



Brussels, 8 September 2021

To the kind attention of

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal

Elisa Ferreira, Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms

Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

Since first hearing of it in the State of the Union Address of September 2020, we have been following the development of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative with great interest and anticipation. **We fully share the idea that the European Green Deal has to be made tangible for the everyday lives of citizens, and that this can be done by combining the virtues of art, technology and design.**

From the 1920s to its dissolution under the Nazi regime, the Bauhaus school promoted a revolutionary educational and training curriculum centred around this very idea of unifying arts and crafts. It was a socially progressive view of the education system as a key to transforming the art industry, reconciling aesthetics with function and the needs of mass production, and highlighting the importance of the youth and women as social groups in their own rights.

Whereas a more critical perspective on the Bauhaus can show both positive and negative aspects - including the general understatement of the contributions of female artists - many of its principles and tenets can speak to us today: "*Form follows function*", "*Truth to materials*", "*Less is more*".

As Greens/EFA MEPs, we feel that the same spirit of renewal and social progress that Bauhaus intended to bring to Europe after the devastations of World War I is now needed in the face of the destruction that we are living through because of the climate crisis and the enormous environmental, economic and societal challenges before us.

While being genuinely *New* and *European*, we see the task for the NEB to be reinterpreting Bauhaus in light of the climate crisis and re-design our private and public spaces at a time when natural disasters, social inequalities and their costs for citizens are all dramatically increasing.

Sustainability, trans-disciplinarity, a participatory and inclusive approach and a genuine European nature are all features that the NEB should possess and build on in order to be up to the tasks of facing the climate crisis and making the European Green Deal tangible for EU citizens.

While congratulating you for the level of engagement that has been achieved during the Co-design phase - including through the creation of the NEB portal, its partnerships and the NEB Awards - as a Commission's Communication is expected to be released, **we call on you to consider the following goals during the Delivery and Dissemination phases:**

- Ensure coherence with legislative and programming instruments - both sector-specific (EPBD and national LTRs) and across complementary policy sectors such as regional cohesion, mobility and social policy - and with a level of ambition that is in line with climate commitments, and create guidelines for Member States to implement the NEB alongside those instruments
- Focus on the renovation and upgrade of the existing building stock and infrastructures
- Ensure that circularity and sustainable criteria for building materials are at the heart of the selection for pilot projects
- Give adequate and targeted financing through Cohesion Funds and Horizon Europe and ensure coherence with Recovery measures
- Create an integrated, non discriminatory, accountable and territorially-structured governance

In the Annex to this letter, we detail the guiding principles and implementation goals that we have just listed.

As Greens/EFA MEPs we believe that by following these principles and pursuing these goals we can succeed in building a New and European Bauhaus to face the climate crisis and make our lives and living areas more sustainable, more inclusive and more beautiful.

Yours faithfully,

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Annex

Our perspective on the guiding principles of the NEB

- **Sustainability**

Buildings are responsible for 40% of the EU's energy demand, they are the single largest energy consumer in Europe, and account for 36% of the EU's CO₂ emissions. 97% of today's buildings will still be standing and in use in 2050. Therefore, it is essential that the current EU building stock becomes sustainable, energy efficient, and fit for the purpose of achieving the goal of climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest. On average, buildings are only renovated every 30 years. In order to meet our climate obligations, the EU building renovation rate should be 3% per year. Equally, every renovation should be a deep renovation i.e. a renovation that leads to a climate neutral building so as to achieve the climate neutrality goal. However, buildings in the EU are currently being renovated at a rate of 1% per year, while deep renovations occur only at a rate of 0.2% per year.

Last year, the Commission's New Circular Economy Action Plan highlighted the role of construction and building materials in creating over 35% of the EU's total waste. The NEB can have a huge role in addressing the reduction and recycling of building materials, the life-cycle assessment of construction projects, and consideration of embodied energy within our built living-environments. By addressing these issues within the NEB, we align the movement closer with EU ambitions under the European Green Deal.

