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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Matters - The role of European cities in the green transition and in achieving the objectives of the Green Deal (26 November 2022) – Information from the Presidency

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Presidency on the above subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Environment) meeting on 20 December 2021.

Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Matters - The role of European cities in the green transition and in achieving the objectives of the Green Deal (26 November 2022)**- Information from the Presidency -**

Today's global challenges are complex and intertwined. They require a multi-level and multi-sectoral response, combining urban and territorial interventions. In times of disruption, it is in towns and cities where place-based, citizen-centred approaches emerge and are applied. Whether it is the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, recognizing the loss of biodiversity, or addressing health crises like the current pandemic, recovery should be based on a green and digital transition. The New Leipzig Charter (2020) strongly emphasises the transformative power of cities for the common good. National urban policies, developed in close collaboration with urban authorities and other stakeholders at regional and local level, can contribute considerably to improving the quality of life of all European citizens.

Building on decades of informal intergovernmental cooperation on urban matters, the Pact of Amsterdam (2016) launched the Urban Agenda for the EU. For the first time, cities of different sizes were at the centre of an initiative that aimed to find joint solutions in direct dialogue with Member States, the European Commission, and other stakeholders.

Cooperation on urban matters in Europe is a case in point: the goal of achieving climate-neutrality by 2050 requires a multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach to urban development. To reach the objectives put forward by European and global frameworks such as the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals an innovative policy approach is required and the Urban Agenda for the EU represents such an approach. By bridging policy silos, the Urban Agenda for the EU underlines the importance of understanding the role of cities in the transition to a greener Europe.

The Urban Agenda for the EU Partnerships have highlighted the impacts and challenges cities face on the ground and the bottlenecks in their daily implementation, and put forward tangible actions to improve regulation, funding and knowledge exchange. Many of them deal with environmental topics: climate adaptation, energy transition, sustainable use of land and nature-based solutions or urban mobility. But also the seemingly ‘non-green’ Partnerships, like those on public procurement or digital transition, have put forward ‘green’ actions. Irrespective of their theme, many Partnership actions focus on Better Regulation and call for the involvement of Member States and the EU.

At their informal meeting on 26 November 2021, the Ministers responsible for Urban Matters adopted the Ljubljana Agreement - reaffirming the Pact of Amsterdam and stating their support for the continuation and further development of the Urban Agenda for the EU for green, fair and productive European cities. Two new Partnerships will be launched in 2022, both addressing the green dimension: “Greening Cities” and “Sustainable Tourism”.

In line with the Slovenian Presidency’s priorities, Ministers had a focussed discussion on the green dimension of urban development, addressing the role of cities in the green transition and in achieving the objectives of the Green Deal. The Urban Agenda for the EU addresses environmental challenges and provides relevant and inspiring perspectives on key environmental issues with an urban dimension. Slovenia asks the **Environment Council** to take note of the information in the leaflet “Addressing environmental challenges through the Urban Agenda for the EU” presented by the Slovenian Presidency at the meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Development on 26 November 2021 (see the two page leaflet attached).

ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES THROUGH THE URBAN AGENDA FOR THE EU

To reach the objectives put forward by European and global frameworks such as the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals, an innovative policy approach is required. The Urban Agenda for the EU, thanks to its multi-level and multi-stakeholder working method, represents such an approach. Established by the Pact of Amsterdam in 2016, this initiative brings together different actors to jointly tackle urban challenges. By bridging policy silos, the Urban Agenda for the EU underlines the importance of understanding and harvesting the urban dimension in the transition to a greener Europe.

The Urban Agenda for the EU in numbers

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There are 14 **Thematic Partnerships** working on 14 selected urban challenges, ranging from climate adaptation to circular economy, from urban mobility to digital transition, and many more. Partnerships are always composed of cities, Member States, the European Commission and other stakeholders. All partners work together on equal footing.

