

**MINISTERIAL MEETING URBAN POLICY 'CITIES EMPOWER EUROPE'  
CONCLUSIONS DUTCH PRESIDENCY 2004**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

**Context**

- 1.1 Although there is not a single model of a European city, there is a growing recognition of the importance of the contribution that cities can and do make to the economic, environmental and social success of Europe;
- 1.2 Despite diversity in political, institutional and constitutional arrangements in member states, the common challenges and opportunities which face European cities underline the need for co-operation between member states on urban policy at a European level.

**Ministers acknowledge**

- 1.3 The achievements of the Lille Programme and the work done by the former presidencies in implementing it;
- 1.4 The contribution of the European Union to the development of European cities to help them enhance their role as drivers of economic competitiveness, social inclusion and environmental quality;
- 1.5 The 'Common Framework on Future Urban Policy' as a document which can inspire future co-operation on European urban policy and the discussion of Structural Funds;
- 1.6 The role of cities and urban regions as driving forces for regional, national and European development, especially in achieving the goals of the Lisbon and the Gothenburg agendas. The Ministers value the outcomes of the European City Summit on 18 and 19 October 2004 in Leiden/ Noordwijk and the declaration of Eurocities of November 2004, highlighting this potential of cities and urban regions;
- 1.7 The role of European institutions – like the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee - and representative associates of cities - like EUROCITIES - is acknowledged. Cooperation with these institutions will be sought in the further preparation of future urban policy documents in the light of the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas.
- 1.8 The participation of citizens in urban programmes and in the decision processes concerning urban programmes, which enhances the quality and the effectiveness of local, national and European urban development. The Ministers take note of the recommendations of the European meeting of citizens, 'Making New Connections', on 26 and 27 November 2004;
- 1.9 The information resulting from projects undertaken under the ESPON Program, in particular from those projects directly related to urban areas of urban policy.

**The Presidency concludes**

- 1.10 That the ministers, meeting together with representatives of European institutions and candidate member states, agreed upon the following political agenda for 2005 and 2006 with the aim of strengthening urban development in a European context.

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**2. AMBITIONS POLITICAL AGENDA URBAN POLICY 2005-2006**

The political agenda has three ambitions, that:

- 2.1 Ministers will stress the need for national governments to promote the urban agenda even more, including small and medium sized cities;
- 2.2 Ministers will collaborate even more in achieving the Lille goals;
- 2.3 Ministers will encourage the EU to put cities higher on the EU agenda.

**3. COMMITMENTS POLITICAL AGENDA URBAN POLICY 2005-2006**

Ministers make the following commitments to act upon these ambitions:

**URBAN ACQUIS**

- 3.1 The experiences of the past decade of the different European countries on urban policy have generated a 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.
- 3.2 Ministers acknowledge the following common principles from the Urban Acquis, divided in five categories:

Priorities

- a. Economic competitiveness, social cohesion and environmental quality must be balanced;
- b. Cities must be liveable, places of choice and places of cultural identity;

Mechanisms for Successful Urban Policy

- c. National, regional and local sectoral policies should be better integrated;
- d. In common with specific urban programmes the mainstream government resources which deliver the services affecting cities, should take into account the specific situation of cities;
- e. Policies for cities must be long term;
- f. Leadership from the top must be balanced with empowerment of communities below;
- g. Agreements, partnerships and trust between different levels of government are needed, not rigid controls;

Engaging Stakeholders

- h. Public, private and community partners in cities should engage in constructive working relationships;
- i. Partnerships must be balanced with democratic accountability of elected local government;
- j. Citizens' participation should be based on a dialogue with experts to stimulate citizens' ownership of the urban living environment;

Achieving the Right Spatial Balance

- k. Policies should be concentrated long term upon particular areas of need or opportunity in cities;

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- l. Social challenges in deprived areas must be linked to economic opportunities in the wider region.
- m. Institutional collaboration between cities and regions should be encouraged;
- n. Balanced urban networks of, and functional cooperation between small, medium, and large-sized cities should be encouraged;

Encouraging Good Practice, Policy Learning and Capacity

- o. Good practice and successes should be promoted widely;
- p. Policies should be subject to evaluation to determine success;
- q. The regeneration skills of professional, community partners, local government should be increased.

