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**European Parliament**  
**Committee on Regional Development**

Ms Danuta Hübner  
Chairwoman of the Committee on Regional Development

***"The idea of having the Supporting Structures on board is  
paying off!"***

Covenant of Mayors Ceremony  
*Tuesday, 4th May 2010*  
Brussels, Belgium

Ladies and Gentleman, Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure to see so many faces I know from my time as Commissioner in charge of regional policy. I am delighted to welcome all of you here today! I would like to express my greatest appreciation of the Covenant of Mayors, this ambitious initiative of the European Commission, that could not have been filled with life without the commitment of Europe's most pioneering cities: without you, ladies and gentlemen, mayors who have committed to go beyond the objectives of the EU energy policy, as regards the reduction of CO2 emissions through improved energy efficiency and cleaner production and use of energy. The Covenant of Mayors is another proof for me that in pursuing European goals, all levels of European governance: European, national, regional and local, need to be engaged, which, as you may recognise, is the approach endorsed and used in European regional policy. I trust that the energy and commitment you are demonstrating here makes it absolutely clear that EU2020 can be a successful European plan for a better Europe only if European towns and cities make it their own strategy.

As economies slowly emerge from an unprecedented economic crisis, the new face of the global economy is still reshaping. Scientific findings continue to ring the alarm bell about climate change. Hundreds of millions of new consumers enter the global markets. The need to green our activities and the economy becomes more and more pressing.

While formulating our answers, we have to realise that these challenges clearly bear opportunities too: climate change guides Europe's transition to low carbon economy but it also allows new types of sustainable jobs to

emerge. The future competitiveness of Europe depends on how structural changes will be made towards a sustainable economy that is built on resource and energy efficiency. Europe has a chance to gain a competitive edge through innovation related to resource efficient technologies. This will then be a sound basis for sustainable jobs today and in the future.

Tackling climate change and ensuring sustainable growth are therefore interlinked, and various policy areas have an important role to play in this process. Energy policy is to ensure affordable energy for competitive economies, security of supply and environmental sustainability. Regional policy is best geared to create synergies with other policies in this field. In the pursuit of harmonious development it supports projects targeting energy efficiency and renewable energies, trying to steer the economy away from the intensive use of traditional energy sources.

Now, 80 % of the European population live in cities, and cities are generating 70 to 80 % of the EU's GDP. However, cities are also in the forefront of energy consumption and the production of greenhouse gases. At the same time, cities also have a large impact on the areas around them. Therefore, in this room we all know that actions aiming at climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as job creation are best to be started in cities. And indeed, much has already been initiated in urban areas, and there is a lot that cities can learn from each other, that they can share and do together. We discussed it a couple of months ago in Barcelona. Let me add, however, that cooperation is not only necessary because of potential capacity building, but also due to the complex nature of challenges that can only be tackled together. This is where a permanent network, such as the Covenant of Mayors can have an important added value. The Covenant provides technical and promotional support and

facilitates the sharing of best practices and existing know-how between urban areas.

I emphasised in the past, and I continue to be convinced that the climate battle will be lost or won in the cities. I would like to stress again, that low carbon growth will not occur without the involvement and commitment of regional and local actors who are capable of harnessing policy tools and translating general goals into their own territorial specificities. Let me illustrate what I mean: the everyday choices of local actors, your everyday choices, on heating in buildings, public transport systems, on land use, etc. have a direct impact on CO<sub>2</sub> emission. This is local expertise which is needed to assess energy efficiency and energy use in a region or city, then appropriate measures are prepared and implemented locally, and finally, it is also in the cities that the job creating opportunities and innovations arise and should be capitalised upon. In addition, citizens are in closer contact with their local authorities from whom they expect effective responses to local impacts of global challenges.

