



CPMR regions charting the future of the European project

The European Union and the world have entered a crucial political and economic phase due to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency, the invasion of Ukraine, and the spike in the price of raw materials, food and energy.

Several global trends are having worrying impacts on territorial cohesion. Their effect varies from region to region, as well as within regions. Therefore, place-based policies will become even more important as will the need to better consider diversity and tailored solutions when it comes to specific territorial needs or advantages. This calls for the active involvement of regional authorities, which are the backbone of a real place-based approach.

Many of the maritime and peripheral regions that make up the CPMR are on the frontline at the EU's external borders, exposed to geopolitical risks, but also to risks related to flooding or erosion in the short term, and are faced with more complex issues regarding decarbonisation of transport. But at the same time, they represent a real potential for developing MREs and decarbonising maritime transport, indirectly benefiting the whole of Europe, or for increasing Europe's food security.

In the face of a volatile geopolitical environment on the European continent, it is vital to keep building a European project based on equality, peace and stability. The potential enlargement of the EU to the Western Balkans and Eastern countries constitutes an opportunity in this regard, but also a challenge. Candidate countries should be supported in their transformation process towards fulfilling the conditions for membership. At the same time, some specific areas such as the Arctic are emerging as strategic and should be followed by enhanced EU involvement in multilevel cooperation. Given the current geopolitical and security situation in Europe, we urgently need to ensure that our critical infrastructure (energy, transport, undersea cables, space, and digital infrastructure) is secure and resilient for the people. We need to enhance preparedness, response and regional cross-border co-operation. Finally, links with the countries of the Mediterranean basin should continue to be strengthened, reinforcing a realistic and effective European Neighbourhood Policy that ensures the security, stability and prosperity of its neighbourhood.

The convergence between the objectives of EU policies and the Sustainable Development Goals could constitute a great opportunity for regional authorities to influence the design of the future EU legislative framework by capitalising on their existing territorial policies and strategies.

The post-pandemic world requires new models of development, ways of doing and living. The EU needs to adapt its policies rapidly by boosting the green and digital transitions while providing the legislative and financial conditions to support the new reindustrialisation of Europe as well as its food and energy security. The Green Deal with the “Fit for 55 package” and “RepowerEU” could be the high climate, social and economy ambition needed, given that these initiatives are adapted and implemented through a multilevel governance and a place-based approach. This approach should consider both the specific assets and the different vulnerabilities, e.g. territorial discontinuity or low population density, of all EU, candidate and potential candidate countries’ territories. Besides, regions do have relevant competences in these matters, sometimes even with legislative powers, which make them key interlocutors providing democratic legitimacy and good governance for sound policy implementation. They can also be proactive in implementing international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals approach in public policies, where the regional and local scale are much more efficient.

The EU is thus at a complex and evolutive juncture where strong political actions could be taken, including the possible modification of the Treaties. At the same time, the CPMR believes that any change in the direction of the EU project and legislative framework cannot be made without the active involvement of regional authorities.

The global context will also have an influence on the EU’s strategy and its investment policy via its Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The CPMR is therefore acknowledging this complex situation and is positioning itself as a force for proposals. The CPMR does not wish to see any region left behind, for instance due to their lack of involvement in the policy-making processes, especially in a changing global context where it is difficult to predict how they will develop. The history of the European Union has shown that the EU project needs to be strengthened to address common challenges, including defending EU values and way of life, especially when it comes to addressing economic, social and environmental crises. The CPMR regions gathered in Crete for the General Assembly strongly believe that the answer to the challenges we face, at all levels, is more European cooperation, not less, and a political project that puts people first and regions at the core.

