Urban dimension of EU policies

2014/2213(INI) - 26/06/2015 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Regional Development adopted an own-initiative report by Kerstin WESTPHAL (S&D, DE) on the urban dimension of EU policies.

Whilst welcoming the initiative of the Commission to work towards a European Urban Agenda, Members considered that **EU policies should support and enable towns, cities and functional urban areas to express and attain their full potential** as motors of economic growth, employment, social inclusion and sustainable development.

Towards an integrated European Urban Agenda: the report recognised that although there is no explicit EU competence on urban development, a broad range of EU initiatives impact directly/indirectly on towns, cities and functional urban areas.

Under these conditions, the Members are convinced that the **European Urban Agenda should be a joint effort by the Commission, the Member States, the local authorities and other stakeholders** to rationalise, coordinate and implement EU policies with an urban dimension through a practical, integrated and coordinated, yet flexible, approach, 'in and with' the towns, cities and functional urban areas, taking account of the local territorial specificities and respecting each Member State's institutional architecture.

The Commission is urged to **come up with a communication detailing the features of the future European Urban Agenda**, based on the 'urban acquis' and the extensive consultation with various stakeholders, including economic and social partners and civil society organisations.

Such an Agenda should be **fully in line with the EU's overall objectives and strategy**, particularly Europe 2020, and the objectives of territorial cohesion.

Integrated territorial development approach: Members called on the Commission to apply a more **place-based integrated territorial approach** when conceptualising new policy initiatives aimed at urban areas. The Commission is asked to:

- introduce, as a general rule, a **territorial impact assessment** on the urban dimension in order to ensure the practical feasibility of all relevant EU policy initiatives at regional and local level, to be receptive to the input from decentralised levels of government when drawing up impact assessments and new policies ('bottom up approach') and to make sure that all relevant sectoral EU policies adequately address the challenges that towns, cities and functional urban areas face; calls on the Commission to concentrate these territorial impact assessments on the following elements: balanced territorial development, territorial integration, aspects of governance, regulation, implementation at local level, and coherence with other policy objectives;
- **systematise and analyse all available data** to prevent duplication and inconsistencies and provide a clear definition of integrated sustainable urban development;
- work on instruments that could **measure the progress** and impact of an integrated urban agenda at EU level.

The urban dimension of EU policy instruments and funding: Members recalled that the EU's Cohesion Policy and its financial instruments are better equipped to support complex integrated territorial strategies for functional urban areas through shared strategic planning and rules.

The Commission and the Member States are urged to make full use of the regulatory framework to create synergies between the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI), the EU subsidised programmes (such as LIFE, Horizon 2020, Intelligent Energy Europe, etc.) and cohesion policy funds, as well as public (i.e. national) investments, private capital and financial instruments in order to obtain the greatest leverage effect of invested funds.

The report highlighted the need to **exploit to a maximum extent the potential of the macro-regional strategies** for successful implementation of the integrated urban approach.

A new model of multi-level governance: Members stated that the European Urban Agenda should be based on a new multi-level governance method, involving the local level more closely at all stages of the policy cycle, thus bringing the policies closer to the realities.

Members urged the Commission to **suggest elements for a new model of multi-level governance based on partnerships and genuine collaboration**, going beyond simple stakeholder consultations, a model combining formal governmental structures with informal flexible governance structures that correspond to the new realities of the digitalised 'network' society, thus bringing government closer to the citizens and improving the democratic legitimacy of the European project.

Knowledge management and data sharing: Members called on the Commission to consolidate and ensure better coordination between the existing platforms (such as URBACT, the Covenant of Mayors, Mayors Adapt, Smart Cities and Communities) in order to allow local actors to better understand them and engage with them in a more efficient way.

Stressing the need to updated and improve the Urban Audit Database, the report encouraged Eurostat and the Commission to provide and compile more detailed data, collected where policies are implemented – in many cases at local level.

Implementing the future European Urban Agenda: in order for the European Urban Agenda to be an effective tool, Members stated that it should be a shared and **regularly updated conceptual framework** with a thematic focus on a **limited number of challenges** in the larger context of the Europe 2020 goals of smart, inclusive and sustainable growth. These challenges should respond to the following criteria: (i) are in line with the shared conceptual framework; (ii) are major urban challenges; (iii) cannot be solved by Member States unilaterally; (iv) where an EU approach has a clear added value.

The Commission is asked to:

- start working on mapping such challenges, but also identifying remaining bottlenecks, policy incoherencies or capacity and knowledge gaps, in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, particularly those at local level;
- appoint a political lead within the College of Commissioners to give strategic direction to the Urban Agenda of European policies and to report annually to Parliament on the Urban Agenda;
- designate a special EU urban coordinator;
- hold a regular urban summit drawing on the 'Cities of tomorrow' forum, bringing stakeholders from all levels of governance and different sectors together;

Lastly, Members urged the Commission to regularly inform Parliament about the external dimension of the European Urban Agenda and believes that the urban agenda could become the EU contribution to the international debate on the United Nations' 'New Urban Agenda' and the Habitat III conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in 2016.