Executive Summary

On 17-18 February the European Commission organised a major Forum, "CITIES - Cities of Tomorrow: Investing in Europe", to discuss how we can strengthen the urban dimension of EU policymaking, and on how we can better recognise cities' key role in rolling out EU and national policies. The main objective of the CITIES Forum was to stimulate a debate at European level on the need for an EU urban agenda. A set of questions put forward in an issues paper specifically developed for the Forum guided the discussions.

Do we need an EU urban agenda?

Virtually all stakeholders agreed that "we need a European urban agenda". An EU urban agenda can be viewed in a narrow sense as a tool for the development of EU cities, i.e., EU as a facilitator of urban development. It can also be understood in a wider sense as a vehicle to develop the EU by addressing societal challenges through policies adapted to the places and the actors most concerned. Cities' role in addressing major societal challenges and implementing European policies - in particular the Europe 2020 strategy - was emphasised by a large number of stakeholders from both the local, national and European level.

More integrated sector policies better adapted to urban realities was seen as a prerequisite in relation to the facilitation of cities participation in EU policy implementation, as was a better articulation between different governance levels. Better awareness was called for both in terms of the potential and needs of cities as well as the impact of sectoral policies on urban areas.

Territorial aspects were also put forward both as arguments for an EU urban agenda (the need to adapt policies and governance to the needs of city regions), as well as aspects an agenda has to deal with – especially the roles of cities for territorial development and cohesion. The need to strengthen national urban agendas was also emphasised as a necessity, not least to counter the fact that cities themselves are political actors with sometimes limited capacity for structural change and dealing with challenges transcending administrative borders.

What should an EU agenda be?

The question regarding what an EU agenda should be did not provide clear cut answers. It was evident from the discussions that different stakeholders have different perceptions of what an EU urban agenda could be. Positions ranged from a method or process without objectives - "the journey is more important than the destination" - to a medium to long-term strategy with priorities for the long-term and operational guidelines for the short term – "the destination is the most important aspect". Stakeholders from both national and local level argued that a long-term vision is needed, "an EU urban agenda for 2050 not a five-years plan". One argument was that city development involves long-term processes and long-lasting infrastructure investments.

Many stakeholders saw an EU urban agenda as a framework to guide action, to bring coherence to a diversity of initiatives and policies, to give clear roles for European, national, regional and local authorities, as well as to be used by cities in implementing their local policies and plans.

City stakeholders in particular saw an EU urban agenda as an instrument to involve cities and their political leaders in the EU policymaking and policy implementation - "an agenda for, with and between cities" – with a special emphasis on Europe 2020. It was argued that an EU urban agenda should have an aim to develop methodology to integrate the goals of the EU2020 strategy with cities’ own strategies, as well as being a tool to guide cities in relation to EU instruments, such as the European Structural and Investment Funds and Horizon 2020.

In the discussions on what the EU urban agenda should be many areas were highlighted as particularly challenging for cities and therefore as potential priority areas for the content of an EU
urban agenda. Some stakeholders also stated that it was necessary to first discuss priorities before discussing actions and how an EU urban agenda should work. Europe 2020 was seen by most as the starting point for priority setting, although some argued that we need to go beyond Europe 2020 both in scope and in time-frame.

Several stakeholders – especially from the local level - emphasised that an EU urban agenda must be flexible and that it should not build on new legislation - “an EU urban agenda should set a flexible framework for EU policies with an urban dimension and a long term vision for the EU’s cities”. Some stressed that any framework must allow a high level of freedom for the local level in shaping their urban policy and initiatives tailored to their urban reality. Diversity and subsidiarity were also stressed; diversity both in terms of whether issues have to be dealt with at EU level or not, as well as diversity in the situation and needs of cities and urban areas - “an EU urban agenda should be about empowerment with the Commission as facilitator and moderator rather than regulator”

Several stakeholders highlighted the international dimension and that an EU urban agenda should take account of the international dimension of EU policies with an urban dimension, including climate policies, and help engage in the international agenda in a coordinated way. The international dimension was considered from the point of view of exporting European know-how and technology, as well as from a more general development perspective linked to the post-2015 Development Goals and the Habitat III. International cooperation between cities was also stressed.

How should an EU agenda work?
The questions concerning working method were difficult to answer without an agreement on what an EU urban agenda should be. However, several concrete proposals were put on the table:

- structural involvement of cities in EU policy making, e.g., cities as part of advisory groups, biennial urban forums, etc.;
- adjustment of EU policies, including concrete priorities, to better respond to urban realities, e.g., setting policy priorities that are meaningful for cities and urban contexts, etc.;
- a rethinking of EU policy delivery to better reflect cities’ role as implementers of EU policy, e.g., a focus on two/three major societal challenges, such as CO2 reduction, climate adaptation or inclusion, to be addressed mainly through urban policies and by cities, etc.;
- strengthened coordination of EU policies directly or indirectly impacting on cities e.g., an urban Europe 2020 coordination platform, urban impact assessment, etc.;
- better articulation and coherence between EU, national and local level policy making e.g., a strengthened role given to the intergovernmental cooperation on urban development, etc.;
- An EU contribution to HABITAT III as an opportunity to take stock of de facto EU urban priorities and affirm the EU’s lead role for sustainable urban development;
- Monitoring of cities involvement and use of European funds, especially European Structural and Investment Funds;
- Using macro-regional strategies as a model for how an EU urban agenda could be conceived and implemented;
- Strengthened and more coordinated knowledge-base, networking and learning (especially with regards to the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC), the URBACT city networking programme, the ESPON programme, the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Environmental Agency (EEA), Urban Europe Joint Programming Initiative, etc.).

Conclusions
There is a clear demand for an EU urban agenda. The Commission and the Commissioner for Regional policy are called upon to lead and coordinate the process to take the EU urban agenda forward. It was evident from the discussions that different stakeholders have different perceptions of what an
EU urban agenda could and should be. It was clear that the development of a European urban agenda is not a single process that can be expressed by a single document or charter. It has to take place in a framework, which allows different actors to take on different roles in coherent parallel, and partly overlapping coordinated processes with commonly agreed objectives.

