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**The essence and spirit of the EU: how  
mayors are making a difference on  
climate change**

Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Covenant of Mayors Ceremony

**Brussels, 4 May 2010**

Presidents,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like, first of all, to say a big thank you to you all. Thank you for coming here to share this moment with us. Thank you for the courage and foresight to make a difference. Thank you for showing leadership and for being at the forefront of our efforts on such an important challenge.

Citizens all over the world are rightly concerned. They know that climate change threatens all that is most important and precious to us: our quality of life, our children's future, peace and stability. That is why expectations were so high at Copenhagen. This climate change conference did not bring us the ambitious agreement the European Union was seeking, but it did provide important guidance that we must now translate into the negotiation texts and into concrete action.

Amidst the current financial and economic situation we have to make climate action one of the keys to economic recovery. Most citizens sensibly expect action by their leaders which addresses both challenges. That is what the Commission is proposing in its Europe 2020 Strategy. A model for smart, green, inclusive growth.

I now have the privilege of speaking to several hundred leaders that have already understood this: you, the signatories of the Covenant of Mayors.

You have decided to contribute to global efforts to tackle climate change using all the instruments that are available to you - also as a means to promote the social and economic well-being of your citizens. And you have done it without waiting for any support or guidance.

You have kept a clear focus on delivering solutions, rather than endlessly recycling tired slogans.

Most of all, you have done all this in a genuine spirit of solidarity with other cities and regions, and loyalty to the overall commitments of both the EU and your respective countries.

Some might say that the efforts of a single city are all well and good in symbolic terms, but irrelevant in global terms.

To those cynics I say: there are now more than 1,600 Covenant cities and regions, involving a population - within the EU - of over 120 million people. If your action plans are fully implemented, as I am sure they will be, you will be contributing one fifth of the total effort needed for the whole EU.

No other stakeholder comes close to making such a significant contribution!

But I am well aware that climate change is not the only motivation to act. While some consider mitigation actions as a cost, local governments see an opportunity. Urban renovation is probably the most promising vector for economic recovery and the creation of jobs.

Smart green buildings, smart transport and logistics and, in general, the whole concept of smart cities are job-intensive activities that contribute directly to the local economy.

Crucially, they also make a positive contribution to other issues, such as social integration, quality of life, well-being, and the attractiveness of our cities. Mitigating climate change is possibly the best sustainable development strategy for many territories in Europe and the world.

Last year I had the honour of participating in the first Ceremony of the Covenant. I expressed my firm intention to support and reinforce this movement.

I am proud to say that in just one year, a difficult year by any standard, we have succeeded in steering our policy programmes in a direction that recognises the key role that cities and regions can play. And we are already starting to see the results.

The Commission is also doing its part to help you in your efforts. For instance the Commission has revised European Regional Development Fund legislation, to highlight the role of cities as key players in regional policy. Now energy-efficiency and renewable energy in buildings are at the core of the revised regulation. In 2009, remarkable new programmes for energy retrofitting in social housing were implemented throughout Europe.

This focus on technology is typical of our plans. And EU research programmes are increasingly targeted to match the long-term needs of cities. In this context, the successful experience of the Concerto and Civitas initiatives will be reinforced in the future.

This trend continues with the Smart Cities programme on ICT for energy efficiency, as well as proposals that are on the table for low energy buildings, smart grids and clean urban mobility.

I am well aware of your financial needs for these efforts. Because of that, we decided to allocate part of our resources to create instruments that leverage funding. The EIB set, as a major funding priority, investments in sustainable energy at local and regional level.

Thanks to the Covenant we developed a successful pilot initiative, ELENA, which in only three months has mobilised €600 million. We look forward to mobilising more than €2 billion before the end of the year. More financial initiatives, in co-operation with the EIB and other financial institutions, are being prepared now.

We need to ensure that the Covenant positions itself successfully in the mainstream of political and legislative developments. A new Energy Efficiency Action Plan is under preparation. I have instructed my services to pay special attention to the Covenant of Mayors and, in general, the regional and local dimension. Your views on these developments will be most welcome.

The international dimension of the Covenant is also high on our agenda. The fact that so many cities from outside the EU have signed up to the Covenant commitments with such enthusiasm is proof, I believe, of how well-founded the principle of voluntary reduction of CO2 emissions is.

Besides, it opens a great window for international co-operation. While national governments may be reluctant to agree on overall mitigation targets, local governments facilitate the negotiations through their own commitments.

That is why we are now assisting the extension of the Covenant into neighbouring countries. We have also received proposals to create a Latin American chapter of the Covenant, implement co-operation with Chinese cities, and develop an agreement with American cities.

Clearly, the Covenant is taking on a global dimension, based upon commitment and co-operation. Cities and regions are responding to citizens' expectations with action rather than debate. This rationale is a strong motivation for the Commission to pursue its support efforts.

In my view, the global dimension of the Covenant should take account of the fact that large parts of the world are already suffering from the effects of climate change. The Covenant's spirit of solidarity should also extend to those poverty-stricken territories which need to undertake urgent adaptation measures.

The Commission has developed, in co-operation with the Committee of the Regions, schemes for decentralised co-operation with developing countries. I would invite you to consider taking advantage of this, and enlarging the scope of the Covenant to support people living in the least developed areas to overcome the effects of climate change with hope for the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

You represent the essence and spirit of the European Union. From the local level you are building a European and global initiative, in the most genuine expression of Europe's democratic values.

You adhere to the EU's overall commitment and contribute to its achievement on your own initiative, in the knowledge that this is good both for your citizens and for all other citizens.

What you are doing is unprecedented, and the eyes of the world are watching, with great interest. The Commission is committed to being your partner and your supporter. We have a challenging path to explore together.

Thank you.