The NEB should focus on delivering a sustainable environment for citizens to live in. It should aim at ensuring that our buildings provide safe and healthy homes as well as environmentally friendly living spaces and surroundings for all. The NEB must not simply support the building of new green buildings alone; the challenge is to also upgrade the existing stock. With the NEB, we can demonstrate our ability to create something new from something used. That is why circularity must be at the heart of the NEB and its resulting pilot projects. NEB designs should optimise the energy and climate impact of the entire lifecycle of building projects with a focus on *sustainability by design*, entailing inter alia the recyclability of construction products and a consideration of how to deal with waste material.

The NEB should pay special attention to fighting the biodiversity crisis through innovative solutions and technologies, i.e. supporting the development of green infrastructures, nature-based solutions and restorative measures in a way that our living areas are ultimately transformed into places where nature and ecosystem services are both respected and integrated, rather than endangered.

- **Trans-disciplinarity**

In face of the immense social, environmental and economic challenges ahead, for the NEB to be successful **we need to move beyond a multidisciplinary approach and move toward a transdisciplinary approach**, bringing together people with multiple talents and encouraging combined thinking, so that instead of building a bridge between the worlds of art and technology, we provide an environment that can foster a union and fruitful learning loops.

At the same time, **the NEB is for everyone. This means for example that there should also be a focus on education, training, and retraining.** The energy transition requires a transition in skills in some professions and the NEB must be used as a means to facilitate this. Retraining professionals such as plumbers and electricians for building renovations or heat pump installations supports the goals of the New European Bauhaus and the Just Transition. Ideally, we would also see courses in third level educational institutions that provide training in areas focussed on sustainability and renewables. Therefore, the NEB could be extended to cover education grants and training schemes.

- **A participatory and inclusive approach**

The NEB is much more than improving our living spaces. It's about creating a new environment that fosters sustainable development. For this reason, it is not enough to involve architects and developers, we must strive to include all members of our societies. Communities and neighbourhoods must be at the heart of the NEB. This would empower local actors to shape their neighbourhoods to their own needs. This bottom-up approach creates more equitable living spaces that leaves the control of a neighbourhood with its citizens and within its community. This would also help to combat the problems of gentrification and renovictions by preserving existing communities.

Sustainable and healthy lifestyles cannot be confined to the well-off and must be available to all members of society, especially those living in or at risk of poverty. In fact, those living in or at risk of poverty should be the main target group of the NEB to ensure that sustainable living is the baseline for our living standards. As such, **we should see the NEB as an opportunity to democratise and “mass produce” sustainability.** It could provide incentives through its pilot projects that would encourage the production and distribution of sustainable utilities and products such as prefabricated elements with sustainable materials and including solar PVs, charging infrastructure, etc.

Upstream, the NEB should support businesses that produce localised sustainable products and services. This would lessen our reliance on non-sustainable industrial materials and/or products that are often overly carbon intensive and keep the rich heritage of our diverse building culture and local sustainable materials. Adopting an approach that is concentrated locally would accelerate the public acceptance of sustainable products as well as accelerate the energy transition in general. Furthermore, a bottom-up approach would provide economic

stimulus to local SMEs and artisanship and reinvigorate communities that have been hit financially by the COVID19 pandemic.

Also, when we consider rebuilding, we should talk to the people involved. If social housing is to be redesigned, the tenants should be involved in the discussions. When we discuss schools, we should involve students, teachers, custodians. In hospitals we need to consider the views of patients, doctors and nurses.

It is crucial that NEB is not only introduced in urban but in rural and remote areas as well. There should be no distinction between any type of region. The NEB and its implementation should be accessible for cities and towns as well as villages and remote areas. The inclusion of EU citizens in the decision-making process and implementation of funding is what NEB should support in order to make the most out of it. It is the people on the ground who know best what is needed in their respective region. The NEB could be a cohesive tool to address structural challenges regions are dealing with: demographic change, environmental disasters as well as the post-pandemic recovery. Interregional and cross-border projects should be promoted and supported by this approach to ensure synergies and solutions are created and a cohesive approach is made available. No region should be discriminated against. No region should be left behind.

