

Transcription, Dr. Clos remarks during the Informal Meeting of EU Ministers Responsible for Territorial Cohesion and Urban Matters in Riga, Latvia. Friday June 10, 2015

The evolution of Urbanization as you know is very relevant because a lot of people are urbanizing. Urbanization is a huge change that is happening on planet earth. We have never seen such a huge rate of urbanization in human history and it seems that this rate is not going to decrease in the forthcoming years.

In fact, as we have a world population of 7.8 billion people now, expecting that in the next 30 or 40 years we reach 10 billion, the rate of urbanization is increasing to the extent that we predict that nearly 3 billion people will be urbanized in the next 30-40 years. That would be double the current world urban population.

This is a fantastic challenge worldwide. Most of this new urbanization is going to take place in developing countries because there is where urbanization is growing very rapidly. Currently, the average urban population of developing countries is about 45% of the whole population, and the expectations are that developing countries will reach 65-70% of urban population in the forthcoming decades.

That means that most of the challenges of rapid urbanization are being presented in developing countries with all the complexities that are therein.

In the developed countries, where the EU is included, the challenges of urbanization are a little bit different. Fortunately, for the developed countries, the process of urbanization has reached a kind of a plateau for about 75% of the population and most of the challenges presented are more related to renewal and regeneration than the challenges of new urbanization.

In the developing countries, the challenges of urbanization are represented by at least three big issues. First is the unplanned or spontaneous urbanization. Most of the current urbanization of the world is unplanned or spontaneous. Spontaneous urbanization gives rise to a number of problems.

One of them is that it is not the best suited form of urbanization to generate development. As urbanization is seen every time more clearly as a tool for development, if it is not done with a certain degree of quality, then its capacity to produce economic outcomes remains very low.

The second big challenge is the governance and institutional capacity to urbanize properly. This challenge is both present at national level and local level. It is the need to generate the institutions that are needed in both levels to be able to urbanize with a certain degree of efficiency.

Finally, in the developing world the other big challenge faced is the financial shortcomings needed to address the urban needs.

In order to address these big challenges of the new urbanization in the developing countries, we hope that through the Habitat III conference we shall reach some degree of international consensus in order to make possible some improvements of the model of urbanization that until now has not been as productive as expected.

At the same time keeping in mind the universality principals of the United Nations, we are also hoping in Habitat III, to be held in Quito in October 2016, to address the challenges of the urbanization in the cities of developed countries. Some of them have already been looked at here by previous speakers but I would like to underline 5 challenges that we consider to affect the urbanization in the developed world.

The first challenge is the changing demographic pattern. The ageing of the population in the advanced countries is presenting a new scenario of urbanization and will require a huge dosis of ingenuity, creativity and innovation to address issues related to this change.

The second challenge is the affordability question. It seems that the good city, the important city with quality, is becoming less and less affordable. There are, in many parts of the developed world, cases of the middle class being expelled from the center of the city, or the good parts of the city because the costs of keeping the quality of urbanization is not within reach of the average population.

The third challenge is climate change. Cities in the developed world are conceived to be responsible for around 70% of the greenhouse gas emissions, both through transportation, buildings and the consumption concentrated in the cities. Climate change as an urban challenge is very important since the average estimate of energy consumption is that when somebody moves from rural to urban areas, the increase in energy consumption is ten-fold.

That means that with the huge urbanization expected in the world, what is going to happen, measures taken notwithstanding, is that the total bill of energy consumption will highly increase. This therefore accelerates the need to reach an agreement on Climate Change otherwise it will be unaffordable in terms of ecosystem preservation on planet earth.

The fourth challenge is migration. Migration is becoming a huge movement and statistics show how it is increasing from the south to the north.

The reasons for this include economic, political and environmental reasons. We have this new wave of migrations that is presenting huge challenges even in the European Union not only for the continent but also for the cities because in the end migrations are hosted by the urban areas.

The fifth challenge of urbanization in the developing world is the change of the economic model. As the industrial representative of the Netherlands has said, we are moving from an industrial culture to a post industrial economy and that changes the employment patterns of the population that in turn changes the nature of the cities.

We know how to build industrial cities very well. This is very well tested and there is a good knowledge of how to address the urban issues in an industrial model of urbanization. What is not so clear is a postindustrial urban model. This is because a postindustrial urban model is facing a very different set of challenges to those faced by the industrial model.

We are seeing youth unemployment in many parts of the world including in the developed world. We are seeing the segregation of the migrants, increase of inequality, tensions between neighborhoods, proliferation of gated communities and there are symptoms of deterioration of the concept of the

cosmopolitan city. The city is becoming a more specialized land, where different parts of the city are fulfilling different functions.

The way to integrate this reality in a cohesive and sustainable manner, not just environmental sustainability but also political and economic sustainability, is the real challenge of the urbanization of the developed world.

This is why we, in UN-Habitat and Habitat III, receive the initiative of the European Union to elaborate an EU Urban Agenda. We hope that this will contribute a lot to this international debate that is becoming really important.

Looking at the Arab Spring, for instance, we see an urban revolution. It was a revolution by the unemployed urban youth. This is raising a number of flags in the minds of many people.

That the European Union engages in a number of sincere, transparent, qualitative assessments of the urban challenges is important for the debates of Habitat III process in order to listen to your experiences in that aspect.

I would like to thank the presidency of Latvia for initiating the debate and during the next presidency of Luxembourg we are going to have the post-2015 summit in New York and then the Paris COP-21 of climate change. We are going to have a semester which is going to be very much centered on issues of development and climate change. Both of them are totally related with urbanization.

Next year, during the Dutch presidency, we hope that we are going to have a meeting in Prague, as a regional meeting to prepare a position of the European countries, together with the European Commission of the United Nations for Habitat III.

We hope that the meeting in Amsterdam that has been already announced is going to unite the voices of many European mayors in the underlying big issues of the new urban agenda for the world to be tabled in Quito in October next year.

Thank you very much for your contribution and we are looking forward to your participation in the debate.