The CITIES Forum is a first step in a process that has the potential to shape our future polices and ways of working. This report on the CITIES Forum forms part of this further process. The Commission proposes to set out in more detail the way forward for a European Urban Agenda before the end of this year.
1. Introduction - debating an EU urban agenda

On 17-18 February the European Commission organised a major Forum, "CITIES - Cities of Tomorrow: Investing in Europe", to discuss how we can strengthen the urban dimension of EU policymaking, and on how we can better recognise cities' key role in rolling out EU and national policies. The main objective of the CITIES Forum was to stimulate a debate at European level on the need for an EU urban agenda. To focus and steer the debates an issues paper1 had been prepared that set out three key questions for discussion:

- Do we need an EU urban agenda?
- What should an EU urban agenda be?
- How should an EU urban agenda be implemented?

The CITIES Forum consisted of a main conference and a series of side-events: a meeting of Directors-General responsible for urban development in the Member States, a meeting of EU Capital Mayors, a city associations' meeting co-organised by Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and Eurocities, a meeting on the new Urban Development Network, an expert workshop on future urban challenges and a workshop on Smart and Connected Cities and Communities.

The huge level of interest in the Forum clearly indicated that the topic is urgent.

2. Background – calls for an EU urban agenda

2.1. EU urban policy

Urban policy, and in its limited sense urban planning, has no legal basis in the founding treaties of the European Union. However, economic, social and territorial cohesion all have a strong urban dimension. As 70% of European citizens live in or depend on cities, the development of urban areas cannot be isolated from the wider European policy framework. Cities have a key role in addressing our key societal challenges and in implementing EU objectives.

The addition of 'Urban Policy' in the name of the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy came in 2012 and was partly a response to the strengthening of multilevel governance in the Lisbon Treaty, but above all recognition of the importance of the local level in general and cities in particular as key actors for European development. One of the objectives of DG Regional and Urban Policy is to ensure that cities play their full part in the economic, social and territorial development of the EU.

Urban policy at EU level is not limited to Cohesion Policy. An increasing number of EU policies explicitly target urban areas; Education and Culture, Transport, Energy, Information Society, Environment, Climate Change, etc. support initiatives such as European Capital of Culture, Smart Cities and Communities European Innovation Partnership, Green Capital Award, Covenant of Mayors. Many other EU initiatives or directives implicitly target urban areas, e.g., noise and air quality directives, migration policies, etc., which although not urban per se, de facto chiefly concern urban areas.

In terms of aims, objectives, and values, there is an explicit agreement on the character of the European city of the future and the principles on which an ideal European city should be based. This

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has come from mutual supporting processes of intergovernmental cooperation and EU support to urban development resulting in what is known as the ‘Acquis Urbain’.

Source: Antonio Calafati

However, if there is an agreement of the principles that should guide urban development in Europe, there is a lack of explicit objectives, targets and instruments - EU's main growth strategy Europe 2020 lacks a visible urban dimension.

2.2. Calls for an EU urban agenda

The increasing recognition of cities' key role for EU and global development has in recent years led to calls for an (EU) urban agenda and a greater recognition of cities as partners for the EU and urban areas as places were sustainable development objectives can be met at a global level:

- In 2011 the European Parliament adopted a resolution arguing for a strengthening of the urban dimension of EU policies and the intergovernmental co-operation on urban development policies, calling for a joint working programme or European Urban Agenda. The European Parliament also stressed the need for a stronger involvement of cities in these processes.
- In early 2013 UN-Habitat approached the Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy to coordinate a contribution to the Habitat III conference in 2016 in the form of an EU urban agenda. UN-HABITAT is shifting its focus from meeting basic needs, such as food, water, energy and shelter, towards more qualitative objectives based on the potential of urban development.
- In mid-2013 a group of Member States led by NL and BE made a proposal for an urban agenda in the context of the intergovernmental cooperation on urban development. The Directors-General responsible for urban development in the Member States have given their support; Greece and the coming Presidency Trio (IT, LV, LU) are committed to supporting this process.
- In late 2013 the Committee of the Regions initiated its own initiative opinion entitled "Towards an integrated urban agenda for the EU". The draft opinion calls for a new Urban Integrated Urban Agenda for the EU giving the urban dimension a structural basis in European policies and legislation.
- In 2014 Eurocities published a policy brief arguing for an EU urban agenda and putting forward recommendations and proposals for action: more and better policy coordination, integration of urban development objectives in a larger number of policies; need to better balance priorities in European investment programmes; a strengthened direct dialogue between cities and the COM, a stronger coordinating role for the Commissioner for regional (and urban) policy, etc.
In 2014 the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) called for an EU urban agenda to facilitate the access and active involvement of all types of cities - small, medium-sized and large cities - in the policy making process, recognise the role of functional regions and the need for better policy coordination.

3. Do we need a European Urban agenda?

The need for an urban agenda was looked at from different angles guided by a set questions put forward in the issues paper:

- Do we need an EU urban agenda to facilitate the participation of cities in EU policy development and implementation, for example, of the Europe 2020 strategy?
- Do we need an EU urban agenda to ensure that urban needs are better reflected in EU sectoral policies, and to improve co-ordination between sectors by pursuing an integrated approach? Do we need it to raise awareness on cities’ needs and potential beyond urban stakeholders?
- Do we need an EU urban agenda to improve articulation between cities, their MS and the European level on policy making?

Virtually all stakeholders agreed that “yes we need a European urban agenda”:

*It is time to stop [paying] lip service to a European Urban Agenda, it is time to act* [Julien van Geertsom, Director-General, Federal Public Service for Social Integration, BE]

Cities’ role in addressing major societal challenges and implementing European policies - in particular the Europe 2020 strategy - was emphasised by a large number of stakeholders from both the local, national and European level.

*“...of course we have to have an urban strategy in the European Union! ... without the cities the European Union would not function at all - we are the ones that make decisions a reality” [Anneli Hulthén, Mayor of Gothenburg, SE]*

But the questions were not perceived as either or; more integrated sector policies better adapted to urban realities was seen rather as a prerequisite than a separate rationale in relation to the facilitation of cities participation in EU policy implementation. The same holds true for the question about better articulation between different governance levels. Better awareness was called for both in terms of the potential and needs of cities as well as the impact of sector policies on urban areas.

