



**Local & Regional  
Europe**

# **Territorial development**

## **An EU Urban Agenda should facilitate local authorities' action on the ground**

CEMR position paper  
Brussels, December 2015

## FOREWORD

*“The need for an **EU Urban Agenda** has been acknowledged and therefore, we now need to move forward together to establish it concretely.*

*CEMR is committed to fully collaborate in the preparation and implementation of an EU Urban Agenda as we are convinced that relevant challenges can only be successfully addressed when all levels of government cooperate. We renew our engagement at the EU level, working with the EU institutions for the development of an EU Urban Agenda that fits the diverse needs of municipalities and irrespective of their size*

*On behalf of local governments and regions, we ask the EU institutions and national governments to take into account CEMR’s key messages, requests and proposals:*

- *Diversity and specificities of cities and towns across the EU and the need for integrated and place-based policies;*
- *Need to better coordinate existing EU initiatives in a coherent framework which will help better identify the local dimension in EU policies;*
- *The importance of territorial proofing and developing specific knowledge and urban development data;*
- *The positive impact of developing partnership and policy coordination between levels of government for more effective public policies to address common challenges;*
- *No new regulation, but better legislation, better connection of policies and programmes between the European Commission services, better access to EU funding sources, and more structured dialogue between the EU, Member States and local governments;*
- *The recognition of the role of the Committee of the Regions, CEMR and other partners voicing the interests of urban areas and regions”*

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## Background information

Many developments are currently taking place at EU level on the EU Urban Agenda: in the European Commission (EC) and in the intergovernmental process.

In fact, Member States (MS) and the European Commission recently published two key documents on the EU Urban Agenda: the Riga Declaration of Ministers “towards an EU Urban Agenda”<sup>1</sup> and the Staff Working Document of the Commission presenting the “results of the public consultation on the key features of an EU Urban Agenda”<sup>2</sup>. We welcome these documents drafted in an open way and which have taken into account most of CEMR’s key messages, requests and proposals.

CEMR calls on the European Commission to continue work on the EU urban agenda in its annual work programme, and the Luxembourgish and Dutch EU Presidencies to continue efforts to establish such an EU Urban Agenda. Furthermore, Member States and the European Commission are invited to undertake joint action with local governments that will generate the development and implementation of an EU Urban Agenda adapted to local needs and across all relevant dimensions.

CEMR is keen to support EU policy development by providing its expertise and fostering exchanges of experience between local governments and their associations, and with other levels of government, when possible and necessary.

This position paper aims to further the discussion by proposing concrete joint actions that will bolster tangible progress.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://eu2015.lv/images/news/2015\\_06\\_10\\_EUUrbanDeclaration.pdf](https://eu2015.lv/images/news/2015_06_10_EUUrbanDeclaration.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/consultation/urb\\_agenda/pdf/swd\\_2015.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/consultation/urb_agenda/pdf/swd_2015.pdf)

## CEMR key recommendations

In this position paper, CEMR formulates some key recommendations on how to make tangible progress in the process towards an EU Urban Agenda:

1. The establishment of an EU Urban Agenda should be based on a **clear timeframe with concrete actions**, developed in close cooperation with local government associations and their members. This will ensure at EU level, full recognition of local governments as crucial partners when developing new or evaluating existing legislation and programmes in all relevant policy areas. The roadmap developed by the Luxembourg and Netherlands EU Presidencies is a good step forward. However, further progress should not rely solely on intergovernmental action: the EU approach is crucial for the achievement of successful outcomes across the EU.

2. We urge the EC, beyond Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG Regio), and Member States, to replicate the **working method of partnership** with local and urban authorities and their associations, similar to the partnership principle that was introduced in the EU cohesion policy<sup>3</sup>; this should be applied to all EU legislation and initiatives with a direct or indirect impact on territories, beyond regional policy.

3. We support and would like to contribute during the discussions at the European Parliament (EP) and the Council to the EC aspirations to develop a methodology for a **real territorial impact assessment** in which the local impacts of new EU policies and legislation, irrespective of which Directorates-General is in charge, are assessed in a pertinent and coherent way. This should lead to the pursuit of EU objectives with the support of local government that generates a minimum amount of administrative and financial burden and optimum results. There is a clear link to the EU Better Regulation package<sup>4</sup> which aims at *“focusing on the things that really do need to be done by the EU and making sure they are done well”*.

4. CEMR is keen to **support the European Commission and Member States in identifying priority issues** for the EU Urban Agenda as a first step, **and in analysing existing EU initiatives**, such as the Covenant of Mayors or Mayors Adapt, with the aim of replicating them in other domains. CEMR is currently working on the development of a Covenant on Demographic Change and the development of Age-Friendly Environment, which is a crucial challenge for cities of all sizes across the EU. These examples provide a rich source of information for valuable insight of developments within the EU.

