Thematic strategy on the urban environment

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The Council adopted conclusions on urban environment. Firstly, it welcomes the Commission's communication on the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment, in particular its focus on integrated environmental management and sustainable transport, as a valuable contribution towards tackling the environmental challenges that still persist today in urban areas, such as poor air quality, high volumes of traffic and congestion, ambient noise, poor building environment, urban sprawl and the

loss of green areas and of biodiversity, waste and waste water. It notes that the policies and measures in the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment are focusing on principles, guidance, support and facilitation for Member States and their cities to improve their urban environment.

Secondly, calls on Member States to strengthen their endeavours to enable cities, by their policies, to achieve high urban environmental and health quality and to consider the possibilities of National Strategic Reference Frameworks (linked to Cohesion Policy) for covering urban environment issues as well as opportunities in the context of the LIFE+ Regulation and funds. It equally recognises the relevance of the 7th FPRD, as well as the importance of promoting eco-innovation through rapid implementation of the ETAP.

The Commission is encouraged to give guidance on how Member States can use these funds to integrate urban environment into their national plans including i.a. innovative and flexible mechanisms for the funding of urban renovation. It is also invited to provide support and impetus for public participation, in particular by actively facilitating and promoting Local Agenda 21 and the Aalborg Commitments.

The Council welcomes the fact that the Commission will come forward with guidelines on sustainable transport plans including environmental objectives, measures and instruments for environmentally friendly and sustainable urban transport as well as examples of good practice. It recommends that Member States and cities make use of these guidelines in their urban transport policies and ensure that sustainable urban transport plans include environmental objectives and measures to improve and promote urban mobility management, public transport, cycling and walking, alternative fuels (e.g. biogas) and propulsion systems, ultra low emission vehicles and carsharing, as well as intermodal city freight logistics.

The Council invites the Commission to consider further activities to develop and promote guidance and tools to improve the quality of the urban environment e.g. by focusing namely on sustainable urban design, planning and construction as well as water issues.

Member States and cities are called upon to implement and facilitate the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment and its proposed areas for action, in particular the environmental management and sustainable transport plans. The Council encourages the establishment of national focal points on urban environment issues (e.g. European Urban Knowledge Network) and the collection of urban environment data and a core-set of indicators, e.g. in the context of 'Urban Audit', to enable progress and the environmental performance of European urban areas to be monitored. The Commission is invited to assess the results of the implementation of the TS and - if appropriate -to propose a revised strategy by 2010.

Lastly, it recommends that synergies and cooperations with international activities in the field of the urban environment like the UNECE WHO Transport Health Environment Pan European Programme THE PEP, the WHO CEHAPE and other relevant initiatives as well as city networks should be aimed at.