

Building the Directorate General for Urban Affairs in European Union.

A proposal for the European Commission.

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1. - Place of the cities as major development resource
2. - The urban dimension of European policies
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5. - Main goals for the Urban Affairs General Directorate

The present documents get together reflection elements that allow sustaining the irreversibility of the process that leads to the creation of a Directorate General for Urban Affairs

The irreversibility of this process results of the assumed necessity to implement the cooperation between Member-States in respect to the urban and territorial development policy. It is time, with vision, to assume the urgency to create, as well, in this area an European joint policy and which are the necessary structures for its definition and implementation within the EU framework. O Directorate General for Urban Affairs deverá articular-se em particular com o Comité Económico e Social e com o Comité das Regiões

The present text is based essentially on political documents on urban and territorial affairs elaborated in the extent of the EU and in the general guideline documents produced by the EU, which favor social, economic and territorial integration.

In the last years it is possible to identify changes of attitudes in national, regional and local policies, which tend for the adoption of common ideas such as: partnership, integration, foresight, town planning quality, qualification and innovation in the professional profiles, sustainability and governance. Moreover, the urban subjects are widely integrated and accepted in European policies as is reflected in the Declarations of Lisbon and of Gothenburg.

The vast bibliography and guideline documents produced in the EU, from the Green Paper on the Urban Environment, testify the place and the importance of the urban affairs in the territorial and social structuring of the whole Europe.

In fact, the objectives of European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) have been summarized “as the intention to use a spatial framework for coordinating a broad number of policies concerning the continent, all of which have an impact on the condition and use of the European territory. In this sense, the ESDP breaks new ground, as its approach is trans-sector and integrating, but also proactive. This should be contrasted to the traditional physical planning approach - still prevalent in many parts of Europe - which tends to be reactive and regulatory, and looks at the spatial dimension mainly on physical and technical terms. It is, therefore, an initiative to be commended and strongly supported by all those concerned about a better future for the European Union and its people.”

To understand the European territory as a whole is undoubtedly an evolution of the policies based on regions, for a growing global understanding of the European territory, in which towns objectively gather the most resources for the development of the European society. But it is important to understand the challenges the cities are facing and if they are well understood in its relation with the rural areas, also understood in its morphological, social and economic complexity.

This is to give the EU and in particular the European Commission an instrument which enables to articulate and promote globally an European policy for territorial cohesion which assume the key challenges of territorial cohesion, at the same time that increases the sum of the policies and responsibilities of each member states.

This will also give the European Commission a more sustainable dialogue with the European Parliament, to the extent that it will be provided with more and better knowledge about the challenges of territorial cohesion policy, being able to contribute to the development of guidelines and overall policy priorities

1. -Place of the cities as major development resource for the territorial cohesion

The cities are more and more the place of the great challenges of Europe. "Towns and cities in Europe present a paradox – be aware that half the population live in urban areas with more than 50,000 inhabitants. On the one hand, they are the motors of growth in an increasingly global economy, concentrating wealth, knowledge and technical capacity. They are also centers for the provision of public services, such as education, healthcare and transportation. At the same time, however, many of the worst problems society faces today are concentrated in urban areas, including economic and social exclusion, degradation of the natural and built environment, congestion, crime, intolerance and racism, and loss of local identity".

The Ministerial Meeting Urban Policy 'Cities Empower Europe' Rotterdam 30 Nov 2004 recognized also that "In achieving the goals of the Lisbon and the Gothenburg agendas, ministers acknowledge that linking economic competitiveness to social inclusion and environmental quality is a crucial challenge on the urban policy agenda in all European countries. Ministers acknowledge that policies need to focus both upon economic opportunities in cities as well as the social needs of cities in order to achieve success in urban development. Therefore Ministers promote strongly the role of cities in local, regional, national and European policies in achieving sustainable urban growth".

2. - The urban dimension of European policies

It is verified however that the urban dimension is in the aim of many European sectorial policies and it wins sense just in the context of those policies. The European dimension of the urban affairs in the development of Europe has not been recognized as sufficiently relevant matter, to base the definition for European urban politic.

This fact it is verified in the Declaration of Vienna: "Although, when talking about urban policy in the EU, reference is usually made to Regional Policy, there are quite a number of other European policies that are having a significant impact on cities and urban development throughout the EU. These include policies in relation to the Environment, Employment and Social Affairs, and Transport.

