

Vice-President Šefčovič at the “Energy Union in motion – Cohesion Policy supporting Coal Regions in Transition” event

Speech by Vice-President Šefčovič, in charge of Energy Union, at the “Energy Union in motion- Cohesion Policy supporting Coal Regions in Transition” event, in Brussels.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this event on the coal regions in transition !

I am thrilled we could organise this session, as part of the *European Week of Regions and Cities*

Climate action starts with our regions.

Regions are THE actors, the drivers, the testbed, in some cases also the pioneers and the engines, of the clean energy transition.

They experience first-handedly not only the benefits but also the **social and industrial challenges** linked to the **low carbon transition**.

Our ultimate objective is: to make sure **no region, no sector, no worker is left behind**. To push a “fair” transition.

This is fundamentally why we have launched the Coal Regions in Transition Initiative – **a structural support action for coal** (and carbon intensive) **regions** – to help drive their transition and **mitigate the social impacts of the clean energy transformation**.

The stakes are high. Because it’s about people’s **health** as well as their **jobs** – we are talking more than 240.00 direct jobs involved in 41 regions.

As Mayors recently put it to me in Silesia, it is about ensuring that our **young people** stay in, or even come back to, their own communities.

It is about offering them not only **good job prospects** but also a **healthy and thriving environment** to live in, and grow, together with their families.

Let me briefly present what it is we are doing:

We are now working with regions **in 7 pilot EU countries** – in Poland, Greece, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and we are starting with Germany and Spain.

We are **mobilising many of our EU programmes and funding instruments** for this **great cause**.

Our structural funds of course – and Corina will tell you more about the reprogramming of operational programmes, but also LIFE, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, and the EU Emissions Trading Scheme.

They are all currently being used to support projects to improve air quality, or the ecological restoration of mining sites and degraded land, modernization of energy system and energy efficiency projects, industrial parks, workers up and re-skilling, social centres for the youth and the elderly. I could continue.

Beyond funding, coal and carbon intensive regions often lack capacity to design transition reforms and build project proposals. This is why the Commission Structural Reform Support Service and JASPERS deliver technical assistance to help move from strategic planning to project implementation and results. This is why our Joint Research Centre also helps in assessing the industrial strengths of each regions, with smart specialization strategies at hand.

To sum up, through these operational country teams, we offer **regions tailor-made support** to guide structural transformation.

This means that we are helping regions on three fronts:

- To prepare or refine their **long-term transition strategies**, based on their competitive edge
- To develop and deploy a **pipeline of flagship projects** to kick-start the transition
- To optimise their use and **implementation of existing – and future – EU funds**.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today is about these regions. About their ownership of and leadership in the low carbon transition.

I am very happy that we can have high-level representatives from Poland, Germany, Romania, Czech Republic and Slovakia in our panel.

They are each at **different stages of development**, and follow **different growth models**. Some regions have decided to phase out coal altogether, going for robust economic and ecological diversification (e.g. geothermal, hydroenergy in former coal mines, innovation centres, agro-tourism). Others want to invest primarily in advanced coal technologies and ecoinnovation. But all need to retain jobs and growth in communities heavily impacted by declining competitiveness of sectors pertaining to the last, fossil fuel-based, industrial revolution.

We also want to support regions' cross-fertilization and exchange of best practices. To that end, we have launched the **European Coal Regions in Transition Platform**, which third meeting should take place on 5-6 November.

Finally, this is a stepping-stone to the global level:

First, we are starting to work closely with international investors. We recently launched a partnership **with Michael Bloomberg** and Bloomberg Philantropies, to put coal regions on the investment map of business leaders.

Second we want to showcase EU global leadership and team up with our international partners on this important challenge. To this end, we will **bring this initiative to the COP24 at Katowice**. We want to position the EU as an international hub of expertise for the regional transition. And I am convinced that here again, **it is multilateral cooperation**, that will make the difference. Because no actor can do this alone.

But for now, let me turn to Corina and our distinguished representatives from the regions.