An EU urban agenda can be viewed in a narrow sense as a tool for the development of EU cities, i.e., EU as a facilitator of urban development. It can also be understood in a wider sense as a vehicle to develop the EU by addressing societal challenges through policies adapted at the places and the actors most concerned - "CITIES4EUROPE and EUROPE4CITIES" as was suggested in the forum. The fact that cities are close to citizens was also brought forward as an argument for an EU urban agenda.

City stakeholders in particular saw the EU urban agenda as an instrument to involve cities and their political leaders in the EU policymaking and policy implementation - “an agenda for, with and between cities” – with a special emphasis on Europe 2020.

Territorial aspects were also put forward both as arguments for an EU urban agenda (the need to adapt policies and governance to the emergence of city regions), as well as aspects an agenda has to deal with – especially the roles of cities for territorial development and cohesion. The need to strengthen national urban agendas was also emphasised as a necessity, not least to counter the fact that cities themselves are political actors with sometimes limited capacity for structural change and dealing with challenges transcending administrative borders.
The only potential argument against an EU urban agenda was on the principal grounds that urban policy is a horizontal policy for which the EU has no formal competence, therefore there should not be an EU urban policy. However, city stakeholder organisations in particular pointed to the fact that EU policies are *de facto* already urban.

3.1. Urban areas as places of change, challenges and solutions

The overarching reason put forward is the recognition that developments in and of urban areas are of crucial importance for Europe’s - and our planet’s - future:

“If we do not succeed in [our] cities, we will not succeed at all” [President Barroso].

Cities as creators of wealth

Cities are value creators and generate a relatively higher proportion of Europe’s GDP. Cities and city regions are seen as places of innovation and the cognitive engines of Europe:

“Cities of tomorrow is Europe of tomorrow, cities are the laboratory where much of our future will be designed, are ideal for building partnerships, are living labs for investments and places of integration.”

But cities are also the places where societal challenges come together. Many, including Ioannis Maniatis [Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, Greece], stressed the significance and complexity of urban issues because of the concentration of social, economic and environmental challenges in cities and argued that we had to treat it as.

Cities as places of social challenges

President Barroso emphasised youth unemployment as a pressing challenge that manifests itself in cities. Professor Jan Vranken argued that more competition and more diversity, but less cohesion and more poverty and social exclusion have increased challenges faced by cities. Cities have become “a dumping place of problems – to be avoided – and a bundle of opportunities – to be fostered”. It was pointed out that the objective to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020 cannot be achieved without the involvement of cities.

“Any discussion on limits should question current processes leading to generate both slums and gated communities.”

Cities as places of environmental challenges

The environmental consequences of the high concentration of people in urban areas with high demand for housing, services, drinking water, etc, and high levels of solid waste, waste water, traffic congestion, noise, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions etc, were put forward as arguments for a paradigm shifts.

“We should have a sense of urgency. [There are] increasing threats to our planet and to our cities as places for re-inventing “the good life”. We have to take the limits’ idea seriously.”

Clos was stressing the global challenge of getting urbanisation right when in the next 30 to 40 years the urban population in the world is to double (an increase of the world’s urban population by 3.5 billion is foreseen, taking place mainly in Africa and Asia). If done right this urbanisation can plant the seeds for a sustainable future, if done wrong, it can bring a societal and ecological disaster.

“Urbanisation is not going very well. The form of urbanisation that we are producing around the world is not very sustainable. It’s very successful commercially, it’s a very good business in terms of building buildings and selling them, but is not very good at building communities, building proper, sustainable societies.” [Joan Clos, UN Undersecretary-general, Executive Director of UN HABITAT]

But Clos also argued that urbanisation in the developed world - “the Global North” - needs to be redesigned as the old industrial model no longer fits.; urbanisation is commercially viable but is not

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1 For some quotes provided in this report, unfortunately, it has not been possible to identify the author.
building sustainable communities and societies. He argued that current urbanisation around the world is unsustainable, built on the paradigm of the industrial revolution and of the 1960s and 1970s, reflected in suburbs around the world. The same problems are now visible in China; “it will be very expensive to retrofit Chinese cities, while it would have been fairly cheap to get things right at the beginning”.

**Cities bringing the EU closer to its citizens**

It was argued that an EU urban agenda should include elements to bring the EU closer to citizens, as reaching citizens and encouraging their participation is crucial for Europe. "As mayors and local administrations are closest to citizens, and local authorities have wide responsibilities that influence citizens’ everyday life, they are key for Europe and all the more in the current context of socio-economic crisis, lost faith in the public administration or anti-Europeanism!"

**3.2. Urban development in a wider territorial context**

The discussions on the territorial aspects focused mainly on three issues: cities’ role for the wider territorial development, the need to pay attention to small and medium sized cities and the development of metropolitan regions and functional urban areas with no formal administrative structures for their governance.

"Despite the changes in the name from DG Regional to DG Regional and Urban Policy [...] most of European policies are spatially blind". [Mark Frequn, Director-General for Housing and Building, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, NL]

**Cities as drivers of territorial development**

If global urbanisation and the future development of our cities are seen as the major global challenges for an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future, it is clear that the links between cities’ development and the more general territorial development is something that most stakeholders liked to stress.

"Cities should be seen as key partners for national and European authorities. They need a new approach, a new governance model, not just more money" [...] "Since cities have always a hinterland and play a role in developing nodes at regional and local level, we can promote regional development through urban policies" [Ioannis Maniatis, Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, Greece].

In this sense an EU urban agenda becomes a concrete vehicle to implement the Territorial Agenda in support of territorial cohesion.

**The role and challenges of small and medium-sized cities**

Both representatives of Member States and local authorities argued that although an EU urban agenda should focus on urban specific issues it must also acknowledge cities’ role regarding overall territorial development, especially that of small and medium sized cities.

Many also stressed that an EU urban agenda must recognise the challenges of sustainable development of the small and medium size cities.

"Big cities will find their way but mid-size cities are facing the biggest problems and Europe is full of them". (Martin Powell, Siemens).

