Territorial Agenda 2030

A future for all places

Informal meeting of Ministers responsible
for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development and/or Territorial Cohesion
1 December 2020, Germany



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I Preamble

(1) We, the Ministers responsible for spatial planning, territorial development and/or territorial cohesion, in cooperation with the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Investment Bank Group and relevant European and national associations, have reviewed the Territorial Agenda launched in 2007 and updated in 2011. We agree on the Territorial Agenda 2030.

(2) We encourage our colleagues in neighbouring countries to take note of the Territorial Agenda and join us in putting it into practice at European, transnational, macro-regional and cross-border levels. Everyone is welcome to use the Territorial Agenda within their countries at national, regional and local levels, and in cooperation with other countries.

(3) We encourage everyone involved in spatial planning and territorial development policies at all administrative and governance levels in the EU and neighbouring countries to put the Territorial Agenda into practice. The Territorial Agenda applies everywhere, focusing on mutual relations and people's well-being.

(4) The Territorial Agenda draws on the conclusions of the ESPON 'State of the European Territory Report' (2019), ESPON 'European Territorial Reference Framework' (2019) and the European Commission's 'Seventh Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion' (2017). It also takes into consideration recent reports on spatial planning, territorial cohesion and territorial development, EU Cohesion Policy and the relevant parts of sector policies from the European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions, and the European Investment Bank Group.

(5) The Territorial Agenda takes into account recent policy frameworks and agendas including the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015), the Paris Agreement (2015), United Nations New Urban Agenda (2016), European Commission reflection paper 'Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030' (2019), the proposal for future EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 (2018), Urban Agenda for the EU (2016), the New Leipzig Charter (2020), Cork 2.0 Declaration

on a Better Life in Rural Areas (2016) and OECD principles on Urban Policy and Rural Policy (2019), as well as the European Green Deal, with its Sustainable Europe Investment Plan and Just Transition Mechanism (2020), the Union Recovery Programme (2020) and the relevant conclusions of the Austrian, Romanian, Finnish and Croatian Presidencies of the Council of the EU.

(6) The Territorial Agenda provides an action-oriented framework to promote territorial cohesion in Europe. Territorial cohesion is a European Union aim introduced by the Treaty on European Union (Article 3, TEU). It means promoting balanced and harmonious territorial development between and within countries, regions, cities and municipalities, as well as ensuring a future for all places and people in Europe, building on the diversity of places and subsidiarity. It enables more equal opportunities, including access to public services for people and enterprises, wherever they are located. At urban scale these aspects are addressed in the New Leipzig Charter. Territorial cohesion reinforces solidarity to promote convergence and reduce inequalities between better-off places and those with less prosperous prospects or that are lagging behind. Territorial cohesion helps all places to perform as well as possible using their own assets through place-based investment. This benefits Europe as a whole and each individual country.

(7) The Territorial Agenda underlines the importance of and provides orientation for strategic spatial planning and calls for strengthening the territorial dimension of sector policies at all governance levels. It seeks to promote an inclusive and sustainable future for all places and to help achieve Sustainable Development Goals in Europe.

(8) It is essential to limit inequalities which hamper Europe, countries, municipalities and regions to build on their success. This can only be achieved by paying more attention to the diversity of places in Europe, along with their development potential and challenges.

(9) While revising the Territorial Agenda, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed policy making and future development outlooks. As implications and policy responses vary across territories due to different conditions, the pandemic shows that territories matter and are highly interdependent. Territorial cohesion should play an important role in the recovery process. Territorial development policies and cooperation on joint objectives

are essential to increase the resilience of municipalities, regions and countries, while also strengthening their recovery processes.

(10) In line with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Articles 174, 175 and 349, TFEU), all Union policies and actions should contribute to economic, social and territorial cohesion. Working towards sustainable territorial cohesion and limiting inequalities between people and places require joint efforts. For this, sector policies, municipal, regional, national, EU and other authorities, as well as various society groups need to come together. They must cooperate to balance inclusiveness, sustainability, competitiveness and resilience through participative and innovative integrated territorial development.

(11) Regional and local governments might need external support to ensure inclusive and sustainable development. Such support can be under EU Cohesion Policy and Rural Development Policy within the Common Agricultural Policy, with objectives and investments in all regions. This is of particular relevance for territories with less prosperous future perspectives, those lagging behind and territories suffering from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps.

(12) The European Green Deal with its Sustainable Europe Investment Plan and Just Transition Mechanism, as well as related EU sector policies and work on Long-term vision for rural areas, offer the opportunity to promote synergies between the Territorial Agenda and overarching EU strategies and policies. The Green Deal links green and Just Transition objectives, as it aims at combating unevenly dispersed effects of the energy transition, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the impact of climate change and other environmental challenges. It aims at turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities for all places and making the transition just and inclusive for all. Thereby, the European Green Deal offers the opportunity to promote synergies between the Territorial Agenda and overarching EU strategies and policies. It is in line with the idea of territorial cohesion and the place-based approach, building on the diverse potential of all places and improving the overall territorial balance in Europe.

