

# Declaration of the 10<sup>th</sup> European Summit of Regions and Cities

19<sup>th</sup> March 2024 - Mons, Belgium

## REGIONS AND CITIES HAVE THE POWER TO DELIVER A STRONGER, FAIRER AND MORE RESILIENT FUTURE FOR EUROPE

Across the European Union, we are more than one million locally and regionally elected representatives who devote our time to improving the daily lives of citizens. On the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Committee of the Regions, we have gathered here for the 10<sup>th</sup> European Summit of Regions and Cities to reaffirm our commitment to delivering a stronger, fairer and more resilient Europe.

Regions and cities implement more than 70% of EU legislation, while already delivering at national level. Citizens entrust us with the collective management of an annual budget of more than EUR 3 trillion for the purpose of delivering public services, as well as with more than half of all public investment in the Union. Yet the demands on sub-national authorities continue to grow. The climate crisis, the digital transition, social inequalities, demographic change and migration, combined with rising geopolitical tensions, are putting considerable pressure on our resources for providing responses to citizens' concerns.

In 2024, the biggest election year to be recorded in history, hundreds of millions of citizens will cast their ballot in the European Parliament elections, alongside numerous local, regional and national elections. This is why we have come together with a vision for a stronger, fairer and more resilient future for Europe, with regions and cities as its beating heart.

## WE ARE CALLING FOR:

- 1** Ambitious public investments, fit for purpose and supported by increased budgetary capacity, exploring new EU own resources, in order to respond to common challenges. Such investments should be guided by the EU Treaty's objective of economic, social and territorial cohesion, applying the "do no harm to cohesion" principle to all policies. Cohesion policy must remain a cornerstone of the European project and the main, most visible EU investment tool for long-term innovative transformation and solidarity, while strengthening the Single Market and the overall competitiveness of the EU in the world.
- 2** Renewed commitment to the European Green Deal as the compass of the European Union, which builds on lessons learnt, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, to achieve climate neutrality, preserve and restore biodiversity, ensure prosperity and support sustainable economic development. It should be based on multi-level governance and should empower local and regional authorities, including through direct funds for cities and regions to co-create innovative solutions needed in helping them respond to the impact of the climate crisis.
- 3** Policies that ensure equal opportunities so as to leave no places or people behind. The diversity of all territorial realities, such as rural and urban areas, farmlands and industrial centres, outermost regions, and islands, as well as sparsely populated areas, must be factored into all EU policies. Local and regional best practices will be key in combating poverty, providing quality jobs and social services, fostering innovation, and managing integration and inclusion, as well as supporting gender equality, youth participation and intergenerational fairness.
- 4** A forward-looking approach to the future of the European Union, involving local and regional authorities in the preparation of EU reforms and enlargement, in particular with regard to the impact on governance and policies such as cohesion and common agricultural policies. Preparing enlargement with all candidate countries should build on the partnership principle, multi-level governance and decentralisation. On Ukraine, solidarity and support should continue to guide the action of the European Union, as long as it takes. The European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine should play a key role in the reconstruction process.
- 5** The reinforcement of the local and regional dimension of European democracy. The European Committee of the Regions must be entrusted with a stronger role in the EU institutional architecture and legislative process, in particular for policies with territorial dimension, as the legitimate political assembly of local and regional representatives. Multilevel governance and active subsidiarity must be central principles in any future EU reform. New participatory mechanisms should be further explored, building on successful practices already in place.

Regions and cities must be heard when the next Strategic Agenda of the European Union, as well as the next political priorities of the European Commission, are being formulated. We call on European leaders to do more to ensure that all EU policies are anchored in the local and regional level, thus reinforcing the democratic legitimacy and efficiency of these policies. We must work together at all levels, where a real difference can be made, be it at European Union, national, regional or local levels. Together, regions and cities have the power to deliver a stronger, fairer and more resilient Europe.