**PROMOTING THE URBAN AGENDA ON A NATIONAL LEVEL**

**Lisbon and Gothenburg agenda**

- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 Ministers encourage urban strategies, which link economic development to social inclusion policies in an innovative manner. Therefore Ministers recognise the need to develop and promote examples of good practice in this field and to support the exchange of innovative policy approaches. They reflect these innovative urban strategies in their European employment action plans and in the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion.

**Knowledge Economy**

- 3.5 Ministers recognise the contribution that cities can make to the development of the knowledge economy and to the prospects of European economic success. They recognise that there cannot be a single approach to urban economic policy and that a tailor-made approach is needed to maximise the economic potential of different type of cities. Ministers recognise that this tailor made approach involves different sectoral policies. Therefore, Ministers stimulate greater coordination and integration of national sectoral policies that impact upon the knowledge base of cities. In this respect it is important to take social inclusion into account

**Social Inclusion**

- 3.6 Ministers encourage greater integration of national policy sectors in affordable housing, health care, education, safety and employment to increase the impact of social inclusion policies. The contribution that cities make to social inclusion should be recognised and strengthened by national governments. Ministers acknowledge the need for compact cities with mixed uses in preventing urban sprawl, and reducing social segregation. They encourage Member States to emphasize in their National Action Plans on Social Inclusion the added value of the area-based integrated approach to deprived urban areas by local authorities.

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- 3.7 Ministers support the added value of combating social exclusion by stimulating economic activity in deprived urban areas. In this respect Ministers acknowledge the need for greater flexibility in urban financial instruments, within existing budgetary constraints. These instruments should however not be used as an instrument in itself but should be integrated in a broader policy package.

**City – Regions**

- 3.8 Ministers recognise that in many member states the administrative boundaries of cities are often much smaller than their economic boundaries, creating working difficulties. Ministers emphasise the value of adopting the city-region concept in this area. This city-region concept encourages integrated territorial development involving the important principle of partnership and collaboration working across the wider economic territory beyond narrow administrative boundaries. It does not impose uniformity across member states but leaves the definition of those boundaries in national and local hands. Ministers wish to encourage increased strategic capacity at city-region level to deliver sustainable development.
- 3.9 Urban strategies are often primarily a local and regional matter. National governments can play an active role in encouraging and supporting urban and territorial development. Ministers promote and facilitate, in deliberation with local and regional government, a leading role for cities and city networks in regional development.

**STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION BETWEEN MEMBER STATES ON URBAN POLICY**

**Next Step in Cooperation between Member States.**

- 3.10 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.

**New, Pressing Urban Challenges**

- 3.11 Ministers recognise 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.

**European Urban Knowledge Exchange**

- 3.12 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.

**Follow Up Actions 2005**

Ministers welcome the actions on urban cooperation between member states that will be initiated in 2005:

Future of URBACT

- 3.13 The URBACT working group to be started under the responsibility of the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations with participation of interested member states of the URBACT monitoring Committee.

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This working group contributes to the preparation of a long term vision of an extended URBACT network. A report will be finished in July 2005. Meanwhile, a midterm report, brought out in February 2005, will define the concrete actions to be taken within a pilot project for a European Knowledge network for 2005 and 2006.

Piloting a European Knowledge Network 2005-2006

3.14 The pilot project for a European Knowledge network, for connecting European databases on urban policy and the extension to a European knowledge network which will link existing local, regional, national and European networks and support member states in developing national networks. The network will build on experience of the existing URBACT programme but aims to cover a wider range of policies and cities, including those outside the current URBAN initiative. 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. Aim of the pilot is to realise a sustainable and effective knowledge network between European cities and knowledge institutes in the period 2007-2013. Most of the cost of the Pilot will be financed by the Dutch ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations with the support of URBACT. Ministers agree with the principle that the participating member states in the pilot will contribute financially.

Strengthening the Knowledge Economy

3.15 Interested member states will participate in a nation- and regional wide analysis to identify the economic potential of urban areas. Aim of the analyses is to develop a strategy-document that contributes to maximising the competitive growth potential of cities in a knowledge based economy. The strategy document will draw upon the urban typologies described in the report of the URBACT Workgroup STRIKE (Strategies for Towns and Regions in the Knowledge Economy). Measures on social inclusion will be taken into account.