(13) We call on those involved in territorial development and strategic spatial planning at all levels to take on board the Territorial Agenda priorities. We also call on those responsible for designing and implementing sector policies – at all levels of governance – to take these priorities into consideration. Coherence between all EU, national and sub-national policies is important for territorial cohesion. Most policies have significant territorial impacts and influence territorial development opportunities in different ways. Coordinated and place-based policies can significantly increase the coherence and effectiveness of policies and reduce the negative effects of conflicting policies.

(14) We call upon decision makers and authorities in Member States, regions, metropolitan areas, cities, towns, municipalities, rural areas and other places to contribute to inclusive and sustainable futures for all places and people. Places with common potential or challenges can collaborate in finding common solutions. Places with complementary potential can explore their comparative advantages together to create additional development potential. We shall facilitate their ability to develop more effective policy responses through closer cooperation.

(15) The place-based approach to policy making contributes to territorial cohesion. It is based on horizontal and vertical coordination, evidence-informed policy making and integrated territorial development. It addresses different levels of governance (multi-level governance approach) contributing to subsidiarity. It ensures cooperation and coordination involving citizens, civil society, businesses, research and scientific institutions and knowledge centres. It ultimately aims to unleash unique territorial potential related to place-based territorial capital, knowledge and assets, while recognising the need for tailored solutions in different types of territories. The development and implementation of European, national, regional and local strategies with a place-based approach will contribute to long-term development and competitiveness for places.

(16) The Territorial Agenda and the New Leipzig Charter share the place-based approach, policy coordination and effective multi-level policy frameworks as common principles. The Territorial Agenda advocates these as overarching principles for all places and policy sectors. The New Leipzig Charter provides guidance for applying these in cities, urban

areas, their functional regions and peri-urban areas. We therefore support strengthened cooperation between and across spatial levels, including urban-rural partnerships.

(17) As set out in the New Leipzig Charter, the principles of good urban governance and quality design ensure attractive, inclusive, durable, adaptable places which help make them more pleasant and attractive for people to work, live and enjoy. It is essential that public authorities proactively plan for high quality and inclusive design when considering development in our cities, towns and villages.

(18) We call upon communities and civil society across Europe to help overcome growing development differences between people and between places. Building bridges between people with different incomes, educational backgrounds, cultures, traditions and religions is key to keeping Europe together. We shall facilitate cooperation and increase solidarity between civil society to reduce segregation and to promote social inclusion as well as using diversity as an asset for everyone's well-being.

(19) The diversity of places in Europe is an underused potential. Place-based policy making can help release untapped potential. Joining efforts across sector policies, governance levels, places and societal groups is essential for an inclusive and sustainable Europe that offers future prospects for all people and places, protects common livelihoods and shapes transitions.

II Why we need to act

(20) Recent studies, including from ESPON, the European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Investment Bank, World Bank and other international, national and regional players, highlight that Europe faces major economic, social and environmental challenges but it also has great potential to improve living conditions in all places and for all people. This requires policy responses with a strong territorial dimension and coordinated approaches acknowledging and using the diversity and specificities of places.

(21) Europe has many different types of places, such as capital regions, metropolitan areas, small and medium-sized towns, peri-urban areas, rural areas, inner peripheries, peripheral areas, northernmost areas, sparsely populated areas, islands, coastal areas, mountainous areas, outermost regions, cross-border regions, macro-regions, areas of demographic decline and areas in economic transformation and industrial transition. These have very different development potential and challenges. At all levels, from sub-local to pan-European, there are increasing economic and social disparities between places and between people along with environmental risks and pressures. These are driven by economies of scale, imbalanced access to markets and qualified labour, as well as disparities in quality of governance and public services. Furthermore, links and flows between places, especially along corridors, affect the possibilities to realise potential or respond to challenges.

Quality of government and governance

(22) The quality of government and governance processes is an important cross-cutting principle for local, regional, national and European development. It matters for the well-being of society and is a prerequisite for long-term sustainable increases in living standards, investments, social trust and political legitimacy. Developing and implementing integrated place-based strategies and investments needs cooperation

across sector policies as well as levels of government and governance, while also engaging local communities. Continuous capacity building at all levels is particularly important to enhance participatory implementation of the strategies.

(23) As highlighted in the Seventh Cohesion Report, the quality of government and governance at all levels varies across Europe. The largest differences are between countries, with variations also within countries. Poor quality of government and governance risks diminishing marginal utility and returns on investments in infrastructure, human capital and technology in the territory.

