



Zagreb Declaration of the Mayors of EU Capital Cities

EU capital cities have been faced with the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. This pandemic has changed our lives across the EU and the world. As EU capital cities play an important role in tackling all the today's challenges which cities face, such as unemployment, climate changes, social and economic disparities we welcome the open and constructive dialogue with the European Commission in order to have a recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. Capital Cities ask the MS to fully include regional and local authorities in the recovery.

The challenges of urbanization may affect the way of life in the cities, but there are also the opportunities that come with it. By bringing together all the partners, EU and cities, Member states, Regions and stakeholders, we can contribute effectively to shaping sustainable long-term urban development and deliver solutions for better living standard of its citizens. No matter how big cities are, they are still the closest level of governance to the citizens and as such are vital in communication with the EU. Therefore, we, the Mayors of EU capital cities continue to have a direct dialogue with the European Commission. The objectives of Europe 2024 or United Nation's 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals cannot be achieved without our active involvement. Capital cities are education and scientific centres and create motivating scene for innovation and smart growth.

In the light of current discussions on Recovery plan for Europe in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: Recovery and Resilience Facility and Technical Support Instrument

We welcome the European Commission's proposal for a Recovery and Resilience Facility¹ which brings €672.5 billion in loans and grants available to Member States. Since RRF as the key instrument at the heart of NextGenerationEU play a crucial role in helping Europe recovery from the economic and social impact of the pandemic it is of a great importance to include regional and local authorities in drafting of national recovery plans. In this way RRF will enable its outcome to make the EU's economies and societies more resilient and to embrace a more digital and greener future.

The urban agenda for the EU

Since its launching in 2016, the urban agenda for the EU has set a milestone in thematic Partnerships representing various governmental levels and stakeholders. We fully welcome the

¹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0038_EN.html

recent adoption of the New Leipzig Charter², under German EU presidency, as the next step in fostering the urban dimension in EU policy making. Leipzig charter sets the framework for a green, just and productive city and underlines the transformative power for the common good. We stress our dedication to contribute to the implementation process and to include a relevant range of EU policy areas, as cities are affected by sectoral EU policies across the Commission's priorities and the urban dimension needs to be reflected in all of them.

Over 70% of Europe's population live in urban areas. Capital cities are often characterised by particularly high concentrations of economic activity, employment and wealth. Indeed, cities are often seen as centres of economic growth, providing opportunities for study, innovation and employment. Therefore, cities attract large number of people but also create complex challenges, such as issues relating to sustainability, social cohesion, affordable housing, efficient transport services. All these urban challenges have to be addressed in an integrated way. We therefore welcome the European Commission's commitment to an integrated approach.

We support the ambition for Europe to become the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050. We believe that Air quality, Climate change, polluted transport are very important issues for the cities and therefore, we welcome the European Commission's commitment to tackle these issues with adequate policies, to ensure that transition to carbon neutrality is irreversible.

We support and recognize the efforts made by the Commission through Just Transition Fund with a purpose to facilitate territories most affected by the transition towards a climate neutral economy. We support the EU's digital strategy³, which will benefit European cities, citizens, economy and the environment.

In the light of current discussions on the European Pillar of Social Rights

We compliment European Commission on its recently published draft Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights⁴. We urge the Commission to back the Action Plan with concrete and ambitious legislative acts, esp. with regard to a European unemployment insurance scheme, and the definition of decent work in the platform economy. With regard to disproportionate vulnerable position of women in the current pandemic and their higher risk to be unemployed, we urge to implement a strong gender equality agenda. We stress the importance to address the severe housing crisis that has reached not only lower, but also middle-income families all over Europe. We also express our full support to the recent report adopted by the European Parliament on access to decent and affordable housing for all⁵.

Strengthening innovation capacities and attracting talents in the cities

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https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/new_leipzig_charter/new_leipzig_charter_en.pdf

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/content/european-digital-strategy>

⁴ <file:///C:/Users/rarar/Downloads/KE-09-21-008-EN-N.pdf>

⁵ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0247_EN.html

Capital cities acknowledge the fact that there is no economic or social growth without innovation. In order to maintain economic development through innovation cities need to create a research and innovation friendly environment. We support Commission's initiative for programme Horizon Europe and Urban Innovative Actions.

Cohesion politics as a support to address these challenges.

We are aware that cohesion policy is an important tool for cities and regions in meeting future challenges. Cohesion funds should serve to support the sustainable development of cities and urban areas, foster the digital and green economy, and address poverty, transport, housing and climate challenges. Also, structural reforms and cohesion must work together while assisting the transition to a digital, green and gender-balanced economy. The main tool to implement the European Green Deal is Cohesion policy and therefore essential for sustainable development. Effective cohesion policy must recognise the great diversity of Europe's regions and territories, offering support specific to their needs, whilst also working towards the broader goal of a more sustainable and equal Europe.

With regard to what is indicated in the text above:

We are at a crucial moment, when the decisions we make concern not only the best possible utilization of EU-funds, such as the cohesion funds and the hitherto unprecedented assets available under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, but also the life quality and health of coming generations. Therefore, when preparing their National Recovery and Resilience Plans and operational programmes, national governments must by all means properly consult local authorities and all relevant stakeholders. In addition, both the European Commission and MSs must pay thorough attention to synergies with other EU programmes (Horizon Europe and the Horizon missions, Urban Innovative Actions, etc.). Finally, investments under the NRRPs and the different operational programmes must be better linked to policy areas, where MSs are in breach of existing EU-legislation, for example as regards to air quality. Such linking could help address pre-pandemic challenges too, and bring about positive social, environmental and health outcomes for millions of EU citizens, boosting the economy and advancing EU-level climate objectives.