



Timișoara Declaration: Cities at the Forefront of a United and Secure Europe

We, the undersigned Mayors, gathered in Timișoara—a city symbolising freedom and European values—at a historic juncture for our continent. We recall the transformative success of previous EU enlargements, particularly since 2004, which have brought unprecedented peace, stability, and prosperity, profoundly improving the lives of millions. This stands as a powerful testament that enlargement is not a burden, but Europe’s most successful policy for strengthening our common project.

Today, Europe faces a new reality. The brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine has irrevocably changed our security landscape. In this context, we affirm that EU enlargement is no longer merely a political choice; it is a fundamental security imperative. A strong, united, and expanded Union is our greatest shield against external aggression and malign influence. The frontline of democracy runs through the cities of our neighbours, and their security is inextricably linked to our own.

Therefore, we express our unwavering support for the merit-based accession of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and the countries of the Western Balkans to the European Union, as well as to the European aspirations of the people of Georgia and Armenia and Türkiye. Their future lies within our European family. This process must be rooted in a shared commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights.

We recognize that the success of the European project is not decided in distant capitals, but is measured at the grassroots level—in our streets, schools, and local communities. Cities are the engines of European integration. In the EU Member States, local and regional authorities are responsible for implementing up to 70% of all EU legislation. In candidate countries, it is our cities that are at the forefront of driving democratic reform, closing existing divides, modernizing infrastructure, and demonstrating the tangible benefits of the European path to citizens – sometimes even despite the direction taken by their national governments.

Yet, our potential remains constrained. To build a stronger, more resilient Europe and deliver on the promise of enlargement, the vital role of cities must be formally recognized and empowered. Furthermore, any political or judicial harassment and unlawful or arbitrary detention of Mayors and elected local government representatives must be stopped.

We, the Mayors, hereby call upon the European Institutions and our National Governments to:

Grant Cities a Seat at the Table: While the European Committee of the Regions plays an essential role in representing local and regional voices within the EU, there remains a pressing need to establish a more structured, permanent and concrete dialogue specifically with cities — from both Member States and candidate countries — on the future of Europe and the enlargement process. As the level of government closest to the people, our insights are crucial for creating policies that work

on the ground and for building public support for our shared European future. This could be further developed as part of the City's agenda currently under development by the European Commission.

Empower Cities to Deliver: Acknowledge that cities are key partners in delivering European promises to citizens. This requires overcoming persistent national political gatekeeping and bureaucratic hurdles that stifle progress. Mechanisms for direct EU funding to cities should be strengthened to ensure that investments respond to local realities rather than political considerations. While acknowledging the European Committee of the Region's ongoing work, embedding cities further in both the design and implementation of EU policies—and protecting their autonomy and rights—would deepen democratic legitimacy and improve outcomes. We must explore and implement mechanisms for direct EU funding for cities to accelerate green and digital transitions, strengthen social cohesion, and ensure that EU investments are driven by local needs, not political loyalties. In this regard, the next Multiannual Financial Framework and Cohesion Policy should be consistent and oriented to also empower the local level, ensuring resources directly support communities where European policies take shape. We warmly welcome the initiative of the Commission to use the funds lost to member states due to breaches of the Rule of Law and Charter of Fundamental Rights, for the purpose of funding those “supporting Europe's democracy, civil society, Union values or the fight against corruption”. Nonetheless, we believe that these funds should also be allocated to all final beneficiaries, cities and regions, that are in the country where funding has been suspended.

Enlargement in Action: City Partnerships: Building on successful initiatives, launching a dedicated, EU-financed programme for capacity building and the exchange of good practices between cities from EU Member States and candidate countries and expanding the TAIEX programme also to include the political representatives of our cities. Such a “NextGen City-to-City Governance” programme will build administrative capacity, accelerate alignment with EU standards, and forge the human connections that are the bedrock of our Union. In addition, programmes such as Erasmus+ should be scaled up to foster exchanges for young people and training for municipal actors, to promote collaboration and boost municipal skills in fields critical to the implementation of the EU legislation.

The future of Europe will be built in its cities. By empowering us, you empower our citizens. By strengthening us, you strengthen the entire European project. We stand ready to work with you to forge a continent that is whole, free, secure, and prosperous for all.

Adopted at the Timișoara Cities Summit on EU Enlargement, 30 September 2025