**The need for new governance to support metropolitan regions**

The diversity of territorial contexts – core cities, functional urban areas, metropolitan, urban-rural, peri-urban, etc. - often came up in the discussions as something that needed to be accommodated by an EU urban agenda, given that integrated development in these different areas is seen as key to the achievement of sustainability.

"The ‘city’ is a concept that requires continuous clarification, notwithstanding the recent effort of the EU/OECD definition. What in the past we called city is no longer the only centre of our preoccupation.”
The challenges of metropolitan regions go beyond the borders of cities and relate to both a governance vacuum and the territorial realities of rapidly growing and sometimes uncontrolled expansion of urban areas, with unsustainable land-take and sprawl, and a “flexible management for the whole functional urban area is needed”.

The European urban system [extracts from paper presented by Alessandro Balducci, Professor of Planning and Urban Policies, Politecnico di Milano]

In Europe we have four types of urban systems: (i) two large urban agglomerations (Paris and London); (ii) a considerable number of large city regions; (iii) a dense network of small and medium-sized cities; and (iv) areas with very few urban centres. Europe does not have gigantic mega-cities like in Asia and the Americas, nor non-urbanised “desert” areas. Instead we have a combination of some major urban centres, polycentric urban structures and dispersed urbanisation. Across the four urban systems this is producing the emergence of mega-city-regions, which are blurring the boundaries of municipalities, provinces and regions.

The emergence of polycentric (mega)-city-regions is a historical and geographical reality, but without a real functional and political base as there is a growing mismatch between administrative and urban structures, which raises a number of problems that states and regions are unable to deal with. The result is that while Asia and the Americas are more and more continents of giant mega-cities, Europe is the continent with a web of medium and small cities with many of the weaknesses of megacities, but at the same time little cohesion at the macro-regional scale (due to inadequate governance and infrastructures) and therefore impaired competitiveness.

The definition of fixed boundaries of new governmental entities (like metropolitan authorities) does not look possible everywhere. We must get used to work with new governance arrangements based upon intergovernmental relations and flexible cooperation of existing entities. This process is complex and requires innovative solutions, a new form of cooperation between former rural and urban areas, local and supra-local, centres and peripheries, if we want.

A European Urban Agenda is needed in order to address more effectively problems of social, economic and environmental sustainability. Such agenda has to

1. to recognise and consider cities for what they really are today, especially in Europe, as extended networks of centres of different size;
2. to support initiatives of horizontal and vertical cooperation to acknowledge and sustain the functional and political role of the European cities.

3.3. Increasing the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of policymaking

Almost all of the stakeholders that expressed themselves in the CITIES Forum argued that an integrated approach to urban development is needed and for this it is essential that EU policies are better coordinated and better adapted to the urban realities where they are being implemented.

Policy coordination and integration

To ensure consistency of urban policy interventions across different EU policies, including the consolidation of different EU funding schemes, was one of the major rationales for an EU urban agenda. Many, including the Committee of the Regions, stressed that we have to abandon a silo mentality; “if we do not look across the silos, we will not develop sustainable answers to the problems that we have”. The answer is a more integrated approach to policy development, to ensure consistent policies and legislation and to avoid policy fragmentation. This was supported by many interventions including from minister Maniatis. An integrated approach was considered essential in order to ensure better results with fewer resources.

Using urban poverty as an example, Julien van Geertsom (Director-General, Federal Public Service for Social Integration, BE) argued that the concentration of poverty in deprived neighbourhoods required an integrated spatial approach a large set of challenges in different policy domains needed to be addressed, such as housing, health care, education, employment, social services, etc. But
vertical integration is also needed, as most of the issues cannot be solved at one specific governmental level.

This integrated approach should concern sectoral integration, such as a more systemic approach to water, energy, transport, waste, ICT, climate change, but should also take on a holistic approach to what a city and its functions are, e.g., places of social interaction, human creativity, networking, new citizenship, knowledge hubs, incubator of solutions.

"Integration is necessary, we need to be linked. Look at the way we work in Member States: our politicians have more and more integrated portfolios. Therefore the EU Commission also has to integrate urban policies" [Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)]

Need to strengthen the urban dimension of Europe 2020

The coordination and integration of policies go hand-in-hand with an expressed need to have a stronger and more explicit integration of the urban dimension in EU policies, especially in Europe 2020. Urban issues should be higher on the EU agenda, urban policy should be given more visibility at the European level; and the urban dimension should be stronger in European funds.

"The preparation of the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy should be seized to put forward the importance of cities in reaching the objectives” [Julien van Geertsom, Director-General, Federal Public Service for Social Integration, BE]”

It was argued that an EU urban agenda should have as aim to develop a methodology to integrate the goals of the EU2020 strategy within cities’ own strategies, as well as being a tool to guide cities in relation to EU instruments, such as Horizon 2020. It was clear EU urban policy is considered to cover a wider policy spectrum than the European Structural and Investments Funds. But there were also arguments that European policy for cities should go beyond Europe 2020 and that an EU urban agenda should ensure more continuity at the European level.

Need to understand urban realities and involving cities in policy making

One of the main reasons put forward in support of an EU urban agenda was to ensure that the new instruments in Cohesion Policy and other EU policies and initiatives with an urban dimension fit the needs of local areas. To achieve better coordination and integration there is a need to raise the awareness at the European level about the impacts of various EU policies on urban areas. Some argued that EU policies are not yet adapted to urban realities, that there is a gap between the real problems and needs of cities and the European level policymaking, and that urban needs should be better reflected in EU sectoral policies.

"The question is: are EU policies adapted to urban realities? This question has not yet a positive answer.”

There is also a perceived lack of recognition of local authorities in the strategic phase of policy making as cities are often considered as end-of-the-line players.

