EN

European Economic and Social Committee

ECO/188
European metropolitan areas

Brussels, 25 April 2007

OPINION

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on

European metropolitan areas: socio-economic implications for Europe's future

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On 7 November 2006, the Federal Ministry for Transport, Construction and Urban Development asked the European Economic and Social Committee, on behalf of the German Presidency, to draw up an exploratory opinion on

European metropolitan areas: socio-economic implications for Europe's future.

The Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 20 March 2007. The rapporteur was Mr van Iersel.

At its 435th plenary session, held on 25 and 26 April (meeting of 25 April), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion nem con with five abstentions.

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Table of Contents

This opinion is a follow up to the opinion on "European Metropolitan Areas: socio-economic implications for Europe's future" (ECO/120)[1]. The two opinions form a consistent whole.

    1.   **Conclusions**

1.1   Over the last fifty years, Europe has been changing and globalisation is accelerating the process, with substantial consequences for Europe's centres of gravity, i.e. its metropolitan areas[2]. It is the metropolitan areas that are best equipped to respond to these challenges and make the most of the opportunities they present.

1.2   The EESC believes that the Council and the Commission should discuss and draw up a series of general guidelines for the development of metropolitan areas and national initiatives in this field. A well-structured European debate would situate national approaches in a shared perspective, which could also motivate regional stakeholders.

1.3   The EESC is of the opinion that a better structured debate on and between metropolitan areas in Europe should contribute to encouraging these regions to involve themselves successfully in the Lisbon-Gothenburg agenda, which could also be reflected in the National Reform Programmes.

1.4   The EESC notes that recent years have witnessed intense debate. The link between large metropolitan areas and the Lisbon Strategy places greater emphasis than in the past on the socio-economic implications of these large metropolitan areas. This is a step forward.

1.5   In many countries and regions, the public authorities, the private sector and civil society are trying to create the conditions required for the sustainable development of metropolitan areas, and to ensure their competitiveness in Europe and the world. In particular, the trend observed in Germany deserves attention. University studies as well as studies carried out at a federal level contribute to the objectivity of the debate. Interministerial conferences on the metropolitan areas involved national and regional authorities.

1.6   The Commission's urban policy and the Council's draft Territorial Agenda are signs of progress. They provide a framework for an ambitious urban policy. The Agenda underlines some characteristics that are specific to large metropolitan areas. Nevertheless, the EESC notes that the draft Territorial Agenda is still too hesitant in this regard.

1.7   Despite differences in national structures and approaches, the challenges and ambitions of major urban regions are generally the same.

1.8   The lack of identity and inadequate *governance* stand in the way of balanced development in metropolitan areas. Existing administrative bodies often go back a very long time. They prevent flexible adjustment.

1.9 The involvement of several levels of authority – national, regional and urban – is indispensable if metropolitan areas are to succeed. This means that decentralised authorities must have legitimacy, which would also facilitate private sector and non-governmental initiatives.

1.10 The EESC once again draws attention to the absence of comparable socio-economic and environmental data on metropolitan areas at EU level. It considers that since this should be addressed at EU and national levels, the

economic, social and environmental performances of European metropolitan regions must be monitored annually in order to broaden our knowledge on each of their situations and enable the relevant metropolitan areas to take action.

2.   **Recommendations**

2.1   The EESC calls on the Commission to draw up a Green Paper on metropolitan areas complementing the Territorial Agenda and the Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion in order to encourage European debate on the basis of an objective analysis.

2.2   The EESC argues that the challenges and aspirations of the large metropolitan areas as well as the knowledge and experience of Member States should be pooled to provide a shared European perspective and that best practices should be disseminated.

2.3   The EESC is convinced of the need for a policy decision by the Commission tasking Eurostat with producing reliable and comparable data on all EU metropolitan areas annually and providing it with additional funds to carry out its new task.

2.4   In order to ensure that Eurostat can assume its new role as soon as possible, the EESC recommends that a pilot study be carried out by ESPON or another organisation with relevant expertise to test possible methods for setting the boundaries of metropolitan areas according to common criteria and to propose a limited list of data which could be produced without delay for metropolitan areas with populations of over one million between 1995 and 2005, namely by referring to existing detailed data from European surveys on the labour force[3].

