

Conclusions of the German EU Council Presidency on the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion

Leipzig, 24 and 25 May 2007

At the invitation of the German EU Council Presidency an Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion took place in Leipzig on 24 and 25 May 2007. On 24 May 2007, the ministers responsible for urban development met and on 25 May 2007, the meeting of the ministers responsible for spatial planning and development took place. The Vice President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Transport, the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, representatives of the European Parliament, the President of the Committee of the Regions, the President of the European Economic and Social Committee, representatives of the European Investment Bank and the Council of Europe Development Bank and representatives of the OECD also took part in the meetings. The Presidency was also pleased to welcome representatives from the candidate countries, neighbouring states and Non-Governmental Organizations.

The Ministers

- expressed their firm conviction that an integrated urban and spatial planning and development policy is needed in order to make an important contribution to improving the situation of European citizens and businesses in their immediate social, cultural, environmental and economic surroundings and
- reaffirmed their will to support steps to take the territorial and urban dimension into account when policies are being drawn up at Community, national regional and local levels, where increasing attention should be paid to the appropriate decision-making process through which policies are being developed.
- agreed that their informal cooperation should contribute to identify and mobilize the diverse potentials of all cities and regions in Europe to promote sustainable economic growth and the creation of new jobs as well as to contribute to social and environmental development and thus help to achieve the objectives laid down in the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies.

Pursuing these aims, the Ministers agreed upon

1. the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities

With the Leipzig Charter, the ministers responsible for urban development agreed on guidelines for an integrated urban development policy which covers economical, social and environmental dimensions, represents a fundamental element of a national urban policy and develops strategies for action on socially and economically deprived urban areas as well as on cities as a whole.

Through the political impetus which it provides, the Leipzig Charter offers the member states an opportunity to make a valuable contribution to the work of the European Commission, in particular to the Commission's report on the follow-up process of cohesion policy due by 2010, by reporting on their experience made in this application of integrated urban development strategies. Against this background the Ministers agreed to cooperate closely in preparing a report and requested the trio presidency (France, Czech Republic, Sweden) that will be in place at the end of 2008 to present this report.

2. the Territorial Agenda of the EU

In the Territorial Agenda of the EU, the ministers responsible for spatial planning and development emphasized their intention to preserve the regional diversity of the European Union in the further course of the EU integration process, to make use of regional identity by considering it a valuable asset in the development of the regions in Europe and to promote complementarities and synergies between the different territories. They agreed to cooperate closely with each other and with the European Commission in the process of implementing the EU Territorial Agenda.

In this context they welcomed Portugal's invitation to an informal ministerial meeting at which an action programme for the implementation of the EU Territorial Agenda should be adopted.

3. The Ministers asked the German Presidency to inform the EU institutions and the EU sector policy councils with urban and spatial impact about the Territorial Agenda of the EU and the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities.

The Ministers further addressed various other far-reaching policy issues:

4. They took note of Spain's report "Housing Policies in the EU: A means for Urban Regeneration" and recommended that the influence of EU policies on national urban development and housing policies be made a permanent subject at future meetings of the Ministers responsible for these policy areas.
5. The Ministers took note of the European Commission's report on the implementation of sustainable urban development and the special emphasis placed on the territorial dimension in the national strategic reference frameworks and the operational programmes of the EU Member States for the 2007-2013 programming period. They would like the new structural funds programmes as appropriate to contribute to an effective implementation of the EU Territorial Agenda and the Leipzig Charter. They requested the European Commission, based on Member States' reports, to include an analysis in the strategy report due by 1 April 2010 which assesses how the special consideration given to the urban and territorial dimension in the structural funds programmes has facilitated integrated urban development and territorial cohesion.