5. CEMR will welcome an EU Urban Agenda that provide a **better access to EU funding to local authorities**. Urban development programmes, which in some Member States prove to be genuine place-based multi-fund programmes, should be managed by local authorities themselves in order to achieve their full potential.

6. The European Commission shall encourage the **exchange of experiences** on innovative, technological and social innovation-driven solutions like the smart cities and communities initiative, or on sustainable integrated urban development and the use of voluntary instruments such as the Urban III programme and the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities<sup>5</sup>.

7. CEMR is **concerned about the development of binding urban indicators** for cities to qualify for being “smart”. The setting of standards in this area has a political dimension and therefore should be approved on the basis of a democratic mandate and in a transparent way. Indicators should only be developed in close cooperation with local authorities and should provide a tool for self-

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<sup>3</sup> Art. 5, Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, 17 December 2013

<sup>4</sup> “Better regulation for better results - An EU agenda” COM(2015) 215 final, 19 May 2015: *“Applying the principles of better regulation will ensure that measures are evidence-based, well designed and deliver tangible and sustainable benefits”*

<sup>5</sup> It has been developed by the Member States as a tool to implement the *Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities*, which they had adopted in 2007

assessment on a voluntary basis. Habitat III is going to develop principles for sustainable urban development in a transparent and inclusive way: we think this is a good approach.

8. CEMR asks the EC to express clearly that the Urban Agenda also **comprises small and medium sized towns as well as local governments in functional areas** (rural-urban partnerships, sub-regional cooperation)

9. Finally, we call for more involvement of **local authorities in preparing the EU report for the Habitat III conference** and the New global Urban Agenda. It should not only be an intergovernmental process; Mayors are at the forefront of action that directly impacts on their citizens and therefore, an intergovernmental approach will lead to suboptimal results.

## **CEMR position towards an EU Urban Agenda**

### ***Local governments are key partners to achieve Europe's objectives***

Many aspects of urban development relate to policy areas that fall under the EU's competence, such as noise, air pollution, state aids, climate and energy, etc., but affect directly or indirectly local authorities. Therefore better policy coordination between different levels of government regarding common challenges is essential.

- ⇒ *CEMR calls for further and speedier efforts to develop new partnership arrangements for the design, implementation and monitoring of EU legislation and policy objectives*

The important concept of 'governing in partnership' must be enshrined in all initiatives of the European Commission, which implies a long-term partnership in relevant policy areas, with local authorities and all relevant Directorates-General (DGs) of the European Commission; it should not be limited to DG Regio, which clearly has a more territorial approach. This concept should also be promoted at national level. Cooperation between local and regional governments, national governments and EU institutions is essential when responding to EU priorities and a shared policy agenda exists.

- ⇒ *The 'partnership principle' now embedded in the cohesion policy should be extended to the relevant DGs of the European Commission and to Member States in other policy areas.*

### ***The EU should systematically conduct territorial impact assessments***

In accordance with the new Better Regulation Package<sup>6</sup>, the EC shall assess ahead of developing any new legislative proposal and in addition to the socio-economic and territorial aspects, the rise in administrative burden compared to the increased benefits. An EU Urban Agenda should therefore help EU officials understand the reality in Europe's local authorities when drafting regulations. It should create a framework for all European Commission DGs to analyse local issues and the impact of EU legislation at the local level. This will assist the adaptation of EU legislation to local conditions. This should be done across DGs of the EC, but also across Ministries in Member States.

- ⇒ *The CEMR is willing to contribute to the methodological development of territorial impact assessments suggested by the EC in its Staff Working Document. An important basis should be the 'territorial impact assessment' methodology developed by the Committee of the Regions.*

The EC now seems to recognise the need to seek expertise of representative associations of local and regional authorities, representing diverse types and sizes of urban areas, before and when drafting EU legislation or developing initiatives. Associations usually work with experts from within their membership, enabling analysis of the impact of EU legislation at an early stage.

- ⇒ *Consequently, representatives of local governments should be involved in all relevant European Commission's expert groups.*

### ***The importance of demonstrating by evidence***

In this regard, we support the intergovernmental discussions conducted by the upcoming Dutch EU Presidency to develop several pilots on topics shared by all Member States, keeping in mind the importance of an integrated and place-based approach. The idea is that these pilots be carried out through a partnership between municipalities, Member States and European Commission services in order to show where there is a need for more, less or another European approach.

- ⇒ *It is crucial that decisions at EU level be based on real evidence, maximising knowledge of policies already in place, and of the obstacles local governments face on the ground. It will help recognise and develop in a proper way the local dimension of EU policies.*

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<sup>6</sup> "Better regulation for better results - An EU agenda" COM(2015) 215 final

### ***The development of an EU Urban Agenda shall ensure the collection of accurate data on the local situation***

The current NUTS II, III and LA1 levels do not always reflect places where real communities live, which affects the quality of impact assessment and policy-making at EU level. This point is acknowledged by the Commission's Staff Working Document, which is very positive. We need real local and sub-local data available EU wide.