The NEB should not neglect digitalisation and its impacts. Technological advancements like smart buildings, the Internet of Things and connected mobility hold the potential to make our lifestyle more sustainable, e.g. by reducing GHG emissions or energy consumption, and to open new possibilities for those in need, including the elder and PRM. At the same time, there are tangible risks for digital technologies to affect our everyday lives. For this reason, NEB projects should always guarantee the respect of pivotal rights, such as privacy and the right to disconnect, both in private and public spaces, combining “privacy-by design” with “privacy-through-design”, and consider rebound effects.

Marginalised communities should be a key concern in conceptualising and implementing the NEB if we mean for it to address our most pressing societal issues and in creating an aesthetic that suits the needs of everyone. The NEB should empower women and youth, as well as BIPOC, PRM and people with disabilities.

- **A genuinely European nature**

The co-design phase succeeded in catalysing the interests of a large audience of experts and practitioners in design, architecture and the arts, coming from all over Europe and beyond. This is witnessed by more than 260 organisations that were selected as official NEB partners, as well as by the larger pool reached through the NEB awards. Building on these first successes, we find it imperative for NEB to reach beyond the group of institutions and professionals and **facilitate civic engagement with a European purpose.** In other words, the educational dimension of this initiative should be able to reach the public, fostering knowledge, stimulating

debate and receiving precious feedback from the end users. Acting locally to think European should be in the focus of the NEB. By doing so, it can become an integral part of a “European way” of designing the buildings and spaces that we live in. In turn, this is likely to raise attention in our international partners, as a newer branch of the EU’s cultural diplomacy.

Our requests for the NEB’s next phases

- **Ensure coherence with legislative and programming instruments - both sector-specific (EPBD and national LTRs) and across complementary policy sectors such as regional cohesion, mobility and social policy - and with a level of ambition that is in line with climate commitments, and create guidelines for Member States to implement the NEB alongside those instruments**

Pilot projects chosen under the NEB should be prioritised according to their coherence with current and upcoming legislative instruments relevant to this area such as the EPBD, the EED, and the RED II. The upcoming revision of the EPBD to be made in line with climate commitments will have a huge impact on the energy performance of our buildings. We hope this legislation will align our buildings with the European Green Deal making our living spaces more energy efficient, more climate friendly, and more sustainable. . Ambitious pilot projects that seek to realise the goals of the above legislation are essential in order to demonstrate that building programmes based on sustainability are economically viable and future-proof.

The NEB can act as a blueprint for this by bringing forward pilot projects that subsidize and support energy technologies, like heat pumps and energy efficiency improvements and passive buildings. The NEB should also focus on scaling up renewable energy, in particular for community and self-consumption. By supporting the scale up of renewable energy installations on rooftops and residential buildings, it can significantly contribute to both pursuing the EU climate and renewable energy goals and to eradicating energy poverty.

- **Focus on existing building stock and infrastructures**

In line with the principles of the European Green Deal, the NEB should focus on preparing our current building stock for a more sustainable and climate-friendly future. By targeting our current building stock with NEB projects with an emphasis on sustainability, we can tackle one of the largest sources of carbon in our society. Therefore, the focus of the NEB should be on retrofitting and renovations that will make our buildings aligned with the goals of the European Green Deal. New builds covered by NEB projects must also be guided by the energy efficiency first principle so that they are future-proof and fit for purpose. This means integrating sustainable energy sources, such as on-site and nearby renewables like solar PVs, district heating or cooling systems for any residual energy demand, etc.