Despite the recognition over the past decade of the need for a more integrated approach towards urban issues at European level, the situation up until now is still very fragmented, with a limited number of small-scale and short-term initiatives".

We know that the European Union urban policy has been laid down in several documents, particularly in Commission Communications "Towards an Urban Agenda in the European Union" (1997) and "Urban Sustainable Development in the EU: a Framework for Action" (1998). These documents mainly focus on four policy aims: strengthening economic prosperity and employment in towns and cities; promoting

equality, social inclusion and regeneration in urban areas; protecting and improving the urban environment: towards local and global sustainability; contributing to good urban governance and local empowerment.

But in the meantime, the Urban affairs are still distributed or, better said, spread among the different EU Institutions: European Commission, Directorates, Advisory bodies such as the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions with their own commissions (Territorial Cohesion Policy, Sustainable Development, Culture and Education, Economic and Social Policy) and in many of the European Agencies.

The issue of programs focused on spatial development, environment and support to scientific research has its origin in the most different activity sectors in the EU and are supported by funds from most different places.

3.- For an Urban strategy with an European dimension

However the complexity of the urban subjects by itself and his integration in the widest vision of the European development, indicates that it is necessary to reformulate the place that these subjects should occupy in the European institutions.

This concern has been expressed in numerous occasions indicating that it is necessary to work the European dimension of the urban affairs in the definition of common policies for a better national governments' articulation. These factors are referred in several documents of the largest relevance. In the declaration of Vienna of Eurocities is undoubtedly declared: "From the cities' perspective, a more integrated approach is needed towards urban areas at the level of the European Union, taking the urban dimension into consideration during the conception, development and implementation of all policies, programmes and legislation with a direct or indirect impact on cities and their citizens. This would require, within the European Commission, a systematic coordination between the different Directorates-General (DGs) dealing with relevant issues, in order to ensure that policies and actions are complementing and reinforcing each other.

Also in the final document of Ministerial Meeting Urban Policy 'Cities Empower Europe' Rotterdam 30 Nov 2004: "Ministers acknowledge the need to make a next step in the collaboration between member states. Ministers agree to develop further the Lille priorities with the aim to improve urban policies and in this respect to improve the coordination between local, regional, national and European levels of government. Ministers recognize that urban challenges vary considerably between the 25 EU member states. In implementing the Lille Priorities new policy issues must be addressed. These are in particular the challenges of improving physical infrastructure and the urban environment, the need for affordable housing, problems of social exclusion developing in large housing estates in many of the member states, and addressing the specific challenges faced by young people and ethnic minority communities in cities. Ministers stress the need to exchange knowledge and practical experience of urban policies between cities, regions, member states and European institutions. Such knowledge will help to develop policies that encourage economic growth, social inclusion and environmental quality".

At the Conclusions of the French Presidency of the European Union at the end of the informal meeting of Ministers responsible for urban affairs at the Conference "Europe, spatial and urban development" Lille, 2 November 2000: "- Intensify the co-operation between the Member States at all levels in order to confront the urban policy implemented in every country, then to form and specify a common doctrine

on the large orientations of urban policy that they expect to conduct as well on an EU scale, all to the extend to which they are concerned in their own framework of responsibility.

- Encourage the initiatives taken by the Commission in the urban field so that a true urban policy, reflected and structured, substitute the simple addition of EU measures destined to different urban areas, even though EU competences on urban policy are not questioned at that stage. The urban dimension will need to be included as one of the main priorities in the future reform of regional and structural policy in the European Union regarding the enlargement and the following programming period of Structural Funds starting from 2007”.

Thus, for prudent reasons, it is obviously important to create a co-ordination body in the EU structures where the Ariadne’s thread of the European Urban affairs policy could be located.

It is difficult to understand why the urban affairs are not centralized in a general directorate like the Fisheries, Environment, Agriculture, Energy and Transportation.

And we believe that the challenges of Urban Affairs have at least the same strategic dimensions, for the future of Europe.

