



Mr Charles Michel  
President of the European Council  
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 175  
B-1048 Bruxelles/Brussel

copy to the Heads of State and Government of the European Union

Dear President,

Cohesion policy is the main European investment policy to reduce territorial disparities and inequalities across the European Union and to achieve the Treaty objective of economic, social and territorial cohesion. It also plays a crucial role for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals and for contributing towards the EU's climate objectives and the digital transition. In view of the ongoing challenges for cities and regions and a growing territorial divide, a strong and effective cohesion policy is needed more than ever.

The #CohesionAlliance<sup>1</sup> for a strong EU Cohesion policy, an alliance of those who share the common objective of an EU future with a strong, effective and more visible Cohesion policy for all regions, has therefore agreed on a number of principles, which you can find in the enclosed joint declaration of the #CohesionAlliance.

While a significant share of these key requests have been considered in the Cohesion policy legislative proposals of the European Commission and have also found the strong support of the European Parliament in its position at first reading, unfortunately the current discussions in the Council on the cohesion policy package as well as the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) negotiations appear to be less positive. In view of the upcoming European Council meeting on 12 and 13 December 2019, where heads of state and government will discuss the next long term budget for the EU, we would therefore like to draw your attention to a number of issues related to the discussions on the future MFF and cohesion policy dossiers that are of utmost importance for the #CohesionAlliance partners.

First and foremost, we have to express our concern about the recent suggestions of the Finnish Presidency of the Council to limit the overall range of the next MFF to 1.07% of the EU-27 GNI

<sup>1</sup> The #CohesionAlliance was jointly launched in October 2017 by AER, AEBR, CALRE, CPMR, CEMR, Eurocities, and the CoR. To date more than 11 600 supporters have joined the alliance, including 450 organisations and institutions (including 122 regions, 140 towns and counties, and 46 associations of local authorities, representing 97% of the EU-27 population). More information: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/cohesion-alliance.aspx>

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(instead of 1.11% as put forward by the Commission or 1.3% as recommended by the European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions). These proposals would mean 12% cuts to cohesion policy compared to the current period (- 44 billion euros). Some Member States even call for a MFF that amounts to only 1.0% of EU-27 GNI. Such drastic cuts would not only result in detrimental effects on the development of the EU's regions and cities, but would also entail major political risks, calling into question the capacity of the EU to fulfil the Treaty objective of strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion, due to a lack of critical mass of support in many regions, meaning also lower investments in key European objectives. We therefore underline the necessity for Cohesion policy to have sufficient funding of at least one-third of the future EU budget at its disposal, and for any new instruments such as the Just Transition Fund and its budgetary allocations to be additional to the existing European Structural and Investment Funds.

Another crucial point for all #CohesionAlliance partners is the importance of the principles of partnership and multi-level governance, which needs to be further strengthened, in order to increase the effectiveness of EU spending by developing efficient and appropriate solutions on the ground. In this respect, we strongly reject any attempt to weaken the principles of partnership and multi-level governance in the Common Provisions Regulation and call for the full implementation of the Code of Conduct on Partnership for ESI funds in the preparation and implementation of the Partnership Agreements and programmes, in order to ensure the full involvement of local and regional authorities in the programming and implementation phase of cohesion policy. Moreover, we consider that the Partnership Agreements should remain mandatory for all Member States, irrespective of the amount of resources from the Funds or the number of programmes.

Finally, we urge the Council and the European Parliament to swiftly conclude the negotiations on the new MFF and accompanying sectorial regulations for 2021-2027, in order to allow the Partnership Agreements and programmes to be set up in due time before the start of the new programming period on 1 January 2021 and thus allow a smooth transition to the upcoming funding period and avoid the disastrous consequences that a late agreement could have for both managing authorities and beneficiaries.

We trust that these concerns of the #CohesionAlliance will be duly considered in the upcoming deliberations on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Ann-Sofi Backgren  
President of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)

Magnus Berntsson  
President of the Assembly of European Regions (AER)

Donatella Porzi

President of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE)

Stefano Bonaccini

President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

Vasco Alves Cordeiro

President of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)

Anna König Jerlmyr

President of EUROCITIES

Karl-Heinz Lambertz

President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR)

Encl.: #CohesionAlliance declaration