

**Address by the Minister of the Interior**

**Mr. Neoclis Sylikiotis**

**“Sustainable capitals  
without exclusions”**

49<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Conference  
of the Union of Capitals of the European Union  
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Mrs. Mayor,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

First of all let me thank you for your invitation to attend and address today the *Annual Conference of the Union of Capitals of the European Union*. In my turn, I also seize the opportunity to welcome our distinguished guests to the conference.

The subject you have chosen is both a timely and a lasting subject. The sustainable development of cities is both a challenge and a need, as it could be the most valuable tool in solving the complex and complicated problems of downgrading and underdevelopment observed usually at the centres of big European cities and capitals.

This subject proves the great and substantive role played by the Union of Capitals of the European Union in the implementation of the Leipzig Charter and the Territorial Agenda, having as its main pivots economic development and social integration, tackling the problems faced today by European capitals, mainly the reconstruction of outdated infrastructure and the volume of immigrants they receive, both legal and illegal.

The successful tackling and solving of these problems, surely serves as a model to solve corresponding problems in other European cities.

The fact that this subject was chosen and the holding of your Conference in the capital of the Republic of Cyprus, acquires particular importance, as Nicosia is the last divided capital of Europe, with a wall running through it, breaking its continuity and cohesion. Undoubtedly, this wall is a jarring note and an anachronism in our times when United Europe is growing and evolving into a single social, economic and political entity.

Throughout its long history, Nicosia, despite the various conquerors was a single city and this is attested by its historical landmarks – an indisputable proof of this is the Venetian Wall surrounding it, as well as other elements which are interspersed on both sides of the wall of shame.

Returning to the subject of your conference, I would like to remind you that Sustainable Development is a basic element of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union of 2005 as well as a component part of the Territorial Agenda with the subtitle “Towards a more competitive and sustainable Europe of diverse regions” adopted at the informal Ministerial Meeting in Leipzig in May 2007.

Also during the same informal Ministerial Meeting, the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities was adopted. One of the provisions of the principles and strategies of this Charter is the subject of today’s conference.

The choice of this subject is of particular interest for Nicosia because, following the Turkish invasion of 1974, the urban area of the capital was violently severed and the areas touching upon the buffer zone suddenly lost a large part of their population. At the same time a lot of the functional elements supporting their socio-economic fabric and stability were also lost.

For many years, these areas were facing problems of continuous depletion of population, which were particularly strong in the Walled City. At the same time there were shortcomings in their communal and social infrastructure and operations, concentration of intrusive usages, significantly degraded infrastructure and many other problems, which were of a disproportionate intensity, compared with other European capitals that do not have such a problem.

However, since 1991 it has been ascertained that there was a need to formulate, adopt and implement an integrated Programme that would make the capital sustainable without exclusions. Through targeted, mainly public investment, the Programme would seek to halt the process of downgrading and aim instead at the revitalization of areas with sustainable development.

As a result of this ascertainment from 1991 to 2008 three successive Revitalization Programmes were implemented, which had a very positive effect on the areas alongside the dividing wall in the capital.

More specifically, the Government Programme sets as a primary goal the revitalization, expansion and substantial strengthening of the Revitalization Programme for a new four-year period, so as to restore the vitality, attractiveness and balance of the areas alongside the Buffer Zone (walls) and so as to consolidate and make permanent the positive effects from the implementation of the Revitalization Programme.

This programme, which covers 2009-2012, was approved by the Council of Ministers on 26.11.2008 with a total expenditure of €24, 5 m. It includes two plans: one plan for the financing of infrastructure works and the other plan for the provision of grants.

This plan in essence is a comprehensive, composite and multifunctional framework, comprising state grants to individuals and town-planning interventions financed wholly or to a large degree, by the Government and applicable in specific areas.

The strategic goal of the programme is to make well targeted and substantial public investment in these areas, with a view to activating the dynamism and capabilities of the private sector, with the simultaneous provision of attractive incentives to medium size enterprises, to encourage them to execute works and make investments that would complement the outcome of public interventions.

Furthermore, the framework of the government policy to revitalize the area for sustainable development includes also the housing plan of the Ministry of Interior.

All the plans complement and dynamically interact with each other in the direction of attaining our strategic goal, which is not only to halt the social and economic downgrading of the areas alongside the wall, but also to achieve a dynamic development by turning the capital into a viable city.

Indicatively, some of the partial aims of the programme are:

- To encourage the use of environmental, cultural, social and economic elements in the development of the area.
- To enrich the area with new uses
- To expand the economic basis of the area
- To create new jobs
- To encourage private initiative in investments
- To upgrade the quality of life of the residents of the capital
- To ensure the return of inhabitants to these areas and to create a cohesive social fabric.

Both the partial goals of the programme for the revitalization of the capital I have just mentioned as well as our aim for the social, economic and natural upgrading of these areas, and also for making them attractive again as places of work, entertainment and visit, by attracting new businesses and encouraging existing ones to expand their activities, are included in the Territorial Agenda of the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities. Epigrammatically, some of these principles provide for:

- Giving due importance to deprived areas in the general framework of all urban development
- Creating high quality public and private areas
- Coordinating public and private funds and town planning focus
- Coordinating planning in local- regional level.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to refer in particular to the role and importance that citizens should play in the all the stages of the various plans, e.g. in the drawing of plans or their implementation, for without their active participation all these are doomed to failure.

The Ministry of the Interior considers local government as our most valuable collaborator in the effective and efficient implementation of the various plans, because local government is the power that is closer to the citizen who is the core of its activities.

I would like to reiterate the commitment of the government, as this is contained in the Government Programme of President Christofias for the substantial strengthening of these areas of the capital and its continuous support to citizens who kept alive and active these urban areas, giving hope to our interventions to turn our capital into a Sustainable City.

Concluding, I would like to wish to our guests a happy and pleasant stay in our island and to wish to organizers of the Conference to attain the goals they have set.

Thank you.