The creation of a General Directorate for the urban affairs means naturally the definition of clear objectives to establish a profitable articulation with the other instances of the EU

4. - Guiding principles of the General Directorate for Urban Affairs

4.1 - Principle of the Transparency

Establish a face for European urban affairs, to avoid fragmentation of responsibilities through hundreds of cabinets and services.

4.2. - Principle of assumption

Assume the urban realities without dependence of eventual attention rendered on the part of other instances that naturally analyze each subject to the light of there own strategy.

4.3 - Principle of the co-responsibility

"Promotion of the territorial dialogue” just as it was proposed by Roman Prodi, President of the European Commission and Peter Straub, President of the Committee of the Regions.

4.5 - Principle of the Integration

The urban subjects occupy a place of primordial importance in the European development and they represent an own logic, but at the same time, they are fruit and they condition all of the challenges and objectives of the EU.

4.6 - Principle of the contract

The urban affairs should be based on dialogue and clear contract between public and private entities

4.7 - Principle of equity

The richness produced by urban transformations should be shared with equity and democracy, based on participation processes, among public and private actors and among citizens involved and interested on them.

5. – Main goals of the General Directorate for Urban Affairs

- 5.1. - Promote a global and integrated approach in urban policy orientated to sustainable development of all space of EU, based on territorial, social and economic domains
- 5.2. - Promote research for better acknowledgement of the role, problems and perspectives of towns and cities in spatial planning for the European territorial sustainable development.
- 5.3. - Promote a common language, tools and legislation for urban and territorial affairs
- 5.4.- Promote an innovative urban action through programmes properly articulated to each other and these with the territory as a whole
- 5.5. - Promote the qualification of human resources through the definition and search of new professional profiles in dialogue particularly with the universities.
- 5.6. - To provide the different instances of the EU with the necessary and strategic elements for the decisions with impact in the urban affairs.
- 5.7. - To assure the access of all Europeans citizens to the improvements resulting from the urban qualification on the European space.
- 5.8. - To share with all countries of the world, the knowledge on the urban subjects, seeking to develop partnerships particularly with the developing countries.
- 5.9. – Promote cultural heritage, territorial landscape and social cohesion as the fundamentals of local regional and European development.

Mentioned documents:

The European Spatial Development Perspective - Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the EU (E.S.D.P.) Comments and recommendations from the European Consultative Forum on the Environment and Sustainable Development 1999

Conclusions of the French Presidency of the European Union at the end of the informal meeting of Ministers responsible for urban affairs at the Conference “Europe, spatial and urban development” Lille, 2000

EUROCITIES Vienna For an Integrated Approach towards Urban Issues and Reinforced Cooperation with Cities in the European Union, Vienna 2004

Ministerial Meeting Urban Policy ‘Cities Empower Europe’ Rotterdam 2004

Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities. Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion . 2007

Territorial Agenda of the European Union, Towards a More Competitive Europe of Diverse Regions, Informal Ministerial Meeting on Territorial Cohesion, Leipzig 2007

1992 European Urban Charter

The European Urban Charter is an initiative of the Council of Europe’s former Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and originates from 1992. It defines citizens’ rights in European towns. The Charter provides a practical guide to good urban management, covering: housing, urban architecture, energy, transport, sport and leisure, street security, pollution.

The European Urban Charter contains a series of principles on good urban management at local level and is based on the belief that citizens have basic urban rights. Its main purpose is to provide a practical tool and urban management handbook for local authorities.

It concentrates on qualitative aspects of urban development and quality of life considerations, in line with the overall vocation of the Council of Europe for the protection of fundamental freedoms and human rights. Central elements of the Charter are:

- urban security
- housing
- environment
- multicultural integration
- transport
- sport and leisure

Political, economic, social and cultural change in Europe over recent years has necessitated revision of the European Urban Charter. This mainly concerns policy themes such as:

- employment
- social exclusion
- information technology
- good governance
- globalization
- sustainable development

1997 Towards an Urban Agenda in the European Union (1997)

(...) At the European level, the European Parliament and the Committee of Regions have supported a more active intervention from the Union in urban development, and the Member States and the European Commission acknowledged their common concern about the future sustainable development of cities at the recent UN Conference on Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat II). This Communication examines possibilities for improving urban development and for increasing the effectiveness of existing Community intervention in urban areas. The intention is not to develop Europe wide urban policies for matters which are best dealt with at a local or regional scale. However, since it is clear that cities in the European Union are facing a number of common problems, there are also opportunities at the European scale to share and facilitate potential solutions. This would not require additional powers at the European level. Rather, much can be achieved through a more focused approach using existing instruments at national and Community level and enhanced co-operation and co-ordination at all levels. (...).

