



Regional Summit in cooperation with the Region of Lower Austria and the #CohesionAlliance

EU-Cohesion Policy: Strengthening Innovation in Europe's Regions

Hosted by Lambert van Nistelrooij MEP

Wednesday, 28 November 2018 | 11:00 – 13:00

PHS P5B001, European Parliament, Brussels

Description

Cohesion Policy provides financial assistance to the member state regions, with the aim of increasing economic growth and improving social cohesion. While a lot has been achieved by Cohesion Policy, the regions need this support to be continued post 2020 if the EU and all its regions are to thrive in the current highly competitive global environment.

Innovation is the key element to boost growth and jobs in Europe, tailor-made strategies should enable each region to identify and develop its own competitive advantages. Therefore, based on the previous initiative "regions4cohesion" and the "CohesionAlliance", the importance of innovation in the context of Cohesion Policy has to be underlined.

The Regional Summit as "Joint Summit of the regions and the CohesionAlliance" demonstrates that for regions and cities the prolongation of EU-Cohesion Policy for all regions is indispensable for the Future of Europe and the discussions in the context of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027.

The Regional Summit will concentrate on the focus of EU-Cohesion Policy post 2020 considering the current circumstances and key challenges (for example, digitisation, Industry 4.0, climate change, globalisation, demographic change).



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There will be two panels concerning the following topics: 1) “Development of regional ecosystems for innovations” and 2) “Innovation through cooperation”.

Different approaches and strategies, depending on the needs and challenges of the regions and best practice examples should show the wide range in the field of innovation. Taking into account the regional experiences in the last periods, their planned strategies for the new period as well as their remarks on the present Commission proposals on Cohesion Policy post 2020 (new possibilities or missing points) will be discussed.

Speakers

Host:

Lambert van Nistelrooij, *Member, European Parliament*

Moderator:

Tim Cupal, *Brussels correspondent, Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF*

Speakers:

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, *President, European Committee of the Regions*

Johanna Mikl-Leitner, *Governor, Lower Austria*

Martin Eichinger, *Minister for Housing, Labour and International Relations, Lower Austria*

Oliver Paasch, *Minister-President, German-speaking Community of Belgium & President of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)*

Goran Pauk, *President, Croatian County Association*

Martin Netolicky, *President, Pardubice Region*

Esa Halme, *Region Mayor, the Council of Tampere Region*

Mark Weinmeister, *State Secretary of European Affairs, Land of Hesse*

Seamus Coyle, *Chairman, Irish Northern and Western Regional Assembly*

Melania de Nichilo Rizzoli, *Minister for Education, Training and Employment, Lombardy Region*

Michiel Rijsberman, *Regional Minister, Province of Flevoland*

Juraj Droba, *President, Bratislava Region*

Erik Bergqvist, *Chair of the Executive Committee, Region Västerbotten*



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Event programme

Welcome: 11h00 – 11h05

Lambert van Nistelrooij, *MEP*

Keynote: 11h05 – 11h15

Johanna Mikl-Leitner, *Governor, Lower Austria*

Impulse: 11h15 – 11h25

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, *President of the European Committee of the Regions*

Moderation: **Tim Cupal**, Brussels correspondent, Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF

Regional Contributions : 11h30 – 12h50

Panel 1 - Development of regional ecosystems for innovations:

Goran Pauk, President of the Croatian County Association

Mark Weinmeister, State Secretary of European Affairs, Land of Hesse

Michiel Rijsberman, Regional Minister for the Province of Flevoland

Juraj Droba, President of the Bratislava Region

Erik Bergkvist, Chair of the Executive Committee, Region Västerbotten

followed by a debate

Panel 2 - Innovation through Cooperation:

Oliver Paasch, Minister President of the German Speaking Community, Belgium & President of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)

Martin Netolicky, President of Pardubice Region

Esa Halme, Region Mayor of Tampere Region

Seamus Coyle, Chairman of the Irish Northern and Western Regional Assembly

Melania de Nichilo Rizzoli, Minister for Education, Training and Employment, Lombardy Region

followed by a debate



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Concluding Remarks: 12h50 – 13h00

Martin Eichtinger, *Minister for Housing, Labour and International Relations, Lower Austria*

Corina Cretu, *European Commissioner for Regional Policy (tbc)*

Family Picture (with Commissioner Cretu – tbc): 13h00

Followed by a lunch reception: Location: PHS A 00 Bar Press (PHS building, level 0)

Following the Regional Summit, you are cordially invited to a lunch reception in the Press Bar upon invitation of Johanna Mikl-Leitner, Governor of Lower Austria.

