

**Opening address by the Mayor of Nicosia at
the 49th UCEU General Assembly Conference
on the theme of “Inclusive and Sustainable Capital Cities”**

Nicosia, Cyprus Hilton Hotel, 30th October 2009

Dear Minister of the Interior,
Dear President of the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy of the CoR
Dear Colleagues,
Dear city delegates,
Dear speakers and discussion coordinators,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you once again to Nicosia and to open the 49th General Assembly Conference of the Union of the Capitals of the European Union under the theme of “**Inclusive and sustainable capital cities**”.

Our city has been honoured with the Presidency of the Union for this year, a significant responsibility made heavier by the excellent work done by Dublin last year but also by its predecessors. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you all for your support and hope that we meet your expectations in this role.

It is a great honour to have with us today the Minister of the Interior, Mr Neoklis Sylikiotis, and the President of the CoR Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy, Dr Michael Schneider, who represents the President of the Committee of the Regions. I wish to thank them both for accepting our invitation.

Europe is a political and social project - it has never been and can never be solely a market. It is, and must remain a project for peace, democracy, prosperity and for solidarity among nations and among citizens.

The newly enlarged Union embraces a wider range of cultural traditions; greater variations in the quality of social infrastructure; greater extremes of poverty and wealth; a wider range of problems of social exclusion; and higher levels of migration, both from within the Union and from third countries. While European legislation has strengthened protection against discrimination across the EU, much remains to be done, especially on implementation and enforcement.

Our theme, addresses key issues of delivering change and progress in an integrated manner. Our capitals are increasingly called upon to confront the impacts of global processes, which pose a challenge for us to take action and promote competitiveness, economic growth and social inclusion, enhance infrastructure, improve the quality of urban space, provide for the integration of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and for the regeneration of marginalized, rundown areas while protecting the natural environment. Diverse measures, interventions and initiatives need to be harnessed in a coordinated manner without neglecting participative and inclusive governance.

Sustainability is about more than resource efficiency. It is also about social and economic sustainability. Particular emphasis is placed on the crucial significance of inclusiveness in urban development, services and policies, so that the social, economic and cultural benefits of development are shared by all. Fostering

development and regeneration, in a creative and inclusive way additionally allows us to successfully tap into the wealth of human resources and other assets of each city.

The pursuit of sustainable solutions acquires special significance for Nicosia; the sustainability of our capital city is additionally challenged by its longstanding division. Considerable work was done over the years in the field of urban regeneration. These projects have demonstrated the value of sustainable development solutions to urban problems and are now beginning to bear fruit.

The environment has indeed acted as an additional driving force in bi-communal cooperation for sustainable solutions. Just recently the two communities on Nicosia, notwithstanding the continuing division of the city and the unresolved Cyprus problem, signed an agreement for a joint waste water treatment plant. For some this was unthinkable, for others logical, necessary and natural.

Our Conference this year can send a message that at this time of crisis Europe's capitals will stand for social responsibility; that we all intend to uphold the vision for sustainable and inclusive cities, which cherish and thrive on openness, diversity, innovation and creativity and strive for progress for all.

Any response to the economic crisis must focus on promoting sustainable recovery. Our standing duty and objective of enhancing local competitiveness, infrastructure, quality of urban space, welfare services and the sustainable development of the city, will have to be pursued in much graver circumstances.

Europe's Structural and Cohesion Funds need to be used as a weapon against exclusion and poverty. They should be used, for example, to extend childcare facilities and lifelong learning provision in Europe's poorest regions; to improve social provision for care of the elderly; and to fund the programmes needed for successful integration of migrants.

Mandatory social impact assessments should be made of proposed EU legislation, and of the implementation of existing EU competition and internal market law.

We also need to tackle the root causes of migration and introduce a common European migration policy. We need, among other, to expand access to education and training.

We as capitals certainly accept the burden of leading by example as we already carry the burden of many capital functions, important for the entire country. I quote the President of the European Parliament, **Jerzy Buzek**, who addressing the first CoR plenary session after his election, he said: " I have always been a supporter of the decentralization of powers. Subsidiarity is key to the welfare of our citizens". We should continue showing a strong commitment to investing public money in environmentally-friendly solutions, initiatives which make our cities more attractive places to invest, work and live in, whilst not losing sight of the need to promote the inclusion of the vulnerable in our cities.

The members of our Union represent almost 37 million European citizens, approximately 7 percent of the total population of the European Union. They are significant hubs of knowledge development, economic activity, technology advances, culture and creativity, with a significant contribution to the economic, social and other

development of wider capital city regions. Our Conference can therefore highlight the significance of capital cities in balanced regional development, territorial cohesion and overall sustainable development in the European Union. This is the aim of the Common Positions which we propose to discuss and adopt later today in the General Assembly meeting.

As we come together, I feel we are showing how acting locally and sharing our experiences reaffirms our belief in seeking collective solutions to global problems.

The Conference has been modeled so as to provide both for the presentation of key dimensions and issues relevant to the theme by experts and for a constructive exchange of ideas and good practices between the Mayors and other delegates of the cities. Hopefully prospects and areas of future cooperation between our capitals can be identified and discussed in this framework.

To explore and present key dimensions of the Conference theme, we have invited distinguished experts, whom I would like to thank wholeheartedly for responding positively to our invitation to be keynote speakers at today's Conference. I would also like to thank the coordinators of the roundtable discussions, who have also undertaken the task of preparing and analyzing a questionnaire on the topics of the roundtable discussions.

The following key areas will be the object of analysis and debate at the roundtable discussions:

- a) Spatial development and sustainable integrated urban development and regeneration.
- b) Social inclusion and social sustainability.
- c) Knowledge cities and Knowledge based development.

Dear Colleagues, dear city delegates,

Our Conference is an opportunity to explore how to achieve inclusive and sustainable capital cities, to share best practices and know-how. In doing so I think we can gain from new thinking for the implementation of our policies on these burning issues.

I wish us all a successful Conference and General Assembly.

Eleni Mavrou
Mayor of Nicosia
UCEU President 2009

