CEMR Leaders' Summit / December 2026

Draft agenda

Dates: 10 and 11 December 2026

Venue: Ipogea Conference Hall (tbc), Via Michele Iacobucci 4, L'Aquila, Italy

Interpretation: EN – FR – DE – IT – ES

"Right to Stay": strengthening territories, empowering people

Europe is at a territorial crossroads. Across the continent, growing disparities between places are becoming increasingly visible and politically significant. While some metropolitan areas continue to attract people, investment and opportunities, many rural, peri-urban, inland and mountainous areas, as well as shrinking cities and regions, are facing population decline, ageing and youth outmigration. As people leave, investment and economic activity can decline, businesses and shops close, and municipalities lose revenues and the capacity to maintain essential services. Breaking this cycle must be a political priority if people are to have a genuine choice about where they live, work and build their future.

At the same time, rapidly growing urban areas are under increasing pressure, with housing, mobility, infrastructure and public services struggling to keep pace with demand. These contrasting dynamics point to a common European challenge: ensuring that territorial development does not leave some places behind while putting unsustainable pressure on others.

These challenges are not merely demographic or economic. They raise fundamental questions about territorial justice, equal opportunities and the future of European democracy. A Europe where people's opportunities increasingly depend on where they live risks weakening social cohesion, fuelling discontent and undermining trust in democratic institutions. Addressing territorial disparities is therefore not only a matter of economic development or cohesion policy; it is essential to maintaining a Europe in which every community and every citizen can see a future for themselves.

The "Right to Stay" emerges as a political response to Europe's growing territorial disparities and as a key condition for strengthening territorial resilience, cohesion and democratic vitality. It is not about preventing mobility or limiting people's freedom to move; rather, it is about ensuring that staying is a genuine choice, not a constraint imposed by a lack of opportunities. Everyone, wherever they live, should have access to quality public services, decent and affordable housing, connectivity, education, healthcare, employment opportunities and a healthy environment. Ensuring these conditions across all territories is essential to fostering social cohesion, strengthening trust in institutions and upholding confidence in the European project.

The "Right to Stay" therefore represents a renewed social and territorial contract for Europe. It affirms that no citizen and no territory should be left behind in the green, digital and demographic

1 Square de Meeûs, 1000 Brussels, Belgium
+32 2 511 74 77 | info@ccre-cemr.org | www.ccre-cemr.org

transitions. It calls for investment in local development, strong services of general interest and place-based policies that recognise the diversity of Europe's territories and build on their unique strengths.

This debate is particularly timely as the European Union enters a crucial phase of reflection on its future. Discussions on the future of Cohesion Policy, the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework and Europe's response to demographic change provide an opportunity to place territorial cohesion more firmly at the centre of the European agenda.

Local and regional leaders are calling for a stronger territorial dimension across all EU policies. Cohesion cannot be reduced to an economic objective alone; it must remain a political commitment to solidarity, equal opportunities and balanced territorial development across Europe.

Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) stand at the forefront of this challenge. They are the democratic institutions closest to citizens, responsible for delivering essential services, supporting local economies and strengthening community resilience. Yet they are increasingly asked to do more with fewer resources. Without stronger investment, adequate competences and genuine multi-level governance, the ambition of guaranteeing a "Right to Stay" for all Europeans will remain out of reach.

For CEMR, the "Right to Stay" is ultimately about empowering people through empowered territories. It is about ensuring that local democracy remains vibrant, that communities remain liveable and that citizens can shape their future wherever they choose to live. This is why CEMR actively contributes to the Freedom to Stay Coalition and advocates for placing the "Right to Stay" at the heart of Europe's territorial agenda.

Against this backdrop, the CEMR Leaders' Summit in L'Aquila will provide a high-level political platform to discuss how Europe can make the Right to Stay a reality. Taking place in the closing weeks of the city's year as Italian Capital of Culture 2026, the Summit will draw on L'Aquila's experience of resilience, reconstruction and solidarity. Its historic centre, emptied by the 2009 earthquake and rebuilt over seventeen years, illustrates what it takes to preserve the conditions that allow communities to remain vibrant and people to build their lives locally: sustained investment, quality services, economic opportunities and cooperation across levels of government.

Through political debates, institutional exchanges and study visits, local and regional leaders will consider how European, national and local action can come together to ensure that people are not forced to leave their communities simply because opportunities and services are no longer available.

Summit Outcomes

- Adoption of the CEMR Territorial Vision for Europe, setting out a political message on territorial cohesion, democracy and the Right to Stay.
- Build a shared political commitment among local and regional leaders, European institutions and key stakeholders, about the Right to Stay as a cornerstone of Europe's future.
- Contribute to the debate on the future of Cohesion Policy and post 2027 EU budget, advocating for stronger place-based investments and territorial impact across all EU policies.
- Position Local and Regional Governments as indispensable democratic actors in addressing demographic change, strengthening resilience and ensuring equal opportunities across territories.

1 Square de Meeûs, 1000 Brussels, Belgium
+32 2 511 74 77 | info@ccre-cemr.org | www.ccre-cemr.org

Day 1. Policy Committee meeting and study visit

Thursday, 10 December 2026

09:00 **Study visit to the reconstructed historical centre**

By walk – meeting point: Ipogea Conference Hall (Via Michele Iacobucci,4, L'Aquila).

12:30 **Lunch followed by registration**

14:00 **Opening of the CEMR Leaders' Summit and the Policy Committee Meeting**

Opening and welcome remarks by **Christoph Schnaudigel**, CEMR president; **Pierluigi Biondi**, Mayor of L'Aquila, **Lorenzo Sospiri** President of the Regional Council of Abruzzo and **Milena Bertani**, AICCRE President.

Participation in this meeting is reserved for members of the CEMR Policy Committee and representatives of CEMR member associations.

18:00 **End of the CEMR Policy Committee meeting**

19:30 **Gala dinner**

Venue: Magione Papale, Via Porta Napoli, 67/I – L'Aquila.

Day 2. Political discussions on the "Right to Stay"

Friday, 11 December 2026

08:30 **Registration**

08:45 **Coordination café**

Participation is open to members of the CEMR Policy Committee who are also members or alternates of the European Committee of the Regions and representatives of their member associations.

09:30 **Shaping a territorial vision for Europe**

Keynote speech by Raffaele Fitto, Executive Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms, European Commission (tbc).

Exchange of views with Policy Committee Members.

Presentation of the CEMR Territorial Vision for Europe by Christoph Schnaudigel, President of CEMR.

11:00 **Coffee break**

11:30 **Moderated political discussion: 'Right to Stay': strengthening territories, empowering people**

Keynote speech by Enrico Letta, President of AREL, Agenzia di Ricerche e Legislazione and of Jacques Delors Institute (tbc).

Moderated panel discussion:

- **Kamila Blahova,** Mayor of Litvinov, CEMR spokesperson on territorial cohesion, SMOCR (tbc).
- **Milena Messori,** Head of the EIB Group Office.
- **Cristina Guarda,** Member of the European Parliament (tbc).
- **Benoît Cassorla,** Senior Adviser for Institutional Relations & Membership Development at SGI Europe (Services of General Interest Europe).

Open debate with the audience.

13:00 **Closing of the CEMR Leaders' Summit followed by lunch**