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Three **pillars** guide the Urban Agenda for the EU: Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge. Each Partnership addresses all three pillars with their actions. The Better Regulation pillar has been identified as having a lot of potential for impact. All three pillars will remain crucial and will be developed further in the next phase of the Urban Agenda for the EU.

To make best use of the Urban Agenda for the EU while addressing societal challenges, **Ministers are invited to:**

Acknowledge that the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnerships provide relevant and inspiring perspectives on key environmental issues and their urban dimensions.

Be inspired by the multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach to addressing complex urban challenges as applied by the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnerships.

Make use of the Partnerships' results and experiences – both formal and informal – in future policymaking on 'green city' related issues.

Get involved in the Urban Agenda for the EU and support future Thematic Partnerships with expertise and resources.

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No less than 139 **Actions** are the concrete outcomes of the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnerships. They take the form of policy recommendations, data and indicators, toolkits, handbooks, or roadmaps. Partnerships implement the actions themselves or in cooperation with other relevant actors. Here, Member States and the European Commission are key: many actions require a follow-up at national and EU levels to realise their full potential.

A new phase for the Urban Agenda for the EU

In 2021, the first phase of the Urban Agenda for the EU is ending. The further development of this initiative has been a priority of the recent Council Presidencies, in particular the Trio Presidency of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. The Slovene Presidency has prepared a new Working Programme for the next generation of the Urban Agenda for the EU as part of the **Ljubljana Agreement**, endorsed by Ministers in November 2021.

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'GREEN' MESSAGES FROM TWO URBAN AGENDA PARTNERSHIPS

Many of the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnerships deal with environmental topics: climate adaptation, energy transition, sustainable use of land and nature-based solutions or urban mobility. But also the seemingly 'non-green' Partnerships, like those on public procurement or digital transition, have put forward 'green' actions. Irrespective of their theme, many Partnership actions focus on Better Regulation and call for the involvement of Member States and the EU level. In light of the Slovenian Presidency's priorities, two themes at the intersection of urban and environmental issues stand out: the Circular Economy and Nature-Based Solutions.

Circular Economy

1

Cities play an essential role developing a circular economy: with their concentration of human exchanges, they can enable measures that encourage both consumers and businesses to embrace more circular behaviour.

Help make waste & water regulations support the Circular Economy in cities

The current legislative framework prevents waste from being channelled back into the economy. The short- and medium-term recommendations are to optimise the legal framework, to change current end-of-waste procedures, and to enhance Extended Producer Responsibility schemes as drivers for innovation. In the long term, the Partnership suggests discarding inbuilt obsolescence, making reparability part of product design, and for Member States and the EU to provide legal, financial and economic incentives.

EU regulatory framework

- Waste Framework Directive
- Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive
- End of Life Vehicle Directive
- Waste from Electric and Electronic Equipment Directive

Potential follow-up actions by Member States

- Support prototyping, testing and experimentation in local and regional contexts for circular solutions by providing sufficient legal room, funding and resources.
- Raise awareness regarding secondary resources in general and, in particular, the use of treated wastewater for civic purposes.

Nature-Based Solutions (NBS)

2

With cities being at the frontline of climate change adaptation, NBS are increasingly seen as effective interventions making urban areas more resilient and pleasant places.

Boost NBS at European, national and local level

The concept of NBS as well as the 'urban environment' should be integrated more comprehensively into existing strategies and regulations at different levels of government. NBS, certainly in the context of spatial planning, need to be understood as a set of integrated solutions for various challenges rather than as simply measures for 'greening a place'.

EU regulatory framework

- Flood Directive
- EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change
- Strategic Environmental Assessment
- EU Green Public Procurement criteria

Potential follow-up actions by Member States

- Embed NBS and ecosystem services into national strategies and investigate the opportunities provided by the European Green Deal to foster NBS at national and local levels.
- Support the mainstreaming of NBS by helping cities tackle existing obstacles restricting a more comprehensive roll-out of NBS and ecosystem services.
- Use the vast knowledge generated within Horizon2020-funded projects on NBS such as CONEXUS, INTERLACE, NATURVATION and NetworkNature.

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