

## Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Matters

Urban Agenda for the EU – Outlook

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State Secretary Bohle, your Excellencies, Commissioner Ferreira, colleagues and friends,

Thank you for inviting me to reflect on the Urban Agenda for the EU. It is a pleasure and a real honour to address you, albeit virtually. The Netherlands, a rather urbanised country as you know, has always been strongly involved in the development of the Urban Agenda - even appointing an Urban Envoy to underpin its commitment.

Earlier today, my Minister presented her urban vision, and voiced her ongoing support for the post-2020 Urban Agenda. Now that it is securely embedded in the New Leipzig Charter and the Implementation Document, its future role in an ever more urbanising EU seems assured.

Let me take you back to 2016. To Amsterdam, at a ministerial meeting like this one, where the 'Urban Family' started a European experiment. It welcomed travellers from all walks of urban life, who enthusiastically got on board to tackle urban challenges, on equal footing and with a common goal. A fascinating, often surprising and informative journey followed.

Along the way, that family has really achieved tangible results and has established the Urban Agenda as an indispensable part of the urban debate in Europe. The most concrete contribution has come from the Partnerships and the cities, which have until now delivered 115 Actions for better regulation, better funding and better knowledge. They are the true powerhouse of the Urban Agenda.

But, the Urban Agenda is more than that. It has put multi-level governance in action, an EU-wide form of cooperation with room for innovation. It has inspired several Member States to set up their own urban agenda's. It has drawn in invaluable support from the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank. It has enabled cities, Member States, the European Commission and other key stakeholders such as CEMR and EUROCITIES to come together and work together outside the existing silo's, tackling pressing urban matters and delivering concrete output for the benefit of EU citizens.

Although I'm still quite a young (one year old) member I feel I'm part of this Urban Family, and I'm proud of it. We have come a long way. I congratulate the German Presidency on the New Leipzig Charter. It is a milestone that reflects our current state of play, ambitions, challenges on sustainable urban development, and lays down the urban principles for the EU for years to come.

4,5 years after leaving Amsterdam, I feel we are at a crossroads. Will we be able to continue this journey and reach new urban destinations, delivering the results of the Urban Agenda to the EU's citizens? I believe we can, if we use the lessons learned so far.

I am encouraged by the commitment of the cities and the enthusiasm and dedication of the Trio Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. They are already working on a joint roadmap for a futureproof Urban Agenda, making it more robust without forgetting its flexible and informal origins. One that will also be an instrument for implementing the Leipzig Charter. I also see an increased ambition among Member States to work together and to align their 'urban' positions.

But to keep moving, we need more. Let me make three suggestions that we might keep in mind as we move forward.

First of all, the Urban Agenda can increase its high level support. Meetings as the one today, where ministers show and voice their support, are very important. Mayors and alderman, Members of the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions, to name but a few, could be excellent Agenda Ambassadors throughout the year, keeping the Urban Agenda on the political map.

Secondly, multilevel cooperation remains key. Not only within the Partnerships (or any other instrument under the UAEU umbrella), but linked to strategic policy plans like the Green Deal, the EU Digital Strategy and the COVID exit and recovery strategy. Also, it is crucial that the relevant Directorates General of the European Commission remain closely involved and commit themselves to working with the Partnerships.

And thirdly, we need the Urban Agenda to be practical, so that our cities and citizens can see and feel that it makes a difference in their day to day life. Focusing on Actions, creating new Partnerships on topical themes and reaching out to more cities, including the smaller and medium-sized ones.

Let our actions speak even louder than our words.

And let us continue this journey together, making Urban matter in a sustainable and inclusive way, in keeping with the spirit of the Urban Agenda.

Thank you for your time.