

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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*Committee on Regional Development*

**2006/2061(INI)**

1.6.2006

## **OPINION**

of the Committee on Regional Development

for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

on a thematic strategy for the urban environment  
(2006/2061(INI))

Draftswoman: Gisela Kallenbach

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## SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Regional Development calls on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Endorses the Commission's recommendations that an integrated approach be taken to managing the urban environment and takes the view that, if applied at local level with the support of the Member States, such an approach should be taken as one of the criteria for the granting of Structural Funds resources and loans from the European Investment Bank;
2. Considers that the Sustainable Urban Transport Project should include the promotion of public transport, supported by EU funding for public transport infrastructure projects such as the extension of park and ride systems, the introduction of environmentally-friendly methods of transport and the building of bicycle lanes;
3. Urges the Commission to simplify local authorities' notification obligations concerning current EU environmental provisions by introducing a single integrated obligation form, thus reducing bureaucracy;
4. Considers it vital for the Commission to draw up a list of indicators in the technical guidelines on the basis of current obligations and targets under relevant existing EU environmental law; further, is of the opinion that integrated concepts must contain measurable targets;
5. Calls on Member States to adopt measures to reduce land use, and in particular to limit greenfield and extend brownfield developments in their urban development programmes, as well as to protect existing green areas such as urban parks and nature reserves;
6. Welcomes the Commission's intention to promote an EU-wide exchange of best practices and proposes that, in order to avoid mistakes in urban development in the future, an honest and open exchange of negative experiences also be encouraged, by means of campaigns – which may be run by associations of towns – aimed at both civil servants and elected representatives, and supports the Commission's work in connection with setting up a thematic Internet portal for local authorities; .
7. Emphasises the significance of research in connection with urban policy, including issues relating to electricity and gas supplies, heating and air conditioning and waste treatment, and calls on the Commission to re-incorporate specific provisions dealing with this issue in the 7th Framework Programme on Research;
8. Considers it extremely important to support a network of national focal points on urban issues, such as the European Urban Knowledge Network, and welcomes the continuation of support for the URBACT programme within the framework of the proposed cohesion policy for 2007-2013;
9. Urges the Commission to go into greater detail with regard to the significance of the relations between cities and their environs for sustainable urban development which contributes to the overall cohesion of the EU and, in this regard, calls on the Commission

and the Member States to promote such sustainable urban development;

10. Urges the Commission to consider the role of the citizens concerned in the implementation of sustainable urban development concepts;
11. Encourages the Commission to carry out a mid-term review of the implementation of the technical guidelines in connection with the 2009 consultation.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Urban areas account for some 80 percent of Europe's population. This inevitably has a serious impact on the environment. In putting forward the thematic strategy for the urban environment, the Commission seeks to improve environmental conditions in European cities. This strategy is one of seven strategies provided for under the 6th Environment Action Plan intended to bring together the numerous existing individual plans to form an integrated approach.

Cities constitute a driving force for growth and employment.<sup>1</sup> As such, cities also compete with each other when it comes to attracting investors or building attractive housing. The unrestrained use of land in the EU at a rate of 120 ha/day runs counter to sustainable development. The areas available in cities for compensatory measures under environmental protection provisions are therefore becoming ever more scarce. Therefore, in allocating Structural Fund resources, preference should be given to the utilization of land already in use or of brownfield sites. This environmental aspect should be taken into account in drawing up national framework plans and operational programmes. Integrated concepts for local environmental policy including plans for sustainable urban public transport should be given priority in the allocation of structural funds.

It is vital that the Commission incorporate a list of appropriate core indicators in the technical guidelines in order to be able to measure the success of the thematic strategy. EU-wide indicators and assessment systems are necessary in order to be able to compare problems and achievements. They also help to define the general course to be pursued as regards future expenditure, planning and development. Comprehensive public participation at the planning and evaluation stages offers the opportunity to raise awareness of the objectives and substance of European policy.

In this regard, it is regrettable that the Commission does not pay sufficient attention to the role of social partners in the successful implementation of an integrated concept for local environmental policy. Policy objectives have the greatest chance of success if drawn up and implemented together with the citizens concerned thus allowing greater public identification with the objectives set and measures undertaken.

The Commission also fails to pay due regard to the significance of the interaction of cities and their environs. This relation is of a symbiotic nature: good public transport links from and to the surrounding region reduce the use of individual transport within the city. The creation of green spaces within city boundaries can reduce population flight to the surrounding region. Greenbelt recreational areas around cities enhance the quality of life throughout the region. Urban and suburban regions need heterogeneous structures with shops, housing and employment opportunities in order to reduce commuter flows.

In general, it is regrettable that the Commission's final document no longer contains many of the positive recommendations from the first communication.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it is to be welcomed that the objectives of this strategy are not to be pursued by means of new

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<sup>1</sup> Commission working document: Cohesion Policy and Cities, 23 November 2005

<sup>2</sup> COM(2004)0060.

legislation. There is no lack of objectives as far as local authorities are concerned but rather a lack of compliance with existing obligations. For this reason, the strategy should help reduce bureaucracy by consolidating the various notification obligations to which local authorities are subject into an integrated, simplified notification obligation.

It is to be welcomed that the exchange of experiences is to be encouraged through networking. In order not to merely add to the numerous existing data banks on best practices, priority should be accorded to practical cooperation. Moreover, the exchange of negative experiences can help avoid mistakes.

In this connection, the creation of urban environment networks is of particular importance. They should be supported under a new cohesion policy. The evaluation of experiences gained with URBACT, a pilot network of national centres, could serve as a cornerstone for a European Framework Programme for the Exchange of Experiences in Urban Development.

Urban development and urban environmental policy are closely linked to social, economic, spatial and demographic challenges, for which reason innovative approaches are called for. Consequently, the re-incorporation of research in this area in the 7th Framework Research Programme<sup>1</sup> is absolutely vital.

The mid-term review planned for 2009 should serve both to improve urban environmental conditions and to assess the effectiveness of financial resources allocated, allowing thus the appropriate conclusions to be drawn.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2005)0119.

## PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	Thematic strategy for the urban environment
<b>Procedure number</b>	2006/2061(INI)
<b>Committee responsible</b>	ENVI
<b>Opinion by</b> Date announced in plenary	REGI 16.3.2006
<b>Enhanced cooperation – date announced in plenary</b>	-
<b>Drafts(wo)man</b> Date appointed	Gisela Kallenbach 22.2.2006
<b>Previous drafts(wo)man</b>	-
<b>Discussed in committee</b>	25.4.2006
<b>Date adopted</b>	30.5.2006
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+ : 28 - : 1 0 : 1
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Stavros Arnautakis, Elspeth Attwooll, Jean Marie Beaupuy, Jana Bobošíková, Graham Booth, Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka, Gerardo Galeote Quecedo, Eugenijus Gentvilas, Zita Gurmai, Marian Harkin, Konstantinos Hatzidakis, Alain Hutchinson, Mieczysław Edmund Janowski, Gisela Kallenbach, Constanze Angela Krehl, Jamila Madeira, Miroslav Mikolášik, James Nicholson, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Jan Olbrycht, Markus Pieper, Francisca Pleguezuelos Aguilar, Elisabeth Schroedter, Grażyna Staniszevska, Margie Sudre
<b>Substitute(s) present for the final vote</b>	Jan Březina, Den Dover, Mojca Drčar Murko, Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Nikolaos Vakalis
<b>Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote</b>	-
<b>Comments (available in one language only)</b>	...