

**Speech by Ms Christine BOUTIN, Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs**

**introduction to the ministerial meeting on urban development**

**25 November 2008 – Palais du Pharo in Marseille**

**Ladies and gentlemen, Ministers, dear colleagues,**

**Commissioner** (*of the EU's regional policy - Mme Danuta Hübner*),

**Mr President of the Urban Housing inter-group of the European Parliament** (*Mr Jean-Marie Beaupuy*),

**Presidents and representatives of the Committee of Regions,  
of the European economic and social Committee  
and the European Investment bank,**

**Representatives of local authorities and civil society,**

It is a joy and an honour for me to open this day.

We are gathered here today to discuss the central subject of urban development. Central indeed, because our meeting comes between yesterday's meeting on housing - over which I presided - and tomorrow's meeting on regional development and cohesion policy. We are aware how much these subjects are intimately related! It is indeed an overall and coherent approach to the city that - together around the table - we now wish to implement.

We declared this loud and clear in the Leipzig Charter of 24 May 2007 under the German presidency. We said: "To protect and develop our cities, we must take into account all aspects of sustainable development, at the same time and without

restriction: economic prosperity; social balance; and the respect for ecological imperatives.

It is therefore a three-pillared approach: economic, social and ecological. If one of these pillars is missing, then the structure collapses and the future of our cities is threatened!

Yet, their future is the future of our very societies. In ten years, nearly two thirds of humanity will work, travel, be housed and live in a city. This is already the case for 70% of us on the European continent.

We are also well aware of all the challenges posed by this generalised urbanisation: a hyper-specialisation of districts, which has led to the functions of the city becoming fragmented: services, facilities, activities, etc.; to the impoverishment of certain districts, which close in on themselves; and to pollution of the air, of water, noise nuisance, etc. In certain cases, cities divide society rather than bringing it together...

Yet the purpose of cities is precisely to bring people together! The city is first and foremost a political project, a community of men and women, driven by the desire to live well together.

It is also not by chance that we have decided to devote half of the Leipzig Charter to the reintegration of disadvantaged districts in our cities.

The main challenge of a sustainable city is therefore to organise the movement of people, their exchanges, the inter-dependency of neighbourhoods and the possibility for everyone, whatever their level of wealth, to have easy access to services, jobs and leisure. In order to be sustainable, the city must - above all - be cohesive! Everything flows from this and, at the same time, we can respond to the imperatives of this economic, social and ecological trio.

We must rethink the city on a human scale. It is a real "challenge for civilisation" at this beginning of the 21st century.

I am particularly happy, in the name of the French Presidency, that our work comes under the auspices of the Leipzig Charter, which sets milestones for this new overall and coherent approach to the sustainable city.

But what is the reality that follows on from this founding text? Where is its concrete implementation? Since May 2007, much work has been done. In particular, I am thinking of the Urban Development Group, under the Slovenian Presidency, then the French Presidency, which worked on the tools for moving the principles of Leipzig into the policies of our member states. It is to this group that we owe the idea of creating a "Reference framework" for implementing the Leipzig Charter.

To progress in this direction, we do not need additional standards, restrictions and obligations. Instead, we need a reciprocal effort to do even better. We need dialogue between us on what happens in this city or that, which could inspire others, with the virtuous effect that this would have - gradually - throughout the European Union.

Neither do we want a framework imposed from "on high" by governments. Rather, we need a collective and open discussion between governments, local authorities and experts. The aim would be to create a tool for enquiry and analysis, which would be made available to the actors concerned, the cities, the private sector and representatives of the inhabitants.

We will return to this in greater detail in a moment.

Because local elected representatives are first and foremost the ones concerned by this approach, I welcome the fact that the Cities Forum will be held in a few days, on the 2nd and 3rd December at Montpellier, bringing together cities' local actors, and above

all representatives of the people, for discussions on the sustainable and cohesive city on a day-to-day basis.

Lastly, it seems appropriate for the implementation of the Leipzig Charter to be the subject of regular follow-up reports, during meetings of urban-development ministers and cities' local actors, to jointly measure the progress made and the effort still to come!

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

At a time when a crisis is occurring on our continent, more than ever and every day, we must defend an ambitious vision of the city. We must "re-make society" and protect against serious social and territorial divisions.

This vast project is the greatest structural reform to come. It will determine - I am convinced - the well-being of the men and women of our European countries, social harmony and the future influence of Europe.

Thank you to your attention.

My colleague Fadela AMARA will now say a few words on the assessment of the implementation of the Leipzig Charter.