

SPEECH
Sustainable Cities and Climate Change: the Covenant of Mayors

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Room 6Q1
European Parliament, Rue Wiertz

It is a great pleasure to welcome you here today. This debate is organised in collaboration with the European Commission (DG ENER) and I would like to thank Mr. Fabrizio Barbaso the effort he has put in to the organisation of this event, on the Commission side of things.

The debate deals with the subject of Sustainable Cities and Climate Change. I cannot stress enough the importance of this subject in today's world.

The 21st century is the urban era. In 2007, half of the world's population live in cities. In the EU, 80% of all citizens already live in urban areas, and their quality of life and health is directly influenced by the state of the urban environment. Cities are responsible for about 75% of all CO₂ emissions and consume about 75% of natural resources.

Cities account for 80% of total economic growth. This growth can be a problem or an opportunity.

Urban sustainability requires social, political and technological innovation. Cities have the ability to generate vast amounts of financial capital that can be used as market drivers for sustainable technologies and services. Amongst the prerequisites to stimulate economic growth, are to be found the retrofitting of the building stock to high performance houses and offices and the efficient management of urban transport and congestion.

The concentration of resources in cities is a useful way in combating climate change as cities are often centres of new thinking and policy innovation. Today's challenges require novel approaches and tackling climate change in cities through innovation requires new action plans.

In order to achieve these goals, an interdisciplinary methodology should be used, emphasising the contribution of ICT to energy efficiency.

Decentralized energy production, integration of renewables in the urban environment, the application of the ICT to energy systems and clean vehicles are examples of innovative technologies for cities.

Indeed, there are a whole series of ways of using such innovative practices, in effective ways: urban planning, urban communication and services infrastructures, congestion charging, dynamic traffic management, on-demand public transport practices and intelligent buildings for emission reduction.

Technology will increasingly change the way the world works and lives and it will undoubtedly help combat one of today's most pressing problems – climate change.

The European Commission has been developing new ways to cooperate with actors interested in energy and transport policy implementation. It has also been working on development at local communities levels, namely by supporting capacity building and networking between the different energy actors.

Let me give you some examples:

Firstly, CONCERTO, which is a major new European Union initiative that has been designed to support local communities in developing concrete initiatives that are both sustainable and highly energy efficient.

Secondly, the CIVITAS Initiative launched by the European Commission in the year 2000, supports ambitious cities in introducing and testing bold and innovative measures to radically improve urban transport.

Thirdly, the ManagEnergy Initiative is developing new ways to cooperate with actors interested in energy and transport policy implementation and development at local and regional levels.

Lastly, the Smart Cities Initiatives. This Initiative will support cities and regions in taking ambitious and pioneering measures to progress towards a 40% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through sustainable use and production of energy by 2020.

Let me now give 3 examples of some initiatives outside of Europe.

Firstly, the Masdar Initiative is an urban project by Norman Foster that aims to develop a sustainable city; a conceptual walled city where residents would enjoy a carbon and waste-free environment.

Secondly, in 2005, President Clinton launched the Clinton Global Initiative that brings together a community of global leaders to devise and implement innovative solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges.

One of CGI recent initiatives was to invite the American company Cisco Systems to provide the CGI with a radical new approach to reducing carbon emissions. In the context of CGI, Cisco committed to an extremely important initiative: Connected Urban Development (CDU). The Connected Urban Development programme aims at delivering new solutions to cities confronted with the challenges of climate change and sustainability. Amsterdam, San Francisco and Seoul are three cities currently collaborating in the CDU initiative.

However, today we are here to discuss, what is undoubtedly the most significant initiative in the world at the moment: the Covenant of Mayors organised by the European Commission.

The Covenant of Mayors is a commitment by signatory towns and cities to go beyond the objectives of EU energy policy in terms of reduction in CO2 emissions.

Today, more than 1400 cities and towns in 36 countries have adhered to the Covenant. Many of them have already outlined their action plans. These show to what extent tackling climate change mitigation at local level is able to mobilise sensible investments, create stable jobs and improve living conditions.

I strongly feel that this is the way forward for Europe in the fight against climate change: voluntary but committed agreements among the stakeholders, involvement of citizens, and a bottom-up approach.

Twenty Portuguese cities have already signed the Covenant of Mayors. In my previous role as Principal Advisor to President Barroso I promoted the Covenant of Mayors in several Fora in Portugal. At the moment, I am organising a meeting in Algarve in order to the Mayors of this region to join us in this excellent initiative.

I challenge the Commission to organize a similar agreement for the European Islands on the one hand and why not come up with a similar project for different economic sectors.

I am sure that this forum will offer us all an opportunity to assess the real value of the covenant of Mayors in the fight against Climate Change.

It is a honour to have deputy Director General Fabrizio Barbaso with us today. Mr. Barbaso will explain the details of the Covenant of Mayors. And this will be followed by a speech of Mr. Grégoire Clerfayt from the Ministry for Environment Region Bruxelles-Capital who will explain the initiatives that have been taken in the fight against Climate Change in Brussels.