People and places drift apart

Increasing imbalances and inequalities

(24) Europe's changing social and economic geography is accompanied by increasing inequalities, driving apart people and places. Some societal groups and communities have the perception that European and national objectives and outlooks do not address their concerns and prospects. This is expressed in the 'geography of discontent' debate. Indeed, widening social and economic disparities in Europe have a spatial dimension such as segregation within towns, cities, rural areas or regions, within regions or countries and within Europe. Increasing inequalities and disparities lead to a considerable diversity for future perspectives. The Territorial Agenda emphasises these challenges and brings them to the attention of policy makers.

(25) Action is needed in the following fields:

(26) **Quality of life:** The underlying objective of all public policies should be to increase citizens' well-being and quality of life. These go beyond economic performance, living standards and purely material aspects to include access to quality public services, freedom of movement and healthy, resilient and high quality architecture and built environments. They also have a territorial dimension ranging from disparities between neighbourhoods such as social exclusion and urban poverty, to disparities between regions and countries.

(27) **Services of general interest:** The accessibility, proximity, affordability and quality of public services is important to quality of life and business development. Needs for greater cost-effectiveness and efficient public management can lead to the withdrawal or clustering of services in certain locations. At the same time, expectations of availability and quality increase. Differences in access to services of general interest risk driving service providers, enterprises and social activities to relocate to areas with better access in the medium to long run. New technologies for online services can reduce the sensitivity of peripheral areas to such relocation pressures. At the same time, there are increasing challenges in access to affordable housing in some areas, especially where temporary accommodation and tourism services significantly reduce the housing stock, contributing to homelessness, gentrification and social exclusion.

(28) **Demographic and societal imbalances:** Ageing, domestic and intra-European migration, including depopulation, pose challenges to Europe's welfare systems and to local and regional development. These demographic dynamics have severe social implications including increased social exclusion and inequalities, as well as challenges for public service provision, labour markets and housing. Ageing and migration point to further concentration in urban areas along with depopulation in rural and peripheral areas. This especially concerns remote areas that lack access to public services and economic and social opportunities. Extra-European migration flows, including outmigration of young and talented people and immigration of refugees, may exacerbate these challenges.

(29) **Digitalisation and the 4th industrial revolution:** Digitalisation and disruptive technologies will shape economic and societal development in Europe. The 4th industrial revolution will lead to fusions of technologies and the lines between physical, digital and biological systems becoming blurred, transforming the labour market significantly. Economic concentration and new technical solutions rapidly rolled out across the world increasingly create 'winner takes all' economies. This gives an additional relevance to regions and urban agglomerations in economic transition. Public authorities and decision makers need to constantly innovate and engage in stakeholder dialogues to prepare for transitions and to shape policies effectively. This also requires taking into consideration data protection and privacy rights, digitalised government and European digital transformation. Divides in education, digital skills and broadband access are a major factor in increased territorial inequalities. The elderly and people living in remote

rural areas (e.g. in mountainous areas or on islands) are often at risk of being excluded from digital transformation processes.

(30) **Employment and economic development:** Local and regional economies in Europe are highly interconnected and interdependent through complex value chains. Economic and employment prospects are affected by local development conditions beyond the influence of local, regional, national and European decision makers. Some places tend to have better economic performance and employment opportunities, e.g. due to higher levels of competitiveness, financial and investment capacity, attractive conditions for investments, favourable business climates, developed regional infrastructures, effective regional innovation systems, higher levels of research, development and innovation activities, access to good education, skilled labour force, as well as good entrepreneurial and natural environments. This reinforces the relative position of better-off places and further perpetuates disparities and imbalances. Another important aspect is the urban growth and polycentric development.

(31) **Interdependencies between places:** While some places in Europe are drifting apart, there are also growing interdependencies between places. These positive and negative externalities mean developments in one place affect potential in another, so changes in one part of Europe can affect other parts of the continent. These interdependencies are most visible in the concentration of economies and increasing disparities between flourishing (often metropolitan) areas and declining (often rural) areas. It is visible in the persistent core-periphery division in Europe and nationally. Internal and especially EU external borders have disparities and differences in legal, social and political systems that affect local and regional development. Barriers to integration between places can result in underutilised human, cultural, economic and ecological resources in border regions, exacerbating their peripheral position and social exclusion.

(32) **Global embeddedness:** Europe is highly interwoven in the global economy. Local and regional development in Europe is affected by global strategies as well as geopolitical and socio-economic developments beyond the influence of local and regional decision makers, including dynamics in Eurasia and the Mediterranean. Many European citizens and enterprises participate in worldwide social and economic networks. Consequently, development in European regions, metropolitan areas, cities and towns is linked to other

places and the flows of goods, services, investments, people and ideas around the world. In short, exogenous developments influence development perspectives for places in Europe. Neither the potential nor the vulnerabilities linked to global developments are equally distributed across Europe. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of global supply chains and a lack of resilience in several economic sectors and territories.