3.4. Need to strengthen national urban agendas

The role of the national level

Many interventions touched upon the role of the national level for the development of cities; an important role for an EU urban agenda should therefore also be to promote and strengthen national urban agendas. The European level alone cannot address the combination of the emergence of metropolitan regions with unclear governance frameworks and the variation in local capacity to manage structural change. Calafati argued that from a policy perspective the key question to address is how to support structural changes that have to be designed and accomplished at local level. He pointed to the fact that national governments and cities have reacted very differently to challenges posed by the urban question and to incorporating an EU perspective on cities in their policies - “why has Amsterdam [...] developed such a comprehensive development strategy whereas Florence has not?”
The ‘European urban question’ [extracts from paper presented by Antonio Calafati, Professor, GSSI Gran Sasso Science Institute L’Aquila]

We need an EU urban agenda to face the ‘European urban question’, i.e.:

a) large and growing disparities among European cities: in terms of current performances and even more so in terms of ‘development potential’;

b) large and growing disparities within cities: in terms of per capita income and also in terms of access to public and collective goods (spatial welfare) and in terms of distribution of negative and positive externalities.

The entire discourse on cities that has developed as a response to the new urban question in Europe is about ‘change’, ‘structural change’. The ‘smart growth’ paradigm is about moving from the ‘current structure’ to a ‘smart structure’. From a policy perspective the key question to address is how to support structural changes that have to be designed and accomplished at local level. From the ‘smart growth’ perspective the question is about changing the ‘economic base’ of European cities, upgrading it to meet the new competitive context, to find a place, a role in the regional, national, European and global ‘spatial division of labour’. However, there are many ‘city economic models’ in Europe, there are very different ‘transitions’ or ‘structural transformations’ to consider. The complexity of the economic changes that we are asking our cities to implement are not well understood and very often not even discussed.

In a global perspective Clos stressed the need for a national urban policy. In its absence, informal urbanisation leads to slums and megacities. Clos argued that central governments – and not mayors – were responsible for the allocation of funds, budgetary spending, labour market, agricultural policy etc. In that sense, national governments were directly responsible for the outcome of urbanisation.

Need to support city development and capacity building

Capacity building of cities was raised as an important reason for an EU urban agenda, both in terms of strategic capacity as well as in terms of resources to adequately deal with growing challenges and new responsibilities resulting from down-scaling of national public services.

“[The fight against poverty requires resources, but as national, regional and local funding has become scarcer cities are very much dependant on the EU (e.g. in the Slovak Republic, 75% of the public investments come from EU funds). Overall there are “less resources for more tasks and more problems”] [Milan Ftáčnik, Mayor of Bratislava, SK]

4. What should an EU agenda be?

The questions related to what an EU agenda should be did not provide clear cut answers, and the positions ranged from a method or process without objectives to a medium to long-term strategy with priorities and operational guidelines for the short term. It was evident from the discussions that
different stakeholders have different perceptions of what an EU urban agenda could be. Positions ranged from a method or process without other objectives than the method itself - “the journey is more important than the destination” - to a medium to long-term strategy with priorities for the long-term and operational guidelines for the short term – “the destination is the most important aspect”.

While some stakeholders emphasised overall holistic objectives for an EU urban agenda with visible results for cities, e.g., through improved living conditions, increased employment, or culture, cohesiveness and governance, others were more focused on the forms and emphasised that new legislation is not the favoured way forward and that the principle of subsidiarity needed to be respected.

4.1. Need for long-term visions

Stakeholders from both national and local level argued that a long-term vision is needed, “an EU urban agenda for 2050 not a five-years plan”. One argument was that city development involves long-term processes and long-lasting infrastructure investments. Some suggested that the Leipzig Charter and the Toledo declaration should form the basis of visions and shared priorities, whilst others mentioned Europe 2020 and the Cities of Tomorrow. It was also argued that a long term vision is needed that goes beyond Europe 2020 and that cities should be involved in drafting a post 2020 agenda.

4.2. An EU urban agenda as a framework for policy and action

Many stakeholders saw an EU urban agenda as a framework to guide action, to bring coherence to a diversity of initiatives and policies, to give clear roles for European, national, regional and local authorities, as well as something to be used by cities in implementing their local policies and plans. Some stressed that any framework must allow a high level of freedom for the local level in shaping their urban policy and initiatives tailored to their urban reality.

Frequin proposed an urban framework building on “Cities of Tomorrow” with a working method built on a rolling agenda to deal with urgent issues in a cyclical manner, with the Member States in the lead through the intergovernmental cooperation on urban development, but with central roles also for the Commission and other EU institutions as well as the cities through their stakeholder organisations. The basic idea is to agree on urgent issues, map the problems and debate the policy implications, with a voluntary engagement. The goal is better-informed policymaking and ad-hoc proposals for action. Urban poverty and intra-EU migration flows have already been selected as initial issues. Others also emphasised the role of the Presidencies of the Council and the need to appoint tasks to ensure that the momentum is not lost.
**A framework of the European urban agenda** [extracts from presentation by Mark Frequin, Director-General for Housing and Building, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, NL]

**WHY:** cities are the places where social and/or economic problems become most manifest, but cities are also the places where innovative solutions are found more rapidly. Cities are the economic engines of the European economy.

**What themes:** based on Smart, green, inclusive Growth and transversal challenges, e.g. transition towards a knowledge society, develop city resilience, greater energy and resource efficiency, sustainable management of natural resources, transition towards a sustainable city, counter social/spatial segregation/polarization, integration of newcomers, demographic changes, foster cities' attractiveness and territorial coherence and cohesion.

**What are the aims:** The Urban Agenda aims to achieve a better informed policy at the national, regional and EU level with a stronger urban dimension. Better informed policy implies that an effective form of multi-level governance is implemented and cities are involved earlier in the policy process at the different levels. Concretely, as a consequence policy, funding and regulations at the EU, regional and national level will be better designed to stimulating cities in contributing to the EU and its future development.

**How to achieve?** Taking into account the urban impact of new policy will lead to better informed policies and will enhance the cities in their role as important deliverers of policy. The paper proposes to implement the European Urban Agenda by use of a long term rolling agenda. This rolling agenda works as follows. Member States can include a theme in the Urban Agenda, as long as the challenge:

- is related to the priorities of EU development;
- is recognized by different member states as an European urban challenge;
- has a clear urban impact and spatial dimension;
- can best be addressed at the city level.

**Who:** The main actors in the European arena, e.g. the European Commission, the Member States, cities and city association are invited to contribute to the agenda from their own roles and perspective.