- ⇒ *Eurostat should extend its action to the subnational and sub-local levels for data collection. It must develop more local-oriented strategies for data collection at different local units level.*

However, this data collection should not mean ranking or the creation of binding urban indicators when a city or town is to be considered as "smart" by international (ISO)/European (DIN) organisations without any political mandate. International Standards Organisation (ISO) is currently developing new standards for sustainable urban development that go well beyond "technical" matters and which extend to legal and political issues as well.

- ⇒ *Any standard should be for self-assessment on a voluntary basis and developed on a political mandate and in a transparent and democratic way.*

Equally we need to move from measuring well-being by looking at GDP alone. For instance the OECD<sup>7</sup> has developed indicators regarding people's material conditions and quality of life in regions in eleven dimensions such as housing conditions, civic engagement and governance, etc.

- ⇒ *We should go beyond the economic dimension and also measure other features of development, as proposed by the OECD or the World Bank.*

### ***The EU Urban Agenda should provide local government's better access to EU funding***

Local governments should be empowered to preserve social harmony, create new businesses and thousands of new jobs, as well as become more sustainable. However, there is a growing gap in urban local finances caused by growing transfers of competences, population growth and growing needs for infrastructures and public services on the one hand, and by declining incomes and the impact of some EU frameworks and regulations like the Stability and Growth Pact (including EU accounting rules) on the other hand.

EU funding and especially the European Structural and Investments Funds should therefore be better accessible for municipalities. Not only on project level, but also to implement urban development programmes within larger national or regional operational programmes.

- ⇒ *Urban development programmes which in some Member States prove to be genuine place-based multi-fund programmes, should be managed by local authorities themselves in order to achieve their full potential.*

Because of the difficult situation of local finances, access to funding is also essential for cities to join EU initiatives like the Covenant of Mayors, Mayors Adapt, the EU urban agenda etc. For the EU agenda, the crucial issue is whether there will be financial support for CEMR members (and through them, for cities themselves) and allocate valuable staff time to provide the expertise to develop the necessary work streams.

### ***Exchanges of experience are crucial to improving and developing effective policies and programmes***

Municipalities need to continue exchanging experiences and research findings among themselves, in order to draw inspiration from each other, to share common concerns and to work together to find appropriate solutions. Exchanges of experience and knowledge can be especially beneficial as a support to smaller cities and towns which cannot easily access the EU arena, and thereby helping them to reinforce their capacity to take part in the EU process and programmes.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/std/Measuring%20Well-Being%20and%20Progress%20Brochure.pdf>

- ⇒ *The European Commission and Member States should capitalise on these initiatives, taking advantage of existing collaborations with European associations of local authorities, representing diverse urban areas, including rural and peri-urban areas.*

**CEMR will support the European Commission and Member States' efforts to identify priority areas and analyse existing EU initiatives**

Together with its members, CEMR will support the identification of common priority domains in the three areas selected for EU action by the European Commission (smart, green and inclusive cities), like poverty, local (renewable) energy supply, environmental protection and combatting climate change, sustainable integrated transport, energy efficiency in buildings, waste management, urban-rural and inter-municipal cooperation, local labour economy restructuring, innovation, local finances, infrastructures, demographic change, migration and integration, etc.

In this context, CEMR supports the initiative of the upcoming Dutch Presidency to set up pilot partnerships between the EC, MS, urban authorities and their associations, in order to explore how municipalities deliver sustainable urban development, where this is connected with EU policies and legislation, how the EU can better integrate a territorial approach in its policies, and better work hand in hand with all levels of government to develop well adapted policies which facilitate the action of local governments on the ground.

In order to have real local expertise on board of these partnerships, CEMR demands to have experts from cities directly involved in the partnerships.

- ⇒ *This pilot partnerships must be selected and developed in a bottom-up way.*

Moreover the European Parliament (EP) must be closely associated in the follow-up and monitoring of this pilot partnerships. As elected representatives, Members of the European Parliament should be given the opportunity to directly discuss with local authorities on key challenges.

- ⇒ *In this perspective, CEMR supports the EP report on the "Urban dimension of EU policies"<sup>8</sup>.*

Finally, CEMR urges the EC to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of existing initiatives. The existing Covenant of Mayors on Energy and the upcoming Covenant on Demographic Change are prime examples of initiatives that draw upon action led by the local level, designed to confront common challenges. The EU should not reinvent the wheel but, as a first building block for an EU Urban Agenda, base its actions on what municipalities are doing already to address common EU challenges.