Host and Speakers

Lambert van Nistelrooij, *Member, European Parliament*



Lambert van Nistelrooij is Member of the European Parliament since 2004. He has been focusing on regional policy, research, innovation, energy and the Digital Agenda.

Lambert was member of the local community council and member of the 'Provinciale en Gedeputeerde Staten' in the Dutch region of Noord-Brabant from 1991-2004. Currently, he is a Member of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, and the Committee on Regional Development. He is also actively involved with Active and Healthy Aging.

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, *President, European Committee of the Regions*



Karl-Heinz Lambertz was elected as President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) in July 2017 after serving a two and a half year term as First Vice-President. He is also a member of the Belgian Senate representing the German-Speaking Community.

Born on 4 June 1952 in Schoppen, Karl-Heinz's interest in politics came early in his career having served as President of the German-speaking Youth Council (1975-1980). After a number of functions linked to his academic background in law, he became Member of Parliament of the German-speaking Community in 1981.

Between 1990 and 1999 he held numerous Ministerial posts in the German-speaking Community Government before being elected its Minister-President (1999-2014). He was then President of Parliament until 2016 before taking post as Senator.



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Karl-Heinz has been a CoR member since 2001 and was President of the CoR's PES Group (2011-2015). Since 2000, he has been a Member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in which he is currently Vice-President.

He is married to his wife Sylvie, has two children and four grand-children.

Speech Abstract: Industry 4.0, climate change and zero emission production, demographic challenges, connecting value chains at the European level, bio economy and its impact on agriculture... All of these challenges need a strong response from the EU. A big part of this response is cohesion policy which is the main investment policy of the EU to develop smart specialization strategies, reinforce synergies between all EU policies and foster interregional cooperation in the field of innovation and industry. The proposal for a new instrument to promote interregional cooperation in the field of innovation and industry is a particularly welcome proposal and should be confirmed in the future negotiations.

Johanna Mikl-Leitner, *Governor, Lower Austria*



Johanna Mikl-Leitner studied Business Education at the University of Economics and Business in Vienna and worked as a business consultant. From 1990 to 1993 she was a trainee at the Federation of Austrian Industries before becoming the deputy publishing director at “Signum Verlag” from 1993 to 1995. In 1995 Johanna Mikl-Leitner became the head of marketing and in 1998 the executive director of the Lower Austrian’s People’s Party. In 1999 she became a Member of the Austrian Parliament. From 2003 until 2011 she served as the Minister for European Regional Policy, Social-, Labour- and Family affairs of the Government of Lower Austria. From 2011 until 2016 she took up the role as Federal Minister of Interior of Austria before returning to regional politics where she served as deputy Governor of the Government of Lower Austria in 2016. Since 2017 she is the Governor of Lower Austria.

Speech Abstract: The European Commission presented its draft proposal for the EU budget 2021-2027 in May 2018. The Commission proposes cuts to EU-Cohesion policy, stresses however the central role of Cohesion policy as most relevant investment strategy of the EU for the creation of jobs, sustainable growth and innovation in the various regions of Europe.

In 2016 Lower Austria has started the European-wide initiative “regions4cohesion” and has joined the CoR’s CohesionAlliance in order to guarantee the continuation of Cohesion policy for all regions. This joint Summit today wants to send another clear and common signal for the future of Cohesion policy.

EU-Cohesion policy contributes significantly to addressing key challenges for the future, whereby the promotion of innovation plays a vital role.



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This summit is therefore dedicated to exchange and discussion; to the experiences that regions have gained in this context during the previous periods; which strategies they pursued and which measures seem to be expedient regarding the new future framework.

The emphasis should therefore be on the role of Cohesion policy and its contribution to the development and implementation of innovative approaches, in each case adjusted to the individual situation of each region.

