

# Bratislava *Declaration*

## *Preamble*

*Highlighting* an indispensable active role of cities in tackling global challenges which pose a burden as much as they represent an opportunity.

*Echoing* that safe child-friendly urban environment requires safeguarding our universal values as only open societies nourishing individual freedoms can guarantee healthy advancement of our children.

*Emphasizing* that democratic deficit at state level endangers our urban communities which is particularly disturbing in case of building safe and stimulating children's environment.

*Reaffirming* that the Pact's mission and its values are of universal merit which cannot be taken for granted and they maintain their global significance demonstrated by the growing membership since Pact's inception.

*Recalling* that it is city leaders who are at the forefront of the Pact's functioning, and they are responsible for shaping Pact's mission.

*Reassuring* of the Pact's determination to cooperate with other initiatives on addressing global challenges while the Pact preserves and enhances locally-driven democratic communities and respect for rule of law.

*Confirming* that standing for our values also means their active protection and support for international regulatory mechanisms aimed at harbouring them.

*Recognizing* that urban development requires respect for subsidiarity and fair financing for cities as metropolitan growth centres.

## *Our mission*

Our Pact is a shield for values of open society underlying a unique role of cities in promoting versatile and inclusive growth and an opportunity for continuous information exchange and knowledge-sharing.

Being true to our mission, we strive to build a legacy which shall be here to stay. The legacy cemented by the joint vision of freedoms, creativity, ensured development, solutions to variety of divisions and global environmental and technological challenges.

Like-minded city leaders have gone together a remarkable path. From the founding declaration through humanitarian actions towards Ukrainian cities and their citizens to global initiatives underpinning democracy or cities' fair financing.

Our Pact represents an open and informal community of solidarity striving for transformative changes towards green and digital societies bringing far-fetched and lasting improvements.

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Over years, we have gone global demonstrating that universal values and endeavours towards flourishing cities as centres of wellbeing are shared in hugely different corners across the globe.

At the same time, Pact's expansion manifests that city leaders perceive urgency to take action in support of the shared values of open society as well as visions of social and economic harmonious development of their cities.

## ***Political threats and our responses***

Democratic backsliding of the current political systems is manifested in symptoms such as governments monopolizing public institutions and judicial power, hampering free media, while promoting hoaxes and factless information with limited public accountability, and increased nepotism in otherwise impartial public service.

Parochial nationalistic chauvinism and hegemonistic tendencies of authoritarian regimes as well as xenophobia and exclusion undermine economic, social, and territorial stability of societies all over the globe.

Cities stand for open society, freedom of speech, political pluralism, justice, rule of law, and fairness as well as gender equality in pursuing opportunities.

Cities support international regulatory or informal mechanisms harbouring rule of law including the use of sanctions against trespassers.

The Pact fully underlines EU Capital Mayors' Conclusions of the 13th Direct Dialogue on the Rule of Law at the local level of 23 January 2024 echoing our commitment to preserve and champion the rule of law, democracy, and an open society.

## ***Upholding values globally***

The Pact of Free Cities upholds the values of human dignity, democracy, freedom, equality, rule of law, and human rights. We advocate globally for these principles, even in the face of oppression and aggression.

As democrats, we stand with peace, freedom, and justice organizations and offer solidarity to those advocating for these principles in Russia. We call for unity in our pursuit of democracy and encourage other cities to join us in action.

The Pact strongly condemns any political violence performed against individuals or groups. We call for peaceful dialogue and deliberation to combat the growing polarisation of our societies.

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## ***Role of the cities in facing the common global challenges***

Cities are well-equipped to tackle global megatrends notably transition to green and digital economy. They attract talents by providing room for inspiration, innovation, creativity, or unconventional problem-solving and versatile approaches.

Cities can play a role model for successful national green and digital policies due to attracting highly productive, vibrant, and grass-rooted economic and social activities.

Increasing inequalities and a decline of once flourishing industrial centres contribute to growing sense of distrust towards public authorities including municipalities. Inhabitants in these localities perceive themselves and their environment as being abandoned by their representatives and their discontent being negligible. It is cities' utmost duty nowadays to reverse this gloomy trend and provide their inhabitants with opportunities raising their self-esteem and a sense of engagement.

Quality of life is a particularly sensitive issue when concerning children, their access to education, social and health care services, and opportunities to live in safe and stable environments.

Our conference on safe urban neighbourhoods as the accompanying event manifests that safe children environment is high on our agenda.

Functioning rule of law also demonstrates a secured environment for our children as it restricts their exposure to harmful social developments.

## ***Urban development and place-based policies***

Metropolitan areas play a central role in local and regional developments. Cities as their hearts concentrate essential economic and social activities and they are conducive to developing fresh innovative ideas.

Place-based policies are essential for urban development as they address megatrends of economic, social, and technological transformations related to environmental challenges, arrival of disruptive technologies and automation, population aging or migration.

Furthermore, place-based policies seek to address various inequalities and local disparities by leveraging on their potential. Place-based policies express cities' confidence to pursue their development goals independently of, yet in constructive cooperation with national level.

Place-based policies are capable to counter public discontent as they promote economic development by valorising local cultural assets and traditions. Thus, place-based policies diminish a popular sense of being abandoned and neglected.

Governance in place-based policies manifests adherence to democratic principles where public mobilisation and engagement are an essence of policymaking.

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## *Direct and just funding of the cities*

Cities are growth inducing. To pursue their development goals, cities need to have guaranteed equal opportunities to access both, domestic and international public sources.

Cities as metropolitan centres need just budgetary environment ensuring fair revenue distribution and a guaranteed direct access to great variety of grant and loan schemes.

**Matus Vallo**, Mayor of Bratislava

**Gergely Karácsony**, Mayor of Budapest

**Bohuslav Svoboda**, Mayor of Prague

**Rafał Trzaskowski**, Mayor of Warsaw

**Jaume Collboni**, Mayor of Barcelona

**Dario Nardella**, Mayor of Florence

**Mike Josef**, Mayor of Frankfurt am Main

**Peter Tschentscher**, Mayor of Hamburg

**Ihor Terekhov**, Mayor of Kharkiv

**Andriy Sadovyi**, Mayor of Lviv

**Giuseppe Sala**, Mayor of Milan

**Katrin Albsteiger**, Mayor of Neu-Ulm

**Anne Hidalgo**, Mayor of Paris

**Vilnis Kirsis**, Mayor of Riga

**Roberto Gualtieri**, Mayor of Rome

**Chiang Wan-an**, Mayor of Taipei

**Erion Veliaj**, Mayor of Tirana

**Martin Ansbacher**, Mayor of Ulm

**Michael Ludwig**, Mayor of Vienna