europe 2020 Strategy: exchanging ideas, crossing borders physically, economically, psychologically, artistically and culturally. Let us learn from your example!

Thank you for your attention.