

**European Sustainable Cities Index Press Conference**

**Danuta Hübner**

**Chair, Committee for Regional Development**

**European Parliament**

**Brussels, 8 December 2009 (11:00)**

**“Sustainable Cities: a Perspective from the EU”**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have gathered here in Brussels while the world's leaders are at the Climate Summit in Copenhagen to discuss what measures the world needs to take in the context of global warming. Let me stress that I hope, and I am sure that the majority of you will agree with me, that a binding agreement incorporating serious caps on green house gas emissions will be reached by the end of next week. Climate change adaptation and mitigation is of the utmost importance, and cities are a good place to start this movement - and, indeed, many have already started. There is a lot that cities can learn from each other, that they can share and do together. The list of good practice is already long and gets longer every day.

I am glad that all of you have come here today for the presentation of the report on sustainable cities, because I feel that this is a very important topic in Europe at the moment and for the future. The topic is so important to all of us because 80% of the European population live in cities, and at the same time what is happening in the cities also has a large influence on the areas around them so that really all European citizens are involved.

The need for sustainability in urban environments should therefore be obvious to everyone. We can no longer afford to put the burden of unsustainable development on the shoulders of our children, grandchildren and future generations. Large investments may be needed in some places, climate proof growth has a cost, but in the long run this will be well worth the effort.

I feel that the report that will be presented to you today by Mr Kielstra of the Economist Intelligence Unit is very important for our fight against global warming. The report is full of good examples from European cities that have already made important moves towards sustainability for those cities that still have some way to go in improving their sustainability.

But what *is* a sustainable city? What exactly is it that makes a city sustainable? Being sustainable is more than just cutting back on the emission of greenhouse gases. It means to focus on ensuring our energy supplies, on efficient transport networks, on energy-efficient buildings, on the use of ICT for city development, on the creation of sustainable jobs, and on coping with the problem of Europe's ageing population. Being sustainable has environmental, social, and economic discussions.

The European Commission's DG REGIO has been working on promoting sustainable urban development for nearly twenty years already. A number of ambitious projects have been initiated during that time through urban initiatives. The URBACT programme is also part of the European Union's cohesion policy. It aims at enabling cities in Europe to work together in order to combat urban challenges. The solutions it provides for cities are sustainable, and they focus jointly on economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This programme currently connects 185 cities in 29 countries and is therefore a far-reaching tool in promoting urban sustainability in Europe.

The Treaty of Lisbon, that entered into force a week ago today, also stipulates a number of important points in the context of today's topic. In the Treaty, territorial cohesion and the territorial dimension of our development have

become explicit objectives of the EU. Urban sustainability matters will have to be addressed at different levels of governance, and the local and urban levels are very important in that context. Nobody knows the cities as well as those who live and work there, and it is these people who are best suited at pursuing common European objectives with respect to our cities' sustainability. This role of local actors in the political dialogue and action has thus been recognised and strengthened.

The European cohesion policy will continue to help cities and towns to develop in a harmonious, balanced, and sustainable way. I can assure you that in our reflection on priorities for post-2013 cohesion policy, sustainable urban development will be among our top priorities.

We all understand that it is not easy for cities to make the transition from the traditional way to becoming a sustainable and competitive environment for the future. European cities must, however, realize that the European Union is right behind them to aid them in this objective that we feel is so extremely important. We are doing a lot to promote sustainability in urban areas but there is still a long way to go. But let me stress that the battle for sustainability will be won or lost in the cities.

Of course, not everything can or should come from above. Quite the contrary: most of the climate-proofing efforts are bottom-up efforts. All of us will need to make an effort and I hope that the Sustainable Cities Index that will be presented to you in a few minutes will help us in that cause, and that it will move those cities that are not yet sustainable to take steps in right direction.

Thank you.