This Communication is structured into four parts. The first part sets out the key challenges which affect all cities to a greater or lesser degree. The second part takes stock of existing EU policies which have an impact, directly or indirectly, on cities. The third part proposes some directions for future actions and the approach which urban policy in Europe could take as a starting point for debate. Finally, fourth part proposes a follow-up of this communication, in particular the organisation of an Urban Forum in 1998

1999 European Spatial Development Perspective Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the European Union ESDP

1 The Spatial Approach at European Level ESDP

1.1 The "Territory": a New Dimension of European Policy

(1) The characteristic territorial feature of the European Union (EU) is its cultural variety, concentrated in a small area. This distinguishes it from other large economic zones of the world, such as the USA, Japan and MERCOSUR¹. This variety – potentially one of the most significant development factors for the EU – must be retained in the face of European integration. Spatial development policies, therefore, must not standardize local and regional identities in the EU, which help enrich the quality of life of its citizens. (2) Since European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) came into force, European integration has made considerable progress². With growing economic and social integration, internal borders are increasingly losing their separating character and more intensive relationships and inter-dependencies are emerging between cities and regions of the Member States. This implies that effects of regional, national or Community projects in one country can have a considerable impact on the spatial structure of other Member States. In implementing Community policy, greater attention must be paid, in future, to spatial factors at an early stage, particularly because it will no longer be possible to compensate for regional productivity disparities by consequently adjusting exchange rates. In that respect, spatial planning can help avoid increases in such regional disparities. (3) Development projects in different Member States complement each other best, if they are directed towards common objectives for spatial development. Therefore, national spatial development policies of the Member States and sectoral policies of the EU require clear spatially transcendent development guidelines. These are presented in this

(4) Competition in the Single European Market is one of the driving forces for spatial development in the EU and will be intensified even more by EMU. Even though regions, cities and local authorities have already started co-operating in diverse fields, they compete with each other for economic activities, jobs and infrastructure. Currently, however, not all European regions start from a similar point. This complicates the strengthening of the economic and social cohesion of the EU. It is therefore important gradually to aim at a spatial balance designed to provide a more even geographical distribution of growth across the territory of the EU (aiming at cohesion).

(7) Spatial development issues in the EU can, in future, only be resolved through co-operation between different governmental and administrative levels. In the wake of European integration, closer relations at all levels are developing: between the regions themselves and between the regions and the national and European authorities.

Cities and regions are becoming more dependent, both on global trends and decisions at the Community level. European integration could benefit spatial development by encouraging the participation of cities and regions.

2000 Lille Action Programme

The Lille Action Programme is a proposal for a multi-annual programme of co-operation in urban affairs in the European Union. It was adopted at the informal meeting of ministers dealing with urban affairs in Lille on 3 November 2000. The programme proposes a common set of nine priorities.

The Lille Action Programme is based on a report prepared by the Committee on Spatial Development in the autumn of 2000. The main aim of the report is to help Member States, the Commission and cities to give more tangible form to the policy objectives defined at European level to the challenges facing cities.

The programme proposes a common set of nine priorities:

- A better acknowledgement of the role of towns and cities in spatial planning
- A new approach of urban policies on national and community levels
- Improving citizens participation
- Action to tackle social and ethnic segregation

- Promote an integrated and balanced urban development
- Promote partnership between public and private sectors
- Diffusion of best practices and networking
- Promote the use of modern technology in urban affairs
- A further analysis of the urban areas to deepen the knowledge of interlinked phenomena in the cities

The programme proposes furthermore to establish more permanent platforms within the EU with respect to exchange of information including best and worst practices of urban policy.

2000 The Lisbon strategy: stimulating the European knowledge economy

The Lisbon strategy was formulated at the European Council meeting of heads of government and state held in Lisbon on 23 and 24 March 2000. The strategic goal for 2010 is to make the European economy the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy. This, it is argued, will produce sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

The strategy initially consisted of economic and social ambitions, but environmental goals were added during the European council's meeting in Gothenburg in 2001. The aim is to encourage sustainable development through the concerted exercise of economic, social and environmental policy.

