Building Europe from the ground up: 75 years of CEMR

4 November 2026 | 4-7 pm | 1 Square de Meeûs, Brussels (CEMR, 1st floor) | Register here

On 28 January 1951, in the aftermath of the Second World War, visionary European mayors gathered in Geneva with a shared conviction: that rebuilding Europe would begin in its towns, cities and regions. Their commitment gave birth to the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the first transnational organisation in Europe, and in the world, bringing together mayors and local leaders around a common vision of peace, democracy and European cooperation. Seventy-five years later, that vision remains as important as ever.

Over the decades, CEMR has grown into the largest and broadest organisation representing local and regional governments in Europe. Together with its members, it has championed local democracy, supported local self-government, defended human rights and territorial cohesion, while ensuring that local and regional governments have a voice in shaping European policies and global debates.

Through periods of reconstruction, integration, enlargement and transformation, CEMR has consistently defended a simple but powerful principle: Europe is built from the ground up, and local democracy is one of the foundations of the European project.

Today, Europe once again stands at a turning point. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, growing geopolitical tensions, climate change, artificial intelligence, demographic shifts, declining trust in democratic institutions, pressures on competitiveness and social cohesion, or the housing crisis are reshaping Europe's political agenda. While these challenges are global and European in nature, their success or failure will ultimately be determined where citizens live: in Europe's towns, cities and regions.

As Europe asks more of local and regional governments than ever before, an important political question emerges: **How should Europe's governance systems evolve to enable local and regional governments to deliver on Europe's future priorities?**

Marking CEMR's 75th anniversary, this high-level political event will bring together leaders from across Europe to reflect on the evolution of local leadership over the past seven decades and to look ahead to the governance challenges of the future. Beyond celebrating a remarkable history, the discussion will explore whether local and regional governments are equipped with the powers, resources and partnerships needed to respond to Europe's most pressing challenges.

The event will also mark the launch of the latest edition of **TERRI 2026 Report**, CEMR's flagship publication on territorial governance, local and regional government powers, and territorial reforms in Europe. Published every five years, TERRI offers a comparative analysis of how territorial governance, reforms and the powers of local and regional governments have evolved across Europe. The 2026 edition focuses on **housing**, providing a timely case study through which to explore whether Europe's governance framework equips local and regional governments with the powers, resources and partnerships needed to address Europe's housing emergency.

Rather than treating housing as a standalone policy issue, the discussion will use it as a case study to explore **whether Europe's governance systems are fit to address increasingly complex challenges and to deliver on citizens' expectations**.

Objectives

- Celebrate 75 years of CEMR and its contribution to European integration, local democracy and multilevel governance.
- Reflect on the changing role of local and regional governments in an increasingly complex geopolitical context.
- Launch the 2026 edition of TERRI and present its key findings.
- Foster a high-level political discussion on how Europe's governance systems should evolve to empower local and regional governments to deliver on Europe's future priorities.
- Use housing as a practical illustration of the governance, investment and cooperation challenges facing Europe's territories.

The session will be moderated by journalist **Esther Herrera**, EU Correspondent for France 24.

Agenda

4 – 4.30 pm | Opening session

What Europe are we building, and how has this vision evolved over the past 75 years?

The opening session will set the political context and will reflect on how Europe's ambitions and challenges have evolved over the past 75 years, what this means for the future of the European project and what is now required from all levels of government. From geopolitical tensions and democratic pressures to demographic change, climate resilience, competitiveness and territorial cohesion, the discussion will explore the forces shaping Europe's future and the role of territories in responding to them.

- Opening remarks: **Christoph Schnaudigel**, CEMR President and President of the County of Karlsruhe.

- Keynote Address - **Europe at a crossroads: Governance, Territory and the Challenges ahead.** Speaker ,TBC

Moderated Q&A and reactions from the audience.

4.30 – 5.30 pm | Political discussion

What do local and regional governments need to deliver Europe's ambitions?

The second session will examine whether Europe's governance systems are equipped to deliver on its ambitions and respond to increasingly complex challenges. Drawing on the findings of the 2026 edition of TERRI Report, the discussion will explore how responsibilities, competences, resources and capacities are distributed across levels of government, and whether local and regional governments have the means to fulfil their growing role. It will examine how territorial governance and multilevel cooperation need to evolve to strengthen Europe's ability to translate policy ambitions into effective delivery on the ground.

Presentation of the TERRI 2026 Report: **Carol Thomas**, CEMR Senior Policy Adviser

Political panel:

- **Declan Costello**, Director-General, SG REFORM, European Commission
- **Violete Crudu**, Vice-President of the Association of Moldovan Municipalities (CALM), Mayor of Cruzești, Moldova
- Elected representative from Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities, VVSG, Belgium, TBC
- **Beatrice Taulegne**, Director for Legislative Work 1, European Committee of the Regions, TBC

Expert reflections

- **Karen E. Maguire**, Senior Counsellor, Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- **Thomas Prorok**, Managing Director, KDZ-Centre for Public Administration Research, TBC

5.30 – 6 pm | Offering answers: three voices, six questions

Housing: A test of Europe's governance model

The final session will put these governance questions to the test through one of Europe's most pressing challenges: housing.

Drawing on the findings of TERRI Report 2026, the discussion will explore what housing reveals about the strengths and limitations of Europe's territorial governance systems. Rather than looking for a single governance model, it will explore how responsibilities, financing, local flexibility and delivery capacity interact in practice. It will then look at what this interaction means for local and regional governments to respond to housing shortages, affordability pressures, demographic change and sustainability requirements.

The discussion will conclude by drawing broader lessons from housing for how Europe can better govern and deliver on complex challenges.

Speakers offering answers:

- **Christian Lamouline**, President of Brulocalis, Mayor of Berchem-Sainte-Agathe, Belgium
- **Liliana Pimentel**, Mayor of Condeixa-a-Nova, Portugal
- **Francesco Amodeo,** European Commission's Task Force on Housing

6 - 7 pm | CEMR 75th anniversary networking cocktail

Including remarks from former CEMR presidents:

- Gunn Marit Helgesen
- Annemarie Jorristma

More information:

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