

Decision of the Bundesrat

Commission Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The urban dimension of EU policies - key features of an EU urban agenda

COM(2014) 490 final

At its 925th session on Friday 19 September 2014, the Bundesrat adopted the following decision pursuant to Sections 3 and 5 of the Act on Cooperation between the Federation and the *Länder* in European Union Affairs (EUZBLG)

1. The Bundesrat welcomes the Commission Communication initiating consultation on a new urban agenda on the basis of the reflection process on 'Cities of Tomorrow', and thus driving forward the discussion on sustainable city development in Europe.
2. It is convinced that a new EU urban agenda should revisit, further develop, consolidate and publicise the Leipzig Charter of 2007 in particular. The Leipzig Charter has on the one hand shown clearly that the instrument of integrated urban development can contribute to overcoming sectoral thinking and behaviour, to organising participation on a broad scale and to reconciling interests in urban spaces. It also emphasises that special attention must be paid to disadvantaged urban areas and population groups in the context of cities as a whole. The aims of the Leipzig Charter are still not evident in many policy and action areas that influence urban development and are in many places not sufficiently put into practice.
3. The Bundesrat urges that an EU urban agenda must in future contribute to the urban dimension (in the sense of integrated urban development) playing a key role with regard to the updating of the Europe 2020 strategy and the main policy documents of the various areas of EU policy (for example, energy/smart cities initiative, digitalisation, infrastructure and mobility, fighting poverty, immigration policy). For example, it was established that the Europe 2020 strategy does not contain any statements on the role, importance or the sustainable development of European cities.
4. It calls on the Commission and the Council to ensure that there is greater coordination and coherence between initiatives in the various EU policy areas which have an impact on cities. As already called for many times by the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions, an EU urban agenda could provide for the establishment of policy impact assessments whereby the environmental impact would be examined in the case of all policy areas of relevance for cities.
5. At the same time, the Bundesrat expects the Commission not to erect any unnecessary obstacles to structural fund support of the urban dimension, which would make it difficult or effectively impossible for cities to avail themselves of EU funds for measures within integrated urban development plans.

By way of illustration - the structural fund regulations do indeed promote (pro forma) the urban dimension and call for a national five per cent minimum quota for urban development measures. However, in view of the narrow definition of aims and investment priorities in the structural fund

regulations (which tend to inhibit integrated urban development), the Commission's excessive demands to participate, administer and control (with every town receiving funding being an intermediate body) and the complication of the 'mixed axis' for urban development in the operational programmes of the *Länder*, the aims of sustainable and integrated urban development as described in many EU documents are rendered meaningless when it comes to actual implementation. This does not encourage community participation. Poorer cities and urban zones which have fewer staff for financial reasons are disadvantaged.

6. The Bundesrat proposes supporting the consolidation of and cooperation between the existing networks and their working bases instead of setting up a further network for exchanging experiences, as intended by the Commission according to Article 9 of the ERDF Regulation (establishment of an urban development network). Possibilities for exchanging experiences are already very advanced at regional, national and European level. There are numerous networks throughout the EU, for example, URBACT, the German-Austrian *URBAN-Netzwerk*, the European Knowledge Network (EUKN), Eurocities, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions - CEMR, the Covenant of Mayors, the Metropolitan Network [*Städteverbund*] in the context of the reference framework for sustainable urban development. The knowledge base can, for example, be extended by improving and updating the data in the framework of the Urban Audit.

7. The Bundesrat would point out that an EU urban agenda at the beginning of the new Structural Funds period would be premature as it cannot take account of experiences with the use of structural funds (where appropriate involving different funds) in the new 2014 - 2020 funding period and their impact on urban development measures.

8. If cities are to adapt successfully to the demands of the future, the regional level must be closely involved in the process of developing an EU urban agenda. Connections between urban and peri-urban areas are key here. This applies both to metropolitan regions with their extensive functional interdependence as a whole, and to functional interconnections with central towns in the regions. Developing these connections is a prerequisite for sustainable development of urban regions and cities.

9. The Bundesrat therefore urges that urban development and structural needs should not be restricted to the concept of 'city', and the concept of urbanity not only applied to 'cities', but extended to functional spaces (for example, metropolitan areas or interconnections between urban and peri-urban areas), which are shaped both by concentrated urban structures and functional interactions with surrounding rural structures.

10. The Bundesrat is transmitting this opinion directly to the Commission.