

"Keeping cities in good shape"

***Opening address of Prof. Danuta Hübner, Commissioner in charge
of Regional Policy***

at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development

Leipzig, 24 May 2007

Dear Minister Tiefensee, dear Ministers and Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is really a great pleasure and satisfaction to be here in Leipzig today and to continue our important discussion on the European city, building on the work of previous Presidencies and, in particular, on the results of Informal Ministerial meetings in Lille (2000), Rotterdam (2004) and Bristol (2005) and preparing the ground for further work in the future. The Leipzig Charter reminds us that "our cities are an irreplaceable economic, social and cultural asset". We have responsibility for maintaining in good shape this environment which the majority of our citizens are happy to call their home.

In the renewed cohesion policy for 2007-2013, cities will play a key role since they are crucial in shaping the European economy. Cities and urban areas are home to most jobs, businesses and higher education institutions. They have been and they will be the engines for regional, national and European economic growth. On the other hand, many cities are confronted with severe problems of social exclusion. Despite progress in

areas like waste and water management, trends in urban transport and urban sprawl are alarming. The battle for sustainable development will almost certainly be decided in cities.

These are the main reasons why we have reinforced the urban dimension in our new cohesion policy. For some of us it is too big, for some still too small. Whatever our impression, the fact of life is that we just account for 7% of global population and our share is likely to shrink in the future. So we must mobilise all our resources and potentials. When cities or regions lag behind, when their potential is not fully exploited, it is a waste of resources. All our regions and cities have the right and the duty to contribute to Europe's prosperity. We need cities and entire urban areas in good shape, wisely using their resources, especially land, caring for them in innovative and sustainable way and being cities for all, for current and further generations.

Cohesion policy copes with complex development problems and new challenges of climate change, of social challenges posed by demographic trends, of access of SMEs to newest technologies and of many others.

The main value of our policy is that within its framework we can address those issues in an integrated manner. Through this integrated approach, tested over years through urban initiative, cohesion policy can improve the overall impact of sectoral interventions by exploiting synergies between policy domains and controlling for their side effects, by favouring dialogue between administrations and social and economic partners, and

by better adapting interventions to the socio-economic characteristics of regions and cities.

In Berlin, just a few weeks ago, our leaders agreed on a Declaration which calls for agreement on new common foundations for the Union before the end of 2009. The Berlin declaration recognised the important role of local and regional self-government and of subsidiarity in the Union's governance. I firmly believe that the reinforcement of the role of regions and cities is a powerful tool in cohesion policy. It will support the establishment of multi-level governance as a corner-stone principle of the EU functioning and improve the design and implementation of our policies across a wide range of areas.

Now, to prove that Europe is united not only through declarations, Member States will have to find a common solution. I believe that the Constitutional Treaty is a good basis on which consensus could be built. And I am convinced we will succeed.

Let me thank Minister Tiefensee for his exceptional commitment and his passion in safeguarding and promoting the interests of cities and their role in the rapidly changing world we live in. I know that you have paid very close attention to prepare a comprehensive and stimulating agenda for our discussions today. I would like to express my appreciation of your efforts. To find solutions to all problems we face in our European cities, to fully exploit their potentials, to make them cities for all, we need common endeavour. The Commission is here to work with you.

I would like to thank you Minister Tiefensee for the warmth of your welcome we have already received and express my recognition of the importance you attach to our common endeavours.

Thank you for your attention.