

UNECE Tenth Conference on Urban and Regional Research  
Bratislava, 22-23 May 2006  
Opening statement by Ms. Christina von Schweinichen,  
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Economic Commission for Europe

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to address this conference today, with the participation of UNECE and CEMAT member States together with spatial planning experts from the region. I would like to convey our appreciation to Mr Stefan Kužma, State Secretary of Construction and Regional Development of Slovakia for his support to the Conference and for making this meeting possible. In particular, I would like to thank Ms. Paskova, the Director of the Department in the Ministry, and her team, for their hard work.

I am also pleased to welcome members of European Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning (CEMAT) and, in particular, Mr. Vitor Campos, Director General for Spatial Planning and Urban Development of Portugal who is here on behalf of the Secretary of State and represents the Presidency of CEMAT of the Council of Europe. We appreciate CEMAT's collaboration in providing substantive input.

As you may know the UNECE Urban and Regional Research Conferences are held at regular intervals. They are intended to provide the opportunity for policy makers, researchers and private sector to developing cooperation on urban challenges.

The basic objective of the Tenth Conference is to use the results of research for guidance on practical steps to be taken to deliver more viable cities. The themes of this Conference draw on findings of the previous UNECE research conference and the discussion will concentrate on two interdependent levels: the city and the urban region, exploring the driving forces of successful contemporary cities and the merits of polycentricity as a means to redistribute urban energies at regional level.

It builds upon the public debate between decision makers, professionals and all other stakeholders who contribute to the production, management and upkeep of cities and share their knowledge on spatially complex urban development issues.

It may be interesting for you to know that the outcome of this conference will feed into the UNECE Committee' programme on Improving Urban Environmental Performance when elaborating Guidelines on Spatial Planning.

The main objective of the study is to provide some guidance on how to improve the functioning of spatial planning systems promoting community involvement, social cohesion through effective planning, housing and land management policies. This fits very well with the UNECE Commission's reform plan adopted last March which confirms that planning, housing and land management are the three pillars of the Committee's work.

Before I conclude, let me bring to your attention the upcoming High Level Meeting that the Committee is organizing next September in Geneva, and where the presence of Ministers and Secretaries of States is expected. The meeting will hold a major discussion on Social and Economic Challenges in Distressed Urban Areas of the UNECE region and will conclude with a Ministerial Declaration providing an overall policy framework for the further work of the Committee. To that end we would like you to convey to your Ministers the importance of their presence at this meeting.

May I conclude in thanking the group of Rapporteurs for the valuable work in preparing the conference debates. We are also looking forward to your active participation in the discussions to be held during these two days. The outcome will be reflected in a report to be finalized after the meeting together with the Rapporteurs and the Chairs. I would like to wish you successful deliberations. Thank you.