Martin Eichtinger, *Minister for Housing, Labour and International Relations, Lower Austria*



Martin Eichtinger received his J.D. from the University of Graz in 1983 and went on to acquire a Diploma in International Affairs from Johns Hopkins University's Bologna Center. He joined the Austrian Foreign Service in 1986 and served as personal secretary to the Foreign Minister. His diplomatic assignments included Mexico and Washington, D.C., where he headed the Austrian Press and Information Service from 1992-1999. Between 1999 and 2007, he was Chief of Cabinet of the Austrian Special Representative for Payments to Former Forced and Slave Laborers of the Nazi Regime, Director for International Affairs at the Austrian Federation of Industry, manager in a private company, Chief of Staff and later Secretary General of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Economics and Labor. From 2007 to 2010, he served as Austrian Ambassador to Romania and the Republic of Moldova. From July 2010 to January 2015, he was Director General for Cultural Policy at the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs. From 2015 until 2018 Martin Eichtinger served as Austrian Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Since January 2018, he is a Member of the Government of Lower Austria, responsible for Housing, Labour and International Relations.

Speech Abstract: The European Commission's proposals have set the framework for the future orientation of EU-Cohesion Policy.

Promotion of innovation plays a key role, especially as a policy objective which focuses on innovative and smart economic change. However, innovation is also the guiding theme for all policy objectives.

This also includes the area of cross-border cooperation, which supports in particular the territorial aspects of Cohesion policy. Cooperation in its various forms, in the regions, based on integrated regional strategies, but also across borders, transnational and interregional.

The various interesting concepts of the regions show the different approaches of the individual regions concerning innovation and their specific needs. A uniting element of all the different approaches is, however, their significant contribution to the innovative regional development and to the objectives of Cohesion policy.

This requires, however, an adequate budget, which does not endanger the further development and continuity of the policy area. This should be the common aim for all stakeholders regarding the upcoming negotiations.

Oliver Paasch, *Minister President of the German Speaking Community, Belgium & President of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)*



Oliver Paasch was born in Malmedy on 21.10.1971 and is a Belgian politician of the German-speaking ProDG party (free citizen list). Between 2004 and 2014, he held several ministerial posts in the Government of the German-speaking Community. Since June 2014 is he the incumbent Minister-President of the German-speaking Community of Belgium. Before his political carrier, he studied Law at the University of Namur and Louvain-la-Neuve and worked as a bank manager at Crédit Général in Liege and as Manager of the Business Centre of CBC bank in Verviers

Speech Abstract: In too many ways EU institutions focus on the Member states leaving the regions out of account. One of the most obvious examples is undoubtedly the orientation of strategies and funds on the basis of the European semester which ignores the regions realities in many cases.

We recognize that the CoR opinions on the multiannual financial framework and common initiatives like the Cohesion Alliance Campaign initiated by Lower Austria can have an impact when it comes to the visibility of regions and defending their interests. We need such a commitment to be heard at the European level – that is to say on the member states level as well.

Nevertheless, the financial weight of cohesion policy as proposed by the commission does not reflect its importance which has repeatedly been declared by regional, national and European policy makers. This counts all the more for cross-border cooperation. Developing instruments and fostering cross border cooperation along all European borders is worth more than 8.4 billion Euro for a period of seven years. More than a third of the European population lives in border regions where administrative and legal obstacles, the combination of different languages and culture still hinders cooperation across the borders – and therewith a core of european integration.

Still, there is some progress in the commission's proposals. Simplification in administration and monitoring procedures, the possibility of connecting different programmes to create synergie and the more comprehensive design of the new ESF+ step in the right direction.



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Goran Pauk, *President, Croatian County Association*



Goran Pauk, born in 1962, studied economics at the University of Split. He started his professional career in the private companies and after that, he worked in police administration, first as a chief of police administration and later as Police official for economic crime. Since September 2006 he is county prefect of Šibenik-Knin county and in October 2017 was elected for the president of the Croatian Association of Counties for the second mandate.

Also, Mr Pauk is head of Croatian delegation in The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. He was honoured with the medal of the Croatian president Dr Franjo Tuđman with the Order of Nikola Šubic Zrinski for heroism in war.

