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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
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Subject:	10th Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF10 - Abu Dhabi, 8-13 February 2020) - EU opening statement

Delegations will find enclosed the EU opening statement at the 10th session of the World Urban Forum, as endorsed by Coreper.

EU Opening Statement at the World Urban Forum

Your Royal Highness, Madame Executive Director and distinguished delegates, it is my privilege to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States

Contextualisation and new EU growth strategy:

- We are extremely pleased to be participating to the 10th edition of the World Urban Forum with a massive delegation on the European Union side. We are here re-affirming the full and continued support and commitment of the European Union and its Member States for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the UN New Urban Agenda, in the European Union and beyond. We will be proud to present our European deliverables all along the week to come.
- A new decision-making cycle is starting for the European Union institutions and it is a critical time for taking the Sustainable Development Goals forward in the decade that is left before 2030. From the start, the European Union has acted on several strands in order to incorporate these goals into its policies and programmes, internally as well as globally. We intend to continue with determination to move forward with the implementation of each and every goal.
- The European Green Deal is the proposed new growth strategy for the European Union presented by the European Commission. It puts sustainability – in all of its senses – and the well-being of citizens at the centre of our action. This requires bringing together four dimensions: environment, productivity, stability and fairness and these four key dimensions will be crucial in implementing the SDGs.
- In view of this context, we strongly support UN HABITAT's efforts in securing the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 11 on quality of life in cities and communities. We are confident that the new UN Habitat governance structure will establish successful working processes.

- This 10th World Urban Forum takes place at the appropriate time to inaugurate a decade of actions for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and more specifically SDG 11, by providing coherence and guidance to UN Habitat's actions, partner countries, communities and non-governmental actors in the localisation of the SDGs and the implementation of the UN New Urban Agenda.

Key principles of action for sustainable urban development:

- Global changes have a direct and increasing effect at local level. They make citizens and places in Europe and over the world face more and more pressing and inter-linked challenges.
- For their part, cities are on the frontline to deliver solutions within a holistic perspective coupled with a people-centred approach to achieving the global overarching goals as introduced in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and other international frameworks. Indeed, sub-national entities and cities are key players in the implementation of SDGs at ground level, as well as other local actors, such as businesses, community-based organizations, and research institutions, to make the 2030 Agenda a reality and leave no one and no place behind.
- Cities are also more than ever poles of attraction, offering increased employment possibilities and public services, including social services, to their surrounding regions. Cities hold therefore major responsibilities vis à vis citizens and surrounding territories. Sustainable and adequate housing is a crucial intervention area to mention in this respect in order to emphasise urban cohesion. Altogether, cities nowadays are the closest to citizens and have responsibilities towards the overall functional territory in which they are embedded.
- Our cities should be sustainable, safe and resilient places as stated by the UN New Urban Agenda. Local authorities, through territorial approaches to tackle complex and crosscutting challenges, are key to propose strategic measures and planning. This includes paying particular attention to gender equality.

- In addition, mobilisation around the climate objectives –which is more important and critical than ever- requires transformative action. Cities are already playing a key role in adapting to the challenges posed by climate change, through circular economy approaches, digitalisation, planning in key sectors as land use, housing and energy efficiency in buildings. They need to be further supported through integrated and innovative strategies for urban and regional planning to reduce both the impact of cities on climate change and strengthen their resilience.
- In the EU, we implement green infrastructure and nature based solutions, as well as principles of urban transformation and urban regeneration of deprived areas: these are crucial actions. We also strive to promote approaches that conciliate climate, social, and economic development issues.
- Altogether, multi-level governance and the consideration of urban issues at all levels, through participatory dialogue between all actors, are key horizontal principles that we promote to realise sustainable urban development. Territorial cohesion can be improved for all places and people in order to leave no one behind, favouring polycentric and balanced development in all territories, including small and medium size cities.

Delivery of the UN New Urban Agenda:

- We believe that above all, the UN New Urban Agenda is fundamental to deliver sustainable development in an integrated and coordinated manner at the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels. It is “a major enabler” to accelerate the implementation of the local, urban and territorial dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- We are fully delivering on the implementation of our three Voluntary commitments made in Quito in 2016 to materialise our support to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, in partnership with many actors and stakeholders:
 - The Urban Agenda for the EU has now produced 12 Actions plans, encompassing 115 actions being implemented in order to improve the consideration for the urban dimension in all policies at all levels.

- The Global people based definition of cities and settlements has been produced, tested and presented in many countries in cooperation with UN Habitat, the ILO, the FAO, the OECD, and the World Bank. The European Commission, together with the OECD will display in this WUF a policy brief of the report on Cities in the world using this new definition. This new definition will be presented to the UN Statistical Commission in 2020 for endorsement.
- The EU International Urban Cooperation Programme now involves 155 cities around the world, cooperating on key topics related to the UN New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The second phase of the programme will be launched during this forum to support further cooperation and bilateral and/or multilateral agreements between EU and non-EU cities.