**What concrete results:** The Urban Agenda should lead to concrete products and results. As pilots, two themes are being explored: ‘Intra EU migration’ and ‘Urban poverty’. Member States can put new themes on the agenda and start working groups. Since some Member States have asked for a vision to underpin the Urban Agenda, it is proposed that a working group will work on this vision and finish this vision during the first semester of 2016.

### 4.3. Principles to guide an EU urban agenda

Many stakeholders – especially from the local level - emphasised that an EU urban agenda must be flexible and that it should not build on new legislation - “an EU urban agenda should set a flexible framework for EU policies with an urban dimension and a long term vision for the EU’s cities”.

Diversity and subsidiarity were also stressed; diversity both in terms of whether issues have to be dealt with at EU level or not, as well as diversity in the situation and needs of cities and urban areas - “an EU urban agenda should be about empowerment with the Commission as facilitator and moderator rather than regulator”

Many stakeholders pointed to the fact that there are already a plethora of principles, initiatives and instruments addressing cities or urban development that have to be used better and with more continuity, e.g. the Leipzig Charter, the Reference Framework for sustainable cities, the Covenant of Mayors, and URBACT.

### 4.4. An EU urban agenda should be implemented through a strategy

There were different opinions on how ambitious and concrete an EU agenda should be. Whereas some saw the method as most important others argued that it must go beyond the development of a common vision or the exchange of expertise and good practices – “a concrete common European urban strategy to reach the agreed joint objectives; if you don’t know where to go, you will never arrive”. The fact that we need to move beyond principles was also stressed:
“We should be aware of the European Union perspective on city. It would be useless to arrange an EU urban agenda in terms of principles, concepts: I cannot see what the EU can say that in addition to what has already been said on this issue” [A Calafati]

Julien van Geertsom argued that these objectives should be translated into policy recommendations and national action plans, based on collaboration between national, regional and local authorities - “if we have the involvement of all, we can make progress”. A roadmap with clear priorities was also suggested, but for this efficient follow-up, monitoring and evaluation had to be ensured.

“A European urban agenda should be more than a vision. It should be a concrete strategy with clear priorities and targets (like Digital Agenda or the Energy Efficiency Package). It should be built bottom-up with the contribution from cities, and should not only be connected to cohesion policy”.

4.5. Need for priorities

In the discussions on what the EU urban agenda should be many areas were highlighted as particularly challenging for cities and as such priority areas for the content of an EU urban agenda. Some also regarded it necessary to first discuss priorities before discussing actions and how an EU urban agenda should work. Europe 2020 was seen by most as the starting point for priority setting, although some argued that we need to go beyond Europe 2020 both in scope and in time-frame.

Ingolf Schädler stressed the role of research and the study of megatrends that the Joint Programming Initiative Urban Europe has carried out, pointing to major challenges such as ageing and climate change. He warned that disparities in Europe will grow rapidly and the growth potential for cities will also change dramatically - “we need to be aware of what is at the horizon and collectively look at possibilities.”

Several issues were highlighted as important, ranging from very precise and concrete areas, such as social housing and broadband in cities, to wider objectives, such as economic development and social inclusion. Three broad areas in particular came out strongly from the discussion; (reducing) inequalities, promoting smart green and CO₂ neutral cities, and better governance.

Fighting inequalities

Inequalities in different forms were often cited as important issues for an EU urban agenda, as challenges such as social polarisation, urban poverty, environmental risks are seen as more intense than they used to be, with the crisis further increasing disparities between Northern and Southern European cities – “in many Southern cities, the question is no more about improving quality of life. It is about surviving to the crisis, and it may take more than a decade”. Hence people, social inclusion, (childhood) poverty and (social) housing should be on top of the list.

Minister Maniatis emphasised the strong need to address the challenge of urban poverty, which used to be concentrated in certain neighbourhoods but is often now a city-wide problem, and stressed the importance of local labour markets and education. Pascal Lamy also emphasised the need to reduce socio-spatial disparities in cities and foster urban cohesion.

Many also pointed out that a shrinking part of the urban population is in paid employment – “in some of our cities, maybe half of the population will not be on paid jobs”. Unemployment today does not only affect unskilled workers but also a large number of jobs requiring middle level qualifications have disappeared, with record levels of unemployment among very qualified young people. Furthermore, there is also an increase in the ‘working poor’.

Other issues perceived as urgent were intra-EU migration and shrinking and ageing cities, especially putting pressure on cities from newer Member States.

Environment, resource efficiency & CO₂ neutral economy

Many different stakeholders saw Green and Smart Cities as a major priority with the concept of smart being enlarged to cover all resource flows. "Smart European city is a city where highly relevant issues such as water, waste, climate adaptation measures, green and blue space, as well as ICT,
Transport and Energy are integrated in a coherent long-term agenda.” This more holistic view of a Smart City was underlined by several participants:

“In my view, Smart Cities with an exclusive focus on ICT, Energy and Transport are not smart at all. Europe needs a coherent approach to make our cities more sustainable and competitive.”

Green and Smart cities would entail actions covering strategies of greenification and Green Infrastructure, climate change adaptation, energy master plans and energy efficiency measures, IT and resource efficiency in buildings, optimisation of infrastructure with better mobility planning and intelligent traffic management.

Some stakeholders argued that the environment is still taken as an externality that should be internalised, and that there is an underestimation of the ecological waste, e.g. the impact of EU policies on CO₂ emissions. It was also argued that "a strong sustainability agenda should not be perceived by people as a punishment, it has to result in raising the city’s attractiveness", e.g. with the development of green spaces, CO₂ reduction, air quality improvement as well as new clusters of innovation. Others highlighted the direct benefits of low emission zones that can generate revenues for local transport networks, or better air quality that reduces the number of premature deaths due to low air quality. The need to think in terms of recycling of city resources (suburban structures, commercial areas, brownfields, etc.) was also put forward.

Blain presented public transport as a key element for urbanisation, creating economic growth and jobs, promoting energy efficiency as well as cities’ attractiveness and competitiveness. Each day, there are around 1.2 billion journeys inside European cities; "in 3 years' time, with simple tools, there may be a reduction of up to 20% of CO₂ emissions with major benefits, notably in terms of air quality."