Speech Abstract: The speech of Mr Pauk will provide participants with an overall overview of the legal and financial framework for innovation encouragement in Croatia, its regions and counties.

It will tackle the topics related to smart specialisation, research and development strategies as well as European structural and investment funds and operational programs in Croatia. More specifically, it will analyse the success of measures and actions defined in operational programs addressed to stakeholders who are dealing with innovation development and management on the field.

Third part of the speech will elaborate on the case of innovation encouragement in Šibenik-Knin County where various regional stakeholders and actions will be presented, assessed and compared to other similar cases in Europe.

Last part of the speech will tackle advantages and disadvantages of the actual innovation state of affairs in Croatia and Šibenik-Knin County and the lessons learned. Finally, it will provide participants with suggestions for improvement of the innovation encouragement in EU regions in the following EU financial perspective (2021-2027).

Martin Netolicky, *President of Pardubice Region*



Martin Netolicky, born in 1982 is Czech Social-Democratic politician and President of the Pardubice Region since 2012. He had studied law and entered his active political career in 2000 as a member of Czech Social Democratic Party. Lately, he was elected a member of municipal assembly of his native town Ceska Trebova. As a president of the region he hold also a various other functions within the Association of the Region of the Czech Republic.

Speech Abstract: Cooperation should be major component in the innovation – transnational, interregional and intersectoral too. We may point out various examples of good practices from all



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above-mentioned aspects, but on the other hand, we should be aware also of the risks that arise from the steps taken to the new directions. Moreover, we should bear in mind limits related to the support of the innovations. Contribution of the Cohesion Policy plays crucial role in pushing forward the Europeans Research and Innovations and this should be maintained in the 2020+ period, but let's debate about the conditions and forms for it in future, so that we get the most from the least invested in this area.

Esa Halme, *Region Mayor of Tampere Region*



Mr Esa Halme is the region mayor of the Council of Tampere Region since 2010. He is an architect specialised in landscape architecture by education. Prior to starting at the Regional Council of Tampere Region he worked as an executive director at the Regional Council of Päijät-Häme. He has worked at engineering and architecture companies, Regional Planning Authority of Provincial Vaasa and Technical Research Centre of Finland (VTT).

Mr Halme has either chaired or been a member of numerous regional development and planning related committees and working groups on European, national and regional level. In addition he has published papers on European structural funds and urban planning.

Speech Abstract: Innovation and cooperation are in the Tampere Region DNA. In his introductory remarks, Region Mayor Halme will go through the Tampere Region's approach to building and supporting a sustainable innovation ecosystem. Mr Halme will also highlight the key role of interregional cooperation, an example of which is the Vanguard Initiative, which Tampere Region has been a proud member of since 2013. Finally, Mr Halme will touch upon the need of support and funding, welcoming in particular the European Commission's bold new tool to support interregional innovation and value chains (component 5).

Mark Weinmeister, *State Secretary of European Affairs, Land of Hesse*



State Secretary Mark Weinmeister studied various subjects. He studied German, History, Pedagogy, and Politics at the University of Göttingen. He then spent time in various positions until he became a Member of the Hessian Parliament from 1999 to 2008.

He then worked as State Secretary in the Hessian Ministry for the Environment, Energy, Agriculture and Consumer Protection until he became State Secretary for European Affairs to the Minister of Federal and European Affairs and Commissioner of Land Hesse to the Federation in January 2014.



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Speech Abstract: The topic of Innovation is significant for Hessen also in the context of regional funding such as the necessity for improving resource efficiency and the reduction of CO₂-emissions. For instance since the beginning of 2018 there is the possibility in Hessen to combine funding from the PIUS (production-integrated environmental protection)-investment programme, funded by the ERDF, that supports SMEs, which contribute to a significant improvement of the CO₂-footprint by way of processes and organisation.

The support of these promising companies should however not result in fully excluding companies in traditional sectors that do not have highly innovative profiles. These traditional SMEs contribute to a significant degree to the economic performance of a region and are therefore essential for the future.

Seamus Coyle, Chairman, Irish Northern and Western Regional Assembly



Councilor Seamus Coyle is an elected Member of Monaghan County Council and a regional representative sitting on the Northern and Western Regional Assembly.

