

**VICE PRESIDENT FOR DEMOCRACY AND DEMOGRAPHY Dubravka ŠUICA**

**KEYNOTE OPENING SPEECH**

**Conference ‘Adapting European Cities to Population Ageing: Policy Challenges and Best Practices’ (online)**

**Date: 30 November 2020**

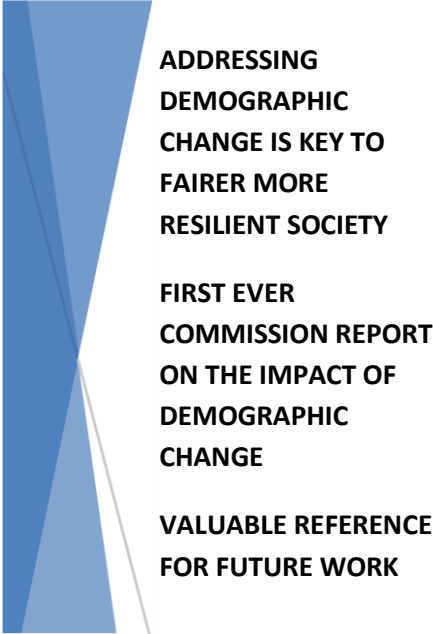
Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this conference and the many organisations joining us from across our European Union with a view to collectively addressing the issues surrounding our European cities and our ageing population. In my role as Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, I work on the full life-cycle, from child rights to active ageing. When it comes to ageing, let me be clear on two points from the outset. Ageing concerns all generations, not just the elderly. Secondly, ageing is not just about challenges, it is also about embracing the opportunities that come with ageing and they are many. Hard evidence shows that Europe is an ageing continent. Preparing cities for ageing is not a question of minimising disruptions. Rather we need a conversation on how we create our future in a positive sense– a future in which many of us enjoy longer lives. Ageing in cities requires a comprehensive approach. We must ensure that not only the **physical accessibility**, but also the **perceived accessibility and safety** within cities enables older people to remain active.



**DEMOGRAPHY AND REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE**

Addressing demographic change is key to building a fairer and more resilient society. I work with my colleague Commissioners to ensure that our policies take account of the implications and impact of demographic change. Hence the necessity of producing the Commission’s first ever report on the Impact of Demographic Change within the first 6 months of our mandate, on 17 June. The report relies on hard evidence and comparable data at EU and regional level. It brings out the major impacts of demographic change, such as on economic growth, labour markets, health and long-term care needs and public finances. The Report is a valuable reference for our current and future work.



The report identified longer life expectancies as a major development within the Union. Older persons are the fastest growing age group. The report indicates the interrelationship between taking action on demographic change and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and references issues such as loneliness, social isolation and providing access to essential services and facilities. It is a strong base for

better-informed policy-making. As a Vice President in the European Commission, my role is one of coordinating several portfolios and services with the clear aim of improving our policy-making.



# GREEN PAPER ON AGEING

We are now working on various strands that come out of this Report and the first one up is the **Green Paper on Ageing**, which will be adopted early in 2021 [TWENTY TWENTY ONE]. It will launch a debate on the **long-term impacts of ageing**, with an emphasis on care and pensions, intergenerational solidarity and how to foster active



ageing. Ageing concerns all generations, both young and elderly. Keeping in mind intergenerational solidarity, the Paper will dive into the impacts, challenges and opportunities of ageing on the economy, society and across the regions. Identifying what ageing means for both the elderly and the young is necessary. We will assess whether our social protection systems are fit to deal with the needs of an ageing population. But we cannot do it this alone. We count on wide participation, and a wide commitment to make active ageing a reality in a time increasingly dominated by digitalisation. We plan to look more closely at issues such as loneliness, social isolation, mental health, economic resilience and long-term care, among others. We need to better harness the opportunities that come with ageing. This includes the positive role older people play in society, the silver economy, voluntary work and other areas.

**LONELINESS**

Let us look at loneliness for a moment. As a group, the elderly are already more exposed to social isolation and loneliness than other parts of our societies. It is a tough fact to face. But I am an optimist too and I do not believe that loneliness has to be a fact of life and I will work on that. Cities can be an anonymous place to live which may contribute to loneliness and we need to look at how to



manage this. I have been a mayor, and once a mayor, always a mayor! Connecting with people is key for me to do my job well. I am very sensitive to this idea of connection. Because when we connect, even if we are alone, we do not feel lonely. However, we see evidence of disconnection. Today we see this happening not only with the elderly, but also with young people. For the elderly, given COVID19, most are unable to connect with friends and family. This impacts their overall health, their mental health, their ability to seek care and assistance; restrictions that were surmountable in normal times, have become impossible during this pandemic. Children and young people are also affected as they are unable to play or spend time with their friends like before; in some cases they cannot study or have not been able to go to school and university under the same conditions as before. So it important that cities become an environment where everyone, including the elderly, can connect with each other.

## **RADAR PROJECT LISBON**

An example of what can be done is the RADAR project in Lisbon which aims to monitor people over 65 [SIXTY FIVE] years old who live alone in Lisbon. The project identifies a community of “radars” near the place where elderly people live, such as pharmacies, coffees, hairdressers, neighbours, family and volunteers. They follow the elderly in order to detect risk situations and deal with it in a personalised way.

The project is part of the programme “Lisbon, City of All Ages” which aim at greater solidarity based on the three pillars of active life, autonomous life and supported life. This project demonstrates just how caring, inclusive and vibrant city environments can and should be for the elderly.



## **AGEING IN CITIES**

Ageing in cities requires a comprehensive approach. Heavy traffic in cities can cause anxiety and act as a barrier to older people's mobility. We must ensure that not only the **physical accessibility**, but also the **perceived accessibility and safety** within cities is enabling older people to remain active. Increasing the security of public spaces requires action from cities. There is evidence of a measurable reduction in stress and improvement in mental health and wellbeing when security is addressed. Creating an age-friendly city is dependent on an integrated approach. Successful initiatives are designed and managed with several institutional and non-institutional actors, which range from civil society organisations, leisure and sport facilities to restaurants. Crucially, we must involve older people during the design and implementation of cities. I like the example of Oslo, where the involvement of seniors is a central principle in the city's commitment to becoming more age-friendly.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today some of us are elderly. The fact is, one day we will all be elderly. If we are lucky. Even the young are impacted directly by the prospect of living a longer life. So you see how ageing is relevant to all generations. Where we live also impacts how we age and so it is vital that cities can be a shining example of intergenerational solidarity, caring and inclusiveness. Ageing brings both challenges and opportunities so it is important that we balance our policy-making for the elderly. But not just the elderly - for everyone across the entire life-

cycle. Living longer in better health is one of the highest expectations of European citizens. This brings challenges and opportunities. Let us seize the moment together to find the best policy solutions to make our cities a wonderful place to live, through the whole life-cycle.

Thank you.

**END**

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