

The Brussels Pledge

European cities in active defence of Europe's citizens and its founding values

7 May 2026

European Committee of the Regions

Jacques Delors Building – Brussels

*In the wake of the Dunkirk Appeal of 22 May 2025, alerted by the 'Cities of Remembrance' international network at a critical moment for the stability of our continent and for peace in the world, **we, European cities, meeting in Brussels on 7 May 2026**, mindful of our history and our responsibilities, solemnly affirm our commitment to act in support of the protection of all our citizens, the defence of the universal values underpinning European unity, and the **active contribution of our municipalities to the construction of a sovereign, progressive, resilient, diverse, open to the world, and peace-promoting Europe**. This calls for a Europe that combines democratic imperatives with strategic vigilance – a Europe whose cities are among the most immediate, concrete and legitimate level of **civic experience**, providing the conditions for care and living together in peace.*

We, European cities, have over the centuries been laboratories of culture and peace and of managing diversities, and have acted as drivers of political, economic, social and environmental transformation through cooperation, civic innovation, wealth creation, the circulation of ideas, justice and solidarity. However, our cities have also been — too often in history — associated with the exploitation of resources and human beings, war and conflict, and the degradation of ecosystems.

Our histories carry, in their memories and landscapes, the traumas and suffering of past centuries, not least those of the twentieth century, marked by the collapse of democracies, totalitarian repression and wars, with the borders of our continent too often written in blood. More than any others, the Cities of Remembrance bear living witness to this.

From these legacies, approached with the necessary scientific rigour, our cities have learned how fragile the institutional frameworks of human progress are, and that any lasting political construction rests on attention to human and environmental vulnerabilities and to interdependence, but also on the capacity for clear-sighted and rational debate, attention to needs, and the encounter of opinions grounded in lived realities.

From the Hanseatic League to the Flemish communes, the Italian city-states, the Rhineland and Andalusian cities, together with the urban systems of Central, Eastern and Mediterranean Europe, our cities have developed, among themselves, structures enabling sustained cooperation as drivers of

unity, prosperity, progress, culture and peace. This dynamic remains at work today, in the wake of inspiring events such as the Ghent Congress of 1913 or the Hague Congress of 1948, through the unwavering work of the European Committee of the Regions, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, Eurocities and other major local authorities networks — alongside the countless twinnings and cross-border partnerships that help shape an everyday Europe, across towns and regions, and close to its people.

Today, in the face of rising nationalism and populism in our towns and societies, of anti-democratic rhetoric, and of patterns of exclusion and rejection, in the face of serious contemporary geopolitical tensions — including imperial ambitions, the lowered inhibitions toward violence, and the erosion of trust — and in the face of major challenges, both internal and external, to European unity and its founding values, our continent and its 700 million people need to build and defend, without delay, a lasting sovereignty grounded in pluralist democracy and extended human rights, in respect for the rule of law and in a commitment to openness, peace and cooperation with the wider world.

In this context, **we, European cities**, alongside all stakeholders, intend to take on our responsibilities and act as frontline political actors. We solemnly commit today to take concrete measures to protect our citizens and to generate their direct involvement, in particular that of younger generations — through dialogue — in a collective drive to defend and develop European unity and a progressive international legal order.

Our commitment is built around three priorities.

Priority #1 – Protecting people and fostering dialogue among young Europeans on the importance of the universal values underpinning European unity born of the post-war period

We, European cities, commit, in line with our responsibilities and in the face of the risks and challenges ahead of us, to develop civil protection awareness measures, with a view to preparing the public — in particular younger people — for any potential threat. This process should lead our young citizens to deepen their awareness — grounded in the concrete risks to which they are exposed — of the broader context of the historical transformations currently unfolding at the global level.

Simultaneously, within the same awareness-raising process, we will encourage young citizens, through twinning arrangements and transnational cooperation, to engage in dialogue with their counterparts across the continent. In doing so, they will be prompted to develop critical thinking, to explore the history of their cities in the twentieth century, and to exchange views with their peers on the foundational values of European unity, born of the traumas of the two world wars, as well as on the relevance of deepening the process of European integration.

Priority #2 – Providing operational assistance and fostering solidarity between cities in Europe and its neighbourhood

We, European cities, commit to providing targeted assistance to cities facing critical situations arising from threats, whether hybrid or, potentially, military in nature.

To this end, our cities will mobilise their skills, know-how and operational capacities, including through city diplomacy. They will implement concrete actions, such as strengthened partnerships and twinning arrangements with affected cities to build lasting solidarity; the organisation of respite stays for young people (on the model of summer camps for young Ukrainians) and vulnerable populations from exposed areas; and the provision of essential equipment, including protective gear, energy support, transport and healthcare services, and vital logistical resources.

Priority #3 – From our cities and their histories, contributing to the co-creation of a sovereign, resilient and peaceful Europe rooted in dialogue and care

We, European cities, commit, in this critical period for our continent and its founding values, to the co-construction of tomorrow's Europe from the grassroots level, fully involving our citizens, in particular younger generations.

Anchored in our municipalities and close to local communities, as the primary level of democratic legitimacy, engaged in day-to-day dialogue with our citizens, we aim to give practical expression to a tangible and resilient European democracy, attentive to the needs, vulnerabilities and diversity of our citizens, conscious that care for citizens nurture democratic vitality and that progressive-minded respect for living systems within our communities forms the foundation of all sustainable development.

In line with the principles of subsidiarity and multi-level governance, our municipalities thus assert themselves, in cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and through associations such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and Eurocities, as one of the fundamental drivers of European unity.

***We, European cities,** faithful to our history and determined to turn principles into action, want civic engagement, dialogue and shared responsibility to become collective forces capable of **renewing Europe and restoring its voice in the world**, embedding every initiative in everyday life — in the very places where Europeans live, and in the very places where, together, we exchange, build and strengthen in concrete terms the promises of a **common future of peace**.*