Sustainable development and climate change

Increasing pressures on the environment

(33) Global sustainable development challenges are highly relevant for local and regional development and living conditions in Europe. This especially concerns climate change, environmental degradation and the transition to a climate-neutral economy. The growing urgency to address climate change, resilience and a transition to more sustainable development is emphasised in political and societal debates as underlined by the United Nations 'Sustainable Development Goals'. These concerns are strategically translated into an EU agenda through the European Green Deal and European Semester country reports. A transition to sustainable development holds different potential and challenges for different rural areas, towns, cities and regions.

(34) Action is needed in the following fields:

(35) **Climate change:** The impacts of climate change vary considerably across European geographical regions with different degrees of vulnerability. The increased risks of sea-level rise, heat waves, forest fires, drought, desertification, other land and soil degradation, floods and other natural and mixed natural and technical hazards call for place-based responses, cooperation and coordinated policies. Climate change mitigation and adaptation actions can even bring new development opportunities for places. This can concern agriculture, the bioeconomy, green, blue and circular economies, and renewable energy production. Climate change impacts as well as mitigation and adaptation actions depend on the territorial context and require tailor-made responses at all levels.

(36) **Loss of biodiversity and land consumption:** The rapid man-made loss of biodiversity poses severe risks to ecosystems and long-term living conditions. This affects livelihoods, quality of life and local economies. Increasing land and coast take and use, soil sealing and urban sprawl reduce open spaces, biodiversity and fertile soil, while also contributing to urban heat islands impacting the functioning of ecosystems. At the same time, abandoned, derelict and underused sites offer potential for land-use changes.

(37) **Air, soil and water quality:** This is essential for human well-being. Air pollution, noise, contaminated soil and polluted ground and surface-water bodies cause serious health problems that can correlate with social inequality. There are disparities in access to clean air, water and soil not only between countries and regions but also between urban and rural areas, as well as inside towns, cities and metropolitan areas.

(38) **Secure, affordable and sustainable energy:** European citizens and enterprises need access to sustainable, secure and affordable energy supplies. This is important for local and regional development. Significant imports from third countries vulnerable to economic or political instability increase problems for energy security. Volatile energy prices and rising emissions highlight the need for sustainable and resilient solutions such as renewable energy, greener, decarbonised economic activities and other measures increasing energy efficiency and reducing energy consumption. Insufficient energy infrastructure and dependence on existing networks call for diversified energy production and supply, as well as energy market development and integration.

(39) **Just transition:** Achieving a climate-neutral economy by 2050 requires decarbonisation actions all over Europe. The economic, environmental and social costs of this transition are particularly high for territories and populations most heavily dependent on fossil fuels and industries emitting significant greenhouse gases. The objective of just transition is to ensure that progress towards a climate-neutral economy happens in a fair way, leaves no one and no place behind, and delivers a high quality of life for all. Investments are needed for the territories negatively affected by the transition process by enabling regions and people to address the social, economic and environmental impacts of the transition towards a climate-neutral economy by 2050.

(40) **Circular value chains:** The circular economy is an important objective for a carbon/climate-neutral economy. The circular economy aims to close material and energy loops through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing and recycling. Industrial symbiosis processes in regional value chains are important. The transition of Europe's economies towards a place-based circular and carbon/climate-neutral model has a territorial dimension and can strengthen functional regions. Economic prosperity in places depends on the competitiveness and creativity of their enterprises and start-ups as well as on local assets, characteristics and traditions, cultural, social and human capital and innovation capacities. In general, urban areas are better positioned to pick up related trends than sparsely populated areas and inner peripheries which often lack critical mass. Towns and smaller cities as well as places with high levels of craftmanship might nevertheless benefit from a circular economy in terms of repair, reuse and sharing activities at local and regional level.

(41) **Nature, landscape and cultural heritage:** Natural and cultural heritage are local and regional development assets that offer unique opportunities for development and high-quality living environments. Sustainable and effective use of resources should benefit local communities and promote local business opportunities. Overexploitation of these assets however can threaten a local or regional economy. Urbanisation, intensive agriculture and fisheries, energy production, mining, industrial activities, transport and other infrastructure developments, particularly when uncoordinated, can cause severe problems. Increased and uncoordinated exploitation of maritime space and marine resources may impact sustainable development, while changes in land and sea use, urbanisation and mass tourism threaten cultural assets and landscapes and may fragment natural habitats and ecological corridors.

Need to act

(42) In Europe, growing inequalities between places and between people as well as unsustainable developments have reached a critical level. Increased concerted action at all geographical and governance levels is needed to ensure positive future perspectives for all people, communities and places in Europe. It is time to better understand and adequately address territorial impacts of sector policies. We seek to contribute to sustainable development and to keeping Europe together by delivering on the following territorial priorities for Europe.

