Urban dimension of EU policies

2014/2213(INI) - 18/07/2014 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to initiate a debate on the urban dimension of European policies and on the key features of a future EU urban agenda.

BACKGROUND: today, approximately 359 million people - 72 % of the total EU population - live in cities, towns and suburbs. Although the speed of transformation has slowed down, the share of the urban population continues to grow, and is likely to reach more than 80% by 2050. Although cities' role for economic, social and cultural development, and their potential for a more resource efficient habitat, have long been recognised, **the policy response at European and national level has been slow and piecemeal** , with many but poorly integrated sectoral initiatives.

In 2011, **the European Parliament** adopted a resolution arguing for a strengthening of the urban dimension of EU policies and the intergovernmental co-operation on urban development policies, calling for a joint working programme or European Urban Agenda.

In response to calls for a EU urban agenda coming from a range of stakeholders at the EU, national and local level, the Commission organised a **CITIES Forum** to initiate a debate on the **need for a EU urban agenda**.

Following the CITIES Forum, Member States discussed the necessity to develop a EU Urban Agenda recognising the demand and expectations from the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, city associations and cities themselves.

CONTENT: building on the results of the CITIES forum, this Communication describes the current urban situation in the EU, where Europe stands today in terms of urban policy, the calls for a EU urban agenda and the global dimension of urban development.

The Commission proposes **a set of questions for consultation** aimed at further clarifying the need for a EU urban agenda, its objectives, and how it could function. A common opinion amongst the many stakeholders is that a EU urban agenda has to respect the subsidiarity principle and not be built on new legislation.

Objectives of a future agenda: the Commission states that an urban agenda at EU level could contribute to several objectives, and:

- enhance the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of policies through better coordination of policies, actors and governance levels and a better understanding of urban development contexts in the conception and implementation of policies ;

- strengthen cities' engagement and ownership of EU and national policymaking and implementation;

- support cities' capacity for transition and structural change to ensure viable urban economies and a socially, environmentally and territorially sustainable development of urban areas;

- being linked to holistic local development objectives, it could bring EU policymaking closer to the citizens;

- be instrumental in EU’s development aid policies and be a vehicle to promote global sustainability issues.

A key first step in the possible definition of an EU urban agenda will be to work out where **EU action might bring most added value** and the elements of urban development that would benefit from a more concerted approach between different sectors and levels of governance.

Characteristics of a EU urban agenda: those who have contributed to this debate so far have suggested that the "agenda" might rather imply a new working method to ensure coherence. Others have proposed that it should take the form of a strategy with priorities for the long-term and operational guidelines for the short term.

An EU urban agenda could focus on a limited set of major European societal challenges, such as CO2 reduction, climate adaptation, inclusion or demographic change. A more ambitious agenda could provide a general framework to focus attention on the urban dimension of EU policies across the board, strengthening coordination between sectoral policies, city, national and EU actors.

Other issues discussed in the Communication include:

- defining the scope and focus of the programme, notably through the Commission's own reflection process Cities of Tomorrow";

- how urban stakeholders might better contribute to the policy development and implementation processes at EU level;

- the best ways to support a stronger urban and territorial knowledge base and exchange of experience to understand better the process of urban development;

- the roles of the local, regional, national and EU levels in the definition, development and implementation of a EU urban agenda.

The opinions and suggestions from stakeholders and competent authorities at the national, regional and local level will be an important input to the new Commission and the new European Parliament.