I. DO NO HARM TO COHESION, EMPOWER THE REGIONS

Regarding the “do no harm to cohesion” principle, the CPMR:

1. **Believes** paramount that all EU policies should contribute to the cohesion of the Union in order not only to secure their efficient and fair implementation by avoiding dysfunctions, but also to help ensure their acceptance and ownership.
2. **Welcomes** the idea of the “do no harm to cohesion” principle introduced into the 8th Cohesion report and believes that this concept is full of promises.
3. **Sees** clear shortcomings in the application of the “do no significant harm” (to environment) principle, since a one-size-fits-all approach in its implementation can lead to imbalances. The CPMR therefore **invites** the European Commission (EC) to further define this concept and set clear and strong criteria for checking that it is respected across all EU policies.
4. **Regrets** that recently proposed legislation falls short of properly addressing the diversity of challenges and opportunities European regions feature, ignoring or minimising their regional impact, resulting in territorially blind legislation. **The CPMR notes**, for instance, a lack of consideration for the Union’s cohesion in several elements of the Fit for 55 Package, resulting in a poor ex-ante territorial impact assessment that fails to anticipate negative consequences on regional accessibility, especially for those territories heavily depending on transport, such as peripheral, outermost, northern sparsely populated areas and insular regions.
5. **Recalls** that regional disparities across Europe remain pronounced and can likely increase due to the economic, climate, energy and food crises. This poses a threat to both the good functioning of the single market and the support to the European project and democratic institutions. These crises, which are having an impact today, will worsen in the coming decades, affecting future generations.
6. **Demands** that the European Commission takes greater account of the economic, social and geographical diversity of EU territories when designing its policies as requested by the European Parliament in different reports¹. **Calls** on the Commission therefore to apply a systematic territorial proofing of its policies to ensure that the “do no harm to cohesion” principle is respected.
7. **Suggests** that “do not harm to cohesion” should be defined as follows: EU policies should be designed with a territorial dimension and demonstrate that their implementation does not hinder the Union's cohesion, while respecting that the diversity of its regions is fully taken into account. This principle should be firmly anchored in future EU legislation. In line with the “do not harm to cohesion” principle, the existing Territorial Agenda and Rural Pact, and the proposed EU Islands Pact are examples that prove to what extent territorial specificities and vulnerabilities could be taken into account in EU policies.
8. **Urges** the Commission to put in place adjustment mechanisms where the application of the principle or an incomplete application thereof have a demonstrated negative impact on specific regions.

Regarding the role of the Regions, the CPMR:

9. **Sees** a tendency to further entrust Member States to plan the implementation of EU policies, while regional authorities play a crucial role in implementing and financing many of them. **Underlines** the contribution of regional and local plans and strategies to achieving EU objectives and implementing policies. **Asks** the Commission therefore to continue entrusting regional authorities in implementing EU-policies, notably the regional and place-based policies.

¹ European Parliament Resolution P9_TA(2022)0225 adopted 07/06/2022



- 10. Notices** that regional and local authorities tend to show a more Europeanised logic than their own Member State, for instance when it comes to developing cross-border cooperation initiatives that bring high EU added value, such as access to cross-border public services, management of natural resources and climate change action, sustainable tourism, transport, to quote a few. Is also **convinced** that well organised multi-level governance schemes can enhance local and regional ownership of EU legislation. In this respect, the CPMR **stresses** the importance of macro-regional strategies to strengthen joint initiatives at the level of territories sharing similar realities and challenges. The creation of new macro-regional strategies should therefore be encouraged.
- 11. Demands**, in light of the above and to ensure multi-level governance, that regional authorities be properly involved in the governance and design of relevant legislation rather than playing a simple role of barely consulted observer. Their involvement early in the legislative process helps to achieve better EU legislations by anticipating potential implementation challenges, building on territorial experiences, hence smoothening legislative adaptation at regional and local scale, and ensuring a stronger coherence between the different levels of public authorities involved. For example, the CPMR **calls** on the European Commission to involve directly the Regions in the discussions on the future of cohesion policy.
- 12. Demands** the re-design of the current European Semester framework to guarantee the full involvement of regional authorities, as the framework has evolved to include the monitoring and coordination of shared management policies and policies with strong territorial impact. The European Semester coordination dialogue should not be limited between the European Commission and the Member States in light of the principle of subsidiarity.

