



Brussels Declaration for European Territorial Cohesion

Europe is a continent with a very asymmetric population density, very low birth and death rates, a stalled economic growth, an accelerating aging process and less dynamism in the agricultural areas. Urban dwellers represent 40% of its population, 28% of its inhabitants live in rural areas and the rest in intermediate - Peri- Urban areas.

Any strategy aimed at giving structure to the territories of the European Union must take this reality into account by integrating a rural dimension in urban life and an urban dimension in rural life, so that no area is left behind. Taking into consideration the diverse nature of these areas when allocating European funds will avoid focusing exclusively on urban areas, thus allowing for a more sustainable and equitable growth.

Cohesion policies and regional investment programmes implemented in the European Union beyond 2020 should be more flexible and inclusive, maintaining the basic structure - of developed, in transition and less developed regions - which has so far proven efficient, but striving to reach a greater involvement of civil society in its implementation, to cut down bureaucratic hurdles, to promote the digitalisation of administrative procedures and to increase territorial cooperation between urban and rural areas as well as between coastal and mountainous areas.

The Committee of the Regions has declared itself in favour of such evolutions of these policies and programmes on numerous occasions. Their dedicated funds must constantly adapt to the new social and cohesion challenges in alignment with the goals of the European Commission, such as the struggle against exclusion, protecting the environment and increasing the conception and implementation of innovative policies.

For all the aforementioned reasons, we believe that Local Intermediate Governments, as structuring elements that link together the strength of municipalities, are the most adequate organisations to guarantee equal opportunities between urban and rural areas, to strive towards greater territorial cohesion and to tackle future challenges related to these issues.

Local Intermediate Governments are best suited to embody the territorial reality of the European Union by maintaining a balance between the proximity with the citizens and the necessary administrative capacity to deal with the implementation of funds and with rural depopulation.

Furthermore, Local Intermediate Governments have integrated transparency, open government, the interaction with citizens and their participation as defining features of their governance and as key instruments for better policies. Our administrations must have a leading role in the implementation of environmental policies by generating an ecosystem that fosters the

collaboration between the private and the public sectors and by allying with businessmen and companies without giving up the idea of leading this process in our territories.

That is why the members of the European Association of Local Intermediate Governments PARTENALIA AISBL call on the European Commission to:

- **Integrate Local Intermediate Authorities as relevant actors in the management and implementation of regional development funds**, as administrations which represent the territorial disparity of the European Union and which are on the front line of the struggle against depopulation and for the maintenance of basic public services in rural areas.

The undersigned members of this joint declaration agree with these recommendations for the conception of the future Cohesion funds and are prepared to intensify their cooperation with the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions in order to achieve a more integrated policy in phase with the territorial disparity of the Union.

