

**UNECE MINISTERIAL MEETING ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT.  
HOUSING AND LAND MANAGEMENT**

*Affordable, adequate and resilient housing in liveable cities*

*(including cities which face extreme weather conditions)*

6-7 October 2021, Geneva, Switzerland

*Speech by H.E. Mrs Violeta Komitova, Minister of Regional Development and  
Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria*

**MADAM CHAIR,**

**HONOURABLE MINISTERS,**

**DISTINGUISHED GUEST,**

Today's ministerial meeting is taking place at a difficult time for all humanity. Climate change is an undisputed fact – we feel it palpably, no matter which part of the world we live in. A major challenge is also the COVID-19 pandemic, which has completely changed our lives, our cities, our habits and perceptions. Today, working remotely, millions of people turned their homes into offices. Others, due to the deepening economic crisis and reduced incomes, face difficulties to service their mortgage loans and are at risk of housing loss, and even homelessness.

**Therefore, now, more than ever, it is important to ensure that the citizens have access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing, in line with the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management for the period 2014-2020 and the Geneva Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development.** The topic of green cities is also on the agenda through the implementation of various architectural and urban planning solutions that will contribute to a better quality of life.

Currently, more than 3 billion people on the planet live in cities; their number is expected to reach 5 billion in 2030. This creates a severe shortage of social and affordable housing. Property market prices are moving upwards, there are problems with security, traffic and clean air. Data show that buildings in the European Union account for 40 % of energy use and 36 % of carbon emissions, making them one of the main drivers of climate change.

In other words, changing the energy performance of buildings is without an alternative. The building need to become more energy efficient and at the same time more cosy and comfortable to live. The optimal comfort of living should be considered in all its dimensions – room air quality, natural lighting, noise indicators and the achievement of a more sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle.

### **Where are we in these processes?**

**A top priority of the regional development policy in Bulgaria is to create vibrant, economically strong and sustainable regions.** In this regard, we are working towards balanced territorial development through better connectivity, more infrastructure projects and equalisation of living standards between regions. **One of the main instruments to achieve the objectives is the Programme for Regional Development 2021-2027** that provides EUR 1.723 billion for the implementation of activities for sustainable development of cities and regions. Of these, EUR 185.5 million will be available for improving the housing stock, including energy efficiency. Projects for the construction of green infrastructure, municipal housing and the refurbishment of entire neighbourhoods will also be possible. In this process, we will also involve local stakeholders to look for local solutions in the fight against climate change and the transition to a green economy.

**In addition, the Republic of Bulgaria's Recovery and Resilience Plan** provides for measures for sustainable energy renovation of multi-apartment buildings. We will achieve this with the increased use of renewable energy sources, prioritising highly efficient solutions using geothermal, hydrothermal and solar energy. The foreseen financial assistance through the Recovery and Resilience Facility is around EUR 600 million. A key target will be energy savings of more than 30 %, sustainable solutions and the transition to a green economy.

Of course, the needs are much greater. The housing stock in Bulgaria is heavily depreciated and **703 978 occupied residential buildings** need to be renovated in the coming years. All this, together with investments in sustainable urban mobility and building educational, health and road infrastructure, is in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 11, namely to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

### **DEAR COLLEAGUES,**

I am glad that we will have the opportunity to exchange experiences and good practices on these topics. I welcome the development of the **Regional Action Plan 2030: Tackling challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, climate and housing emergencies in region, city, neighbourhood and homes.** I hope this document to be a starting point for finding innovative and non-standard solutions for continuing investments in the renovation and development of the building stock.

I wish productive work to the participants in the ministerial meeting!