

Informal meeting of ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy, Territorial Cohesion and Urban Matters

Warsaw, 21 May 2025

Joint declaration



We, the Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy, Territorial Cohesion and Urban Matters, gathered in Warsaw on 21 May 2025 for an informal meeting under the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, taking into account the Commission Communication “The road to the next multiannual financial framework”, the European Council Conclusions on European defence (6 March 2025), Joint Conclusions of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on Policy Objectives and Priorities for 2025–2029 (18 March 2025), Council Conclusions on competitiveness (20 March 2025), as well as the Council Conclusions on Cohesion and Cohesion Policy post-2027 (28 March 2025), along with conclusions on Cohesion Policy adopted under the preceding presidencies, and without prejudging the negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework post-2027 and the Mid Term Review of Cohesion Policy,

recognising:

- i. the uneven territorial impact of global challenges – including increasing severity of climate-related risks, accelerating digital, green and demographic transitions, deteriorating housing and energy affordability, persisting social, economic and territorial inequalities and deepening geopolitical instability – which raise security and defence concerns, tensions on value chains and challenge the Union’s resilience and competitiveness (hereinafter referred to as the Challenges);
- ii. the need for a better coordinated and more territorially sensitive response that promotes cohesion across the EU to strengthen the Union and to make sure no place is left behind;

and highlighting

- iii. the importance of ensuring that future responses to these Challenges are developed in a manner that upholds the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and partnership, and take due account of the institutional diversity across the Member States;
1. CONSIDER economic, social and territorial cohesion as one of key EU priorities, as enshrined in the Treaties, and CALL ON the European Commission to implement it together with the new priorities of security, defence, resilience, competitiveness, the continuation of green and digital policies; as well as responding to demographic challenges in a mutually reinforcing and territorially balanced manner, while also addressing, where relevant, the issue of affordable housing. These priorities are later referred to as Joint EU Priorities.
 2. WELCOME the commitment to a better coordination of EU policies expressed by the European Commission in the Communication “The road to the next multiannual financial framework” and STRESS that to be efficient, such coordination should take into account the territorial dimension of relevant EU policies. As such policies are implemented in places, they should be designed, implemented and assessed through a place-based approach.
 3. ACKNOWLEDGE the need to elaborate an evidence-based territorial development vision, considering key territorial effects of relevant sectoral EU priorities and disparities of European significance.
 4. UNDERLINE that such a vision should be followed by a shared understanding of how to promote cohesion and territorial development while focusing on Joint EU Priorities. The vision indicating common objectives for the EU policies, should be developed in a collaborative manner by the European Commission and the Member States and adopted by the Council of the EU.
 5. RECALL that the Territorial Agenda 2030, the New Leipzig Charter and the Urban Agenda for the EU as well as experiences from their implementation, could be used to operationalise the vision.
 6. HIGHLIGHT that Cohesion Policy must continue to play a key role in reducing regional and intra-regional disparities across the EU and act as a driver of territorial adaptation to ongoing transitions, ensuring that no region and no one is left behind and that all territories and communities are enabled to contribute to Joint EU Priorities. It should remain open for all regions to fully leverage their resources and strengths. In

this context, we CALL on the Commission to propose a transparent, simple, flexible, and efficient Cohesion Policy post-2027, able to adequately address Joint EU Priorities.

7. INSIST that the key Cohesion Policy principles – multi-level governance, partnership, and a place-based approach – which are also embedded in the Territorial Agenda, the Urban Agenda for the EU, and the New Leipzig Charter, as well as shared-management, should orient relevant EU policies to support the involvement of national, regional and local authorities in the design and implementation of EU strategic and legislative frameworks, ensuring that their perspectives are reflected in policymaking.
8. EMPHASIZE the need for territorial impact assessments of EU policies as well as the assessment of the territorial effects of EU regulations and, when relevant, European Semester recommendations on territories in order to achieve the Joint EU Priorities more effectively. Such territorial impact assessments should be tailored to the specific governance and territorial contexts of each Member State.
9. RECOGNISE that the regions referred to in the Articles 174 and 349 of the TFEU require a particular focus due to their unique development circumstances. At the same time, ACKNOWLEDGE that some territories across the EU are facing significant pressures related to migration, climate threats or stagnation – which also require adequate attention and tailored responses. Special attention should be given to the Member States and regions that are most affected by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, especially regions bordering Russia and Belarus and those bordering Ukraine.
10. UNDERLINE that cities of all sizes and their functional areas are key drivers of competitiveness and innovation, serving as engines of economic growth and hubs of social and cultural development. They play a significant role in fostering sustainable development within the European Union and in addressing the Challenges. HIGHLIGHT the importance of addressing, where relevant, urban-rural linkages through the functional approach and ensuring adequate spatial planning as it enables synergies between these areas, ultimately contributing to more resilient economies, sustainability, and improved quality of life.
11. HIGHLIGHT the importance of addressing diverse housing challenges across the EU, including the need for carbon neutral and affordable housing. DRAW ATTENTION to the potential benefits of strategic integration of housing policies and investments into broader urban and rural development frameworks and to how such an alignment can take into account public infrastructure and services of general interest, economic sustainability and social inclusion, while still allowing for tailored solutions that reflect the specific realities of different Member States.