II. TOWARDS A NEW AND RESILIENT POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR EU INVESTMENTS BEYOND 2027 MOBILISING THE FULL POTENTIAL OF PERIPHERAL MARITIME REGIONS

Regarding the EU's future financial framework, the CPMR:

- 13. Considers** it is crucial to give regional authorities a prominent role in the debate. In the event the EC plans a major reform of the MFF, the CPMR regions will stand ready to exert influence on this process of change rather than resist it.
- 14. Calls** on the EC to centre its preparatory work on the future MFF around three main goals: 1) achieving simplification, including via a rationalisation and improved coordination of funds; 2) strengthening the place-based orientation of investments; 3) making the budget more responsive to negative shocks via dedicated flexibility instruments, without harming cohesion policy or compromising regional involvement. These three principles should be already reflected, where possible, in the mid-term review of the current MFF.
- 15. Urges** the establishment, under the post-27 MFF, of a *common investment policy* governed by a common legal and long-term strategic framework and with cohesion policy as its centrepiece. The current multiplication of funds, and their fragmentation across different legal bases, is producing an untenable burden on regional authorities in charge of implementation. It also deters potential beneficiaries from applying for funding as they are often lost in the face of this babel of procedures and instruments. Ultimately, it may undermine the impact of investments and lower the EU's capacity to help address territorial challenges. It is important to simplify the architecture of the funding instruments and avoid the multiplication of funds in the future without reducing the overall amount of resources allocated to cohesion policy.

- 16. Notes** that the Recovery and Resilience Facility has represented a watershed for EU finances on many accounts and is likely to influence the shape of future investment instruments, including cohesion policy. The CPMR **recognises** the lack of regional involvement and the limited territorial dimension of the RRF. When designing any future investment instruments, it is crucial to include regional authorities as co-creators.
- 17. Regrets** that the principle of additionality, whereby EU funds shall not replace national investments but be additional to them, has been discontinued under the 2021-2027 cohesion policy legislation and does not apply to the RRF. The CPMR **is concerned** that this could contribute, at least in some Member States, to a further decrease of national funds for territorial development and the deployment of EU resources to plug the resulting gap.
- 18. Calls** on the Council to respect the commitment made in the Interinstitutional Agreement on the MFF to work alongside the European Parliament towards introducing new own resources. A revamp of the revenue side of the MFF, by reducing the share of Gross National Income (GNI)-based contributions and therefore diminishing the influence of national interests over the MFF, could help strengthen both the EU added value and the territorial orientation of the EU budget.²
- 19. Believes** that synergies and interoperability across funds will have to be strengthened, including by scaling up or mainstreaming innovative frameworks piloted in this period, such as single investment strategies at regional level encompassing all EU funds and Horizon Europe missions. It also **suggests** strengthening the role of local and regional authorities in the management and implementation of European funds, and seeking a deeper involvement of civil society organisations, in coordination with the Member States and the European institutions.
- 20. Considers** it therefore paramount to give adequate means to funds under shared management such as cohesion policy, rural development and maritime, fishery and aquaculture funds in the future budgetary framework. These funds should also provide for enough flexibility to engage with non-EU regions, building upon existing provisions in this regard.
- 21. Stresses** that the repayment of the NextGenerationEU borrowing should not have an impact on the size of the future MFF, and in particular on the envelopes of shared management funds.
- 22. Opposes** the nationalisation of policies observed both through the National Strategic Plans for Agriculture and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. It **believes** that this is a miscalculation for the effectiveness of public policies. In concrete terms, it disconnects investment decisions from the territories and does not guarantee coherence with regional strategies, particularly for the mobilisation of funds under shared management. In this respect, it **urges** the European Commission to encourage the involvement of regional and local government in more effective and cross-cutting multilevel governance.
- 23. Proposes**, in order to make progress on in-depth simplification, that the European Commission should organise a complementary working group bringing together all the links in the chain, from the beneficiary to all those involved in monitoring, including of course the regional managing authorities.
- 24. Calls** for greater harmonisation of the rules between directly managed funds and shared management funds, including with regard to state aid. Only such an approach will enable the principle of synergies between funds to be put into practice.

² Note: the regions within the Swedish delegation of the CPMR exercised their right to opt out of the vote on point 18 of the present Final Declaration.