We can further use the NEB as a platform to conserve and expand our public and green spaces, both in rural and urban areas. We support NEB projects that facilitate green infrastructure solutions in improving air quality or water management. Our living areas should focus on improving the quality of life; this can be achieved by creating more green spaces and provide for safe active travel by bike and on foot, which will lead to safer cities and less traffic congestion, thereby lowering the amount of carbon being emitted through vehicles (i.e. more trees, less cars in our city centres). Accordingly, we should prioritise NEB pilot projects that support innovative neighbourhoods promoting shared equipment, recycled materials, green spaces, common playgrounds, etc.

→ Ensure that circularity and sustainable criteria for building materials are at the heart of the selection for pilot projects

All pilot projects under the NEB must strictly adhere to the provisions outlined the EU's Circular economy action plan and should be focussed on prioritising sustainable building materials. This includes taking into account the recyclability of the material, its environmental effects, and its proper disposal and waste management. Best practice examples for recovering and on site reuse of materials, as well as sustainable substitution of sand, cement or steel should be part of the NEB catalogue for pilot projects. This will also help to promote safe practices with the construction industry and pave the way for a climate friendlier approach to construction.

→ Give adequate and targeted financing through Cohesion Funds and Horizon Europe and ensure coherence with Recovery measures

Given the fact that EU funds are already allocated within the MFF 21-27 and the NEB initiative was just proposed after the MFF approval, it is highly important, that the budget needed for this initiative is not cutting any existing programs, e.g. cohesion funds but also other as cultural or environmental ones. Even though the NEB is offering a great opportunity for a new holistic movement within the Union and its programmes, money needs to be made available either additionally from Commission side, in order to even foster important cohesive programs already planned, or the initiative needs to be implemented and used as a synergy within already existing programs. The latter could be supported by providing a higher co-financing for those projects respectively and should be strongly communicated by the Commission to promote the inclusion of NEB. If so, there should not be any additional administrative burden and even small-scale projects should be able to include the approach of NEB within the existing funding.

As some of the funding will come from Horizon Europe, in particular through thematic clusters and from the newly established instruments so called 'R&I missions', we consider of particular interest the one on climate-neutral and smart cities with the aim of creating "100 climate-neutral cities by 2030 - by and for the citizens", as well as calls HORIZON-MISS-2021-CIT-01-02 (EUR 2 million) and HORIZON-MISS-2021-NEB-01 (EUR 25 million) under the work programme 2021-22 for missions.

Funds mobilised within the NextGenerationEU, specifically under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, are another unmissable opportunity to give the NEB adequate funding. The green and digital transition is indeed an overarching goal of the European recovery efforts, and building renovation is a flagship area for investment and reform for Member States within their Resilience and Recovery Plans (RRPs). Whereas it remains unclear how much of green spending under this Facility will be specifically devoted to investments in renovation, in its scrutiny over the implementation of these Plans the Commission should encourage Member States to finance NEB-related projects and to align their investment to the spirit of the NEB, thus ensuring full coherence between the recovery, the European Green Deal and the objectives of sustainability, quality of experience and inclusiveness.

→ Create an integrated, non discriminatory, accountable and territorially-structured governance

We argue that the governance structure of the NEB should include:

- Public involvement and ownership, e.g. through responsibility over project selection
- Appropriate territorial layout based on functional criteria (vs. administrative units)
- Integrated approach (vs. sectoral approach, silo approach) bringing all relevant dimensions together
- Non-discriminatory participation
- Overarching governance framework providing for coordination, capitalisation, accountability and exchange of experience

When it comes to getting regional and local authorities involved, budgeting issues coexist with weaker strategic actions and reinforce each other. For this reason, the NEB should be coupled with the EU's long-term vision for rural areas to ensure that challenges rural areas are facing are addressed properly. In 2018, 83% of the EU's total area was defined as a rural area. Poor infrastructure, demographic change as well as population loss are negative developments within these regions, among others. To ensure the long-term vision for rural areas is as effective as the NEB, these two initiatives should be connected to increase synergies and advantages in implementing them at national and regional level.