III Territorial priorities for Europe

(43) Ensuring a sustainable future for all places and people in Europe requires actions based on:

- a common understanding that development needs and impacts of future developments differ between places in Europe, which can be increased through exchanges of knowledge and experiences gained from specific solutions and their related support schemes; and
- cooperation and coordination between places, levels of governments, policy sectors and societal groups to address complex issues and utilise diverse potential, including through EU Cohesion Policy, Rural Development Policy, Interreg, or other tools enhancing integrated territorial or local development.

(44) We therefore define two overarching objectives, a Just Europe and a Green Europe, which have six priorities for developing the European territory as a whole, along with all its places:

A JUST EUROPE

that offers future perspectives for all places and people

(45) The priorities for a Just Europe underline the territorial dimension and spatial planning contributions to overarching policy priorities. These priorities include economic, social and territorial cohesion, the European Pillar of Social Rights, a Europe closer to citizens, a more inclusive, sustainable and integrated development of places, Just Transition and territorial integration in Europe.

BALANCED EUROPE

Better balanced territorial development utilising Europe's diversity

(46) Europe's territorial diversity offers considerable development potential. This can contribute to better balanced territorial development, counteracting excessive concentration, strengthening secondary growth poles and reducing inequalities between people and between places. Cooperation in polycentric networks of cities, metropolitan areas and regions contributes to spreading development potential more optimally. Therefore, we will take action to encourage neighbourhoods, communities, municipalities, counties, regions and Member States to cooperate on responses to global societal challenges and improving working, living and business conditions in all places as well as strengthening socio-economic prosperity, innovation capacity, positions in global value chains and global competitiveness across Europe.

(47) Polarisation between Europe's core and its periphery, its capitals, metropolitan areas, cities, towns, rural areas and areas with geographic and demographic specificities undermines balanced territorial development. Small and medium-sized towns especially have underexploited potential to cushion polarisation. They play a crucial role in regional economic development and social well-being, particularly with national and international accessibility and adequate access to services at local and regional level. Polycentric networks can also contribute to more sustainable transport. We invite policy makers from all levels to promote polycentric development models that offer a role for all places.

(48) Europe has diverse territories, such as coastal zones, islands, mountainous areas, inner peripheries, plains, river valleys and lake basins. All these territories have unique development challenges and potential, though remoteness and the distinct characteristics of outermost regions mean they face particular development challenges. We will take action to encourage decision makers at all governance levels to unleash the unique potential of territories with specific geographies and adequately address the constraints of these areas through integrated and cooperative approaches.

FUNCTIONAL REGIONS

Convergent local and regional development, less inequality between places

(49) Cities and towns of all sizes are motors of economic and social development and attractive places for living, working, visiting and investing. Cooperation and networking within and between cities, towns and their surrounding areas in the same functional region create development perspectives for all places taking into account the need to promote urban-rural linkages. Such functional regions often break with existing administrative delineations. They differ according to functional character and interconnection, are highly dynamic and can shift over time. Decision makers in cities and towns looking beyond their administrative borders to cooperate with their surrounding areas can help their places serve as motors for intra-regional growth. This is to the benefit, rather than at the expense, of their surrounding communities and rural areas. Together cities, towns and their surrounding areas can ensure a healthy and affordable living environment, avoiding further urban sprawl and reducing land take. We will search for dialogue with decision makers in cities and towns of all sizes to apply an integrated multilevel governance approach. This means involving people from different governance levels, in particular local and regional ones, as well as diverse policy sectors and societal groups.

(50) Europe has diverse urban, peri-urban, rural, peripheral and sparsely populated areas. Some of these suffer from segregation or face severe depopulation. Their development is closely related to unique local characteristics and relationships with other places, accessibility and access to public services, education opportunities and internet connections, diversified economic activities and entrepreneurship as well as their ecological functions and ecosystem services. At urban scale these aspects are addressed in the New Leipzig Charter. We will engage with local and regional decision makers to strengthen cooperation on long-term place-based strategies for these areas and address sustainable functional links between neighbouring areas, including through spatial planning and instruments of EU Cohesion Policy, Rural Development Policy and EU policies such as integrated territorial investments (ITI), community-led local development (CLLD - LEADER) or any other tools enhancing integrated territorial or local development. These may already exist in the territory.

INTEGRATION BEYOND BORDERS

Easier living and working across national borders

(51) Territorial and maritime cooperation between places in different countries helps make better use of development potential and address common challenges. Joining forces beyond borders, including Interreg programmes and projects, can create critical mass for development and promote synergies while diminishing economic, social and environmental fragmentation and negative externalities. This includes ecosystems, natural and cultural heritage, labour markets, public service provision and city networks divided by internal, external, land or maritime borders. We will take action to embed stable cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation in macro-regional, national, regional and local development strategies. Examples of stable approaches that facilitate cooperation between administrative areas beyond single projects include strategic Interreg cooperation, Initiative on Knowledge and Innovation Communities by the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT KIC Initiatives), Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) platforms, EU Strategic Value Chain Consortiums, Horizon Europe cooperation, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), mainstream EU Cohesion Policy programmes, macro-regional strategies, inter-metropolitan cooperation, functional regions governance, cross-border planning and legal cross-border agreements. We also support the development of new strategic documents, where needed, and the promotion of co-development, involving citizens across borders.