III. CALLING FOR SWIFT ACTION IN SUPPORT OF A JUST TRANSITION TOWARDS CLIMATE-NEUTRALITY IN 2050

25. **Welcomes** the ambition of the REPowerEU plan to accelerate the roll-out of fossil-free energies to support the transition towards climate-neutrality in 2050 and improve Europe's security of energy supply.
26. Nevertheless, **expresses some concern** about the financing and governance aspects of the plan. It believes the REPowerEU plan is an important step towards an energy independent Union and an opportunity that cannot be missed to make sure that Europe's energy transition is place-based and anchored in the territories. Thus, the CPMR **calls** for a full involvement of regional authorities in the design and implementation of the REPowerEU plans.
27. **Believes** it is urgent that Europe becomes self-sufficient in raw materials, which is crucial for the green transition. To a large extent these materials can be found in Europe's peripheral maritime regions. Therefore, the CPMR **stresses** the importance of a multi-level approach to secure the supply chains, from sustainable extraction to reliable transport in close cooperation with these Regions.
28. **Calls** on the European Union to pay close attention to the situation of the regions, which are facing new budgetary equations that could have consequences for the public services provided to European citizens. At the same time, they must anticipate investments in transitions (mobility, renovation, etc.) and face an explosion in energy costs.
29. **Believes**, following the example of the Brexit Adjustment Reserve, which introduced an allocation criterion targeting maritime regions, that this type of criterion should also be used to provide better support for adapting to climate change in territories where more than 60% of Europe's population is concentrated, as well as for the transition of port infrastructures, which will facilitate the transition of maritime transport, which accounts for more than 80% of world trade.
30. **Believes** that in the current energy context, the European Commission should urgently do everything possible to enable the fisheries sector, which is currently being left behind, to make the energy transition. A plan to accelerate the transition of the fisheries sector, including the removal of regulatory obstacles, should be collectively developed as of 2023, failing which the taxation on energy within this sector will doubly penalise it and amount to a message of political abandonment. This sector is already heavily penalised by seafood imports, which account for over 70% of products consumed in Europe. In this respect, the CPMR **recalls** that these imports do not guarantee a level of sustainability comparable to the one provided by the Common Fisheries Policy and expose us to food insecurity. Consequently, the CPMR **calls** for the introduction of a European objective to reduce dependence on external imports of seafood products.
31. **Calls** on the European Commission and Member States to speed up and simplify the permitting processes related to production of fossil-free energy (e.g. offshore renewable energies, green hydrogen), and to facilitate the development of the required skills, as clean energy can have a fundamental strategic and decarbonising role.
32. **Underlines** that reaching the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal will require an efficient and interoperable TEN-T that ensures seamless connectivity in Europe.
33. **Calls** on the European Commission to take the opportunity of the mid-term review of the current MFF to increase support to the implementation of the TEN-T, especially when its new version will enter into force in 2024, and to lead a bold reflection on solutions for the future financing of the EU budget, leaving no stone unturned.



IV. SOLIDARITY AT THE CORE OF THE EUROPEAN PROJECT

Regarding solidarity as a fundamental European principle and value, the CPMR:

- 34. Recalls** that according to [Article 3](#) of the Treaty on European Union, solidarity among Member States should be promoted alongside social, economic and territorial cohesion.
- 35. Believes** that a strong Europe cannot be built without a concrete expression of this solidarity, and that in the face of internal and external challenges that are shaking Europe's stability, it should be the basis on which to develop common solutions and responses. In this regard it **believes** that the 2030 Agenda provides a useful overarching framework to support international cooperation and sustainable development. In the same spirit of solidarity, increasing and strengthening cooperation especially with pre-accession countries, in relation to the *acquis communautaire* and the many opportunities it offers at all levels of government, including EU cooperation programmes, can play a leading role in strengthening Europe's stability and maintaining its peace.
- 36. Recalls** in this regard the united approach that allowed the EU to ensure a rapid and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and a recovery package for all its territories to cope with the fall-out.
- 37. Welcomes** as a shining example the wave of solidarity seen at the European level from the EU institutions, countries, regional and local authorities down to the citizens on the ground in support of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people following the unjustified and unprovoked attack by Russia. The CPMR **firmly condemns** the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation and supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. The CPMR **stands** with Ukraine and its people. The CPMR **reiterates** that its member regions are providing a key contribution to solidarity efforts in the wake of the Ukraine war, by providing humanitarian aid and receiving and ensuring the integration and inclusion of refugees, while also assisting their own businesses and citizens to cope with the economic effects induced by the war.
- 38. Regrets**, in contrast, that it is precisely a lack of solidarity that has led to a deadlock on a key piece of EU legislation, the Migration and Asylum Pact, which has prevented Member States from agreeing on a more sustainable, organised, multilevel and humane policy at the European level. It therefore **hopes** that the united response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis with the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive represents a breakthrough for the future, showing that such solidarity mechanisms can be implemented when there is political will. In the future, the EU should do more to ensure a fair, non-discriminatory and equal treatment of all beneficiaries of international protection and vulnerable migrants, strengthening the role of regions in EU migration policy as key actors in multi-level governance and integration and inclusion of migrants.
- 39. Warns** that challenges in this area are only set to become greater, as the world faces the risk of escalating conflicts, climate disasters, water and energy insecurity, famine and extreme poverty pushing people to move from their homelands and seek refuge. A gender approach of those risks is necessary as their impacts intersect with structural gender inequities and gender-based violence. Immobility or lack of long-term vision at European Union and Member State level would directly impact the regions as they continue to bear the brunt of failed EU policy, lack of solidarity, disinformation and inadequate resources to deal with the migration phenomena.
- 40. Highlights** that decentralised cooperation is an expression of solidarity on the ground that must be encouraged and developed through dedicated EU programmes and funding. It plays a crucial role within Europe, its neighbourhood and beyond. At operational level, it allows sharing and transfer of knowhow and experiences, and the boosting of capacities. At democratic level, it contributes towards achieving more successful decentralisation and multi-level governance processes. As a key illustration, regions, together with municipalities and other key players, are engaging in such peer-to-peer cooperation in view of Ukraine's reconstruction and future accession.



- 41. Proposes** that the decentralised cooperation promoted through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) be transversal to all relevant EU policies, considering at the same time their respective external dimensions and adapting them to specific diplomatic and geopolitical situations. This would allow the ENP to be an even more important vector for EU policy implementation with the EU's neighbours, involve more regional and local authorities and serve to better anticipate the impacts of crises.

V. REFLECTIONS IN VIEW OF A EUROPEAN CONVENTION TO AMEND THE EU TREATIES

Regarding the future of Europe, the CPMR:

- 42. Stresses** that the “Conference on the Future of Europe - (CoFE)” has launched an important debate among European Institutions, national governments, regional and local authorities, citizens, social partners and civil society. It considers that the conclusions as endorsed by the Conference’s plenary on 30 April 2022 provide the preconditions to move forward with the reflection on the European project. It **draws the attention** of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission to their own responsibility to live up to the expectations that have been created by the CoFE.
- 43. Highlights** that to address the current geopolitical, social, climate, energy, economic, and food security challenges, the EU requires rapid and firm political action that could lead to some Treaty changes. Hence, **observes** that, in line with the Conference’s plenary and the European Parliament’s proposal to convene a Convention, the ordinary procedure of Art. 48 of the Treaty of the European Union could be triggered. If it will be the case, the CPMR **calls upon** Member States, the European Parliament and the European Commission to fully involve regional and local authorities in its preparatory work and implementation.
- 44. Believes**, in this potential scenario, that the proposed amendments to be submitted to the Convention should go beyond dealing with topics such as simplifying the EU institutional architecture and improving transparency and accountability in the decision-making process. In this regard, **it specifically demands to consider**:
- to add “do no harm to cohesion” as a new guiding principle of next generation policies aiming to enhance the EU’s sustainable development;
 - a new objective to strengthen “climate cohesion”, in such a manner that no EU region gets left behind due to its vulnerability to climate change;
 - to extend to the “do no harm to cohesion” principle the scope of the “[Early Warning System](#)”, according to which national parliaments can request the revision of a Commission’s proposal if they deem it breaches the subsidiarity principles. The system should also be triggered by regional governments along with regional parliaments that can be already consulted by national parliaments;
 - to reflect on the possibility to embed in the Treaties a clear definition of multilevel governance so that EU policies can better consider it.