Increasing Zones of Economic Opportunity

3.16 The Netherlands and the United Kingdom, together with France, Ireland, Italy and Hungary will develop a document reviewing and assessing the different policy instruments used by the member states and European Commission to help regenerate deprived areas. This would be an initial step in developing a Common European Review on "economic opportunity zones". This review will identify financial and fiscal measures which have been successfully used in an integrated way to encourage the economic regeneration of socially deprived areas in their wider territories. It could serve as a model of good practice in redevelopment and could be approved and adopted by the European Commission. The review will take actions undertaken by the European Commission into account. The aim is to submit the review to the European Commission for approval in order to allow cities to use these instruments more easily, avoiding complex and time-consuming negotiations with the European Commission.

Exchange of Knowledge Challenges Urban Infrastructure

3.17 The initiative of interested Member States to engage in exchanging best practice and experience in solving pressing problems in urban housing and infrastructure. The exchange will build upon its recent experiences of substantial population losses from inner cities, the regeneration of the physical infrastructure, the problems associated with large housing infrastructure and managing the social challenges they present.

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**URBAN ON THE EU AGENDA**

**European Urban Policies**

- 3.18 Ministers recognise the European Union's valuable contribution in raising awareness of urban issues and providing assistance through urban actions within Community Policies. Already in 1998 the Commission adopted the Framework of Action for Sustainable Urban Development in the European Union, which aimed at better co-ordination and targeted community action on urban problems.
- 3.19 In this context, 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. More than 10 percent of the planned spending in mainstream programmes is devoted to urban development measures. URBAN has stimulated innovative approaches to urban regeneration through integrated programmes built on local partnerships.
- 3.20 The ministers value also other significant actions promoting urban development launched by the Commission, such as the 'thematic strategy on the urban environment' which is currently under consideration, the 'City of Tomorrow' actions under the Fifth European Framework Programme for Research as well as actions in the field of Transport, Employment and Social Affairs, Culture and other relevant Policy initiatives.
- 3.21 Ministers invite the Commission to assess the impact of the Framework of Action for Sustainable Urban Development in the light of the European Union's new policy priorities for implementing the agendas of Lisbon and Gothenburg. Those issues should be identified where a contribution of urban policy is providing the highest value-added and a joint work programme with members states will be set up.
- 3.22 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.
- 3.23 Ministers call upon the European Council to take into account the contribution of the urban dimension in the Lisbon process and specifically in their annual spring Council in 2005.

**Urban Audit**

- 3.24 Ministers welcome the results of the Urban Audit, which provides a picture of the quality of life in large and medium-size cities across the European Union. It is the foundation of European Urban Statistics which will assist cities, member states and the Commission in developing appropriate policy responses to urgent problems. Ministers invite the European Commission to undertake an Urban Audit on a regular basis in future, in close cooperation with Member States.

**Knowledge Exchange**

- 3.25 URBACT is currently promoting the identification of good practices and exchange of experience between almost 200 EU cities. Ministers stress the relevance of the European level for promoting the exchange of ideas, information and good practice about cities across national boundaries and for providing incentives to encourage cities to adopt best practices.

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**Organising the Discussion**

3.26 Ministers request the Commission to ensure that there is adequate opportunity to discuss urban matters under the existing comitology. The European Commission can support this by organising more regular meetings on urban policy for developing the urban policy agenda and the implementation strategy the ministers agreed upon, and by financing the cost of the attendance of one urban expert per member state during these meetings. Ministers value the Urban Development Group (UDG) as an informal forum for the Member States for urban matters. If opportunities under the existing comitology cannot be ensured, the UDG will be reinforced in its structure by the member states.

**4. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**

4.1 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. This implementation strategy should consider actions on sustainable urban development, including the follow up to the actions ministers agreed upon for 2005. The implementation strategy should support the debate on strengthening the position of cities to contribute better to the welfare of Europe.

4.2 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. Sweden is willing to organize a conference in early 2006 focussed on partnership between different levels of government and in close cooperation with the services of the Commission and the Urban Development Group, in a form that can be found useful. Other member states are invited to take initiatives for additional actions.