Other key EU and MS initiatives:

- Further to the ambition of the Digital Transition Partnership under the Urban Agenda for the EU, cities and communities in the EU are taking the initiative to pursue their digital transformation and scaling up of urban digital solutions, while ensuring technological sovereignty and citizens' digital rights. This commitment was formalised by signing a Declaration at the recent European Cities Forum in Porto.
- The EU and its MS are major partners in reaching the Sustainable Urban Development both within the EU and globally while contributing to the acceleration of the implementation of the UN New Urban Agenda. A number of initiatives are backing up this ambition :

- Within the EU, Cohesion policy provides opportunities for investments in all types of cities through a multi-sectoral strategic, multi-level governance, and multi-stakeholder approach. For the next programming period the European Commission has proposed to strengthen the urban and territorial dimension of Cohesion policy and to define a new dedicated policy objective; the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, comprising notably a proposal for a just transition mechanism was adopted by the European Commission on 14 January 2020 to be the financial arm of the Green Deal. Relevant urban, local and regional authorities are expected to be fully involved and participate in the whole process, from programming to implementation and monitoring. We also aim at investing in integrated territorial development strategies beyond the national and regional level of this policy, targeting functional areas crossing administrative boundaries, at sub-regional, urban or local community levels. This will notably contribute to highlighting the role of small and medium sized urban areas especially in terms of development of wider regions. Last but not least on that front, we are also supporting monitoring of the Sustainable development Goals and the UN New Urban Agenda at urban and territorial level through Voluntary Local Reviews, with a European Handbook indicating methods, actions and tools.
- Going further in establishing ambitious objectives for the EU and its territories, the already mentioned European Green Deal aims at supporting the role of urban areas and cities in promoting responsible production and consumption, circular economy, sustainable mobility, nature based solutions and their numerous interlinkages, which will be essential in order to fully implement the Green deal in all its dimensions.
- In the context of EU development cooperation, the EU and its Member States provide substantial assistance through a multitude of programmes and channels to our partner countries and cities to support sustainable urban development. In the first quarter of 2020, a new call for city to city partnerships will be launched for a budget of 110 million EUR to strengthen exchanges between cities in our partner countries and EU cities. The European Commission is in the process of signing agreements to advance access to finance for sustainable urban development as part of the European External Investment Plan. The support to cities will be an essential component of advancing the external dimension of the European Green Deal.

- In parallel, the ministries responsible for urban planning in the European Union currently reflect on an ambitious long-term European urban agenda, formalising in 2020 a new Leipzig charter on sustainable European Cities with stronger ambitions for sustainable development and a timetable for completion.

Innovation and culture:

- The theme of this forum “Cities of opportunity: Linking culture and innovation” highlights interactions between culture and innovation as levers for promoting social inclusion, citizen participation and urban resilience.
- We believe cultural capital and the ability of actors to create social links significantly contributes to ensuring sustainable urban development and equal access to common goods and services for all. Culture enables urban development to be anchored in its territorial ecosystem. Cultural and social resources therefore have a leading role in achieving the international commitments on sustainable development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 11 and the New Urban Agenda.
- The New European Agenda for Culture and the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage adopted by the European Commission in 2018, the Council of the European Union's Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022, the Manifesto for Culture of the Future and the Urban Agenda for the European Union partnership on ‘Culture and Cultural Heritage’ all contribute to reflect on this crucial dimension at the EU level. In 2020, the cities of Rijeka, Croatia, and Galway, Ireland hold the title of European Capitals of Culture.
- As for culture and cultural heritage, innovation is linked to the uniqueness of a territory while the variety of approaches towards innovation enhances the identity of cities, their traditions and their cultural heritage. In this respect, we are convinced that successful innovation appear when firstly, local conditions and resources are actively taken into account, and secondly, sustainable and performing innovation ecosystems are nurtured.

- The EU and its Member States are also promoting the development of collective reflections on the role of cities as innovation hubs, shifting from having proximity to resources to proximity to knowledge. There, Smart Specialisation Strategies supported by the EU Cohesion Policy contribute greatly to design investments building on the assets and potential of regional and local areas.
- For their part, digital solutions are tools which help cities to get smarter, increase the common welfare and security, improve the quality and accessibility of public services as well as reduce costs for sustaining them. Accordingly, if digital solutions are meaningful and oriented on real benefit for people, they can achieve substantial economic, social and environmental benefits; in particular in a smart and sustainable city context.

WUF 11

- As an ending note, we are very pleased to refer to the next edition of World Urban Forum in 2022 to be hosted by Katowice, Poland, and thus in the European Union. We hope it will be as promising and successful as this one to highlight our common ambition for sustainable urban development globally.

Thank you for your attention