(52) There remain many legal and administrative obstacles to deepening cooperation beyond borders. We will intensify the dialogue with policy makers at all governance levels to coordinate national sector policies between countries and to diminish existing obstacles to cooperation.

A Green Europe

that protects common livelihoods and shapes societal transition

(53) Green Europe priorities underline the territorial dimension and spatial planning contributions to overarching policy priorities such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the European Green Deal, the Paris Agreement, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the European Landscape Convention and the EU Forest Strategy. Other relevant priorities concern Europe fit for the digital age, sustainable mobility and a fully integrated European transport network, the transition to a circular economy in Europe and the application of an ecosystem-based approach.

Healthy Environment

Better ecological livelihoods, climate-neutral and resilient towns, cities and regions

(54) Ecosystems, including agricultural, forest, grassland, fresh water and marine ecosystems, are fundamental to human existence and important for long-term sustainable development. It is a joint responsibility to ensure that they are sustainably accessible to the wider public, well-functioning, resilient, enhanced, in healthy conditions and that they generate income for local populations and businesses. This helps mitigate climate change, combat the loss of biodiversity, ensure the provision of ecosystem services and raise public awareness of all the above. Integrated management is particularly important, taking into consideration different geographical specificities. We support the development of nature-based solutions as well as green and blue infrastructure networks that link ecosystems and protected areas in spatial planning, land management and other policies, and the development of new crisis management tools to increase places' safety and resilience.

(55) Climate change and a loss of biodiversity risk eroding livelihoods. Risk and disaster management as well as prevention measures are important to building resilient communities. We will respect the natural limits of Europe's common livelihoods and increase the resilience of all places impacted by climate change. This can be done by

developing local and regional strategies for climate-neutral towns, cities and regions. Possible mitigating and adaptive actions include promoting sustainable land-use, open spaces and public green areas, restoring degraded land and coastal areas, combatting deforestation and preserving oceans and water bodies. Other actions can involve preventing urban sprawl and urban heat islands, implementing green infrastructure, improving air quality, ensuring no net land-take by 2050, strengthening the delivery of ecosystem services and improving the integration of terrestrial and maritime spatial planning.

(56) Europe's natural and cultural heritage is a unique and diverse asset to be protected, managed and further developed. Areas rich in natural and cultural heritage or unique landscapes need to make best use of these assets and their untapped potential. They need to balance nature conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and economic development, including by creating environmentally friendly jobs, fostering community growth and well-being, or working with innovative social entrepreneurs. We will concentrate on strengthening awareness and empowering local and regional communities to protect, rehabilitate, utilise and reutilise their (built) environments, landscapes, material and immaterial cultural assets and other unique values through instruments of EU Cohesion Policy, Rural Development Policy, spatial planning or any other tools enhancing integrated territorial or local development among others. These may already be effectively present in the territory.

Circular Economy

Strong and sustainable local economies in a globalised world

(57) Circularity means managing material, water and energy flows. It includes reusing and recycling products including buildings, building materials and wastewater based on life-cycle assessment and energy renovation for buildings. The transition of Europe's economies towards a place-based circular and carbon/climate-neutral economy depends on the competitiveness and assets of local and regional players. In a globalised economy, this requires building industrial symbiosis processes which bring together global competitiveness and local assets. We support Europe's transition to a circular

economy and the development of place-based industrial symbiosis processes, also taking into account the need for sustainable soil and land use.

(58) To better utilise Europe's multifaceted territorial assets for the transition to a circular economy we support the development of local and regional circular economy strategies linking local and global economies. These strategies should build on local assets and the capacity to innovate while also combining energy and economic transition processes for a place-based circular economy. Smart specialisation strategies and European research and innovation policies, such as Horizon Europe or the Joint Programming Initiative Urban Europe, can play an important role in the circular economy transition.

(59) Local products, markets, business environments, training, entrepreneurship, increased self-sufficiency and strong communities are important for creating resilient local economies and benefits for the environment. Diversified local economies help reduce vulnerability to external forces while assisting energy and economic transition processes. We encourage the strengthening of innovation capacities in all regions, including local strategies for energy transition and measures in the building, transport and bioeconomy sectors.

SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS

Sustainable digital and physical connectivity of places

(60) Physical and digital connections are important for European societies and economies and pose major environmental challenges. Therefore, smart, sustainable and safe forms of transport and connectivity are needed, especially to support the priorities of a balanced Europe and functional regions.