3.   **Reasons**

3.1   In its 2004 opinion, the EESC drew attention to the socio-economic implications of European metropolitan areas[4], which it considered to be largely under-estimated.

3.2   This opinion sought to draw the attention of the EU institutions to the ongoing, and sometimes striking, concentration of people and economic activity in the metropolitan areas of Europe and the world.

3.3   In its 2004 opinion, the EESC argues in favour of placing the development of European metropolitan areas on the EU agenda. The EESC was the first to stress the direct link between metropolitan areas and the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. Metropolitan areas are the laboratories of the global economy. They are the powerhouses of the economy and centres of creativity and innovation.

3.4   At the same time, the main challenges facing Europe in the coming years are concentrated in metropolitan areas. In particular, these areas are often faced with poverty, social exclusion and spatial segregation, with implications for employment and (international) criminality[5].

3.5   The influence of metropolitan areas is reinforced by the multiplicity of interactions between them at European as well as international level. The networks they form help to strengthen European integration.

3.6   In its 2004 opinion, the EESC notes that there is a shortage of comparative studies with satisfactory data on their strengths, weaknesses, constraints and opportunities.

3.7   It is for this reason that in 2004 the EESC insisted on the need to define European metropolitan areas and to produce relevant and comparable data, including the evaluation of the Lisbon Strategy key indicators, for each such area.

3.8   The knowledge-based economy and the networked society increase the attraction of metropolitan areas for people and economic activities. Some Member States have engaged in lively national and regional debates on the policy to adopt for large metropolitan areas, especially with regard to their governance. These discussions are sometimes followed by concrete actions from both the bottom up and the top down.

4.   **The Commission's reaction in 2004**

4.1   In 2004, the EESC called on the Commission to carry out integrated studies with the participation of the relevant Commissioners and to present regular reports on the socio-economic situation in metropolitan areas and their ranking on a European scale. This would make it possible to assess the strengths and weaknesses of large metropolitan areas in order to improve the framing of European and national policies and facilitate the dissemination of best practice.

4.2   In its reaction to the EESC's recommendations, the Commission stated that it "agrees with both the EESC's points concerning the key role of metropolitan areas in achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy and the absence at European level of reliable and comparable data on these territorial units."[6]

4.3   Despite this shared view, a targeted and more integrated approach to metropolitan areas by the Commission has not materialised. An urban policy is gradually being implemented but it does not distinguish between "cities and metropolitan areas". The data supplied by statistics offices are incomplete and produced on the basis of national definitions. As a result, they are still not always comparable at European level.

5.   **National debates and initiatives**

5.1   Several national and regional initiatives have been taken recently which highlight the way metropolitan areas are evolving. These initiatives often include a range of measures to support a more harmonious development of infrastructure, spatial planning, the economy and social aspects, as well as the development of transport and telecommunications infrastructure between the metropolitan areas themselves. Examples of some initiatives in several countries are provided below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

5.1.1   An in-depth discussion on metropolitan areas has been ongoing in **Germany** since 1993. University studies and debates were conducted with the aim of drawing up, in an appropriate and objective manner, a list of functions carried out by large metropolitan areas and to identify such areas by reference to the list.

5.1.1.1   These German studies led to a shift from the traditional approach, with a national map showing the cities and municipalities and *Länder,* to an alternative approach that presents a new map of Germany with *Leitbilder* or patterns. On the basis of guidelines and spatial planning policy action plans (dating back to 1992 and 1995), which had stressed the importance and roles of the metropolitan areas, Germany has had eleven metropolitan regions since the decision of the interministerial conference of the *Bund* and *Länder* ministers for spatial planning of 30 June 2006. The first interministerial conference on this matter took place in 2003.

5.1.1.2   The map of German metropolitan regions reveals incompatibilities between existing administrative organisation and the geographical boundaries of the metropolitan regions. For instance, the metropolitan region of Nuremberg includes Nuremberg city and an agglomeration of neighbouring urban and rural municipalities. Others, Frankfurt/Rhine-Main and Hamburg for instance, partially cover the territories of several *Länder*, whereas others, Munich and the Ruhrgebiet for instance, are part of one *Land*. In several cases, thematic regionalisation is already in place, e.g. in the areas of culture, sport, sustainability and the countryside. In all cases, the territory includes major and minor towns, and rural areas. In this way, it is possible to define clearly the territories of the metropolitan areas in question.