For 2018 Seamus was elected as Cathaoirleach (Chairperson) for the region overseeing the introduction of the first Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies in Ireland and providing the oversight on our BMW Regional Operational Programme. His area of focus for 2018 is the continued delivery of EU structural funds 'to the regions; and by the regions in Ireland'. As an elected member representing border communities Brexit plays a considerable role in the Chairpersons strategic priorities. Seamus is also a full-time farmer.

Speech Abstract: Structural Funds and particularly ERDF has had a transformational impact in Ireland, over three programming periods, and particularly in our most peripheral region – Northern and Western Region. As a Chairperson for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (BMW Regional Operational Programme) I am witness to the impact of Cohesion Policy across our urban and rural communities; in our education and innovation systems and across the Arts and Cultural spheres. My speech wants to put life into Cohesion Policy, telling the story and make the impact of Cohesion Funds felt across Europe. As a region, and managing authority engaged in cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation I look forward to sharing our story. The region is also about to publish its first Regional and Spatial Economic Strategies aligned with evolving EU Priorities (post 2020). Most importantly our region continues to have competitiveness moving from a category of 'developed' region back to 'region in transition'.



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Michiel Rijsberman, *Regional Minister, Province of Flevoland*



Regional Minister for the Province of Flevoland, responsible for European affairs

Cohesion policy related functions as Regional Minister:

- IPO spokesperson on cohesion policy on behalf of the Dutch Provinces in Brussels (IPO is a member of CEMR)
- Committee of the Regions (CoR) member of the COTER group
 - CoR rapporteur for the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund
 - CoR rapporteur for the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union
- Assembly of European Regions (AER) chair of the taskforce on cohesion policy
- Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) member of the cohesion policy core group
- Responsible for regional economy on behalf of the Randstad Region (a partnership between the provinces of Utrecht, North-Holland, South-Holland and Flevoland). N.B. Randstad Region is a member of the Vanguard Initiative.

Speech Abstract:

- In our regional ecosystem (Flevoland is part of the Western Netherlands OP) focus on innovation, competitiveness and transition to a low-carbon economy.

Two examples of projects:

- Several projects for *innovation in the energy transition* (Powerparking Flevoland / Smart solar charging Utrecht)
- Several projects for boosting innovation through facilitating great ideas from SMEs and startups (POC funding in Zuid-Holland/Flevoland / Noorderpark in North-Holland)

Our RIS3 has proved to add value (even though NL only receives 25€ per person from ERDF) and we welcome the continuation of smart specialization in the EC-proposals.

Two suggestions for improvement:

- The Dutch provinces (together with MIN EZK and Dutch cities) would support a broader focus of RIS3 where innovation dovetails with a growth strategy based on the available workforce and stronger links with other investments in education, infrastructure, SMEs and environment in the region. This 2.0 RIS3 could help us make innovation available for everyone: from a local startup in a barn in rural Flevoland to a high tech campus near the University of Delft.
- More possibilities for a strong international cooperation with other regional ecosystems across Europe could further strengthened our future OP for 2021-2027. Give regional ecosystems the opportunity to connect, share and inspire each other.



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Juraj Droba, *President of the Bratislava Region*



Juraj Droba is a Slovak politician, entrepreneur and businessman, who was elected as a President of Bratislava Region in 2017. He was a Member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic from 2010 to 2017, serving as a Vice-chairman of the Mandate and Immunity Committee as well as a Member of the Permanent Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Prior to his political career, Juraj was a Director of External Affairs and a Member of Executive Management Board in T-Mobile Slovakia. Juraj graduated as a Master of Political Management from the George Washington University in Washington D. C. and holds an MBA from the University of Pittsburgh. His passions are languages and sport, which he studied at Comenius University in Bratislava and Rijksuniversiteit in Gent. Juraj lives in Bratislava with his son.

