

Mrs mayor Moratti, mr vice-president Frattini, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here today in Milano.

Mayor Moratti, it certainly is a great pleasure to be in your beautiful and cultural city - I was able to visit the impressive Scala and watch the Opera *Così fan tutte* yesterday evening. But Milan is also an economically vibrant city and a very important business and trade hub for the port and the city of Rotterdam.

Of course my greatest pleasure is to see that the initiative we took last year with the Integrating Cities conference in Rotterdam, has developed so well.

Mr Frattini, I remember very well the meeting we had, almost two years ago in your office in Brussels. We spoke about the The Hague Programme for Freedom, Security and Justice and my Opinion for the Committee of the Regions. And we both strongly felt the need to have a close look at the Common Agenda for Integration and the Common Basic Principles and see how they can actually be implemented on the ground. This common understanding led to the first Integrating Cities conference, or, as it was called the 'Rotterdam process'.

Let me recall what we concluded last year in Rotterdam: European policy needs the local practice. It is crucial that European policy and local practice are completely in tandem with each other. Integration policy is a joint responsibility and a common challenge.

And indeed, since last year's conference, we can see that our common activities in the field of integration have deepened quite significantly.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to speak a few words about the integration process in my city. We learned that in an *intercultural* society, it is crucial to build bridges, bridges that connect people. I think the logo of Integrating Cities, with people stretching out to one another, symbolizes that very well.

Integration is in the first place about participation. The key to participation is employment, be it a regular job or voluntary work. Participation and citizenship is also stimulated by debates and dialogue. Last year I mentioned our Islam debate in which 5000 people took part. Annually we also organize the Day of Dialogue. And only last week we started Debates on Education in various neighbourhoods, at numerous schools and in mosques. Here parents and professionals discuss how to best bring up their children. These are all instruments that foster citizenship and participation. That is one of the focal points of our local integration policy.

Ladies and gentlemen, this conference aims to bring together all such types of local practices. We, policymakers at European, national and local level, must exchange our experiences in order to learn from each other.

In this process, Eurocities has taken up a central role in mobilizing cities. In close cooperation with the European Commission and many other partners Eurocities is currently developing a European Website on Integration. This includes a database of one hundred good practices and can be a very useful tool for all of us. And later today you will hear more about the project “Benchmarking Local Integration Governance”, in which 12 cities compare their policies.

As a member of the Committee of the Regions, I also see a broadening in the relations between the local authorities and the European institutions. The frequent attendance of European commissioners to the meetings of the Committee of the Regions, is a proof of this ‘territorial dialogue’.

I very much welcome this involvement and commitment of local and national actors in the European policy process.

Mr Frattini, I think we can say that the ‘model’ we developed together in Rotterdam, has been widely followed. European policy is more and more confronted with local practice. Let me give you just one recent example. In his communication on the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market, European commissioner Spidla, gives local authorities and their networks a central role.

A brief remark on the future: We are looking forward to the launch of the Integration Fund. Mr Frattini, I am confident that this will be a huge support for our local efforts to make our cities more liveable and attractive.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude. I see today's conference as a further milestone in the good cooperation between the European Institutions, the European Cities and the member states. In the "Milan Declaration" which will be distributed today, we commit ourselves to continuous dialogue and cooperation in order to achieve a successful policy on integration and participation.

We highlight the principles of partnership, empowerment and good governance. These are crucial building blocks for our policies. Our challenge now is to build further upon this.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish all of us a very successful Integrating Cities conference.