The principal themes of this integrated strategy are:

- permanent education
- social inclusion
- environmental protection
- information and communication technology, ICT
- employment
- innovation and business climate.

Implementation of the strategy is by the open coordination method. This 'soft' way of developing, implementing and monitoring policy entails EU member states comparing their progress in the areas of the Lisbon strategy, exchanging good practices, and together evaluating the implementation. Every spring, the European Council meets to discuss overall progress and set out guidelines for the realisation of the strategic goals.

2001 Gothenburg Agenda

The Gothenburg European Council in June 2001 completed the Lisbon strategy by adding an environmental dimension. It focussed on a new emphasis to protect the environment and achieve a more sustainable pattern of development.

The Gothenburg European Council set out key environmental objectives and target dates at strategic, political and legislative levels, taking account of international agreements.

The Council added the environmental dimension to the Lisbon process as its 'third pillar', the others being economic and social reform. Integration of environmental protection into other Community policies became a requirement. Sustainable development deals with economic, social and environmental policies in a mutually reinforcing way. Priorities include combating climate change, ensuring sustainable transport, addressing threats to public health and managing natural resources more responsible.

For the four priorities, the Gothenborg European Council agreed on:

- Climate change: Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, Kyoto targets. Progress towards electricity generated from renewable sources.
- Sustainable transport: Decoupling gross domestic product from transport growth. Tackling rising traffic volumes, congestion, noise and pollution. Encouraging the use of and investment in environmentally friendly transport and related infrastructure.

- Public health: Respond to citizens' concerns regarding food safety, the use of chemicals, infectious diseases and antibiotic resistance.
- Resource management: Decoupling resource use and the generation of waste from growth.

Since 2002, the Gothenburg strategy has been subject to ongoing monitoring and adjustment, the results of which are published in a separate chapter of the Commission's annual report on the Lisbon strategy. The latter is usually published in March of each year, before the spring European Council.

2004 EUROCITIES Vienna Declaration

'EUROCITIES Vienna Declaration' was officially adopted by EUROCITIES members on the occasion of EUROCITIES Annual Conference, which took place in Vienna from 10 to 12 November 2004. It sets out a series of 18 specific proposals for strengthening the cooperation between cities, national governments and the EU institutions, in order to improve policy-making and implementation at all levels.

SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS

With this Declaration, EUROCITIES wishes to contribute to a more integrated and balanced approach towards urban issues, both at European level and at national level, and outline avenues for reinforced cooperation with cities in the European Union. EUROCITIES does so through a set of concrete proposals addressed to the Council and the Member States, to the European Commission, and to the European Parliament.

The Constitutional Treaty and evolving governance processes are creating a suitable framework for reinforced cooperation with local and regional authorities, and setting the stage for more integrated approaches towards complex challenges. Increasingly, European policies and programmes, in areas such as regional policy and environmental policy, are addressing the specific needs and circumstances of urban areas. Although these developments towards the mainstreaming of urban issues at European level are to be welcomed, there remains a need for a more coherent and coordinated approach towards the implementation of European policies in urban areas. Meanwhile, in the Member States of the European Union, significant changes have been taking place in relation to the institutional context at national level, and especially the relationship between national governments and local and regional authorities. In many countries, there is a growing recognition of the need for more integrated approaches to urban challenges and for structured dialogue with large cities. This has led to a number of interesting developments, such as: increased coordination of complementary policy sectors; new laws facilitating local partnerships; the promotion of citizens' participation in local decision-making processes; and national policy measures designed to ensure the balanced development of cities and regions.

The major challenges that are currently being faced by the European Union and by the Member States will only be tackled by developing more balanced and integrated policy approaches, involving a wide range of stakeholders, including the large cities. These challenges include: achieving the Lisbon and Göteborg objectives; ensuring a better balance between the imperatives of economic growth and competitiveness, and those of social cohesion and eradicating poverty; fighting all kinds of discrimination; supporting the creation of quality jobs; and ensuring a sound provision of reliable services that are accessible and affordable for all citizens. They also include the need to promote sustainable development and address threats to our environment by promoting positive changes in relation to energy consumption and transport patterns.