(61) The transition to a sustainable digital society can support decentralised and sustainable developments. E-inclusion where people, enterprises and places benefit from digitalisation, depends on fair and affordable access to high-quality internet, next generation mobile phone connections and digital skills – while taking into consideration sustainability and health issues. This particularly concerns access to e-governance and e-services of general interest affecting the quality of life and competitiveness of places. We will invite stakeholders to enter into a dialogue on the need for adequate access to

high-speed fixed and mobile communication networks in all places, and the need for a digital infrastructure with a low carbon footprint and low impact on human health. This can help ensure adequate living and business conditions across Europe.

(62) Access to intermodal freight and passenger transport is important for all places in Europe. Efficient and environmentally friendly transport solutions are ever more important to achieving climate, air pollution, noise objectives, accessibility and connectivity of all regions in Europe. This includes transport modes individually, as well as combined transport. We will further improve links between regional planning and the development of Trans-European Networks (TEN), especially along core network corridors. Linking all places with major transport nodes supports international trade connections and local development opportunities. EU Cohesion Policy and Connecting Europe Facility are important to achieving this.

(63) Reliable secondary and local transport networks which link to transnational networks and urban centres are essential for quality of life and for business opportunities. This especially concerns towns, rural, peripheral and sparsely populated areas, islands, mountain areas and outermost regions. We invite spatial and transport planners to explore new socially and environmentally progressive models for local and regional mobility-as-a-service and to cooperate on multimodal and environmentally friendly accessibility of and within urban centres. Instruments of EU Cohesion Policy, sustainable urban mobility plans or any other tools enhancing integrated territorial or local development are important for this and may already be effectively present in the territory.

IV Putting priorities into action

(64) The priorities spelled out in the Territorial Agenda 2030 need to be supported by actions from committed players. Only then can Territorial Agenda priorities and concerns over spatial inequalities and the transition towards a carbon/climate-neutral economy be addressed appropriately. Taken together, the actions should strengthen

- multi-level governance;
- place-based approaches;
- coordinated sector policy territorial impacts and coherence;
- cooperation between territories;
- territorial cohesion at European level;
- territorial cohesion at cross-border, transnational, inter- and intra-regional level; and
- Member State and neighbouring country contributions to territorial cohesion.

(65) The above points are closely related to the principles of good urban governance outlined in the New Leipzig Charter. These are urban policy for the common good, an integrated approach, participation and co-creation, multi-level governance and a place-based approach.

Call on key players

(66) Application of the Territorial Agenda relies on informal multilevel cooperation between Member States, sub-national authorities, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Investment Bank and other relevant players. Application of the Territorial Agenda would benefit from cooperation with those in charge of the Urban Agenda, the New Leipzig Charter, EU Cohesion and Rural Development Policy, the implementation of the EU Recovery Plan and the EU macro-regional and sea basin strategies.

(67) **Member State intergovernmental cooperation** will strengthen cooperation on Territorial Agenda priorities at European level with the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Investment Bank. Every second year Member States will discuss progress in applying the Territorial Agenda, especially initiatives and actions, at a meeting of the Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP). Findings on this progress will be discussed at meetings of the Directors-General on Territorial Cohesion (DGTC). To strengthen dialogue on the interplay between territorial development and sector policies, DGTC meetings could include a joint session with representatives of territorially relevant policy sectors.

(68) **Member States individually** will promote the Territorial Agenda priorities and engage relevant players in all sector policies and at all levels of government. This includes promoting the Territorial Agenda in national strategic, spatial and territorial planning processes, Partnership Agreements and programmes for EU Cohesion Policy, national recovery plans and other EU funds, underlining the importance of the principle of subsidiarity to define the nature of territories and to secure targeted interventions and support in each Member State. It includes communicating the Territorial Agenda and working towards territorial cohesion at national level together with sector ministries, sub-national authorities and civil society.

(69) **Sub-national authorities and bodies**, including those at local and regional level and their national associations, are invited to apply the Territorial Agenda and take steps to engage relevant players. This includes considering Territorial Agenda priorities in their spatial planning and overarching development strategies and policies, as well as taking inspiration from pilot actions and offering their own proposals for new pilot actions. In particular they are encouraged to cooperate with neighbouring territories and places facing similar or complementary potential or challenges, and with the actors involved. In addition, sub-national authorities are invited to take an active role in regional, national and European debates concerning application of the Territorial Agenda.

(70) **European Commission** is invited to contribute to the Territorial Agenda priorities and further strengthen its efforts to promote territorial cohesion in Europe, the territorial dimension in EU policies, and to coordinate sector policies. This may include strengthening the territorial dimension in the European Semester and Impact Assessments using available tools to assess territorial impacts and stronger stakeholder involvement, as well as further promoting – under EU Cohesion Policy and other relevant EU policies – integrated territorial development, uptake of relevant tools and instruments, territorial cooperation, and following and taking inspiration from pilot actions.