- ⇒ *CEMR is actively involved in crucial EU initiatives for local authorities like the Covenant of Mayors, Mayors Adapt, etc. Therefore we can and want to support the European Commission in such analysis.*

**Local authorities as key partners in international negotiations**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) is an opportunity to discuss and chart new pathways in response to the challenges of urbanisation and for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by cities and local governments. Consequently the development of such an international urban agenda requires the involvement of local and regional authorities as they will implement policy decisions taken at a higher level on the ground and are interested in exchanging with other cities around the world on urban development. This process should not only be driven from an intergovernmental approach. We agree with the position of the European Union and Member States that we need to be enabled and actively engaged in this preparatory process and in the conference, and together, we should form a global partnership

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<sup>8</sup> 2014/2213(INI), Committee on Regional Development, Rapporteur: Ms Kerstin Westphal MEP

for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. More support from EU institutions and Member States is needed to make our contribution to the process becomes recognised as essential.

- ⇒ *CEMR already contributes to the Habitat III process through the Global Task Force of local and regional governments<sup>9</sup>, but is willing to step up its dialogue with the EC, in particular DG Development and Cooperation and DG Regio, when building the EU report for Habitat III and the New global Urban Agenda.*

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.gtf2016.org/>

## Annex

### Example 1:

The Covenant of Mayors is a bottom-up movement uniting local authorities around a common commitment towards low-carbon society.

- The Covenant of Mayors is a key instrument to support the EU climate and energy policies for 2020. The key success factor of the Covenant is its clear objective, which is directly linked to the EU climate and energy targets: take up EU energy policy objectives - **reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 20% by 2020** at local level.
- The Covenant of Mayors is **voluntary**: the local level politically endorses EU objectives and adopts a long term vision for local sustainable development with concrete initiatives.
- It is based on **multi-level governance and cooperation principle**, involving diverse stakeholders since the long process of energy transition requires the involvement of a wide spectrum of players, at all levels.
- **Over 6 200** signatories of the Covenant have committed to **an average 28% CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions by 2020**.
- On the way to the **COP 21 global climate negotiations in Paris** at the end of this year, the Covenant of Mayors shows clear leadership of European municipalities in the fight against climate change.

We recommend:

- Reinforcing the Covenant of Mayors initiative and **strengthening synergies with related EU programmes and financial mechanisms** to ensure maximum impact.
- While cities work on delivering their 2020 commitments, many of them have already put into place climate strategies towards 2030, 2040 or 2050. Therefore **a Covenant 2030 is needed**. As of 2015, this timeframe must be prolonged to keep the long term dimension of the initiative, building on the objectives of the 2030 Climate and Energy Package and the definition of the new EU Urban Agenda.

### Example 2:

The Covenant on Demographic Change, based on the experience of the Covenant on energy, will be launched in December 2015 by CEMR, and other stakeholders such as AGE Platform Europe, TNO, Polibienestar. Challenging the demographic change through age-friendly environments represent a common challenge for Europe and is already recognised in many EU initiatives. However this domain lacks visibility, concrete actions, and policy coordination. So the idea is to create a voluntary working framework, which will help in particular local authorities to develop action plans with a clear target of improving quality of life for older citizens through the creation or improvement of age-friendly environments.

It will provide guidebooks, technical assistance, expertise for the development of voluntary action plans on age-friendly environments and the measurement of progresses, help for access to EU funding, etc. In this context, we promote:

- a coordinated action of the different levels of governance from the local to the European ones (local authorities, regions, national governments and the EU) since each level has different and complementary competences to help developing age-friendly environments.
- an integrated approach as supported by WHO in eight domains: outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information and community support and health services.
- exchanges of experience and expertise thanks to peer reviews and through a repository of notable practices. The network can also be a means to find partners for projects..
- coordination with other EU related initiatives like the Covenant of Mayors, Mayors Adapt, the European Innovation Partnership on Smart Cities, WHO initiatives, etc. in order to coordinate and not duplicate.

This Covenant has been developed from a bottom-up approach through the Thematic Network on Innovation for Age-Friendly Environments<sup>10</sup>. Many local authorities of all sizes, all over Europe, have already committed to continuing their engagement in this direction. We now ask the Commission to support this emerging demand through improved policy coordination and impact assessment of existing and upcoming legislations in each domain, to help optimise the actions of local authorities.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://afeinnovnet.eu/>

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## About CEMR

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the broadest organisation of local and regional authorities in Europe. Its members are over 57 national associations of municipalities and regions from 41 European countries. Together these associations represent some 150 000 local and regional authorities.

CEMR's objectives are twofold: to influence European legislation on behalf of local and regional authorities and to provide a platform for exchange between its member associations and their elected officials and experts.

Moreover, CEMR is the European section of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the worldwide organisation of local government.

[www.ccre.org](http://www.ccre.org)