On the other hand it is also important that local responses play their role alongside national and European efforts. As powers and competences are more and more spread between different levels of governance, and as public action is playing its role in shaping the new growth model, the most appropriate level of public intervention has to be carefully chosen. In the EU, it can be stated with confidence, that local and regional level interventions are decisive for dynamism and change, for job creation, for energy efficiency and for bringing different stakeholders together.

Cities and towns are not alone in their struggle to face today's challenges. They are not alone, and they should not be left alone either. Some towns

or cities often have the political will to sign up to the Covenant, but lack the capacities to draw up and implement Sustainable Energy Action Plans. This is why Supporting Structures matter so strongly, and I welcome the fact that there are already 65 of them.<sup>1</sup> I am confident that Supporting Structures contribute to the best possible implementation of the Covenant, as well as to increasing its impact. They ensure better institutional cooperation and better governance. And they also strengthen your links with European Institutions.

And your most committed supporting structure is European regional policy. It supports cities and regions in many ways in their pursuing sustainable urban development, good urban governance and tackling of climate change. First of all, in the 2007-2013 programming period the urban dimension is "mainstreamed" into the co-financed regional and national programmes, also meaning that all cities are potential beneficiaries of funding. Then the URBACT II programme aims to facilitate exchange of best practices and networking between urban planners and other local experts. Another example is JESSICA, the Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas. It is an initiative that promotes financial engineering with a view to support projects that are part of an integrated plan for sustainable urban development. And finally, the URBAN AUDIT, involving 27 National Statistical Offices, working together under Eurostat coordination provides statistical data and information on living conditions in 357 European cities.

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<sup>1</sup> These Structures are either public administrations, local and regional bodies or associations/networks of local and regional authorities providing strategic guidance and financial and technical support to Covenant Signatories on their territory.

In the current programming period Cohesion policy targets rehabilitation of industrial sites and contaminated land areas (€3,4 billion), urban and rural regeneration projects (€9.8 billion), clean urban transport (€7 billion) and housing (€917 million), the total sum earmarked for urban development (€21.1 billion) representing 6.1% of the total EU cohesion policy budget.<sup>2</sup>

In the context of tackling the economic crisis, financial support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) has been extended for housing interventions for extremely poor and marginalised communities, including many Roma communities. This amendment to the Regulation completes a measure from 2009 that allowed for the ERDF supporting energy efficiency measures in housing in all Member States of the EU.

Therefore, I would like to encourage all of you to explore all possibilities and make use of the available funding and tools offered under the umbrella of regional policy. Further, I would like to encourage you to make your voice heard and give input into the unfolding debate on the future of cohesion policy, so that its architecture can be best shaped together.

I am convinced that the future regional policy should remain an essential part of the EU economic policy framework, targeting territorial factors of competitiveness. It will play an ever greater role in mobilising regional and local actors to achieve European priorities, related to competitiveness, innovation or environment. It will reinforce cities, and other regional and local actors, as well intermediate and supporting structures. However, as the Committee on Regional Development of the

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<sup>2</sup> Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/themes/urban/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/themes/urban/index_en.htm)

European Parliament also pointed out in its report on urban dimension in cohesion policy, and as you know, other EU policy areas also provide support to urban areas and thus linkages between different policy areas need to be improved and the implementation of the integrated approach needs to be secured.<sup>3</sup>

I am confident that the European Union will continue to back cities in their efforts to transform into a sustainable and competitive environment. European regional policy will continue to help cities and towns to develop in a harmonious, balanced and sustainable way. I am confident that cohesion policy can only gain and be enriched and more effective through the enhancing of the role of cities. The need to strengthen the urban dimension within this policy is getting clearer and I want to assure you that the Committee on Regional Development of the European Parliament will deliver a clear voice on sustainable urban development during its reflections on the post 2013 policy priorities.

Thank you for your attention.

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<sup>3</sup> European Parliament resolution of 24 March 2009 on the urban dimension of cohesion policy in the new programming period (2008/2130(INI)), Rapporteur: Oldřich Vlasák