

JOINT POSITION of the Eastern Border Regions of the European Union
on the future of cohesion policy and regional resilience after 2027

Brussels, 21 April 2026

We, the representatives of the regions situated along the European Union's eastern external border – from the Barents Sea in the north to the Mediterranean Sea in the south – gathered in Brussels, present a joint position on the future shape of the Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034) and the strategic role of our territories in ensuring the security, stability and cohesion of the Union.

We welcome the European Commission's announcements regarding the strengthening of its approach to border regions, including the initiative to establish a Pact for the Eastern Border Regions. We regard this as a significant step towards taking fuller account of the specific characteristics and role of the regions on the eastern flank of the European Union in shaping future European policies.

In the face of persistent and growing geopolitical, economic and demographic challenges, we declare our commitment to intensifying cooperation and the activities of the regions on the EU's eastern border. We aim to inject new momentum into joint actions aimed at strengthening the resilience, competitiveness and integration of our territories within the single market and the broader European architecture.

Our regions, forming the external border of the European Union, play a special role in protecting it and ensuring the security of the Union as a whole. On the one hand, we are committed to safeguarding the EU's challenging external border; on the other, we bear significant social, economic and developmental costs associated with the curtailment of traditional economic and social ties with our eastern neighbours.

Acting in the spirit of European solidarity and subsidiarity, we emphasise that the security and stability of the EU's eastern flank is not merely a local and regional challenge, but constitutes a fundamental European added value. Our territories, serving as the 'gateways to the Union', bear the burden of protecting shared values and the stability of the entire single market.

In the context of Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and the persistent hybrid threats from Russia and Belarus and the ongoing war in the Middle East, we emphasise the need for a systematic and long-term approach to supporting the EU's eastern flank.

We call for the adoption of a uniform, comprehensive and inclusive definition of 'Eastern Border Regions' and for its inclusion in all future EU legislative frameworks and financial instruments. This definition should cover all regions (NUTS II) and, where appropriate, sub-regions (NUTS III) bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, as well as regions along the Black Sea coast that remain directly affected by the

consequences of geopolitical tensions and all regions situated at the EU's eastern external borders. The inclusion of this definition within the territorial scope of the proposed regulations should grant investments carried out in the EU's eastern border regions special status, particularly with regard to building the resilience of these regions and matters relating to their security and defence. Given the geopolitical situation of the Union's eastern regions, the difficult neighbourhood and the increased risk of threats and crises in these areas, as well as the widening development disparities compared to western or central regions, the granting of this special status should, in particular, entitle these regions to a higher aid intensity limit and more flexible rules for granting aid.

The current situation clearly indicates that the impact of military aggression and hybrid activities is cross-border and systemic in nature, affecting the entire length of the EU's eastern flank.

We emphasise that the EU's eastern border constitutes a common European good, requiring coordinated and adequate support at EU level.

We call for:

- Prioritising the Eastern Border Regions in security instruments, including increased and more flexible access to the Internal Security Fund (ISF) and the Border Management and Visa Instrument (BMVI), in order to effectively counter hybrid threats, the instrumentalisation of migration and cyberattacks.
- Strengthening the military mobility component, in particular through increased investment under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) in dual-use infrastructure, covering transport, energy and digital networks, which will enable effective crisis response and the protection of critical infrastructure.
- Developing civil resilience capabilities, including the implementation of a 'resilience by design' approach in regional policies, the development of resilience clusters, and ensuring the continuity of public service provision.
- Introducing dedicated support mechanisms to encourage investment in eastern regions, so that living conditions and economic development do not lead to the depopulation of these areas.

The Eastern Border regions face particularly intense demographic pressure, exacerbated by security factors and development constraints resulting from the geopolitical situation.

In this context, we propose:

- targeted support for the reconstruction and diversification of supply chains,
- dedicated grant schemes for SMEs affected by the loss of eastern markets, supporting the resilience of local businesses and the stability of public services
- increased investment in innovation and economic transformation, enabling structural challenges to be turned into long-term competitive advantages.
- increased EU support for the Eastern Border Regions and the allocation of special financial resources to these regions

- increasing the intensity of regional aid and introducing greater flexibility in state aid rules, as well as simplifying the conditions for granting aid to the aforementioned regions.
- developing instruments to support labour markets, which will enable current challenges to be transformed into sustainable competitive advantages and strengthen territorial cohesion at EU level.

We emphasise the strategic importance of strengthening the connectivity of the Eastern Border Regions both within the European Union and in relations with partner and candidate countries, in particular Ukraine and Moldova.

We call for:

- prioritising investments that are key to transport corridors linking the Baltic, Black and Aegean Sea regions, enabling an effective response to emergencies, increasing military mobility and maintaining the continuity of economic flows within the European Union
- the further development of cross-border infrastructure and the interoperability of transport, energy and digital systems,
- strengthening the territorial dimension of the EU enlargement process through the active involvement of border regions.

The resilience and stability of the European Union are directly linked to the situation at its external borders. In this context, support for the Eastern Border Regions should be recognised as a strategic priority for the Union, going beyond the traditional framework of regional policy.

We call on the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States to provide appropriate financial and regulatory instruments that will enable the effective implementation of this approach in the next financial framework.

In line with our commitment to intensifying the activities of the EU's Eastern Border Regions, in the face of growing geopolitical, economic and demographic challenges, we pledge to inject new momentum into our joint efforts. Our commitment will be realised through active cooperation in strengthening the resilience, competitiveness and full integration of our territories within the single market and the broader European architecture.

We firmly believe that our increased activity and closer regional cooperation constitute an essential foundation for the effective implementation of cohesion policy after 2027. Thanks to such a partnership, the EU's eastern flank will become an area of stable growth and a model of modern resilience, serving the security and prosperity of the entire Union.