(71) **European Parliament** is invited to note the Territorial Agenda and to consider its priorities in the Committee on Regional Development (REGI) and other committees and intergroups which have a territorial dimension. This may include advocating Territorial Agenda priorities in EU legislative processes.

(72) **European Committee of the Regions**, as the European Union's advisory body formally representing regions and municipalities at EU level, is invited to contribute to the implementation and further development of the Territorial Agenda. To this end, the Europan Committee of the Regions is invited to inform its members about the Territorial Agenda and implementation progress. It is also invited to encourage local and regional authorities in Europe to apply the Territorial Agenda, cooperate with neighbouring territories and places, learn from pilot actions and offer their own proposals for new pilot actions. The European Committee of the Regions is also invited to promote Territorial Agenda objectives at European level through its consultative work. It is also invited to promote the uptake and further development of territorial tools and instruments such as territorial impact assessments, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), and integrated territorial development under EU Cohesion Policy.

(73) **European Economic and Social Committee** is asked to inform its members about the Territorial Agenda priorities and encourage them to cooperate in implementing the Territorial Agenda. This includes underlining the importance of civil society partners to ensuring a sustainable future for all places and strengthening CLLD and any other tool facilitating integrated territorial development and cooperation. In addition, they are asked to advocate Territorial Agenda priorities in policy debates at European level.

(74) **European Investment Bank Group** is asked to reflect priorities and actions of the Territorial Agenda as appropriate in its lending, grant-loan blending and advisory services approach, taking into account the need to support sustainable territorial development strategies without jeopardising its financial discipline. Since the EIB Group can play an important role in financing sustainable investments of all sizes in areas covered by the Territorial Agenda, it is invited to contribute to pilot actions, in particular to support the development of better funding approaches in the territorial context complementing the European Commission. This can include supporting place-sensitive investments through lending, grant-loan blending and advising Member States and key players about territorial project preparation and implementation as well as the use of financial instruments.

(75) **European and national associations** addressing spatial development and/or representing local and regional governments are invited to inform their members about the Territorial Agenda priorities and encourage them to apply the Agenda, cooperate with neighbouring territories and places, learn from pilot actions and offer their own proposals for new pilot actions. In addition, they are encouraged to advocate Territorial Agenda objectives in policy debates at transnational and European level.

Implementation through dedicated actions

(76) Actions putting the Territorial Agenda into practice can be taken at any governance level and can vary in character and focus. Every key player is asked to implement the Territorial Agenda in the context of their regular mandate. Only then can spatial inequalities and the societal transformation toward a carbon/climate-neutral economy be addressed appropriately.

(77) To inspire joint actions across Europe, pilot actions demonstrate, test and develop practices which contribute to achieving Territorial Agenda priorities. These actions mirror increasing recognition of the importance of place-based policies by showing how the territorial dimension of regional, national and European policies can be actively addressed. They focus on learning, sharing best practices, joint working groups

developing ways forward, or implementation. Everybody is encouraged to closely follow these actions, take inspiration and offer proposals for new actions. Actions addressing priorities of the Urban Agenda, New Leipzig Charter and Territorial Agenda can strengthen links between urban and territorial policies.

Coordination

(78) The activities of the Territorial Agenda will be coordinated by meetings of the Directors General on Territorial Cohesion (DGTC), prepared by the Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP), and supported by the Territorial Agenda Working Group (TAWG).

(79) The next ESPON cooperation programme shall continue and strengthen support and advice to the implementation process and Presidencies of the Council of the EU, e.g. through monitoring activities and focused communication of evidence and knowledge related to the Territorial Agenda 2030.

(80) Coordination activities of the Territorial Agenda 2030 will

- endeavour to ensure that activities and pilot actions are transparent, conceived with and supported by (representatives of) Member States, sub-national players and the European Commission, mutually reinforcing and optimally impacting EU and national policy making;
- regularly review progress on implementation and pilot actions; and
- communicate Territorial Agenda objectives and priorities as well as implementation progress to players at sub-national, national and European level.

Follow up

(81) The forthcoming Presidencies of the Council of the EU are asked to follow up on the Territorial Agenda 2030 and further strengthen its communication, application and governance:

(82) **Communication** on progress in applying the Territorial Agenda and marking the 25th and 30th anniversaries of the European Spatial Development Perspective (1999) in 2024 and 2029 and the 20th anniversary of the Territorial Agenda (2007) in 2027.

(83) **Application** of the Territorial Agenda including a discussion on progress, including pilot actions.

(84) **Governance** with a focus on a stocktaking in 2024 including reviews of the governance system, implementation progress and relevance of the priorities. This will be conducted in the light of preparations for EU Cohesion Policy post-2027. The Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2025 is invited to organise an informal ministerial meeting, informing a decision on possible renewal of the Territorial Agenda 2030.

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