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## Cities fostering democracy in the European Union Urban perspectives for the Conference on the Future of Europe

Europe's cities and municipalities are the birthplace of democracy and at the same time living innovation labs for European democracy. Building on the experience, transformational power and the democratic mobilisation capacity of cities is key to making the Conference on the Future of Europe a success and paving the way towards a reformed EU governance focusing on proximity and participation. The promotion of a more active role for cities is supported by the **European Committee of the Regions, Eurocities and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions** and complements the interests of European regions. Cities, their mayors, municipal councillors and administrations are the closest governance level to citizens and should therefore play a stronger role at the European level, in line with the subsidiarity principle and local self-government. By setting targets at the local level and involving citizens in the design and implementation of sustainable policies, they contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and providing the European Green Deal with local ownership. The participants at today's forum agree on the following recommendations:

1. The [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) offers an opportunity to promote innovative ways of involving citizens in the functioning of the European Union and developing a European Participation Strategy. Deliberative and participatory practices, such as participative municipal budgeting and the co-management of public spaces, which are used to strengthen our values-based European democracy, should be further promoted and reflected, including at EU level. We believe an **EU permanent mechanism for structured dialogue with citizens** through regional and local authorities' representatives should be established. This mechanism would 1) enable cities to work with citizens on European issues that impact them directly, 2) enable European policy makers to design policies adapted to cities and supported by citizens, 3) allow citizens to be part of a policy process that ultimately affects their daily lives. The following policy issues with a strong urban and territorial relevance and contribution could fall under such a dialogue:
2. Cities of all sizes are at the heart of the **green transition**, as they are responsible for 70-80% of world emissions. At the same time, local and regional authorities implement 70% of climate mitigation measures and 90% of climate adaptation policies. Cities and municipalities therefore need to be recognised as protagonists of the green transition towards climate neutrality, including through regular exchange of ideas or best practices, stronger involvement in programme design and implementation and EU financial support, including for capacity-building.
3. Cities and municipalities are pioneers in the **digital transformation** by virtue of developing and implementing innovative and integrated solutions for citizens and communities. An acceleration in the deployment of broadband infrastructure and capacity-building at the local level is needed to overcome the "double digital divide" of unequal access and digital illiteracy. In addition, many online platforms have a considerable impact at the local level – such as urban and regional transport, housing, tourist accommodation and the delivery of public services, which needs to be considered in European approaches to tackling issues.
4. Cities and municipalities are facing and have already overcome many challenges to foster **social cohesion**, build inclusive societies and promote diversity. European and national strategies for social integration, addressing notably gender equality, demographic change, disabilities and the integration of migrants, therefore need to fully involve cities and municipalities in sharing their experience and suitable policy tools. Ensuring their direct and timely access to EU funding is key to enabling them to fulfil their role as social "integrators".
5. The [New Leipzig Charter](#), building on the **transformative power** of cities for the common good, the renewed Urban Agenda for the EU and the [Territorial Agenda 2030](#) should enable cities and municipalities to participate in the design of the relevant European policies and act as a benchmark for the practical implementation of EU policies in all Member States. They must enable EU institutions, Member States, cities and municipalities to connect via a policy platform to support the EU New Green Deal and its roll-out through the different policies anchored at the urban and local level.