The President

Ms Ursula von der Leyen
President
European Commission

Brussels, 10 July 2026

<u>Re</u>: Safeguarding the territorial dimension of the European Commission and preserving a strong role for DG REGIO

Dear President,

On behalf of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the first and largest association representing European local and regional governments, I am writing to express our deep concern regarding persistent media reports about a possible restructuring of the European Commission's Directorates-General and in particular about a possible reduction of its role and capacities of DG REGIO.

CEMR shares and reinforces the concerns already expressed by the Conference of Presidents of the European Committee of the Regions in its letter of 19 May 2026. Given the importance of this matter for Europe's local and regional governments, we would respectfully welcome official clarification from the Commission on the plans under consideration, particularly regarding the future of DG REGIO, which has been our primary interlocutor within the European Commission for decades.

From our perspective, a strong Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy is indispensable for the success of cohesion policy and the effective management of EU investment instruments. DG REGIO provides the Commission with the expertise, administrative capacity and territorial knowledge needed to oversee the implementation of European Structural and Investment Funds, ensure sound financial management, and maintain direct dialogue with the local and regional governments responsible for delivering EU policies on the ground. It is also the Commission's key interface with Europe's cities, towns and regions, ensuring that territorial realities are reflected in European policymaking.

A strong link with local and regional governments will become even more important in the context of the Commission's proposal for National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) for the post-2027 period. While the proposal encourages Member States to preserve functioning management arrangements, the success of this approach will depend on maintaining the expertise and capacity of existing Managing Authorities, many of which have developed over decades the technical knowledge, institutional memory and partnership culture required to manage EU funds effectively.

At the same time, the Commission has proposed additional national coordination arrangements while indicating that Commission services should continue to maintain direct contact with Managing Authorities, including where these are regional or local governments. For this commitment to remain meaningful, the Commission must retain sufficient administrative and human resources to ensure effective dialogue, oversight and partnership. Without such capacity, the principle of partnership risks becoming merely formal.

DG REGIO also plays a crucial role in ensuring the structured dialogue with partners involved in the implementation of EU funds. This allows the Commission to receive direct feedback on how programmes perform on the ground and to adapt implementation where necessary. Preserving these channels is essential to ensuring that European investment responds to territorial needs and delivers tangible results for citizens.

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Should DG REGIO be substantially weakened or its role reduced, this would send a profoundly negative political message to Europe's local and and regional governments: that they no longer have a central place in the Union's institutional architecture. It would weaken the ambition of a Europe of territories and move towards a model increasingly disconnected from the level of government closest to citizens.

At the same time, any reorganisation of the Commission could also be an opportunity to strengthen the territorial dimension of European policymaking. Local and regional governments implement up to 70% of EU legislation and are indispensable to the Union's effectiveness, democratic legitimacy and capacity to deliver. CEMR therefore believes that any future organisational model should include a fully-fledged Directorate-General dedicated to territorial development and cohesion, as well as strong territorial units within relevant sectoral Directorates-General, so that the territorial impact of EU policies and funding is systematically assessed and addressed.

This is particularly important as the Commission has advanced several territorial initiatives in 2026, including the first-ever EU strategies for islands and coastal communities, work on the EU's eastern regions bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, and initiatives concerning the outermost regions. The mandate of Executive Vice-President Raffaele Fitto also explicitly includes cohesion policy, regional development, cities, islands, outermost regions and the objective of securing an "effective right to stay". Delivering on these ambitions requires the appropriate administrative capacity and a clear institutional home within the Commission.

In this regard, we would appreciate the opportunity for a meeting with you and the relevant members of the College to discuss:

• How the Commission intends to implement its territorial strategies and initiatives in the context of an internal reorganisation;

• How the Commission intends to maintain direct contact with local and regional governments in programming and implementation of the NRPPs to ensure the full application of the principles of partnership and multilevel-governments;

• What vision and political ambition the Commission has for a Europe of local and regional authorities, and how it intends to preserve its credibility in this regard should DG REGIO be substantially weakened or its role significantly reduced.

Europe needs an administration that reflects how Europe works: through partnership, multilevel governance and territorial responsibility. The Commission should not weaken the structures that make this possible. On the contrary, it should send a strong signal that Europe remains committed to cohesion, proximity and trust.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Christoph Schnaudigel
President of the County of Karlsruhe

c.c.:

Mr Raffaele Fitto, Executive Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms
Mr Piotr Serafin, Commissioner for Budget, Anti-Fraud and Public Administration
Ms Ilze Juhansone, Secretary General of the European Commission