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NEWSLETTER

<http://urban-intergroup.eu>

PREPARATORY ACTION

RURBAN: state of play

The European Commission, in cooperation with French Lorraine region, organized on November 16th in Metz (France) a European seminar to present the first findings of a study on "Partnership for sustainable urban-rural development" RURBAN. This conference was the following step of the reflection originally initiated by the URBAN Intergroup as a preparatory action in 2010. It was granted €2 million under the EU budget for 2011 and 2012.

This preparatory action agreed by the European Parliament and currently undertaken by the European Commission aims to draw policy lessons concerning the potential role of urban-rural partnerships in improving regional competitiveness and territorial cohesion. The seminar in Metz followed the presentation last March of a preparatory study on existing evidences of the partnership for sustainable rural-urban development, prepared by the German Association for Housing, Urban and Spatial Development.

In Metz, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) presented officially for the first time findings of a comprehensive study on assessing urban-rural partnership in some of the OECD countries. The case studies of existing good cooperation practices between urban and rural areas from Germany, the United Kingdom and France were then presented.

The seminar in Metz was opened by **Cécile Duflot**, French Minister of Territorial Equa-

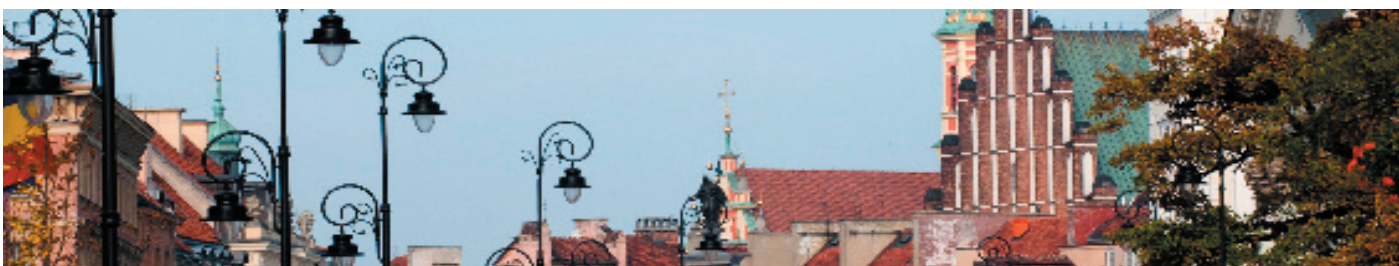
lity and Housing, and **Charlina Vitcheva**, Director of the DG REGIO. Around 200 participants, including representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, urban and rural networks, academics and high level officials from Member States took part in the conference.

Policy implications of the study were discussed in the last panel discussion. **Jan Olbrycht MEP** (EPP, Poland), President of the URBAN Intergroup which initiated this reflection, reminded the aims of the RURBAN preparatory action supported by the European Parliament. He also underlined the importance of study findings and future policy implications. "Cohesion policy, which is necessary for a long term growth, should be achieved by all European policies. That is why we should work at all administrative levels on the complementarities between policies," said **Jan Olbrycht**. "Urban and rural partnerships can improve regional competitiveness", he added.

The next stage in this action will be a conference organised in Warsaw (Poland) in April 2013. The whole preparatory action will be concluded at a final conference in Italy.

More information about the seminar
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/rurban/2012/programme_en.cfm

More information about RURBAN
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/cohesion/urban_rural/index_en.cfm



URBAN conferences and meetings

ENVIRONMENT

Natural solutions for urban areas in Europe

A conference on “Natural Solutions for Cities in Europe” was held on Wednesday November 14th in the European Parliament in Brussels. It was organized by the URBAN Intergroup, in cooperation with the Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development.

The conference was chaired by **Jan Olbrycht MEP** (EPP, Poland), President of the URBAN Intergroup, **Cristina Gutierrez-Cortines MEP** (EPP, Spain) and **Vittorio Prodi MEP** (S&D, Italy), Vice-Presidents of the Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development.