New models of governance

The fact that urban development takes place in a multi-actor and multi-level governance framework that transcends administrative borders led many to highlight governance as a priority area for an EU urban agenda.

“We have to change the conceptual framework about cities. It becomes more and more difficult to define what is urban and what is not urban. Our democratic system does not match the reality of cities, beyond administrative and national borders.”

Gutiérrez-Cortines also saw governance as a key problem - “the urban fabric is more than urban planning.” The EU was called upon to address the challenge of multi-governance by supporting new and flexible forms of governance, with support actions, research, pilot projects.

However, urban governance is not only about multilevel governance and its horizontal dimension does not only concern administrative (geographic) borders. Vranken argued that there is a need for a global urban policy framework in which an increasingly heterogeneous conglomerate of actors and agencies, with various backgrounds and competencies, define and deliver services independently from the boundaries of the traditional local government structure.

Several experts stressed that governing bodies, especially at city level, are not (always) able to handle the complexity of urban challenges that required transitional change and and multi-scalar governance. Calafati argued that "there is no such thing as a 'European city'", and that there is great diversity in urban setting and challenges. There are successful and non-successful cities; successful cities can adapt to changing circumstances to shape their development trajectories. This adjustment capacity of a city is very much dependant on the political-cognitive dimension, i.e. the willingness to adapt a smart growth paradigm and the ability to conceive effective transition strategies.

4.6. The international dimension

Several stakeholders highlighted the international dimension and stated that an EU urban agenda should concern also EU external policies with an urban dimension, including climate policies, and help engage in the international agenda in a coordinated way - “not to forget the international dimension of urban policy – cities are acting locally and globally”. The international dimension was considered from
the point of view of exporting European know-how and technology, as well as from a more general development perspective – "scope the problems at a global level; pay attention to articulate the urban agenda to the discussion on post-2015 Development Goals". It was also argued that an EU urban agenda should take into account the processes around UN Habitat III and serve as a basis for a common EU position on international issues.

International cooperation between cities was also stressed but Joan Clos pointed to that Europeans tended to export their model of an industrialised city, although it is not needed in a large part of the world, and neglected to reflect on or discuss the future of Europe’s own cities. It was also pointed out that the centre of our global economy is shifting towards the East and it will continue to do so in the next decades.

5. How should an EU agenda work?

The discussion concerning how an EU agenda should work revolved around the steps needed to develop an EU urban agenda, the roles of the Member States, the Commission, and regional and local authorities, as well as how the implementation of an EU urban agenda could be monitored and steered. This question was maybe the most difficult to answer, as it demanded some clear notions of what the agenda should be. However, two issues were seen as crucial:

(i) stronger and more direct involvement of cities in EU policymaking;
(ii) better coordination and coherence of EU policies to reflect city needs and urban development contexts.

Several concrete proposals were also put on the table:

- A structural involvement of cities in EU policy making, e.g., cities as part of advisory groups, biennial urban forums, etc.;
- An adjustment of EU policies, including concrete priorities, to better respond to urban realities, e.g., setting policy priorities that are meaningful for cities and urban contexts, etc.;
- A rethinking of EU policy delivery to better reflect cities’ role as implementers of EU policy, e.g., a focus on two-three major societal challenges, such as CO2 reduction, climate adaptation or inclusion, to be addressed mainly through urban policies and by cities, etc.;
- A strengthened coordination of EU policies directly or indirectly impacting on cities e.g., an urban Europe 2020 coordination platform, urban impact assessment, etc.;
- A better articulation and coherence between EU, national and local level policy making e.g., a strengthened role of the intergovernmental cooperation on urban development, etc.;
- EU contribution to HABITAT III as a structured way to set EU urban priorities and affirm EU’s lead role for good urban development;
- Monitoring of cities involvement and use of European funds, especially European Structural and Investment Funds;
- Using macro-regional strategies as a model for how an EU urban agenda could be conceived and implemented;
- Strengthened and more coordinated knowledge-base, networking and learning (especially with regards to the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC), the URBACT city networking programme, the ESPON programme, the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Environmental Agency (EEA), Urban Europe Joint Programming Initiative, etc.).

Ad hoc approaches were also suggested, such as expanding existing initiatives when they are yielding success, focusing on policy levers which directly impact on the quality of life in cities, letting the best ideas and models compete. Warnings were also raised against reinventing the wheel. The
difficulty to achieve change because of inertia in the system and dominance of sectoral approaches at all governance levels, was also stressed.

Some particular issues received more attention: improved multi-level governance; multi-actor governance and partnerships; citizen engagement through enabling technologies; target setting and monitoring; and a strengthened knowledge-base.

5.1. Improved multi-level governance

A large number of stakeholders from all governance levels stressed well-functioning multi-level governance as an essential aspect for an EU urban agenda and that new working methods between EU, MS and city actors were needed. Many pointed to the need to established clear working processes for exchange between the European level, the Member States, and local authorities.

EUROCITIES argued that an urban agenda at EU level has to be based on a practical, coherent and coordinated approach, which allows cities, the EU, and national governments to work more closely together. Different possible models to involve cities were suggested, e.g., city engagement in working groups to address the effectiveness of existing legislation and its implementation, city involvement in the development of new legislation through new partnerships and exchange models, cities direct involvement in the reform of Europe 2020.

"Local governments would be directly affected by such an agenda and have a duty to provide a good quality of life to their citizens... Therefore it is good to involve them from the beginning of the policy-making process."

Many stakeholders from the local level saw as the main purpose of an EU urban agenda to be strengthened and more direct links between the EU (the Commission and the European Parliament) and cities, as EU regulation is translated via national governments without cities' involvement; “cities are more than implementation areas or receivers of funds, they need to be involved when developing or adapting EU legislation”. It was suggested to review existing methods for involving cities directly in EU policy developments to see how they can be developed further. Bas Verkerk [Mayor of Delft, Committee of the Regions rapporteur on an urban agendaNL] called for a new model of governance with structural involvement of cities in EU policymaking. The Covenant of Mayors was used as an example of how the EU could engage directly with cities although a critical voice suggested that it need to be more flexible and less detailed, technical and complicated.