Having in mind the above, we the Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy, Territorial Cohesion and Urban Matters

12. CALL ON the Commission, to ensure that the EU strategic, legislative and financial frameworks for post-2027 perspective as well as current policy actions, especially the new policy agenda for cities, include territorial dimension and effectively contribute to addressing the Challenges and Joint EU Priorities. In order to achieve that, it is necessary to:
 - i. INTRODUCE regular territorial impact assessments of relevant EU policies and legislation, and their effects on different types of territories, in order to avoid exacerbating regional disparities and undesirable effects on different regions;
 - ii. ADDRESS the three dimensions of transformative development of European cities – just, green and productive – as recognised in the New Leipzig Charter, and ENSURE that they are well reflected in future EU policies, thus contributing to the achievement of Joint EU Priorities also at local level. Sustainable

urban development addressing the Challenges and allowing for flexibility in local adaptation as well as reflecting territorial specificities, requires an adequate EU support;

- iii. RECOGNISE regions, cities of all sizes and their functional areas as strategic partners in shaping and implementing EU policies, rather than as passive recipients of funding. Accordingly, STRENGTHEN relevant engagement mechanisms and tools, in particular by a stronger involvement of existing coordination bodies throughout the entire policy cycle;
 - iv. ENHANCE, together with the Member States, institutional capacity building and urban cooperation to ensure that cities of all sizes are able to effectively contribute to Joint EU Priorities;
 - v. ENSURE consolidation and better coordination of various EU instruments for cities of all sizes, including, where relevant, their functional areas in order to increase their accessibility, efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and usefulness also for regional and local authorities. Moreover, IMPROVE the relevance and use of the territorial instruments within EU policies in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity;
 - vi. FACILITATE the operationalisation and implementation of actions resulting from the Thematic Partnerships of the Urban Agenda for the EU, in particular those elaborated within the Better Regulation pillar, and ENSURE an operational interconnection of the Urban Agenda for the EU with relevant EU programmes. In this regard, PROVIDE coordination, continuity and complementarity between the Urban Agenda for the EU and the new policy agenda for cities;
 - vii. ENSURE the full use of the existing intergovernmental cooperation on territorial cohesion and urban matters, in particular the Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP), the Urban Development Group (UDG) and respective Directors General meetings to foster strategic discussions between the Member States and the Commission and to improve the coordination on territorial and urban development. Regional and urban partners should also be given an opportunity to provide inputs for policy agendas, among others for the designing and implementation of the new policy agenda for cities;
 - viii. ENCOURAGE synergies between EU policies affecting housing and national housing policies, with the possibility of active involvement of local, regional and national authorities, and respecting the principle of subsidiarity. As housing is fundamental to societal well-being, housing policy should be seen as an enabler for social inclusion, resilient local and regional economies, sustainability, and territorial cohesion, ensuring that regions and cities of all sizes with their functional areas remain competitive and attractive for talent, businesses, and investment;
 - ix. STRENGTHEN the role of European Territorial Cooperation as a tool to enhance functional links and integration between EU regions and countries and with Partner States and EU Candidate Countries. Cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation frameworks should be continued and supported enabling the territories to jointly address the Challenges and to enhance resilience, connectivity and territorial cohesion.
- 13. We, the Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy, Territorial Cohesion and Urban Matters, COMMIT to:**
- i. CONSIDER conducting territorial impact assessments of relevant national policies, in order not to exacerbate territorial imbalances nor reinforce centralizing growth patterns;
 - ii. ADVANCE the implementation of Territorial Agenda principles in policy development and governance to strengthen the place-based approach;
 - iii. INITIATE the renewal of the Territorial Agenda 2030 in the context of the European territorial development vision, with a view to employing it as a tool in support of the delivery of the vision and a response to the Challenges, in close cooperation with the European Commission, between the Member States, Partner States, regions and relevant intergovernmental groups such as the NTCCP and UDG;

- iv. APPROACH ESPON to organise a foresight study, to provide the evidence base for the territorial development vision, including at urban scale, analyse the risks of territorially blind policies and illustrate their potential consequences if spatial considerations are not adequately integrated into the EU policymaking;
- v. CONTINUE the efforts to improve the coordination of national sectoral policies to implement integrated sustainable regional and urban development and, where relevant, promote the functional approach for regions and cities of all sizes to ensure policy coherence and more effective responses to the Challenges;
- vi. INTENSIFY actions on institutional capacity building, including interregional networking, recognising that resilient, effective, skilled and competent national, regional and local authorities are essential for the achievement of Joint EU Priorities.

Warsaw, 21 May 2025