Thematic strategy on the urban environment

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Gyula HEGYI (PES, HU) in response to the Commission communication on the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment (TSUE). Although MEPs welcomed the Commission's initiative, they nevertheless argued that it did not go far enough towards achieving the goals set in the 6th Environmental Action Programme and regretted that the Commission had not proposed any legally binding measures and deadlines. They also said that the TSUE did not attempt "to balance European policy between urban and rural areas, or between centrally located towns and cities and those in outlying areas".

The report stressed that a Sustainable Urban Management Plan (SUMP) and a Sustainable Urban Transport Plan (SUTP) should be required by Community law for all urban areas with over 100 000 inhabitants. Such a law should include clear deadlines and binding targets at local and European level, as voluntary measures had so far proven ineffective. The committee said that SUMPs should include waste management plans, noise maps and action plans, local air pollution plans and local environmental plans. Citizens, NGOs, business organisations and other stakeholders should be involved in the preparation of the SUMPs, which should be made available to the public. The report also suggested inter alia that more attention be paid "to preventing and removing dirt, litter, graffiti, animals' excrement and excessive noise from domestic and vehicular music systems".

SUTPs should promote non-motorised transport modes such as cycling and walking, promote public transport and tackle growing individual car use, through parking restrictions and congestion charges. The report called for more use of environment-friendly modes of transport and technologies, such as bio-fuels and hybrid car technologies. It also proposes a 5% shift in passenger kilometres from individual transport /cars to sustainable means such as public transport and cycling, within the period 2002-2012. The committee reminded Member States of their responsibility to take into acount the most vulnerable transport users in the design of cities, in line with the aim of reducing road deaths by 50% by 2010 as set out in the White Paper on European Transport Policy. Moreover, it recalled that air pollution was a major cause of health problems in the EU and therefore stressed that cities with high air pollution should consider introducing congestion charges and establishing low emission zones.

Lastly, the report regretted the lack of any specific action in the field of sustainable urban construction, even though this was identified as one of the four focus areas of the TSUE, and stressed the importance of increasing the environmental performance of buildings through energy- and water- efficient house design.