

**Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy,
Territorial Cohesion and Urban Matters
National Library of Latvia, Riga**

**Riga Declaration: a Step Towards an EU Urban Agenda
10 June 2015, 9.10 – 10.10**

Speaking points for President Markku Markkula

Dear Commissioner, dear Ministers,

Thank you for inviting me to this important event of the Latvian Presidency.

THE EU IS STILL LACKING AN URBAN AGENDA

From the outset I would like to say that there have been talks about a EU agenda on urban development for more than 25 years now. But after these years of conferences, declarations and resolutions, these debates have still not become a reality.

As the European Committee of the Regions, we attach great importance to the development of a EU Urban Agenda. We outlined this in **our opinion** adopted in 2014 **where we asked the European Commission to launch a White Paper on the EU Urban Agenda.**

Let me be clear: we do not call for an additional urban legislation at EU level, since it touches issues of subsidiarity. **The problem is not the absence of an “EU urban law” but too little consistency at EU level between the different policy initiatives** and the subsidy programmes, which target the urban areas. Thus not every policy initiative achieves tangible results.

The final objective of the EU Urban Agenda should be a genuine cross-cutting anchoring of the urban dimension in the EU decision-making process and not a specific EU strategy or programme.

TERRITORIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Moreover, the EU policies have been too often territorially blind: different strategies, legislations and instruments are poured on cities, without any consistency check. In this perspective, the new Commission's initiative for a **Better Regulation Package** contains interesting elements about the territorial dimension of impact assessments.

In this sense, the European Committee of the Regions had already stressed that **Territorial Impact Assessment must become a regular part of the preparation process for new EU legislation**. Together with the European Parliament we call upon all Commission services to include this kind of territorial assessment to eliminate overlaps and inconsistencies.

Also, from our perspective **the EU Urban Agenda should not be confined to Europe's largest cities, but should also be applicable to all types of urban areas** while looking at the interaction between the city and the countryside. Therefore, we welcome the attention the Latvian Presidency has paid to both small and big urban areas. And we're happy to see that a similar approach is continued through the Luxembourgish Presidency's priorities, which were published recently.

Finally, in order **to work on an evidence-based policy, we should monitor, progress and map new data**. We should consolidate the knowledge-base enhancing the multidisciplinary European research on urban development. For instance, this could be supported by Horizon 2020 and ESPON, while the OECD and the World Bank's work should be also considered.

RIGA DECLARATION AND BEYOND

Today we are very pleased to see that the Latvian Presidency's proposals in the Riga declaration, which will be adopted today, takes up many of our ideas. In particular, the declaration mentions the need for an integrated and **place-based approach**, effective coordination of EU policies with an urban dimension and the fact that the agenda should apply to **urban areas of all sizes**. We also welcome the recognition of the **partnership principle** and the respect of **subsidiarity and proportionality**.

In order to make a success of this process, we call for a **strong partnership involving multilevel governance cooperation** among Cities, Regions, Member States and EU institutions. Let's remember that local and regional authorities are not simple stakeholders, but the level of government that is closest to citizens and businesses.

We also welcome the call on the European Commission to **enhance ex-ante impact assessments of new EU initiatives and legislation** with regards their territorial impacts and consequences for local authorities.

With this Declaration **Member States commit to the development of a EU Urban Agenda**, which refers to the active role of local and regional authorities in the design, implementation and monitoring of urban policies and policies.

But for us the work is not over, it's rather part of a long-term process. In the same spirit and building on the work of the Latvian Presidency, the European Committee of the Regions will continue its cooperation on urban matters with the upcoming Luxembourgish, Dutch and Slovak Presidencies.

We can already announce that a **major event on urban policies is likely to be organised in Amsterdam in May 2016**, as a result of the commitment of the Dutch members of the Committee of the Regions and in line with the priorities of the upcoming Dutch Presidency.

We would also be delighted to welcome you to this year's **week of EU's Regions and Cities ("Open days")** where 5000 participants will debate regional and urban policies, bringing their local experiences to EU policy making. This will be jointly organised in Brussels during 5-8 October by the European Committee of the Regions and the European Commission – DG Regio.

I look forward to meeting you there and working in partnership with you to make the urban agenda deliver on the development of our cities.

Thank you.