Adopted unanimously, Agios Nikolaos (Crete, GR), 28 October 2022



This political declaration seeks to demonstrate the potential and the added value that the CPMR and its member regions could provide to chart a brighter future for the European project, and in this way be considered by EU Institutions, a priori, as a solid partner in any possible scenario and configuration. This document includes key questions, reflections, commitments and recommendations that will inform the EU policy debate and continue to evolve in view of the next CPMR General Assembly in 2023, when the organisation will celebrate its 50 years of existence and deliver its manifesto and consolidated proposals to the new EU Institutions.

***CPMR Regions call on the European Institutions to consider
the highlights of this Final Declaration to inspire
the discussion on the future of the European project:***

- 1. In case a Convention for the modification of the EU Treaties is convened, regional and local authorities should play a key role in its preparatory work and implementation.*
- 2. The reflections on the possible reform should consider including a clear definition of “do no harm to cohesion” in the EU Treaties as a principle to be respected across all EU policies and embedded in relevant EU legislation. Ensure in this way that the new generation of policies is fully shaped on a place based and multilevel governance approach.*
- 3. Tackle energy security, energy poverty and the climate crisis at the same time, by supporting a green, sustainable, territorially balanced and socially fair energy transition, harnessing fully the potential of the transport and maritime sector to a climate neutral future.*
- 4. Maintain solidarity at the core of the European project and include “climate cohesion” as an additional key objective, so that no EU region gets left behind due to its vulnerability to climate change.*
- 5. Foresee a single EU investment policy beyond 2027, governed by a common legal and strategic framework and with cohesion policy as its centrepiece. Ensure adequate means, and flexibility to engage with non-EU regions, especially for funds under shared management, to harness the full potential of peripheral maritime regions.*



The Peripheral Maritime Regions listed below met for the 50th CPMR Annual General Assembly in Agios Nikolaos (Crete, Greece) on 27-28 October 2022:

ABERDEENSHIRE (UK), AÇORES (PT), AJARA (GE), ALENTEJO (PT), ANDALUCIA(ES), AGDER (NO), BALEARES (ES), BRETAGNE (FR), CALABRIA (IT), CALARASI (RO), CATALUNYA (ES), CYPRUS, DYTIKI ELLADA (EL), EMILIA ROMAGNA (IT), FLEVOLAND (NL), GALICIA (ES), GENERALITAT VALENCIANA (ES), GOTLAND (SE), GOZO (MT), HELSINKI-UUSIMAA (FI), IONIA NISIA (EL), KENTRIKI MAKEDONIA (EL)*, KRITI (EL), KYMENLAAKSO (FI), LISBOA E VALE DO TEJO (PT)), MADEIRA (PT), MAYOTTE (FR), MIDTJYLLAND (DK), MØRE OG ROMSDAL (NO), MURCIA (ES), NAVARRA (ES), NOORD-HOLLAND (NL), NORDJYLLAND (DK), NORRBOTTEN (SE), NORTE (PT), NORTHERN & WESTERN REGIONALASSEMBLY (IE), NOUVELLE AQUITAINE (FR), OCCITANIE (FR), ÖSTERGÖTLAND (SE), OSTROBOTHNIA (FI), OULU (FI), PAIS VASCO (ES), PAYS DE LA LOIRE (FR), REGION SUD (PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR, FR), ROGALAND (NO), SAINT-MARTIN (FR), SKÅNE (SE), SOUTH-WEST FINLAND (FI), STOCKHOLM (SE), TOSCANA (IT), TRØNDELAG (NO), TULCEA (RO), VÄRMLAND (SE), VÄSTERBOTTEN (SE), VÄSTRA GÖTALAND (SE), VESTLAND (NO), VESTFOLD OG TELEMARK (NO), VIKEN (NO), VOREIO AIGAIIO (EL), WALES (UK), WEST-VLAANDEREN (BE), ZUID- HOLLAND (NL)

*OBSERVER