2004 Informal EU ministerial meeting on Urban Policy 30 Nov 2004

Conclusions of the informal ministerial meeting on Urban Policy, chaired by the Dutch Minister for Government Reform and Kingdom Relations. The ministers want more attention paid to the role of cities as engines of economic development and a better social climate.

In achieving the goals of the Lisbon and the Gothenburg agendas, ministers acknowledge that linking economic competitiveness to social inclusion and environmental quality is a crucial challenge on the urban policy agenda in all European countries. Ministers acknowledge that policies need to focus both upon economic opportunities in cities as well as the social needs of cities in order to achieve success in urban development.

Urban acquis and sharing experience

The experiences of the past decade of the different European countries on urban policy have generated set of common principles that underpin successful policies. Ministers value this 'Urban Acquis' as a basis of a more coherent approach to urban policy. They encourage the development of urban policies on the basis of this Urban Acquis.

Good practice and successes should therefore be promoted widely. Policies should be subject to evaluation. The ministers recognise the need to reflect innovative urban strategies in their European employment action plans and in the national action plans on social inclusion.

Strengthening collaboration between Member States on urban policy The ministers agreed in piloting a European Knowledge Network: The network will build on experience of the existing URBACT programme but aims to cover a wider range of policies and cities. The pilot will be carried out under the responsibility of the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations with the voluntary participation of other Member States and the support of URBACT.

Urban on the EU agenda

Ministers value that Cohesion Policy has made a substantial contribution to urban development through actions in mainstream "Objective 1, 2 and 3" programmes as well as through the Urban Community Initiative. Ministers confirm their preparedness to co-operate with the Commission on implementing the urban content of the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas. They stress the need to take account of the diverse urban realities present in the enlarged European Union

Implementation strategy

Ministers acknowledge the need for the development of an implementation strategy for the coming two years, which translates the overarching goals and the policy commitments the Ministers agreed upon into concrete actions. Ministers ask the Dutch and the coming Presidencies together with the Commission to develop the implementation strategy for 2005 and 2006 in cooperation with the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions. It should include the consideration of priority fields, actions and a time schedule, identify the participating member states and must take into account the practicalities of implementation.

2004 European City Summit 2004, Noordwijk - the Netherlands

The third City Summit, organized by the European Commission in conjunction with the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, took place in Noordwijk, Netherlands, on 18 and 19 October.

The conference was held in the run-up to the ministerial conference on urban affairs in Rotterdam on 30 November, and was attended by over six hundred representatives of towns and cities in all the EU member states. The European Commission and the Dutch presidency welcomed mayors, interest groups, Commission staff and others involved in urban programmes in Europe. The first City Summit took place in London in 2002, the second in Milan in 2003.

Cities are the engines of social and economic growth and innovation.

They are at the forefront of sustainable social development and social cohesion. At the conference opening Jacques Barrot, the commissioner with responsibility for regional policy, explained that 'The Commission proposes to reinforce the role of cities in the next generation of European development programmes due to start in 2007'. The Commission's proposal includes an increase in funding for projects in towns and cities as well as more exchanges of best practices.

The conference also saw the presentation of the Urban Audit: a large databank with comparative data on 189 towns and cities in fifteen EU member states which will provide a wealth of information. The system contains data on over three hundred indicators for each town or city. By exchanging and sharing this knowledge it will be possible to eliminate inequalities in cities and concentrate on each community's strong points.

Many of the speakers and panel members argued for more room and more possibilities for urban programmes in the European context in the future so that the sharing of knowledge and expertise in the EU can be put to maximum effect.

The second day saw the presentation of a survey of urban policy in the member states. This Dutch study is a follow-up to a survey of the fifteen old member states, updated with a survey of the ten countries that acceded in May this year. Vice-premier and minister for Government Reform and Kingdom Relations Thomas de Graaf observed that at the national level there was growing interest in a targeted approach to urban problems, reflecting the rising importance of urban policy at all levels including the European.

In his speech Mr de Graaf also spoke of the forthcoming European urban network: 'this will have to consist of local, national and European knowledge networks linked to each other. We want to use the existing URBACT structure. A working party consisting of representatives of member states, government think-tanks and cities will further elaborate this in a pilot for the coming two years, and will be required to report its initial results in mid 2005.