5.1.1.3   No specific national measures have been planned (as yet). Metropolitan areas have been asked to define their own specificities and showcase them. The objective is to develop German metropolitan areas as autonomous entities within the European and international context. Needless to say, national policies, such as rail or aviation policies, could be used to support these areas' ambitions.

5.1.1.4   In order to support the legitimacy of this new approach, metropolitan areas were asked to set up democratic representational systems in line with their specificities and vision for the future. They are free to define the procedures, either by direct suffrage, as in Stuttgart for example, or by indirect representation, as in the cities and municipalities of the Nuremberg region.

5.1.1.5   The policy objectives which have to be discussed and realised in the case of these metropolitan areas - whose characteristics vary - are as follows: ensuring the necessary critical mass for competitiveness; creating conditions for effective governance; clarifying the division of responsibilities; developing polycentric spatial organisation; finding a satisfactory balance between urban development and the protection of rural areas; developing transport infrastructure and ensuring mobility; supporting innovation and economic clusters; managing technological "risks" and natural risks; obtaining the necessary public investment resources; improving international accessibility; ensuring the region's promotion.

5.1.2   In the **United Kingdom**, interest in strengthening the development of metropolitan areas began at the beginning of the century. In 2004, a government memo was published on the competitiveness of the metropolitan

areas other than London[7]. The aim was to create conditions for strengthening the autonomy of the "city-regions" in an international context. However, the process was blocked, mainly due to the negative outcome of a referendum on setting up a regional assembly in the Newcastle region.

5.1.2.1   At present, debate in the UK focuses on sharing responsibilities between the national and regional levels on the one hand, and the cities and municipalities in the most populated regions identified as future metropolitan areas on the other. The idea of setting up city-regions still has relevance. Despite the ambiguity in the ongoing debate, a White Paper on the subject will soon be published and a new form of spatial organisation based on recognised criteria, similar to the German model, is in the pipeline.

5.1.2.2   We need to distinguish between decentralisation policy and support for the development of metropolitan areas. The latter is characterised by flexibility and alliances formed between municipalities in order to make the most of opportunities and overcome challenges together. A good example of this is the development in the North of England (Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle and York), a bottom-up initiative called Northern Way. This development is characterised by a number of agreements within the metropolitan area.

5.1.2.3   A top-down approach in response to local and regional initiatives is considered indispensable because many strategic decisions can only be taken by common accord. These decisions could take the form of three agendas: a competitiveness agenda for supporting the best and least performing regions; a social cohesion agenda for disadvantaged populations; and an environment agenda comprising measures for improving quality of life and preserving natural resources. In these three fields, the metropolitan area is considered to be the most appropriate geographical level for implementing these policies.

5.1.3   In **France**, the debate has been ongoing since 1960. Until recently, very few concrete measures had been taken because the political dimension of the debate had been underestimated. On a more general level, this lack of political dimension has been apparent throughout Europe.

5.1.3.1   In 2004, DIACT[8] launched a call for proposals for metropolitan projects with a view to encouraging cooperation between major cities and supporting the economic development of metropolitan regions. Fifteen metropolitan projects prepared by the local authorities were selected by a panel comprising the directors of the relevant ministries and experts. The projects were finalised in 2006. In 2007, metropolitan contracts will benefit from State financial support for implementing structural measures. Through this initiative DIACT recognises the importance of metropolitan regions as having a key role in the competitiveness of the regions.

5.1.4   In **Italy** and **Spain**, regionalisation is making progress. This trend, which does not directly concern metropolitan areas, nevertheless creates new (legal) opportunities for the governance of metropolitan areas.

5.1.4.1   In Italy, a law passed in 1990 set out a top-down approach identifying 14 metropolitan areas. It was not implemented. A new law in 1999 authorised bottom-up initiatives for creating metropolitan areas. A single assembly comprising 20 municipalities and with a budget was set up in the Bologna region. Finally, a constitutional reform in 2001 authorised the establishment of three metropolitan areas around Rome, Naples and Milan. The implementation of this reform has been relaunched recently.