However, it was also stated that the Commission is already engaged in direct discussion with cities and that it is the dialogue between the national level and cities that must be strengthened – "Member States need to set up equivalent structures at national level and involve local authorities when developing policies or adapting EU legislation. The first step is a commitment between Member States and their cities mediated by the EC”.

5.2. New multi-actor partnerships

A call for more developed multi-actor partnerships complemented the call for better multi-level governance. This concerned involving the public and private sectors, civil society including citizens and academia, as well as involving cross sectoral or cross-administrative border partnerships. Eurocities, CEMR, the European Parliament were cited as key actors together with the European Investment Bank, citizens and the private and third sector at large. The Partnership Principle was quoted as something that should also apply to the EU urban agenda, alongside the European Innovation Partnership: "the Agenda should be like the European Innovation Partnerships, bringing together cities, industries, innovative SME's, research organisations and civil society actors to improve urban life."

While some stressed the need to engage and enable other organisations, the third sector and citizens and not just governments, others emphasised the involvement of political leaders: “we need politicians around the table”. 

Many pointed to the relations between cities and the business world as essential for the future of cities, and that focus must be placed on how to involve the private sector in supporting urban development and on the mechanisms that can facilitate this. The multitude of actors - business, public administration, civil society, experts - and the multitude of domains, departments, ministries, were seen as arguments for a new political culture with a flexible and responsive administration, structural participation of citizens, clients, and users and a decentralised decision-making.

5.3. Citizens’ engagement through enabling technologies

Many stakeholders brought forward citizens’ engagement and participation as a crucial aspect for the success of an EU urban agenda.

"An EU urban agenda must be concrete and include elements to bring the EU closer to citizens. The importance of reaching citizens and encouraging their participation should not be underestimated – it is crucial for Europe."

It was stated that as the economic crisis has accentuated urban challenges, such as social inclusion, an integrated approach to tackle urban challenges based on new ways to engage citizens in public policies was needed. In this context information technology could act as a facilitator both of citizens’ participation and the integration of policies. Tablets given to young students in Tanzania to map the slums was given as an example of enabling the community the play a key role in the co-creation of solutions.

The discussions reflected a general support for more bottom-up approaches – "replacing top-down control with bottom-up trust" – and extended to cities seen as enablers of urban services and innovation at large.

"Governments have to realize that they cannot solve problems by themselves. They have to open up and serve as platforms, enabling organizations and citizens to achieve more. Opening up city data enables the business sector to develop solutions".

Smart Cities ecosystems were mentioned, in which city sensing and open data are enablers for citizen participation and co-management, even co-creation, of urban services; "smart citizens need to build smart cities".

"Citizens are the eyes and the ears of the city. If you can get your citizens in as partners, you can substantially increase your resources, e.g. let citizens tell which fence needs to be fixed instead of let municipal workers control everything ".

5.4. Ensuring results: setting targets and monitoring progress

Several stakeholders stressed the need to be concrete and impact oriented. It was suggested that the EU urban agenda could take the form of "a strategic paper with broadly defined common objectives, and unified criteria to measure impact", as well as an action plan with a clear timescale. Many showed willingness to discuss common objectives, targets and guidelines. From a city perspective common targets were seen as a way to create critical mass, become stronger and attract (other) EU and private funds.

Frequin proposed that the EU urban agenda should have an action similar to the Roadmap of the Territorial Agenda, and that the Presidency Trios of the European Council should play a leading role for its implementation.

Monitoring of progress, both of cities individual development as well as of the EU urban agenda process as a whole, was seen as essential to ensure results. Different aspects were stressed, such as transparency, need for mix of qualitative and quantitative monitoring, monitoring based on learning, underpinning monitoring by consistent data sets, audit carried out at the EU level of urban development, ranking and benchmarking of cities, etc. The Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC) was mentioned by several participants as a relevant tool.
Several stakeholders called for a (bi-)annual forums or high-level meetings to assess the impact of EU policies on cities. The CITIES Forum was considered as setting a precedent for biennial urban summits between the EU and national and city governments. Commissioner Hahn's role in bringing cities to the centre of the attention and to co-ordinate efforts within the commission was recognised, and it was suggested to appoint an urban coordinator who would support the Commissioner for regional [and urban policy] in joining up EU policies with an urban dimension. All Commissioners were urged to make urban study visits and have meetings with city mayors as a standard part of their programmes when they visit member states.

5.5. Knowledge and data to underpin an EU urban agenda

Better knowledge and more refined comparable data and indicators on urban development and quality of life were called for to enable better monitoring of city performance in tackling different urban challenges. Esa Halme emphasised the role of networking of actors and building open, learning environments, using open data, and benchmarking. He argued that we must create a passion for change which received support from the audience - “good urban practices should be collected somewhere, evaluated and distributed”.

Better knowledge was associated with a focus on innovation, networking, learning, and cooperation between governance levels and between actors. The importance of good practice models and solutions regarding issues such as energy in building and transport, and innovation were highlighted and it was suggested that they should be spread with the help of platforms and databases, and supported by closer interaction between research/science and policy communities.

6. Conclusions

The CITIES Forum was organised with the explicit objective to open a European-wide debate about the need for an EU urban agenda, what it should be and how it could be put in place. It has generated a wealth of input and also high expectations on the Commission for taking the EU urban agenda forward, not least in relation to the revision of Europe 2020 and the priorities of the future Commission.

The questions whether we need an EU urban agenda received an unambiguous answer – yes, we do need an EU urban agenda. There is a clearly expressed demand for an EU urban agenda and the calls for the Commission and the Commissioner for Regional policy to take on a leading and coordinating role in taking the EU urban agenda process forward. However, it was evident from the discussions that different stakeholders have different perceptions of what an EU urban agenda could be. Its form, content and working method needs a further and more systematic exploration.

During the forum it became clear that the development of a European urban agenda is not a single process that can be resumed by a single document or charter. The development of a European urban agenda has to take place in a framework, which allows different actors to take on different roles in coherent parallel, and partly overlapping coordinated processes with commonly agreed objectives.

The CITIES Forum is a first step in a process that has the potential to shape our future polices and ways of working. This report on the CITIES Forum forms part of this further process. The Commission proposes to set out in more detail the way forward for a European Urban Agenda before the end of this year.