6. They took note of Portugal's report on "European Urban and Territorial Networks to Exchange Experience, Learning and Skills and Generate New Knowledge", supported the key actions of this report and emphasized the need to intensify this exchange of experience for the purpose of an integrated policy for cities and regions. The Ministers asked Portugal to coordinate this process together with the European Commission under its upcoming presidency. The Ministers expressed their support for the European Commission's communication "Regions for Economic Change" and committed themselves to actively contribute to the implementation of European programmes, such as URBACT and Interreg IV C, in order to exchange experiences and facilitate the dissemination of good practices. They took note that 14 Member States who have participated in the European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) have agreed to continue their financial contribution, focusing on the EUKN core programme, to the EUKN after the pilot phase, of up to three years.
7. With regard to new funding instruments, the Ministers welcomed the EU's JESSICA and JEREMIE initiatives which they consider to be very promising instruments for funding urban development investments. They asked the Commission to report on progress with regard to implementing these instruments at a future informal meeting of ministers. They were of the opinion that an expert working group should identify and resolve the various issues regarding the implementation of the JESSICA initiative and requested Germany to take the initiative of establishing this working group.

The Ministers took note of the report of the expert working group established under the UK Presidency (Bristol 2005) on the topic of "The Role of the European Investment Bank in Sustainable Urban Development" and of the "Conclusions and Recommendations" (Annex 1). In line with the EIB's political mission in accordance with Article 267 of the EC Treaty, the Ministers called on the European Investment Bank to place special emphasis on i) developing innovative financial products tailored to investment needs and risk profiles in the urban context; ii) getting involved more strongly in deprived urban neighbourhoods, in particular by taking on greater risk; iii) providing technical and project-oriented assistance to EU Member States and iv) publishing guidelines on the conditions of funding from the European Investment Bank. The Ministers requested the European Commission and the European Investment Bank to provide them with an opinion on the questions and recommendations of the expert working group under the trio presidency that will be in place at the end of 2008 (France, Czech Republic and Sweden).

8. They requested the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Commission to initiate a dialogue with the Member States on how to examine and take into account the effects that European legislation may have on a sustainable urban and spatial development and how the coordination of EU policies and initiatives that concern urban and territorial policy areas can be improved. This assessment and coordination should take place within the framework of the existing institutions and procedures, such as impact assessments. The Ministers requested the European Commission to report on these topics in 2010.

9. They thanked the European Commission for presenting their strategic considerations on the planned Green Paper on Urban Transport and emphasized that this Green Paper should be the start of a political discourse on the role and functions of urban transport as an important element of integrated sustainable urban development policy all the while respecting the principle of subsidiarity. The Ministers asked the trio presidency (Portugal, Slovenia and France) to intensify the discussion process on this Green Paper among the Member States.
10. They affirmed their intention to strive for more political recognition of the urban and territorial dimension of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies. At national level, they called for greater cooperation and dialogue between the authorities responsible for the implementation of the National Reform Programme (NRP) under the Lisbon strategy and the authorities responsible for the territorial dimension. At community level, they asked Slovenia to incorporate the EU Territorial Agenda and the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities into its preparations for the spring 2008 European Council. They agreed to fully support the Slovenian Presidency in this endeavour.
11. The Ministers agreed to initiate a political debate in their states on how to find synergies between the priorities of the Territorial Agenda of the EU and the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities as well as on how to integrate the urban and territorial aspects of the Community Strategic Guidelines into national, regional and local development policies. In order to contribute to this debate, they requested the European Commission to prepare a report on territorial cohesion by 2008.
12. The Ministers took note of the results of the territorial cooperation and of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON 2006) in the 2000 – 2006 structural funds period and agreed to support and make use of ESPON 2013 and the new Objective 3 instrument – European Territorial Cooperation – for implementing the EU Territorial Agenda and the Leipzig Charter. In particular, they felt there is a need for territorial cooperation projects on the consequences drawn by regions and cities from the threat posed by climate change – so that regions and cities can adopt prevention, mitigation and adaptation measures –, as well as projects to intensify networking between regions and cities as European development corridors emerge and cooperation projects to mitigate the effects of demographic change caused by ageing and immigration.