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**A Territorial Agenda for Europe –
Looking ahead to the German Presidency**

Report for the

EU Stakeholders Conference

in Amsterdam on 28 June 2006

In my capacity as German infrastructure minister responsible for the fields of transport, building and urban development, my main objective is to promote economic growth and boost employment. As is the case in other departments, the work in my department is focused on achieving this goal which is the most important task the Federal Government has set itself. Our job is to create the right general conditions.

Secondly, greater emphasis is being placed on the work to promote new technologies and innovations – one of our priorities is to help progressive technologies and innovations gain general acceptance because we are firmly convinced that this is the only way to create high-quality jobs for the future.

Thirdly, we see it as our duty to work in the policy areas we are responsible for to promote regional and social cohesion in Germany and in Europe – we view this as an integrated approach aimed at achieving prosperity and enhancing the quality of life at all levels.

And fourthly, we want to strengthen and enhance European co-operation – this is the only way to boost economic growth and hence achieve prosperity and a higher quality of life. Even if scepticism about Europe is sometimes widespread and the work on a Constitution for Europe needs to regain momentum, there is the great hope underlying the goal of a United Europe that we can permanently overcome old borders and hostilities and this is a goal we want to achieve.

I am very pleased that today's Stakeholders Conference has focused on all these challenges and that we want to pursue together in particular the possibilities and opportunities provided by paying greater attention to the territorial dimension (spatial development) in our policies.

This joint impetus should help us move forward as a Community as well as in our individual countries and regions. We would therefore like to feed our ideas into all EU sectoral policies.

We can and must generate more momentum for sustainable economic growth and employment. This is our contribution to the Lisbon Strategy. The discussion today has also shown clearly that there are many ways of making greater use of the development opportunities available – in the Netherlands a very graphic expression is used for this: you speak about the “territorial capital” of a region or a city.

But it will not be immediately clear to everyone what is meant by the term “territorial capital”.

And I am firmly convinced that we need to be close to the people, not only in our practical daily work but also in the language we use, in communicating with the public – this will help people understand what we are doing and gain their support!

So what are we really talking about when we talk about “territorial capital”?

We are talking about the citizens, individual people in the Community. We are talking about businesses and their employees.

The real question we are asking here is about the concrete living and working conditions we have now and what they will be like in the future.

We know that Europe has a vast pool of human resources. These are people who are well educated and highly trained. We have a knowledge-based society in Europe: we have know-how, we have creativity and innovative potential, we have innovations in products and processes. At the same time – and we can be proud of this – we have high social standards in Europe and a large degree of cultural diversity.

But we also see that unemployment is becoming more widespread in Europe. That involves poverty and social exclusion for some sections of the population. And having different ethnic groups living side by side does not always work smoothly.

The discussion in Amsterdam has illustrated that the situation we are in provides numerous opportunities for making greater use of the development opportunities presented by a region or a town or a city.

Policy-makers must focus more on territorial capital, that is to say the people living there, the businesses operating in the cities and regions and the nationals and foreigners who create the national product in the individual countries. We have to come to grips with the concrete living conditions of the people. This will also involve questions relating to training and the social dimension.

So by activating and harnessing the economic potential available we can make an important contribution to boosting growth and employment.

I see the joint European work programme we adopted in Rotterdam confirmed by this conference.

To bring the process we began in Rotterdam to a temporary close, Germany will be holding an informal ministerial meeting on territorial cohesion and urban development in Leipzig on 24-25 May 2007 within the scope of our Presidency of the Council.

By focusing attention on spatial development and urban development in Europe, we want to co-ordinate two policy areas which are important for European integration. We want to adopt the Territorial Agenda of the European Union in Leipzig.

We will analyse and evaluate the most important development policy challenges affecting territorial issues in this document which will be drawn up jointly by all the Member States of the European Union.

We reached agreement in Luxembourg under the chairmanship of Minister Haldorf on six action areas. They aim

- to strengthen metropolitan areas and cities as engines for European development;
- to promote urban-rural partnerships, in particular by integrating regions that are lagging behind in their development;
- to develop transnational clusters of regions of innovation and promote knowledge-based societies;
- to make greater use of trans-European corridors in both the transport and the energy sectors;
- to improve risk management, for example in coastal areas and river basins; and
- to improve the marketing of ecologically and culturally valuable areas.

These could be tangible contributions to boosting growth and employment and improving social and regional cohesion in Europe. It is also important in this context to engage with the impact of demographic change in all territorial fields of action. This is increasingly becoming a challenge for cities and regions in Europe.

We want to send a clear message on

- how the various territorial opportunities we have in Europe can be better mobilized by harnessing cross-border and transnational co-operation;

- and how we can strengthen the competitiveness of our continent in the world by making better use of the regional diversity of Europe.

By pursuing an integrated spatial development and urban policy, we want to make a contribution

- to improving the co-ordination of EU policies with each other and with the various administrative levels in Europe; and
- to taking greater account of the fact that opportunities vary from one region to another in the EU and this should be done at an earlier stage in making decisions at European level.

For, the task of the Territorial Agenda is a twofold one: it will contribute to improving the co-ordination of urban and regional policy as well as – and I would like to draw particular attention to this – making it easier to co-ordinate decisions at city-regional and European level.

But the Territorial Agenda should not get bogged down in declarations of intent.

I would like to suggest that we explain our recommendations with the aid of concrete spatially differentiated analyses and examples of successful cross-border and transnational co-operation.

