

Speech 10 June

**[INTRODUCTION]**

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

I would like to start by thanking the TRIO, the Netherlands, and very much the Latvian Presidency of the Council, for their intensive and committed work in preparing the Riga Declaration, which is a decisive step towards the implementation of the EU Urban Agenda.

The new funding round has set ambitious objectives in the context of the EU 2020 Strategy, and we can expect everybody to make a contribution: Member States, regions, cities, towns, rural areas...

And the Urban Agenda consists exactly of this: supporting cities with the means they need, to do their part of this enterprise.

The EU Urban Agenda is about enabling cities to fully contribute to EU objectives.

It's about better addressing our great challenges, about better exploiting the potential for innovation, creativity, resource efficiency and social inclusion, which we have in our cities.

It is about building a better Europe at the grassroots by those that know best how to address every day's citizens' needs and concerns.

At the same time, experience and the replies to the public consultation tell us what the EU Urban Agenda should not be.

The EU Urban Agenda is not about grabbing new policy competences for the EU. The EU Urban Agenda will not bring more regulation, or encroach on subsidiarity,

On the contrary, the Urban Agenda is about better regulation and more transparency in what the EU is already doing.

It's about better using the tools and instruments, that are already available.

And the Riga Declaration gives a number of hints, about how we could achieve this together.

### **[THE WORK AHEAD ON THE EU AGENDA]**

Last week, in our CITIES Forum, we presented the results of last year's public consultation and discussed the next steps we envisage to take.

The main outcome of the consultation was a broad agreement on the need for an EU urban agenda, for several reasons:

- We need to respond better to both pressing societal challenges and urban realities;
- We need to improve coordination of policies; and
- We need to strengthen the links between cities and their surrounding regions.

Following the hundreds of contributions we have received, but also the fruitful discussions we have held with both you and the cities, we propose a framework based on four components:

- **A focus on a few priority areas**, covering smart, green and inclusive cities;
- **Better EU legislation**: in particular thanks to our reinforced analysis of territorial impacts when designing policies.  
we have just approved new "Better Regulation" guidelines, including on territorial impacts and greater opportunity for feedback from all stakeholders,

including urban ones. We now all need to make sure we make best use of these new opportunities

- **Better coordination of EU urban initiatives;** and
- **Better data, benchmarking and monitoring.**

These components should help us to focus on the right issues, those where Europe can make a difference.

And in this context, your input and your expertise cannot be replaced.

We need to jointly identify the critical urban issues, for which EU initiatives and actions both make sense and provide a significant value added, over and above actions that can be taken at national or local level.

In this respect, I welcome the draft roadmap presented by the Netherlands, which will help us to define and agree, upon concrete objectives and actions.

In parallel, the Commission is working on improving coordination of EU urban related instruments, such as for instance between the recently launched Urban Innovative Actions, the Covenant of Mayors or the Smart Cities EIP.

I hope that we will be able to report some progress already during the Luxemburgish Presidency.

The aim is to arrive at an operational EU Urban Agenda during the Dutch Presidency.

### **[ROLE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES]**

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very happy that the Latvian Presidency, together with the TRIO, has put a second item on the agenda for our discussion of today.

Small and medium sized urban areas are the home of almost one in three Europeans.

Having a sound discussion on the role of urban areas, also means keeping in mind what is going on in these cities and towns.

They function as bridges between the bigger cities and the rural areas, and as centres of services and activities in the more sparsely populated areas.

But within this range of cities and towns, we can find a huge diversity of situations, of dynamics, of development processes.

Because having similar size, does not mean that they face the same problems or offer the same potential.

For this heterogeneous group of cities and towns, we can really say that geography matters.

For this reason, I am glad that the TRIO has managed to make the link between the urban agenda and territorial cohesion.

On our side, we have been developing, for some time already, specific work on urban-rural linkages.

Furthermore, I am glad that in our Policy, we already offer tools that match the needs of small and medium-sized urban areas, and integrate them economically in their wider region.

For the new programming period, strong efforts were done in this direction.

"Community-led local development", Integrated Territorial Investments, cooperation programmes.

The uptake is positive, but could be even higher.

And we will go further to help small and medium-sized urban areas, for instance, we are now working with Commissioner Hogan on the key issue of rural broadband.

## **[CONCLUSION]**

To conclude, it is up to all of us now to make sure, that we enable cities and the citizens that live, create and work in these areas to exploit the extraordinary potential they hold in their hands.

And in this context, we can make no better contribution than implementing a sound, realistic and shared EU Urban Agenda.

Thank you for your attention.