**NL Intergovernmental Position Paper on the future of the Urban Agenda of the EU**

**Introduction**

The growing importance of cities and urban areas in the EU has increasingly been recognized in the past years. Cities concentrate people, economic and intellectual power, innovation and green, cultural and social development. They can however also consume a lot of energy, suffer from overpopulation and -tourism, and be vulnerable to security risks - including terrorism and even pandemics.  
  
The urban potential is huge. We therefore believe that cities will have to play a key role in delivering the upcoming green and digital transitions of the EU, and in developing an effective post-COVID-19 recovery strategy. The Urban Agenda for the EU can be the linking pin between the cities and these strategic goals and challenges.   
  
As the founding father of the Pact of Amsterdam, The Netherlands has always been instrumental in supporting and developing the Urban Agenda for the EU. It is one of the lasting legacies of the 2016 Dutch presidency of the Council of the EU. Together with the Dutch Urban Agenda, the Urban Agenda for the EU has been an important factor in the development of true multi-level urban development in the Netherlands.

This paper reflects the common, informal position of the Netherlands' central, regional and local governments and Partnership participants. It focuses the implementation and further development of the Urban Agenda for the EU and its multilevel approach.

This paper does not, legally or in any other form, bind the Dutch government or its representatives.

**Joint Statement**

We, the representatives of the Netherlands' central, regional and local governments, and Partnership participants, acknowledge that the Pact of Amsterdam, establishing an Urban Agenda for the EU, is a milestone for Europe and cities. It recognises the role and growing importance of cities in the EU and gives city authorities a seat at the table as equal partners alongside Member States and EU institutions.

Supported by the European Urban Initiative as part of the EU’s cohesion policy, the Urban Agenda must continue to develop into a coherent urban framework, strengthening the role of cities in the EU and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

The Urban Agenda has the potential to harness the combined powers of cities to support the challenges the EU faces in the coming years: the digital and green transitions, and the post-COVID recovery. Shared ownership is key; cities, Member States and EU institutions should actively work together towards the common goal of sustainable urban development and resilient, productive and livable cities for our citizens.

To achieve the above, we recommend the following.

I. In order to ensure that the work of future Partnerships (or any other multi-level governance instrument under the UAEU umbrella) is aligned with the broader EU policies, it should be linked to the European Commission's annual work programme(s) and strategic policy plans like the Green Deal, the EU Digital Strategy and the COVID exit and recovery strategy.Furthermore, it is crucial that the relevant Directorates General of the European Commission are involved from the outset and commit themselves to working with the Partnerships.

II. In order to ensure the institutional embedding of the future Urban Agenda, and to underline the commitment of the Member States, the German Presidency of the Council of the EU is invited to prepare and oversee the adoption of Council Conclusions for both the New Leipzig Charter and the Implementation Document of the Urban Agenda. These Council Conclusions should confirm the commitment of the Member States to the Urban Agenda and convey a firm message to the European Commission about the need for the continuation of the Urban Agenda with the required resources and budget.

III. In order to effectively develop the Urban Agenda in the next programming period, it needs sufficient funding.

IV. In order to drive progress on urban matters at EU level, inspire and push for a strategic cross sectorial agenda for cities in Europe, we recommend the setting up of a high-level group on the Urban Agenda composed of a core group of high level representatives from cities, Member States, Members of the European Parliament and relevant Commissioners.

V. In order to facilitate European, national and urban leaders to define a common agenda, shared responsibilities and actions, we recommend holding an annual EU Urban Leadership summit. The systematic involvement of cities in policy making on urban matters, in line with the partnership approach of the Urban Agenda, should be part of this process.

**Background and underlying considerations**

1. The Netherlands will continue to strongly support the implementation and further development of the Urban Agenda for the EU.

2. As a Member State, The Netherlands supports the strengthening of the position of cities and urban areas in the EU. 70% of all citizens in the EU live in cities. We believe that cities and urban areas are social and economic powerhouses and places of innovation, crucial to delivering the green and digital transitions. They are also the places where social and health challenges concentrate.

3. As many Europeans live in cities, working together on a horizontal and vertical level is needed to address these challenges in an integrated and silo-breaking way. Dutch local and regional authorities have traditionally been directly involved in preparing the NL input for relevant EU-law.

