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(CEPI) - What are the main reasons why the Urban Intergroup was formed in 2005?

(Mr OLBRYCHT) - When I first came to the European Parliament, as a former mayor I found out that there was a working group which focused on urban-related issues. At the time, the leader of this group couldn't create an intergroup, because it was something very new. Later on, we wanted to continue the work of this group on urban issues, but we needed the support of the political groups to do so. The main support, at that time came from the Liberals, and Jean Marie Beaupuy became our first president. I took over as president after he left the Parliament.

Our discovery that there is a lot of discussion to be had at the European level about cities was the beginning of the intergroup. Our long-term goal is to prove that urban policy is a real matter for the European Union, rather than just being part of regional policy as many politicians often say.

(CEPI) - What are the main activities carried out by the Urban Intergroup?

(Mr OLBRYCHT) - It is important to understand that the intergroup has a special structure: it is a cross-committee, cross-party and voluntary-based activity, so it is only composed of the members of parliament who are interested in the concrete subject matter and field. The parliament allows the creation of up to 20 intergroups, which don't get funding but are able to use the facilities of the parliament. As the members of the intergroup come from different committees and parties, we try to monitor everything that, at the European level, could potentially have consequences for cities, because often the elements that are being discussed by different committees can be contradictory. We try to introduce new elements into legislation and to react to proposals that come from the Commission. In fact, as soon as the Commission presents new regulations which relate to urban issues for the coming year, we immediately intervene. Also, we always try to stay in constant contact with the different actors in the urban field in Europe which is why we now have more than 120 partners in Europe. We want to keep in touch with practitioners in order to receive some insightful feedback on European legislation, but also because they bring us their ideas about what we should and should not work on.

(CEPI) - What are the most challenging topics that are being discussed by the intergroup at the moment?

(Mr OLBRYCHT) - Firstly, the action topics linked to the European agenda: the most important one today is the new perspective for the long-term EU budget 2021-2027. Preparing legislation for this period is a priority, especially on the structural funds but, at the same time, we also address other relevant topics such as transport, energy, digital investment etc. Secondly, the work on the Urban Agenda, which was proposed by the Dutch presidency of the Council of the EU, and which is now organized by the Commission with the so-called "partnerships" working on concrete elements. We try to monitor what they are doing and consequences for legislation. Finally, there are some "horizontal subjects" which are not directly linked to legislation, but are very relevant. For example, the question of smart cities and how they should be defined and organized, how Europe should facilitate the process of digitalization, and other subjects including climate change.

(CEPI) - 4) How do you think that real estate professionals can become involved in the work of the Urban Intergroup?

(Mr OLBRYCHT) - We need urban policy in Europe, which is often understood in a simplistic way, for example merely as European funding for cities. But in fact we are mainly fighting to define urban policy in Europe in terms of the urban dimension of different European policies. So, it is not only about money but also legislation, special planning and real estate. As you know, real estate is one of the main sources of finance for many cities in the world, so cities should be active in this field. Real estate is central to urban policy: how can we discuss, for example, special planning without a serious debate on real estate? The main question is about policy in real estate: what is the long-term strategy? Problems in real estate are at the center of the debate about urban issues, revitalization, housing and social policy. Real estate is not only about cities, it is of much broader interest, and as we are the intergroup which deals with urban issues that is why I think that for us it is of crucial importance.



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