

[INTRODUCTION]

Dear Ministers,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Good evening!

Let me start by warmly thanking Latvia for the organisation of the informal ministerial meeting, and for the achievements of its Presidency.

I also want to thank all of you for the rich and fruitful exchanges of today on key elements such as investments in the real economy with the new Cohesion Policy, administrative capacity or simplification.

This is also fully relevant in the context of the EU Urban Agenda.

The ministerial declaration that we will discuss tomorrow, is the culmination of a long-standing work and represents a decisive step forward towards the implementation of the EU Urban Agenda.

In this context, I would like to thank the TRIO, and especially Latvia, for having made it possible.

But I also would like to thank the Netherlands for all the work they have invested and continue investing in the EU Urban Agenda.

Tonight I would especially like to focus on why this work on the EU Urban Agenda is so important.

The EU 2020 Strategy has set ambitious objectives for the Union as a whole

3 in 4 Europeans live in urban areas; hence a large share of our ability to deliver the EU 2020 Strategy will depend on how much we are able to mobilise the potential and the energies that are embedded in our cities.

And this is where the EU Urban Agenda can play a major role.

The EU Urban Agenda is not an isolated objective in itself.

It should help to deliver our main EU objectives, on the ground close to the citizens.

By supporting projects on the ground, municipalities contribute to the achievement of the big EU priorities: Jobs and Growth, the Energy Union, the Digital Agenda, Social Integration, Migration...

All these priorities fit into the EU Urban Agenda, because the Agenda is about stimulating innovation and creating jobs, tackling and preparing for climate change; building inclusive societies that are capable of handling migration.

[TERRITORIAL COHESION]

Moreover, cities are not isolated islands, but networked hubs in wider regions, linked with rural areas, often providing key social and economic inputs and services to their hinterland.

To a large extent, the EU Urban Agenda is about policymaking that is better aware of territorial differences.

It's about recognising that places and people matter.

It's about delivering EU policies that are better tailored to local needs and potential.

In this respect, the Commission has certainly a key role to play in providing the right policy coordination and instruments, in order to achieve balanced territorial development throughout the Union.

Of course, significant efforts have already been made for 2014-2020 [twenty fourteen twenty twenty], not least with tools such as the Urban Innovative Actions, which I launched last week during the CITIES Forum in Brussels.

Ladies and gentlemen,

all of this concerns primarily the implementation of the EU Urban Agenda, because municipalities are both project promoters and beneficiaries of Cohesion Policy.

[THE INTERNATIONAL COMPONENT]

But it is not only Europe that is urbanised.

The World is turning urban at a high speed, and it is our duty to help making sure that this urbanisation is sustainable.

The EU has a solid track-record, and we should ensure that international debates on these issues also build on our experience.

Next year, the HABITAT III conference will be held in Quito, in order to work on a global New Urban Agenda.

Together with the Member States, the Commission will provide input to this process, inspired by the European model of sustainable urban development.

Several European cities and urban areas are pro-active at the worldwide level, and have taken leadership on key issues such as climate change.

But already in September, we may have a new Sustainable Development Goal adopted, the SDG 11, which is directly focused on urban development.

Since 2012 , we also have a China-EU Partnership on urbanisation, which can be an important point on the agenda of the next EU-China summit in June.

These are, ladies and gentlemen, just a few examples to illustrate why the EU Urban Agenda is also important for the EU's global relations.

[PARTNERSHIP]

I would like to finish my address, by taking a moment to underline the importance of a strong partnership approach, in the implementation of the EU Urban Agenda.

As I already said, the EU Urban Agenda is not an end in itself, but a tool for better designing and better implementing our policy objectives.

This cannot be achieved only by top-down EU action.

We need effective partnerships between the local, national and EU levels.

As representatives of the Member States, I would like to call on you to engage as partners, as I do with the other European institutions and committees.

But above all, I would like that we all engage with public and private actors, those that make change happen at the local level.

[CONCLUSION]

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues:

I am confident that the Riga Declaration is the start of something big on the EU Urban Agenda that we will build together.

I look very much forward to this joint work.

Thank you for your attention!