The Territorial Agenda must not become a utopian document. All the proposals should be based on successful and plausible examples.

The highly successful European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON) and a wide range of successful INTERREG projects provide a sound basis for our work.

What does our timetable look like?

- There will be two meetings of the Directors-General to prepare the informal ministerial meeting on territorial cohesion in Leipzig. The Finnish Director-General, Mr Kangas, has just extended an invitation to a meeting in Espoo on 16 November. This will be our first chance to discuss at a political level the complete texts drafted by the officials responsible in the individual Member States for this policy area.
- When the meeting in Espoo is over, the next step will be to pursue a Stakeholder Dialogue with various institutions and non-governmental organizations in Europe that are active in the field of regional development. For example, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) has extended invitations to a debate on the Territorial Agenda in Pamplona (Spain) on 24 November 2006. It is particularly important to keep in close touch with the Directorate-General for Regional Policy as well as with other Directorates-General such as the Directorates-General for the Environment and for Transport and Energy. As soon as the Espoo meeting is over, we should try and contact the Committee on Regional Policy of the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions. It would be very helpful for our work if the Finish Presidency of the Council could present a timetable for the Stakeholder Dialogue at the meeting in Espoo.
- The results of the Stakeholder Dialogue will be addressed at political level at a second meeting of the Directors-General which will be held in Berlin in mid-March. Prior to this meeting, we want to hold a conference on metropolitan regions highlighting their special role as engines of growth promoting territorial cohesion and this will allow us to establish a dialogue with the scientific institutes that provide advice for policy-makers. The focus at the ministerial meeting itself will be placed on

adopting the Territorial Agenda. We will, of course, circulate the completed evidence document before the meeting.

It is important to me to ensure that when we have adopted the Territorial Agenda in Leipzig the process does not then come to a standstill.

Because this will only be the beginning of the implementation phase of the Territorial Agenda. Our strategies will then have to prove their worth in practice.

We would therefore like to ask the Portuguese Presidency of the Council to consider at an early stage of their preparations whether it might be possible to ensure that the issue of the application of the Territorial Agenda will be on the agenda for the following Presidencies.

When we discuss concrete policies for this continent of ours with its different traditions, its different economic constellations and different current political priorities, it becomes apparent that the territorial dimension and cohesion policy go hand in hand.

In pushing ahead with the cohesion process in Europe, we must pay attention to distinctive features in different regions and to the diversity of local and regional cultures in Europe. That might seem to make our work more difficult, but this is only at first sight. In the long run, this is the only way to achieve success, I believe.

We can celebrate a major European success at the moment. The Financial Perspective for the coming seven years has been successfully completed. This will provide funds amounting to 864 billion euros for the period 2007-2013. Of this, 308 billion euros will be made available for the Cohesion and Structural Funds alone. I think it is a remarkable political success that the Commission and the Member States have managed to achieve a sound basis for planning for the next seven years. A large share of the structural

cohesion funds will be channelled into the new Member States in Central and Eastern Europe as a gesture of European solidarity.

I know from the eastern part of Germany where I come from, which is itself an assisted area, that the people definitely realize that the improvement of their concrete living conditions is supported by the EU.

However, there is still too little awareness of the importance of European policies for growth and employment, for social and regional cohesion and for a successful concerted approach to global competition. European policies must be clearly visible in regional development and urban policies and vice versa. We have already achieved this quite well in border areas. This is well illustrated in examples of cross-border economic areas around Lake Constance and in the Aachen-Liège-Maastricht area and we may also see this happening in the future on our eastern border between Szczecin and Uckermark.

But that is not enough. European policies must respond better to the needs of all towns, cities and regions. By the same token, cities and regions must also be made fit for Europe, that is to say they must take greater account of European policies in their own projects at local level. I am thinking here in particular of the trans-European networks (especially in the field of transport).

Our ministerial meeting in Leipzig must provide a political stimulus to describe these linkages and, at the same time, to see the great diversity of our continent as one of its strengths.

We have to make clear that we are taking responsibility for the preservation of this diversity and, at the same time, assuming responsibility for social integration at regional, national and European level. Many people still regard Europe more as a threat than as an opportunity. Many see national

and regional identity threatened by the process of European integration and worry about the plight of traditions that have developed over long periods of time. We must take these fears seriously.

We can help to counteract the latent fears many people have if we succeed in making it clear where European integration processes are urgently needed and where, on the other hand, we can, quite consciously, do without such strategies.

In his book “The European Dream”, the American author Jeremy Rifkin draws attention to our close co-operation within the European Union on territorial issues as a model to emulate. He stresses the importance of the voluntary co-operation among European cities and regions across national borders in developing strategic regional development perspectives. This approach, in this form, is not found anywhere else in the world.

Indeed, it is sometimes helpful if our strengths are pointed out by someone from another part of the world. The diversity of European urban cultures is precisely what makes Europe so distinctive. The more we enable towns and cities in Europe to work together across national frontiers, the more we will increase Europe’s attractiveness in the world.

The crucial factor in gaining acceptance for the Territorial Agenda will be what we call the Stakeholder Dialogue. I am very grateful to you, Minister Dekker, for setting our joint work in motion not only by holding the informal ministerial meeting in Rotterdam but also by launching the Europe-wide dialogue on the Territorial Agenda here today.

What is distinctive about the way we work is that we don’t present ready-made strategies and reports. Quite the contrary: we integrate the players involved in European regional development into our co-operation from the outset.

After the successful conference the web-based dialogue is opened.