On 30 November the Dutch presidency is to hold an informal ministerial conference on urban policy. The ministers at the conference, which is to be held in Rotterdam, will join in discussions on such subjects as the role of cities in the knowledge economy and social exclusion. The presidency also wants to make moves in the collaboration between cities, member states and the European Commission and to conclude appropriate strategic arrangements for the years to come.

2007 Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities

Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion

We, the ministers responsible for urban development in the Member States of the European Union, consider European cities of all sizes which have evolved in the course of history to be valuable and irreplaceable economic, social and cultural assets.

With the objective of protecting, strengthening and further developing our cities, we strongly support the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, building on the Lille Action Programme, the Rotterdam Urban Acquis and the Bristol Accord. In doing so, all dimensions of sustainable development should be taken into account at the same time and with the same weight. These include economic prosperity, social balance and a healthy environment. At the same time attention should be paid to cultural and health aspects. In this due attention should be paid to the institutional capacity in the Member States.

Our cities possess unique cultural and architectural qualities, strong forces of social inclusion and exceptional possibilities for economic development. They are centres of knowledge and sources of growth and innovation. At the same time, however, they suffer from demographic problems, social inequality, social exclusion of specific population groups a lack of affordable and suitable housing and environmental problems. In the long run, cities cannot fulfil their function as engines of social progress and economic growth as described in the Lisbon Strategy unless we succeed in maintaining the social balance within and among them, ensuring their cultural diversity and establishing high quality in the fields of urban design, architecture and environment.

We increasingly need holistic strategies and coordinated action by all persons and institutions involved in the urban development process which reach beyond the boundaries of individual cities. Every level of government - local, regional, national and European – has a responsibility for the future of our cities. To make this multi-level government really effective, we must improve the coordination of the sectoral

policy areas and develop a new sense of responsibility for integrated urban development policy. We must also ensure that those working to deliver these policies at all levels acquire the generic and cross occupational skills and knowledge needed to develop cities as sustainable communities.

2007 Leipzig, Territorial Agenda of the European Union Towards a More Competitive and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions

(1) The EU looks with confidence at the progress achieved in economic, social and ecological terms. Together the EU Member States operate a combined economy, which is about one third of the world-wide Gross Domestic Product. It is this economic power as well as a territory covering more than 4 million km² and a population of 490 million inhabitants in a variety of regions and cities, which characterises the territorial dimension of the EU.

(2) We, as Ministers responsible for spatial planning and development, present the Territorial Agenda as an action-oriented political framework for our future cooperation, developed together with the European Commission. Through the Territorial Agenda we are contributing to sustainable economic growth and job creation as well as social and ecological development in all EU regions. We are hereby supporting both the Lisbon and the Gothenburg Strategies of the European Council, which are complementary strategies.

(3) Through the Territorial Agenda we would like to promote a polycentric territorial development of the EU, with a view to making better use of available resources in European regions. An important aspect is the territorial integration of places where people live. In this way we will contribute to a Europe which is culturally, socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. It is particularly important to better integrate our newer Member States into this policy of polycentric settlement development. Through the Territorial Agenda we will help – in terms of territorial solidarity – to secure better living conditions and quality of life with equal opportunities, oriented towards regional and local potentials, irrespective of where people live – whether in the European core area or in the periphery.

(4) We see the future task “Territorial Cohesion” as a permanent and cooperative process involving the various actors and stakeholders of territorial development at political, administrative and technical levels. This cooperation is characterised by the history, culture and institutional arrangements in each Member State. EU Cohesion Policy should be able to respond more effectively than it has done so far to the territorial needs and characteristics, specific geographical challenges and opportunities of the regions and cities. That is why we advocate the need for the territorial dimension to play a stronger role in future Cohesion Policy in order to promote economic and social wellbeing.

(5) Territorial Cohesion can only be achieved through an intensive and continuous dialogue between all stakeholders of territorial development. This process of cooperation is what we call territorial governance. The private sector (especially locally and regionally based entrepreneurship), the scientific community, the public sector (especially local and regional authorities), non-governmental organisations and different sectors need to act together in order to make better use of crucial investments in European regions and contribute to tackling climate change.