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# Cities should play a key role in green recovery

An open letter to the President and to the Members of the European Council

*by the mayors of Visegrad Group capitals*

16 June 2020

We, the mayors of Bratislava, Budapest, Prague and Warsaw represent over five million people in a region of over 60 million inhabitants. Producing about 20 percent of its GDP, our cities are the engines that drive the economies of the Visegrad countries.

We are also on the frontlines in the battle against the coronavirus pandemic, with most of the cases concentrating in cities. Beyond the human tragedy, the economic toll is also disproportionately affecting the capitals as key industries and tourism have grounded to a halt. Our citizens face not only medical emergencies but also economic hardships. Our economies will need tailored and targeted financial support if they are to recover rapidly from the ravages of the coronavirus.

We have great hopes and expectations for the recovery plans under development in the EU and in the Member States. However, these recovery measures must not lose sight of the escalating climate crisis, a challenge even greater than the coronavirus. We wholeheartedly support the objectives set out in the European Green Deal and wish to see them implemented as an integral part of the EU's recovery strategy. Our cities were the first authorities in the Visegrad region to declare climate emergency, and we are committed to continuing our work to keep the planet habitable for our children.

We call upon the governments of the Member States to raise their greenhouse gas emission reduction ambitions and increase the EU's 2030 target from 40% to 55%. Science tells us that humanity needs to decarbonise faster in order to save our civilisation, and we think that the EU should show a good example to the rest of the world. The 55 % target is in accordance with the upper end of the reduction range set out in the European Green Deal.

We are ready and eager to do our part in achieving these emission reductions. Capital cities are a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions, but also have a vast, untapped potential for reducing them. We can renovate our old and inefficient housing stock, put solar panels on roofs and install heat pumps in gardens. We can motivate people to use public transport and bicycles instead of cars, or switch to electric vehicles. The urban landscape has been significantly transformed and its resilience disrupted. It is important to revitalize urban areas and its greenery to capture emissions, reduce overheating and the other negative impacts of the climate crisis.

We have the political mandate and the legal authority to make the most out of the investment support we receive. Above all, we are ready to make use of the immense potential of capital regions for technological innovation and creativity, – not just for our own benefit, but also for the good of all communities in the Visegrad region who lack the capacity to tackle the impending crisis on their own.

Targeted funding for cities is all the more needed as the Visegrad Group capitals - similarly to other EU capitals - have limited access to conventional EU Structural and Cohesion Funds. We welcome the prospective use of Integrated Territorial Investment, but additional specialized investment mechanisms, such as EU-city contracts and other joint integrated measures, are also needed to achieve our common emission reduction and climate adaptation objectives

We intend to put a special emphasis on the construction sector, not only because most of urban greenhouse gas emissions come from heating, but also because the coronavirus causes a sharp downturn in that industry. There will be ample capacity to carry out low-carbon building renovations, which would also ensure employment to

many workers. In this context, we endorse the Renovation Wave proposed in the European Green Deal, considering that the current rate of building renovation is nowhere near to what we need to achieve in decarbonisation by 2050.

Last, we propose that the EU's new recovery measures include a specific European Building Renovation Fund providing grants combined with loans to cities and citizens directly or via commercial banks.

The joint crises of the coronavirus and global warming creates an unprecedented test of concerted action for the EU. The capitals of the Visegrad Group offer their active partnership to the EU and its member states in building a healthy, green and resilient Europe.

We truly hope that through this partnership we can work together with all key European stakeholders for the benefit of the European Union and the whole world alike.

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