The conference mainly focused on the presence of nature in the urban space. Participants agreed that, in view of the increasing trend of urbanization and environmental exploitation, care for nature is essential. Among many ideas raised at the conference, the most important was that the effective fusion of city and nature may be achieved in practical ways.

“The new principle of sustainable urban development has been introduced in EU cohesion policy’s new regulations. Now, we need to translate this concept of sustainability into concrete actions,” emphasised **Jan Olbrycht** at the opening of the conference. He explained that what may seem as an opposite – nature and city – can be overcome by a sustainable development of urban, peri-urban and rural areas. Next to best practices presentation there was a vital share of views on how to understand biodiversity in cities from various perspectives from regional development, business investments to NGO’s activity.

“Certain measures need to be taken to comply with Tokyo aims and objectives,” said **Cristina Gutierrez-Cortines**, member of the URBAN Intergroup. “One of the most important needs for the city is to breath and decrease its carbon emissions, and therefore, its environmental impact”, she explained. “Urban development needs to customize measures according to their idiosyncrasy with more open spaces, with green areas on the ground as well as terraces and buildings,” she added. She moreover under-



For **Cristina Gutierrez-Cortines MEP** (EPP, Spain) (on the left), the *Agenda 21* has to become a roadmap and guide for all the Mayors in Europe.

lined that the European Parliament strives to work together with the European Commission and the European Environmental Agency (EEA) to amendment, review and enlarge the *Agenda 21* to become a roadmap and guide for all the Mayors in Europe.

Following the presentations, the debate with the audience brought a fruitful exchange of views and interventions, notably by Ms **Jacqueline McGlade**, Executive Director of the European Environmental Agency, said: “We are not using land around cities efficiently: the greening of cities has to become even more attractive because we cannot afford to continue losing the amount of soil we are currently losing in the face of food security issues, floods, climate adaptation, etc.”

To conclude the meeting, **Vittorio Prodi** stressed the importance of continuing discussions on the need to develop urban biodiversity initiatives because of the deteriorating situation of urban environments. “We have to organise territorial care to keep water as long as possible where it falls because the changes in rainfall patterns due to climate change have disastrous consequences on our territories,” he said. The MEP stressed that this organisation has to begin in EU cities, which can then lead communities to make these changes.

More information and presentations:
www.ebcd.org/en/EP_Intergroup_CCBSD/Natural_Solutions_for_Urban_Areas_in_Europe.html

CONFERENCE

Attractiveness of corporate real estate investing in EU cities

URBAN Intergroup and RICS – the world’s leading qualification when it comes to professional standards in land, property and construction – organized a seminar on November 26th in the European Parliament in Brussels to discuss the findings of the RICS research report “Corporate Real Estates: Investment and EU cities” in order to better understand the economic success which stands behind some of the world cities.

The seminar was held under the patronage of the European Parliament Vice-President **Oldřich Vlasák MEP** (ECR, Czech Republic) and the URBAN Intergroup President **Jan Olbrycht MEP** (EPP, Poland).

The study showed that efficient, flexible working environments, mobility (both urban mobility within the city and connectivity to other cities) and “green” buildings are amongst the key drivers of investment attraction in Europe’s key cities. It also demonstrated that stakeholders also highly appreciate certainty, clarity and continuity, in terms of political stability, legislative framework and market practices.

The study concentrated on the “soft” reasons of investors’ interests in coming and investing to certain European cities collected through round-table discussions with senior management of occupiers, service providers, investors and other property professionals. Questions were grouped around the choice of location, city’s relationship with its surroundings, market constraints and the best practices.

This topic is of utmost importance for the European Parliament. As **Oldřich Vlasák** mentioned: “It is clear today that investors appreciate good transport and energy infra-



For **Oldřich Vlasák MEP** (ECR, Czech Republic) (second from the left), good transport and energy infrastructure are key to attract investors in EU cities.

structure, sufficiency of skilled (and preferably reasonably priced) workforce but also reasonable standard of life quality in the city with available housing, education, entertainment or health care supply. And these are policies generally decided upon by local public policy makers but framed in Brussels”. Economy of a place is closely related to political decisions of the city leaders as well as to local legislative limits.

