

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to speak on behalf of the EIB – the EU Bank - at this important summit.

You represent and defend Europe's regions and their role in addressing the investment gap. Your role is absolutely critical in this respect – after all, 60% of investment is implemented at the sub-national level.

We will not turn the corner until and unless investment gets back to pre-crisis levels; all of you know that investment in the EU has dropped, on average, by some 15 percent, and the comeback is still slow.

Investors still lack confidence in the economic climate. At the same time, in many parts of the EU, there is **low capacity to prepare viable projects, both from the technical and financial point of view**. This is an absolutely critical point, and the reason why the EIB and European Commission have launched the so-called Advisory Hub for clients.

Since 1958, the EIB has had a special role when it comes to providing investment in the EU and its regions.

The regional aspect is very strongly present to this day – it is one of our key business objectives.

Signatures contributing to economic and social cohesion reached nearly 30% of the 78 billion euro lent last year.

There are three principal ways we support regional policy:

- with loans to individual projects
- with framework loans to pre-finance the national contribution to the grant money – 31 of these so-called Structural Programme Loans have been signed so far in the current MFF, for almost 15 billion euro
- and, finally, with advisory, both financial and technical

Summing this up in one sentence, you could call our strategy “lending, blending and advising.”

Some more concrete examples of our support to regional policy:

1/ The Danube region, which is significant for Slovakia and the neighbouring countries. We invest billions of euros every year in projects with both national AND cross border significance. And by the way, we support other regional strategies too.

2/ Our increasing activity in the agri sector, both in the older and newer Member States. Some countries are really big on agriculture business, which is important for territorial cohesion.

3/ Regional and municipal loans for urban rehabilitation. Every week, the Management Committee of the EIB approves one or more such loans across Europe. The cities and regions are too numerous to mention, we support literally HUNDREDS of them.

4/ Education and culture: let me mention recent projects:

- one in Poland, where we have financed research by the Academy of Science;
- one in Hungary, 48 million for an upgrade of the educational infrastructure signed just last month;
- in Finland, where some 30% of our financing last year was for education
- and in the UK, where we have provided over 2 billion GBP since 2010 for investment at 30 universities including Oxford, Edinburgh, Belfast and others.

5/ another important way of supporting regions is by cooperating with National Promotional Institutions across the EU.

6/ and by Investing in the EU Neighborhood – Moldova, Ukraine and other countries - which enables cross-border strategy with EU members.

Because time is limited, I would like to highlight only three critical areas with a regional angle where EIB can provide significant assistance:

1/ Smart specialization

The EIB supports the policies of the future. We support technological as well as practice-based innovation, and offer R&D finance to companies across the EU. We are open to working with initiatives such as the Vanguard Regions – in April I had a meeting with President Markkula to discuss precisely this approach.

2/ Urban agenda

You had a very successful meeting in Amsterdam a month ago. The EIB is fully committed to the EU's urban agenda. In fact, IFIs such as our bank are among the most important financiers of urban development globally.

3/ and finally, The European Fund for Strategic Investments, also known as the “Juncker Plan” – the single biggest challenge the EIB has ever taken upon itself.

Among the more than 100 billion euro catalysed by EFSI projects so far, there is a number with a regional angle, and my colleague Willi Molterer will speak about that in detail in a later panel.

Let me just mention that we are open to working with regional and local authorities on EFSI – as indeed we have already done in cities from Lisbon to Poznan and all the way to Helsinki. My message is this: please do not hesitate and do get in touch with the EIB for your financing needs – we, after all, are your bank.

Thank you for your attention.