

Delivering Europe Together: Placing Regions at the Heart of the Next MFF Rhodes Declaration of the EPP-CoR Group in the CoR

AS EPP LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEADERS, REPRESENTATIVES OF EUROPE'S REGIONS AND CITIES:

We want Europe to be competitive, and secure, sustainable and prosperous. We want the European Union (EU) to work with all its engines – its regions and cities, and we want to work together. We need to get citizens on board, across all cities and regions.

We stress that the debate on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2028-2034 is a defining political moment for the EU. Europe's ability to continue to deliver on competitiveness, territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural development, resilience, green and digital transitions as well as deliver on new challenges such as security, will depend on an EU budget that matches all its ambitions.

We insist that new strategic priorities must go hand in hand with sustaining and modernising the EU foundational policies.

The EU's Cohesion policy is the world's largest investment policy that underpins convergence, competitiveness and territorial resilience, open to all European regions, visible for citizens and inclusive of all levels of governance. **Cohesion policy is a core Treaty objective and the only instrument** ensuring that no territory is left behind.

We call for sufficient financial means to meet existing and new priorities. European ambition cannot rest on the false myth of *doing more with less*. Therefore, overall funding for the MFF 2028-2034 should amount to **1.27%** of EU Gross National Income (GNI), excluding repayments of the debt related to the NextGenerationEU recovery fund. **To this end we support the introduction of new, genuine EU own resources to enable an ambitious MFF** and to strengthen the EU's capacity to respond flexibly to unforeseen challenges.

We underline the need for simplification and effectiveness in the EU budget. Simplification should primarily serve beneficiaries, lowering barriers to access EU funding and making spending more efficient. However, streamlining budgetary structures must not lead to a loss of transparency, democratic control or territorial involvement, nor be used as a pretext to weaken the partnership principle.

We affirm that flexibility must complement, not replace, predictability. Budgetary predictability is a political condition, not a technical detail. Stable and legally secure MFF is indispensable for long-term investment, regional administrative capacity and citizens' trust

We insist that EU spending must remain place-based and territorially sensitive. EU policies must recognise Europe's territorial diversity and reflect different regional realities, including islands, outermost regions, rural and mountain areas and structurally disadvantaged territories.

We recognise that performance-oriented approaches are needed but warn that financing models disconnected from real costs and territorial implementation risk weakening accountability, transparency and public trust.

We emphasise that active subsidiarity, multilevel governance and the partnership principle are obligations, not options. The effective involvement of regional and local authorities is essential for democratic legitimacy, better delivery of lasting results on the ground, as centralisation has shown all its limits.

We stress that the participation of subnational levels of government must be ensured, with strong and binding legislative safeguards in the preparation of the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs), so that regional and local authorities are genuinely included in their design, programming and implementation. We also advocate mandatory territorial chapters, at least one per Member State, and a subsidiarity clause empowering the European Commission to reject plans that are overly centralised.

We therefore call on the Council and the national governments to ensure the early and meaningful involvement of regions and cities in shaping the next MFF. We urge the European institutions to conclude negotiations on the MFF by the end of 2026 to avoid delays at the start of the new programming period.

Delivering Europe together means recognising regions and cities as co-architects of Europe's future. Only clear political guidance, strong democratic oversight and genuine territorial ownership will ensure that the EU budget delivers real results for citizens and strengthens Europe's unity and resilience.