4. Our local and regional governments consider the UAEU to be a success and are active in the majority of Partnerships. Their commitment to sustainable urban development is a driving force behind the Dutch involvement.

*New Leipzig Charter and Urban Agenda post 2020*

5. We believe that the New Leipzig Charter can be an important catalyst for the future sustainable urban development in Europe. It should be a concise and clear catalogue of principles, with the Urban Agenda as its main delivery vehicle.

6. We consider Council Conclusions as crucial for the success of the New Leipzig Charter and follow-up to the Urban Agenda for the EU. These Council Conclusions should confirm the commitment of the Member States to the Urban Agenda and convey a firm message to the European Commission about the need for the continuation of the Urban Agenda with the required resources and budget.

7. Whereas the New Leipzig Charter is a catalogue of political principles, any document regarding the follow-up of the UAEU should be as concrete, practical and future-proof as possible. It should build on the results and commitments of Pact of Amsterdam and the Declaration of Bucharest.

8. The follow-up of the UAEU should be based on the three current pillars of the UAEU: better regulation, better funding and better knowledge.

9. Multi-level governance is an administrative innovation of the Urban Agenda and should be widely promoted, inter alia in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

10. The spirit of the Urban Agenda, based on the principle of partnership, is and should remain one of informal cooperation on equal footing.

11. Cities will be key players when taking up the challenges the EU faces the coming years, like the recovery from the COVID-19 outbreak, climate change and the digital transition. Therefore, the Urban Agenda should connect clearly to the Green Deal, the Digital Agenda and the socio-economic initiatives of the Commission linked to measures aimed at the recovery from the COVID-19 outbreak.

*Partnerships and practicalities*  
  
12. Partnerships should be given the opportunity to continue their work under the UAEU flag after their formal mandate. Here, content and goal must be leading, not form. Flexibility in composition, scope and duration should be possible. Partnerships should be supported, and not be subjected to administrative demands and control mechanisms.

13. Whilst looking towards the future, we should not forget that the current Partnerships have delivered a substantial number of Actions. Both Member States and the Commission now have a responsibility to implement them and should develop short-term follow-up plans.

14. There should be room for new themes and Partnerships in order to secure the continuation of the Urban Agenda. These themes should connect with and provide input for topical EU policy priorities and initiatives, especially where these (either legislative or non-legislative) have a clear urban relevance. Topical examples could be Urban Health and Urban Resilience.

15. Initiatives for new themes and Partnerships should not be postponed for administrative reasons, but be able to go ahead if the time is right, a crosscutting post-COVID Partnership being a case in point.

16. We recognize the important role of the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions in bringing forward and supporting the UAEU. We call on the EP and the CoR, together with the Member States and the Commission, to shape the follow-up to the UAEU and also to incorporate the recommendations of the partnerships in the decision-making on future EU policies and (better) regulation.

17. The UAEU was developed, and the Partnerships were funded, to strengthen the role and position of cities and urban regions. Therefore, in any follow-up document, the role of cities and Partnership coordinators and action leaders should be strong and clearly defined.

18. Member States (specifically relevant ministries) should also step up their commitment, producing concrete plans and recommendations for bringing forward the UAEU and implementing its Actions, i.e. in the field of Better Regulation.

19. The European Commission’s Directorates General (so not only DG REGIO) should acquire a strengthened role and engagement in establishing urban priorities, taking into account the annual Work Programme of the European Commission.  
  
20. Proper funding for Partnership support is crucial for the future development of the UAEU. At the moment, attention for concrete funding (i.e. of a dedicated Secretariat) is broadly inadequate.

21. Concrete results in the field of Better Regulation are important for the success of the Partnerships and the UAEU itself. NL will take the initiative to provide expertise and recommendations for the Operational Document.

**Commitment and follow-up**

22. Our minister supports the strengthening of the position of cities and urban areas in the EU and will be present at the ministerial meeting in Leipzig, where the New Leipzig Charter will be presented under the German Presidency of the Council of the EU.

23. To further underpin the NL commitment, a Dutch Urban Envoy has been appointed to act as a mediator between the various Urban stakeholders, in the tradition and spirit of the Urban Agenda.

24. Notwithstanding the above, NL and the Urban Envoy will not assume sole ownership and/or responsibility for the UAEU. We will strive for joint and shared ownership, and commitment of all parties involved.

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