



Europa-Forum Wachau 2026

*“Shaping the Future of Europe:
For a prosperous and united European Union”*

Göttweig Declaration

21 May 2026

For a Strong, Modern, and Efficient European Union

We, as part of the strong and innovative Power Regions in Europe, set out in this declaration our common and forward-looking vision for the future of the European Union.

Building on the principles of the Power Regions Declaration of 4 March 2026, we reaffirm our commitment to act as key partners of the EU institutions in shaping a renewed, strong, and modern Cohesion Policy that fosters competitiveness, resilience, and strategic autonomy.

In a rapidly changing global environment, strengthening the European Union's competitiveness, resilience, and economic security is essential to sustain its prosperity and global position. Europe's regions are at the heart of this effort. Their innovative industrial ecosystems drive transformation through knowledge, skills, and technological leadership.

To fully leverage this potential, we declare:

1. Empowering Regions as Central Actors

Regions must remain at the core of the future EU Cohesion Policy. We call on all EU institutions to involve them more closely in both the design and implementation of Cohesion Policy 2028+. Their role, competences, and achievements must be fully respected and legally safeguarded.

A strong Cohesion Policy requires a solid financial foundation. In line with the growing European principle of "Do no harm to cohesion" we stress the need for a fixed, sufficient, and ring-fenced budget for all categories of regions to ensure planning security and enable long-term investments in infrastructure, innovation, and industrial

transformation. This financial stability should also be safeguarded by reconsidering the suppression of the n+1 rule, particularly for strategic projects that require predictability over time.

At the same time, regions must retain a recognised and guaranteed role across all phases of policy design and implementation, including the possibility to manage dedicated regional chapters within the National and Regional Partnership Plans. A robust multilevel governance system is essential to ensure policies remain effective, targeted, and place-based. Any move towards centralisation risks undermining their impact. Europe will not become stronger through centralisation, but through regional implementation. We recognize that European Territorial Cooperation is a key tool for implementing cohesion and cooperation among territories at regional level.

The new MFF must adhere to this principle – with regional autonomy and regional funding because its impact is visible and tangible.

2. Releasing the Handbrake: Efficiency through Simplification

Europe must reduce administrative burdens to unlock its full economic potential. Simplification is a strategic necessity. We call on the European Commission, co-legislators, and Member States to decisively cut red tape and streamline procedures. Advancing towards “a single rulebook”, while preserving the specificity of the Interreg programmes, would constitute a real and effective simplification for beneficiaries across the European Union. A more efficient regulatory framework will accelerate investments, improve programme delivery, and enhance the impact of EU funding—while ensuring legal certainty, proportionality, and subsidiarity.

The EU must clearly adhere to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, ensuring that regulatory intervention is appropriately calibrated to the scale and impact of the objectives pursued. Europe should focus more strongly on its key priorities and step back in areas that are better addressed at the regional level. This focus on key issues is vital to strengthen Europe's global relevance, security, and economic prosperity rather than a regulatory approach that constitutes excessive micromanagement leading to a decline in competitiveness against the U.S. and China.

3. Innovation-Friendly Framework and “Think Small First”

A successful simplification agenda requires a regulatory framework that supports innovation and SMEs. Applying the “Think Small First” principle ensures that small and medium-sized enterprises can thrive without disproportionate burdens.

Supporting SMEs across all regions strengthens competitiveness, drives innovation, and advances the green and digital transitions, while maintaining high standards and safeguarding the integrity of the EU Single Market.

United in our commitment to a stronger Europe, we call for a regulatory and financial framework that combines enhanced competitiveness and strategic autonomy with meaningful simplification and strong multilevel governance. Only by keeping regions at the centre of European policymaking can the European Union achieve sustainable growth, resilience, and cohesion in the years ahead.

AUTONOME PROVINZ
BOZEN - SÜDTIROL



PROVINCIA AUTONOMA
DI BOLZANO - ALTO ADIGE

PROVINZIA AUTONOMA DE BULSAN - SÜDTIROL

**Autonomous Province of
Bolzano/Bozen-South Tyrol | Italy**



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Generalitat de Catalunya
Government of Catalonia

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Catalonia | Spain**



Regione Emilia-Romagna

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Regional Council of Häme

Region of Häme
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