5.1.4.2   In Spain, the spatial debate is overshadowed by regional autonomy. The autonomous regions have sole authority in this area. As a result, they are responsible for metropolitan areas. An ongoing process to strengthen major cities co-exists alongside a trial of strength between the central government, autonomous communities and metropolitan areas such as Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. Bilbao, a case apart, has been a success in terms of metropolisation.

5.1.4.3   The existence of metropolitan areas is not restricted to large countries or even to individual countries. Metropolitan areas such as Centrope, i.e. Vienna-Bratislava-Brnö-Gjör, a region covering no less than four countries, and Copenhagen-Malmö (Denmark and Sweden) are among the best known examples. Both areas are progressing. In the Netherlands, there is in-depth discussion on the most appropriate governance for the Randstad in order to eliminate the administrative fragmentation impeding infrastructural, spatial and socio-economic development.

5.1.5   In the new Member States there have been comparable developments to those in the above-mentioned countries. In Poland, the government has identified a number of metropolitan areas or city-regions. One example is

the Katowice region, which recently acquired the specific status of a metropolitan area. Nevertheless, urban and metropolitan development is non-controlled as a rule, and therefore arbitrary due to lack of appropriate regional governance. This is why some metropolitan areas are looking for inspiration to the practices and expertise of countries with a tradition in decentralised policies.

5.1.6   Chambers of Commerce and Industry, being high profile and active representatives of the business world at local and regional levels, are also involved in the process of metropolisation, especially Chambers in capitals and city-regions. They contribute everywhere to the attractiveness and economic and cultural influence of their regions without losing sight of the need for quality of life and respect for the environment.

6.   **Pan-European trends**

6.1   At EU level, implementing the Lisbon Strategy is the Barroso Commission's priority objective. All Commissioners are involved. DG REGIO has placed the Lisbon Strategy at the heart of the "new brand" of regional policy, spearheaded by urban development.

6.1.1   "Lisbon" and urban development have become priorities for all regions benefiting from EU programmes. These programmes do not explicitly target metropolitan areas. URBACT is among the more appropriate programmes for the latter[9].

6.1.2   In addition to DG REGIO, other DGs, for instance DG Research, DG Environment and DG Transport, run specific programmes that are often important for metropolitan areas because they too are more than ever influenced by the Lisbon objectives. Metropolitan areas *per se* are not specifically targeted, but all programmes to strengthen the performance of cities are relevant to metropolitan areas too.

< h3 class="Heading-00203">6.1.3   In June 2006, a Council working group published a first proposal for a Territorial Agenda[10]. The document gives a good description of trends towards urbanisation in European society. Nevertheless, a clear distinction between cities and metropolitan areas is still lacking.

6.2   Several Informal Councils of Spatial Planning Ministers have focused on the challenges of (big) cities[11]. Spatial planning is a competence of the Union under the present Treaty, Title XIX (Environment), Article 175(2) [12].

6.3   The **European Parliament**[13] emphasises that "towns and cities and urban agglomerations or areas, where 78% of the European Union population is concentrated, are the place where most problems are concentrated and the place where the future is built". It considers them key players in regional and local development and in achieving the revised Lisbon and Gothenburg objectives.

6.3.1   The European Parliament calls on all the Commission DGs directly or indirectly concerned with urban issues to coordinate their efforts in order to identify specific urban problems in each field of action and jointly to present the positive impacts of their policies. It proposes setting up an interdepartmental task force and argues in favour of setting up a "territorial dialogue".

6.4   The **Committee of the Regions** is increasingly insistent in drawing the attention of the European institutions to the challenges facing urban regions. Its conclusions are based on the same concerns and principles underlying the EP's and the EESC's conclusions.

6.4.1   The Committee of the Regions stresses the realities of "functional regions" and cooperation between partners across administrative borders – national, regional, and local – which should be promoted by means of special incentives in EU policies, such as the promotion of strategic development projects for large areas. It is particularly important that new cooperation networks should be set up between metropolitan and urban areas, and existing ones strengthened, in particular through the cooperation currently being developed under the INTERREG III initiative, which will take effect during the 2007-2013 period through the territorial cooperation objective[14].