Besides mobility and certainty, which were on the top of the investors’ list of priorities for investments, managers expressed their view on access to finance, postponement and re-negotiation of decisions, connectivity to suburbs, general quality of life connected to “city branding” and sustainability of living in the city (accessibility of “green” or A-rated buildings, operational costs etc.). A post-crisis trend is that investors have great difficulty to access finance. Banks have virtually ceased lending for real estate investment. The financial industry has become more careful to lend, construction and refurbishments are down, and increased regulation in financial services is putting extra pressure on city investment.

Speaking in numbers

According to the recent *Ernst and Young* study in terms of investor perception, Western Europe ranks the second most attractive region with 33% of the world investments and Central and Eastern Europe has 21%, which makes it the third most attractive destination. With nearly 20% of economic activity, the whole real estate contributes hugely to the economy – more than automotive or telecommunications industry. Commercial real estate has 2.5% of economic activity and employs more than 4 million people. Jeff Rupp, director of Public Affairs in INREV declared that half of all commercial property is held as investment. Important is also the role of these buildings when speaking of energy consumption or emissions – energy efficiency improvements would decrease costs by €60 billion per year.

URBAN voice in Europe

COOPERATION

URBAN Intergroup at the first EU-China Mayors' Forum

The URBAN Intergroup was represented at the EU-China Mayors' Forum, the first annual flagship event of the EU-China Urbanisation Partnership.

On September 19th, **Jan Olbrycht MEP**, President of the URBAN Intergroup, delivered a welcome message to the participants of the seminar "Governing sustainable urban development: Experiences from China and the EU". He underlined that urbanisation process in China is a very interesting field of observation for EU urban actors. Mr **Olbrycht** stressed that in spite of historical differences of urban settlements, "the EU and China can learn from each other about good and bad urbanisation experiences." "Today, in spite of differences of scale and taking into account the number of inhabitants, we are able to compare problems and challenges that European and Chinese cities are facing", he concluded.

Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines MEP (EPP, Spain) represented the Intergroup on the second day of the Forum, during the discussion on Sustainable Urban Planning and Construction of Low-carbon Eco-cities. She stated: "We do not find a solution to problems of sustainability, efficiency and climate change in big international conferences but at local level, in the cities. Mayors have taken the challenge of tackling climate change



For **Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines MEP** (EPP, Spain) (on the right), solutions to problems of sustainability and efficiency should be found locally. (© CoR)

with great responsibility, and they work on it in their territory."

The EU-China Mayors' Forum got together EU and Chinese Mayors, local decision-makers, city planners, business and NGOs willing to share experience in moving towards sustainable, integrated and efficient solutions. It was the new political cooperation initiative decided at the top level by China and the EU, launched at the occasion of the 7th EU-China Summit. The Forum was concluded by the signature of the EU-China Mayors' Charter.



Urban related workshops

The 10th European Week of Regions and Cities – Open Days – held in Brussels in October was as always a great opportunity to talk about European cities and their development. URBAN Intergroup members were present in many events, especially the debate "Be SMART – think CITY!" and the panel on urban housing.

Be SMART – think CITY!

Participants to the debate "Be SMART – think CITY!" provided answers to the question "what are our cities and regions doing in or-

der to become smart?" From clean transport to active ageing or water scarcity, participants discussed multidisciplinary solutions to make EU cities smarter. The discussion also focused on the attempt to define what a smart city is, its characteristics and main goals, as well as the concept of "smart cities" in the Europe 2020 strategy.

For **Jan Olbrycht MEP** (EPP, Poland), President of the URBAN Intergroup who moderated the workshop, "the expression *smart city* should become a new way of thinking about city, synonymous of global good management". He stressed that it should "not only be



For **Jan Olbrycht MEP** (EPP, Poland), "the expression *smart city* should become a new way of thinking about city, synonymous of global good management". (© Yvan Barbera)

associated to the new technologies". During his opening speech, Mr **Olbrycht** also underlined that the word "smart" has become very fashionable, but its sense is not similarly understood, "that is why we should use it very carefully".

