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Dear President, dear Congress members, dear fellow youth delegates, good afternoon to all.

My name is Lea Hatt and I am the youth delegate from Switzerland and am currently living in the city of Geneva. It is an honor to be able to represent the youth perspective in today's debate and I would like to thank you on the behalf of all the youth delegates to the Congress for this invitation.

It goes without saying that in these extraordinary times our cities and citizens have shown extraordinary resilience, solidarity and compassion. At the same time, it also goes without saying that this pandemic has shed light on many social inequalities, in more or less every country of the continent. Covid has had some common and particular challenges for us young people and I would like to share with you our perspective and try and convince you that we, young people, are a core social group, facing specific pressures and that through strengthening our voices, cities can and will become more apt at facing various challenges going forward. In other words, we're hoping to convince you of the importance of integrating young people in the next European Urban Charter, where we haven't been mentioned up to now.

So, concerning the challenges crystallized through Covid for young people.

Firstly, the question of job and financial insecurity has been even more present for many of us young people in the last one and a half years, as our jobs were and are often the first ones being cut, as we work in flexible contracts, meaning a few hours a week in a restaurant or a shop. And although certain cities and countries provide

financial support, there are many young people that slip through the net. We all have friends that were obliged to move back to their parents at age 25, because they simply couldn't pay the rent in the city they studied in.

The job insecurity, the feeling of overwhelm facing the future, the multiple and complex challenges our world is currently facing, also with regard to the climate crisis – all have impacts on mental health, this impact is especially important, when we can't compensate the overwhelm through social interactions or express our opinions in social movements. This is of course true for society at large, but particularly also for young people. There have been many initiatives to address mental health in cities and we hope this will continue to be the case moving forward. It should be added that cities have to face this question to an even greater extent : considered as hotspots, cities were oftentimes subject to stricter lockdowns, with people having to isolate more, whilst not being able to offer as many outdoor activities and green spaces like smaller towns could.

Thirdly, in terms of access to education, nine of my youth delegate colleagues from Albania, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom; conducted a survey in their cities and towns with young people and local authorities. They found that a third of respondents had a friend that had problems continuing with their studies due to missing technical infrastructure. Inequalities in terms of access to technical infrastructure and internet is a challenge that can't be ignored in a situation of a pandemic where young people are obliged to stay at home but are also expected to finish their studies in the same time that was expected pre-pandemic. Positively the survey found that many local authorities were aware of this issue.

From these challenges, which are in no way a conclusive list, to some concrete projects that were implemented during the pandemic by fellow youth delegates in the context of our mandate – and that could be used as cornerstones for thinking about our post-covid cities.

Firstly, many projects contributed hugely to actually acknowledging and tracking the challenges that young people faced. This has been done in various ways... for example through the survey by the nine youth delegates I mentioned before, but also through a documentary made by the youth delegate from Andorra, Elisabeth, that captured the experiences of young people in her town during the pandemic. Or another example: the Youth delegate from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lamija interviewed exchange students arriving during the pandemic in Sarajevo and collecting their experience during the pandemic. In short, all these projects captured and acknowledged the realities and challenges of young citizens, which is an important step for cities that wish to in a subsequent step provide useful resources and solutions for young people and citizens more generally.

A second important cornerstone that many youth delegate projects focused on, was thinking of ways to integrate technological tools in the design of their respective cities. Vadim, the youth delegate from the Russian federation, for example conducted a survey where he collected the opinions from nearly 300 residents on the Smart City plan of Moscow, and asked them, which types of technology they wished to see more of, where they had doubts etc. Alina and Staša, the youth delegates from Germany and Serbia, used video conferencing tools to bring together young people from both their cities, to meet and exchange on similarities and differences facing Covid. Krysia, the youth delegate from Poland made capsule videos with residents from her hometown during Covid on Facebook, with politicians, artists and academics, especially focusing on promoting discussions around sustainability on social media. The project I worked on was centered around an online platform where young people could post their ideas for their city and present them in a Zoom conference to local representatives. One of the outputs has been to integrate the young people that posted ideas into the implementation of the climate action plan in the city – which shows how online tools can be linked to offline participation.

This leads me to the third cornerstone for our post Covid cities highlighted by many youth delegate projects, which is the importance to translate the online also into increased offline platforms of exchange – and giving young people a central voice in these exchanges. Reacting to rising inequalities, stereotyping and discriminations in their respective hometowns, both the youth delegates from Cyprus, Evgenia and the youth delegate from Greece, Vasiliki organized an intercommunal conference last year. Similarly, the youth delegate from Ukraine Vitalii also organized a large-scale event – both on and offline, bringing together youth councils, local authorities and collecting solutions for the region going forward, but also summing up the impact of the crisis on young people. Organizing these events highlights the need many youth delegates felt to create more exchange in their cities and towns – especially also during the pandemic.

We are convinced that the congress contributes in essential ways to enforce democracy and participation in our cities and we want to emphasize our appreciation for giving us the platform to highlight the youth perspective – we hope our specific challenges and solutions will be integrated in the next European Urban Charter! And we hope that the drive and energy we young people can bring, will be able to express itself in our respective countries at large.

With that I would like to thank you for your attention and, if you have any questions, I am happy to answer, and I am sure any other of my Youth delegate colleagues will also gladly do so.

Oh, and if you are interested in learning more about the projects youth delegates did last year, because there are many more than those that I mentioned – you can find explanatory videos on the congress website, I will send the link in the chat afterwards.

Thank you!