6.5   In its March and September declarations, the METREX network[15] emphasises the need to define metropolitan areas and recognise them as key components of the EU's Territorial Agenda. It calls for comparable data on metropolitan areas to be produced at European level. It calls on the Commission to draw up a Green paper with three key dimensions: economic competitiveness, social cohesion and environmental protection. METREX believes that several major problems facing Europe, such as climate change, demographic ageing or immigration,

can only be solved effectively and comprehensively with the support of the metropolitan areas. Finally it considers that metropolitan areas can play a key role in implementing the Lisbon objectives, especially with regard to ensuring Europe's competitiveness at an international level.

6.6 The number of **regions represented in Brussels** has greatly increased over the last 15 years[16]. They hold conferences where the development and challenges faced by metropolitan areas are a focus for intensive discussion.

6.7 Indeed, a group of regions represented in Brussels has been set up under the name "Lisbon Regions".

6.8 The ESPON programme has produced extensive information, data, indicators and reports on European regions in recent years. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that regional administrative boundaries are very different from those of metropolitan areas, the results of this high-quality work do not provide those responsible for development, planning, and management of metropolitan areas with the information and studies they need to identify the most suitable policies for maximising the potential of these areas.

6.9 DG Regional Policy and Eurostat launched the Urban Audit project in order to provide reliable and comparable indicators for a number of cities[17]. The EESC welcomes efforts made to produce data on urban zones. However, the nature of the information provided does not as yet lend itself to widespread use[18].

7. **Intense ongoing debate**

7.1 The EESC notes that the debate on metropolitan areas has grown far more intensive in recent years for two main reasons: (i) the growing number of metropolitan areas around the world has made it clear that a new form of urban organisation is developing very rapidly[19]; (ii) acknowledgement of the link between the economic, social and environmental development of large metropolitan areas and the Lisbon Strategy has fuelled the debate.

7.2 Political and social discussions on the most appropriate approach are underway in all Member States, irrespective of their size and stage of development.

7.3 These discussions occur primarily in a national context. Nevertheless, in many cases, the authorities acknowledge that the actual territory of some metropolitan areas is not contained within national borders. The examples of Copenhagen-Malmö and Vienna-Bratislava have already been cited, but other metropolitan areas identified by the French authorities, namely Metz-Luxembourg-Saarbrücken and Lille-Courtrai, should also be mentioned. The number of cross-border regions in the EU with the characteristics of metropolitan areas is on the increase.

7.4 Despite intensified debate over the years, the EESC notes that these new structures are in their first infancy.

7.5 The vast majority of cities and metropolitan areas wishing to assert their importance at European and international level present their own situation using national and regional figures, without always being aware themselves of the actual size of the area they are referring to. This is one of the consequences of the difference which exists between metropolitan areas and the administrative region(s) they are part of.

7.6 The EESC notes that despite different national and regional approaches and structures, there seems to be clear agreement on the problems involved. The following are among the most frequently discussed:

- the critical mass of a metropolitan area, city-region or network of cities and municipalities;

- the balance between urban and rural districts comprising metropolitan areas;

- the various roles of metropolitan areas;

- education and training;

- creativity, research and innovation;

- clusters and the competitiveness of businesses on international markets;

- attracting international investment;

- major infrastructure, its financing and public-private partnerships;

- transport and telecommunications networks linking large metropolitan areas in Europe and around the world;

- cultural influence;

- multicultural societies (immigration) and the challenges of poverty and exclusion;

- employability of the workforce and job creation;

- industrial production and services with high added value;

- climate change, energy efficiency, pollution reduction and waste management;

- de-pollution and redevelopment of brownfield sites in connection with the restructuring of production;

- reduced insecurity, criminality and international terrorist risks;

- reduced inequalities between infra-regional territories and a partnership between the centre and the periphery;

- the thorny issue of governance.