The MEP also stressed that the concept of "smart city" doesn't only apply to cities, which well managed energy and transport problems. "It is also a city which fits into a constantly changing reality and is good managed by people using their knowledge, new technologies and a human capital to overcome new challenges," he said. The workshop was organised by a consortium of regions from Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Italy Latvia, Poland, Spain and Sweden.

Financing energy-efficient buildings in urban areas

On October 10th, **Lambert van Nistelrooij MEP** (EPP, the Netherlands), Vice-President of the URBAN Intergroup, contributed to a panel on urban housing. The main topic for discussion was how the EU can contribute



to affordable housing and climate targets in urban areas.

The European Commission now proposes to spend 20% of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) on energy efficiency and renewable energy in more developed and transition regions, and 6% in less developed regions.

"Now, Member States and regions start to prepare these operational programmes", reminded **Lambert van Nistelrooij**. "In 2013 this will lead to an agreement between the European Commission and the respective Member States. Be aware of these changes from the 1st of January 2014," he added.

"I stress that it is not only about making more funds available. 7% of regional policy funds are already allocated to energy efficiency and sustainable energy. However, these funds are hardly used on the regional and national level and that of course is a missed opportunity", he deplored. "Besides that, the Parliament supports an amendment to contribute to the energy efficiency in housing in the cohesion countries," Mr **van Nistelrooij** added.

SEMINAR

Urban planning agencies have their say on cohesion policy

Karima Delli MEP (the Greens/EFA, France), Vice-President of the URBAN Intergroup, participated in the European Seminar of the French Federation of Public Urban Planning Agencies (FNAU) which took place on October 12th in Brussels. Representatives of the urban planning agencies, of the European Commission and of the DARTAR (French Inter-ministerial Delegation for Territorial Planning and Regional Attractiveness), and local elected officials took part in



Karima Delli MEP (the Greens/EFA, France) (*second on the left*) pledged for French urban planning agencies to be better involved in the design, monitoring and evaluation of territorial strategies.

the seminar.

Ms **Delli** presented to them a state of play of the ongoing negotiations, between the European Parliament and the Council, on sustainable urban development, in the framework of the next programming period of cohesion policy (2014-2020).

She deplored delays in the timetable of negotiations, partly due to tricky negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). She recalled the difficulty for the regions and the central government to anticipate the final decisions in order to design on time their territorial development strategy.

Secondly, **Karima Delli** listed the obstacles that France still faces to establish a real inte-

grated approach, which requires improving complementarities with national schemes, enhancing the multi-level governance by an appropriate decentralization process and developing exchanges of knowledge and best practices.

She finally sent a message of support to the French urban planning agencies so that they could be involved in the design, monitoring and evaluation of territorial strategies. She thanked their efforts to raise local representatives' awareness of the opportunities offered by EU cohesion policy funds and their involvement in participating in EU territorial cooperation programs.

ROMA-NET

Lack of progress on EU regional funding for housing marginalised communities

On November 8th, **Lambert van Nistelrooij MEP** (EPP, the Netherlands), Vice-president of the URBAN Intergroup, was invited to the conference on "Roma inclusion in urban setting – strategy, practice and future", organized by the Roma-Net partners and the European Commission. He urged local and regional authorities to make better progress in spending EU funds for housing for marginalized communities, such as the Roma.

EU regional funds for housing are available but it comes down to real commitment at local level. Real commitment should therefore be enforced by taking up the National Roma Strategy in the partnership contract and the national reform programmes in the period 2014-2020.

"The new place-based approach unlocks unused local capabilities to earmark 5% of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) resources of each Member State for integrated urban strategies," explained **Lambert van Nistelrooij MEP**. He assured that funds will be available for housing. "With regard to the second important instrument,



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the community led local development, the multi-fund financed strategies with integrated bottom up approach may play a significant role in the inclusion of marginalized communities, including Roma," he explained, stressing that "it will be an effective tool for the involvement of the concerned communities themselves."



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