Speech Abstract: During the recent years, Bratislava Region has been ranked as one of the top ten most developed European regions according to Eurostat statistics based on measuring GDP/per capita (PPP). With a very limited financial resources, Bratislava Region has to face several challenges of a metropolitan region related to the quality of environment, social exclusion, transport or suburbanization. More important, Bratislava Region pursues its goals to achieve sustainable smart development in order to provide its residents with innovative and accessible services. In terms of mobility, Bratislava Region has implemented an integrated public transport system, which is presently expanding beyond the regional borders. As regards the environment, Bratislava Region is the first Slovak region, which has developed an adaptation strategy to climate change and established a climate fund. Bratislava Region was a pioneering Slovak region with the first regional smart specialization strategy, which identified the most promising research areas with a huge innovation potential. Given that the metropolitan regions are important engines of economic growth and centres of research and development, the future Cohesion Policy should pay special attention to their needs and address them with tailor-made solutions.

Erik Bergkvist, *Chair of the Executive Committee, Region Västerbotten*



Dr. Erik Bergkvist, Chair of the Executive Committee, Region Västerbotten. PhD in Economics, Umeå University 2001. Member of the Social Democratic Party since 1981. Priority policy areas are regional development, child and youth policy, international relations and welfare financing. Member of the Social Democrats party board. Vice-chairman of the Norrland Trust Fund (Norrlandsfonden), vice-chairman of Almi Nord, as well as member of the Västerbotten County Council.

Dr. Erik Bergkvist has been very active in the European policy debate. Among other issues, he has emphasized the need for a stronger cohesion policy in Europe to tackle social, economic and environmental challenges. As well as championing the position of regions in policy-making, building partnerships and promoting solidarity within Europe and between regions, especially in the European



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part of the Arctic. He is member of the Executive Committee of the Baltic Sea Commission and member of the CPMR (Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions) political bureau.

Speech Abstract: The European Regional Development Fund contributes to innovation capacity in Sweden, one example being the investment in the automotive winter testing site in northern Sweden. But also the coming together of different actors for planning and implementation of the different funds spurs innovation. Thanks to cohesion policy and smart specialization, Swedish regions can increase competitiveness and employment within their strong areas. By supporting more innovation, enterprises and clusters, improving communications, boosting the use of digital technology and developing international business cooperation, Övre Norrland for example is contributing to continued development and attractiveness in its own region and the rest of Europe.

It is important that cohesion policy builds capacity for all regions to participate in European cooperation so that all regions can contribute to European competitiveness. A cohesion policy project can have greater power and influence by attracting investment from other funds or by building capacity for participation in the EU's sector programmes such as Horizon 2020, COSME and CEF.

Melania de Nichilo Rizzoli, *Minister for Education, Training and Employment, Lombardy Region*



Melania De Nichilo Rizzoli is Regional Minister for Education, Training and Employment of Lombardy.

She was born on May 31st, 1956 in Rome. She is a surgeon.

As a Member of the Italian Parliament (Chamber) from 2008 to 2013, she was involved in the Social Affairs Committee as well as in the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee on mistakes in the health field and on the causes of regional health deficits.

She is author of several informative texts on health and social matters.

In the current Regional Legislature, on March 29th, 2018, President Attilio Fontana appointed her as Regional Minister for Education, Training and Employment.

In the Lombardy Region Government, she is in charge of these subjects: education, training, work, employment and corporate crises, training tools for job placement.

Speech Abstract: Reaffirmation of the Lombardy Region's commitment to a 360-degree innovation approach in the post-2020 investment strategies, **placing the citizen in the social dimension at the centre of its active policies.**

Valorisation of the regional best practices in terms of personalized tools to involve unemployed people in the labour market in an active way. These practices, such as “Dote Unica Lavoro”, have already been rewarded by the European Commission.



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Valorisation of the **partnership principle** both at regional level (through a deep stakeholder involvement) and in Europe, through the continuous dialogue with European Institutions as well as the work with partner Regions.

In this context, **mention of the Presidency of the network of the “4 Motors of Europe”** for the next year, the fruitful work with Lower Austria and the other regions of the **“Regions4Cohesion” initiative** and of the very important **Conference we are organizing in Milan in June next year**, with European Social Network.

In this Conference more than 600 public and private stakeholders in the field of Social Services from across the World will come together to our Region and they will have the opportunity to showcase their best practices to social service directors, ministers, academics, users, and social innovators through a variety of formats.