7.7   People do not always have a sense of belonging to a metropolitan area. European metropolitan areas lack political legitimacy. The administrative structures of the past are no longer adequate – they date back to previous eras – but national governments are very sensitive to resistance to new arrangements among stakeholders, in particular existing regional political and administrative bodies. In addition, the challenges facing metropolitan areas are immense. In order to overcome them and manage development appropriately, governance needs to be re-organised almost everywhere as part of an overall strategy.

Brussels, 25 April 2007.

<table>
<tr><td>The President</td><td>The Secretary-General</td></tr>
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<tr><td>European Economic and Social Committee</td><td>European Economic and Social Committee</td></tr>
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1 OJ C 302, 7.12.2004, p. 101.

2 It is important to distinguish between a metropolis and a metropolitan area. Generally speaking, a metropolis is laid out as a large city or agglomeration, whereas a "metropolitan area" is an area made up of one very big city or a number of major polycentric cities surrounded by other municipalities or rural

areas. As a result, a metropolitan area covers a much wider area than a metropolis.

3 A first successful study on 14 European metropolitan areas has already been carried out under the INTERREG II C programme (in 2000). The EESC is referring to a study by GEMACA, Group for European Metropolitan Areas Comparative Analysis.

4 EESC opinion on *European metropolitan areas: socio-economic implications for Europe's future*, OJ C 302, 7.12.2004, p. 101.

5 EESC opinion on *Immigration in the EU and integration policies: cooperation between regional and local governments and civil society organisations,* OJ C 318, 23.12.2006, p. 128.

6 Reference to the reaction of the Commission's DG REGIO to the EESC's own-initiative opinion on *European metropolitan areas: socio-economic implications for Europe's future,* OJ C 302, 7.12.2004, p. 101.

7 Competitive Cities: where do the core cities stand? (Core cites refers to the metropolitan areas outside London mainly located in the North West of the country).

8 *Délégation interministérielle à l'aménagement et à la compétitivité des territoires* [Interministerial Delegation for Land Planning and Regional Competitiveness] (ex DATAR).

9 The Commission is currently preparing a guide on urban issues.

10 The Territorial State and Perspectives of the European Union: Towards a Stronger European Territorial Cohesion in the Light of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Ambitions, First Draft, 26 June 2006.

11 The first Informal Council of Spatial Planning and Home Affairs Ministers, where the challenges facing cities were discussed in detail, was held in Rotterdam in November 2004. It was followed by the Informal Council of Luxembourg in May 2005 on "The Territorial State and Perspectives of the European Union". The next Informal Council will take place in Leipzig in May 2007.

12 Article 175

"1. The Council, acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 251 and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, shall decide what action is to be taken by the Community in order to achieve the objectives referred to in Article 174.

2. By way of derogation from the decision-making procedure provided for in paragraph 1 and without prejudice to Article 95, the Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, shall adopt:

     (a) provisions primarily of a fiscal nature;

     (b) measures affecting:

      — town and country planning,

      — quantitative management of water resources or affecting, directly or indirectly, the availability of those resources,

      — land use, with the exception of waste management;

(c) measures significantly affecting a Member State's choice between different energy sources and the general structure of its energy supply."

13 European Parliament: *Resolution on the urban dimension in the context of enlargement*, adopted on 13.10.2005, OJ C 233, 28.9.2006, p. 127.

14 CoR opinion on *Cohesion Policy and cities: the urban contribution to growth and jobs in the regions*; OJ C 206, 29.8.2006, p. 17.

15 METREX: Network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas, an association of fifty major urban regions.

16 From 20 in 1990 to 199 in 2006.

17 The Urban Audit identifies three spatial levels: the Core City, Larger Urban Zone (LUZ) and Sub-City District. According to the project organisers, the LUZ corresponds roughly to the functional urban zone.

18 Relatively few indicators are in fact provided for LUZ for the same year. The geographical boundaries of LUZ are set according to national criteria. This does not guarantee the comparability of the indicators at EU level. These boundaries are still unpublished. The indicators do not refer to recent years (2001 is the most recent). Eurostat's present resources for carrying out this important project covering 27 countries, 258 cities, 260 LUZ and 150 indicators are manifestly insufficient.

19 The urban population worldwide exceeds 3 billion. The population of 400 metropolitan areas is over 1 million in comparison with 16 such areas a century ago.

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