



## **Key takeaways from the second day of the conference “Green Transition Drives European Cities” – Zagreb 2024.**

### **Background**

The second day of the conference brought together mayors and their deputies from a number of European and Croatian cities, representatives of the European Commission, business and academia, and civil society in the presence of 176 citizens (out of 241 who registered), and 416 who participated online.

The aim of this part of the conference was to exchange mayors' views on the challenges they face in managing the energy transition and climate change, to identify what is needed to increase the capacity of cities to implement the European Green Deal (EGD) and the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), and to inform about key projects and good practices of cities they are implementing to ensure a fair, efficient and sustainable green transition. In the context of the upcoming elections to the European Parliament, the aim was also to determine the opinion of cities, business and academia and civil society on the future of the EGD and the guidelines on the basis of which it should be developed.

### **Conclusions:**

1. Cities need a new EGD as a permanent framework for a green and sustainable transition that goes beyond election cycles.
2. The EGD never lived up to its full potential locally and, as a result, failed to reach its full potential overall. This is largely due to the neglect of the role of cities in the design and implementation of the EGD. In addition, the EGD has not always sufficiently considered the territorial impacts of its policies, and therefore it has not been embedded in local and regional development strategies up to the satisfactory level.
3. In developing the new EGD, NECP, and other strategic documents, cities must be involved from the very beginning. This is crucial because cities are primarily responsible for implementation. Until now, they have only been included at the end of the process, after policies have been defined and objectives established. These documents should acknowledge their diversity, capacities, and other specificities.
4. Cities are the main drivers and carriers of the green and sustainable transition, and it is therefore crucial to increase the assistance in development of their administrative and implementation capacities.

5. The new EGD, as an overarching policy, must better coordinate all related policies and initiatives. Currently, these efforts often conflict and contradict each other, hindering effective implementation on site, particularly in cities. Mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of individual policies and initiatives must also be simplified and mutually harmonized due to their overlap and mutual contradictions that produce unnecessary administrative burden on cities and excessively engage their implementation capacity.
6. The EGD remains the best alternative to successfully implement the comprehensive transition towards a more resilient, more prosperous, strategically independent, environmentally conscious, and competitive European economy for the current generations and those to come, as well as to create new jobs.
7. Cities aim to strengthen multi-level governance mechanisms by facilitating co-planning processes with regional, local, and national authorities. This approach considers their specific needs and promotes the implementation of integrated sustainability policies at the regional and local levels through a cross-silo strategy.
8. The new EGD must incorporate a robust financial package of grants and loans within the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). This package should include direct funding lines for city projects, provisions to enhance their administrative capacity, and mechanisms to mobilize private capital for financing green transition initiatives.
9. It is necessary to provide cities with direct access to European funds, thus avoiding the nationalization of European funds, where the allocation of European funds is determined by the government.
10. The new EGD must be based on science and not on political populism since we still do not know the overall consequences and effects of climate change.
11. The new EGD must strengthen the just, green, and digital transition, taking into account vulnerable groups and the varying degree of development of European cities and regions. No one should be left behind in the green transition.
12. To ensure a just and inclusive transition, it is essential to establish and promote platforms for dialogue with local stakeholders, particularly those most vulnerable to climate change. Young people's voices need to be heard in the conversations on the green transition. It should be ensured that European youth are equipped with the skills and knowledge to actively contribute and shape the changing socio-economic systems in their cities.
13. Cities are taking a leading role in implementing and accelerating the green transition and are developing and implementing more ambitious green policies than their governments. Therefore, the new EGD should recognise these efforts and provide additional incentives to cities towards meeting its ambitious targets.
14. Urban development strategies need to become the local EGD policies, driving systemic transformations towards resilient, and climate-neutral cities.
15. Urban development strategies, budgetary plans, and sectorial strategies need to be consistent and actively contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Generation of isolated systems should be systematically avoided.
16. Spatial plans need to reflect balanced social environmental and economic benefits to ensure sustainable use of resources, increase resilience to crises and climate change, and make more efficient use of existing and new infrastructures.
17. Greater emphasis should be placed on social cohesion and policies that secure jobs, provide upskilling and reskilling opportunities, and ensure access to clean energy, healthy and sustainable food, affordable housing for all, while eliminating energy poverty.

18. Stronger partnerships between cities and the research, development and innovation sector should be promoted, established, and nurtured to facilitate faster energy transition and strengthen energy efficiency, security, and resilience of cities.
19. Cities need an appropriate and stimulating national legal framework for the green transition, simpler and mutually harmonized national procedures with reasonable deadlines for each stage of the procedure. Inefficiency of implementation is largely the result of complex, uncoordinated and time-consuming procedures, and confusing intertwining of competences of state bodies.
20. Cities need a stronger commitment of the government and key political entities towards a green and sustainable transition and more competences in relation to the national level, in order to more effectively implement green transition projects and a comprehensive array of policies related to the green and sustainable transition.